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## **The Digital Presence of Emerging Visual Artists and Its Impact on Career Growth**

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Master's in Marketing

Thesis Supervisor:

Professor Loizos Petrides, Assistant Invited Professor of  
Management in the Marketing, Operations, and General  
Management Department, ISCTE Business School

November, 2022





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Marketing, Operations and Management

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## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Resumo**

O principal objetivo do presente estudo é perceber como é que a presença digital de artistas visuais impacta a sua carreira, mais especificamente num modelo de quatro áreas principais: marca, envolvimento digital, rede de contactos e conversão (vendas). Para perceber qual é que é o impacto da sua presença, é fundamental perceber primeiro como é que esta presença funciona.

Para recolher dados através de pessoas que trabalham na área, com o conhecimento e experiência para explorar estes tópicos e responder às questões de investigação, foram realizadas oito entrevistas semiestruturadas. Todos os artistas entrevistados têm uma carreira focada em ilustração e estão num nível inicial/emergente de carreira.

Os resultados demonstram que entre os entrevistados a vertente mais impactada é a da marca. Isto acontece porque o aumento de visibilidade da marca do artista, o facto de este conseguir mostrar quem é e o trabalho que faz acontece de forma simples e direta, através dos seus canais digitais e sobretudo do seu perfil de Instagram.

O estudo inicia com uma revisão bibliográfica que o contextualiza. Encontra-se dentro da visão do artista enquanto gestor de marca, que para ter sucesso na sua carreira tem que gerir a sua própria marca – uma marca humana. Passando esta necessidade para o ano em que vivemos, fez sentido explorar a sua presença digital. Presença digital pode ser descrita como a soma de todas as suas atividades *online*, bem como as atividades realizadas pela sua audiência e partes interessadas num ambiente digital.

**Palavras-chave:** Carreira Artística, Canais Digitais, Conversão, Envolvimento, Marca Humana, Marketing das Artes, Presença Digital, Rede de Contactos, Redes Sociais.





## **Abstract**

The main objective of the present work is to understand how the digital presence of visual artists impacts their career growth, more specifically in a framework of four key areas: branding, engagement, networking, and conversion. To understand what the impact is, it is fundamental to understand how it works at a first stage.

To collect data from people working in the area with the knowledge and experience to explore these topics and answer to the research questions, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted. All the artists interviewed have a career focused on illustration and are at an entry/emerging career level.

Results show that within the interviewees the most impacted area is branding. This happens as gaining brand visibility and showing the work they do and who they are behind it happens in a direct and simple way through their digital channels, mainly their Instagram profile.

The study starts with a bibliographic review to contextualize it. Its view is in agreement with the perspective of the artist as a brand manager, one that to succeed needs to manage their own brand – a human brand. Taking this necessity of managing a brand and a business to the current year we live in, it made sense to explore their digital presence. Digital presence can be defined as the sum of their online activities, as well as the activities taken by their audiences and stakeholders in a digital environment.

**Key-words:** Arts Marketing, Artistic Career, Branding, Conversion, Digital Presence, Digital Channels, Engagement, Human Brand, Networking, Social Media.



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## Chapter 1: **Introduction**

The very starting point of this current study was my curiosity and interest in connecting the Arts world with the Marketing and Business ones, as those are both part of my background and who I am as a young professional. In addition, that valuable connection was something that was not approached during my bachelor's studies in an Artistic Faculty in Portugal.

Even if authors state this connection as an unsustainable one (Butler, 2000; Lee, 2005) and many artists still have a romanticized view of their work, alienated from market notions (L. Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014), this study is in agreement with the vision of that connection as a valuable one for the artist - one of the first arts marketing definitions states that: “the primary aim of arts marketing is to bring an appropriate number of people into an appropriate form of contact with the artists and in so doing to arrive at the best financial outcome that is compatible with the achievement of that aim” (Diggle, 1976, as cited in Lee & Lee, 2017). Within this vision, the artist is seen as a brand manager and strategist (Andy Warhol, 1975; Peng, 1992; Schroeder, 2005; Muñiz et al., 2014; Toghraee & Farsi, 2018; Petrides & Fernandes, 2020), one that to succeed has to manage his personal brand – a human brand (Schroeder 2005; Moulard et al. 2015; Lee & Lee, 2017; Kerrigan, et al. 2011; Muñiz et al., 2014; Fillis, 2015; Preece, 2015).

Considering the digital era we currently live in, this study focuses on how the artist manages his personal brand within the digital world that surrounds him. This is relevant in a post pandemic era where the online art market place deserves even more attention (Matthews, 2020; Sutton 2021), and social media management plays a huge role on it (Forbes & Derby, 2019; McAndrew, 2021). As claimed by Lee & Lee (2019), users are attracted to use digital platforms of the arts world as they are useful and easy to use, even surpassing barriers of the offline world, such as geographical restrictions, lack of information and the intimidating culture of the galleries.

The present study aims to answer to two research questions (RQs): How do emerging visual artists manage their digital presence? (RQ1) What is the impact this presence has on their career growth? (RQ2) Digital presence can be defined as “the sum total of all the online activities managed by an organization (including websites, blogs, and social media profiles), as well as the online activities carried out by key stakeholders, such as employees and consumers.” (Cruz & Karatzas, 2019, p. 64). In terms of career growth, four main areas were considered, as explained ahead.

The present study was developed through a qualitative analysis that aimed to collect

information related with the emerging visual artists' experience regarding their digital presence and the impact it has on their career. The adoption of a qualitative method was chosen based on the necessity of getting closure to a specific reality (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1998) and to assist an investigation of complex issues that comprise human experience, behaviors and points of view (Kelly, 2017). The participants interviewed are eight Portuguese artists that focus their work on illustration and are at an early/ emerging career stage, with an average of 8 years of working experience.

The qualitative analysis was developed in three main parts. The first one was an introductory one, to understand the artist career context, COVID-19 impact, business model, and income sources. The second part was conducted in order to understand how they act upon their digital presence. Lastly, the third part was related with the impact this digital presence has on their career. To understand this impact, a conceptual framework was developed based on the four types of social media objectives raised by Medjani et al. (2019), when analyzing how managers quantify and evaluate social media within an emerging market.

The four areas considered on this study are: (i) Branding, considering the artist visibility and awareness, as branding is fundamental for the artist and many art entities around him (Schroeder, 2005); (ii) Engagement, considering the audience interaction and the creation of a sense of community, as it is believed that engaged consumers are highly valuable ones, as that provides testimonies with their comments and develop optimistic buzz around the brands they feel connected with (Saboo et al., 2016); (iii) Networking, considering relationships and opportunities with gatekeepers that may be developed, as these skills may allow artists to launch, sustain, and advance their careers (Petrides & Fernandes, 2020) and the recommendation artists may receive (iv) Conversion, considering artworks acquisition and sales, as ultimately these will provide "the necessary financial resources to continue producing art" (Petrides & Fernandes, 2020, p.312).

All the eight interviews were conducted via video call through the Zoom online application. Recording was consented as well as permission was given by all interviewees to use the shared data for dissertation purposes. All the interviews were transcribed, and only relevant parts were translated to English and were presented in the Results and Discussion chapter. For confidential reasons, a code was attributed to each artist when citing what he or she said. In the annex 2 there is some information regarding the artist's context and work. The average duration of the interviews was 39 minutes. As these were semi-structured interviews, based on a flexible interview guide (annex 1), the interviewees had space to express and develop their opinions and experiences.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 The Artist as a Brand Manager

Several authors explore the relationship between arts and marketing as an incoherent one. Lee (2005) states that the romantic interpretation of the artistic production is neglected when involved by a management context and considering the market and customer orientation approach. Suitably within this vision, Butler (2000) claims that the arts marketing field is blurring strong distinctions between the arts and marketing concepts, as the market and product orientation coming from marketing is seen as an affront for the internal creation and artistic attempt that involves the artist himself. The critique emerging from art being produced with the objective of being sold, is mainly that this will lead to vulgar and sloppy art creations (Peng, 1992). Hence, there are still many artists who have a romanticized view of their work and are alienated from the market, trying to challenge it with symbolic capital (L. Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014). To combine these two concepts better, part of the literature has been decreasing the purpose of marketing to a functional one inside this field (Lee, 2005).

Nonetheless, seeing the financial market as an evil factor for arts and cultures could not make sense in a society where the artworks success depended on galleries management actions, agents' strategies and practices, auction houses evaluations, and other legal and administrative mechanisms structuring the industry and commerce (Peng, 1992). One of the first arts marketing definitions states that: "the primary aim of arts marketing is to bring an appropriate number of people into an appropriate form of contact with the artists and in so doing to arrive at the best financial outcome that is compatible with the achievement of that aim" (Diggle, 1976, as cited in Lee & Lee, 2017). As mentioned by Lee (2005), during the 1970s and 1980s, marketing in the arts was related to a pack of techniques and decision processes to help arts organizations reach a wider public. In that time, artists as Andy Warhol, already saw business as a necessary step coming after art, desiring to be an Art Businessman, believing that "being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art" (Andy Warhol, 1975, as cited in Degen, 2013, p.184). Going deeper in the vision of the arts as a business, Peng (1992) stated that not having the market connected to arts, and the artworks without a financial value associated, would lead to a reality where arts are stuck in the soul of the artists, away from society's view, who is not affirming their value by the use of money.

In a more recent approach, considering the two last decades of the arts marketing evolution, Lee & Lee (2017) have summarized the area and divided it in three different categories:

“Marketing of Arts Organizations” (Lee & Lee, 2017, p.20), being marketing here used as a tool for art organizations branding, relationships, brand equity and brand association; “Marketing with Artworks/ Artists” (Lee & Lee, 2017, p.21), more related with what the arts world and the artists themselves can teach to marketing, and finally “Marketing from the Art World” (Lee & Lee, 2017, p.22) that studies the social context around the arts, considering societal issues as something that cannot be separated from the arts. Baumgarth (2018) explores how artworks and brands connect, being one of the possible expressions looking for social, ecological or political awareness as a result of the artworks.

Art should be considered a serious business (Schroeder, 2005), where the artist should consider three different domains to succeed in his career: the market and culture; their support system and their competitors (Muñiz et al., 2014). These areas were mastered by big modern artists such as Pablo Picasso, the main figure of the authors’ case study, who has invested in his own brand in a very prompt time, before the consumer culture main expression, differentiating himself and his work with a particular world view.

More recently, Petrides & Fernandes (2020) developed a model that identifies four building blocks that are all components of a successful artistic career: “creativity, artistic production, and the desire to exhibit; relationships with gatekeepers; entrepreneurial marketing skills; creation and management of an artistic brand” (Petrides & Fernandes, 2020, p.312). Another approach for the artist as a creative entrepreneur was given by (Toghraee & Farsi, 2018), who proposed that instead of using the usual 4Ps of marketing, artists should consider a 5Cs framework, related with their contact network, communication capability, content creativity, cultural values, and creation of artwork.

Branding can be seen as an essential tool not only for the artist, but also for different art entities, such as art museums, organizations, exhibitions, auction houses, artists, collectors, and audiences (Schroeder, 2005). The artists that are brand managers experts are the ones succeeding in vastly exhibiting their own work, reaching high levels of sales and getting collected (Schroeder, 2005). Amplifying this idea, Lee & Lee (2017) claim that the artists’ brands are now seen as more relevant when it comes to the judgement and evaluation of the artworks in the market than the artworks themselves. Likewise, Oosterlinck & Radermecker (2019) defend that one painting’s value is mostly influenced according to the creator artist’s reputation. Therefore, to successfully manage his brand, the artist should adopt a strategic behavior and consider different contact touchpoints with gatekeepers (mainly galleries) as key supporters of his career (Petrides & Fernandes, 2020).



## 2.2 Human Brands

A human brand is “a term that refers to any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts” (Thomson, 2006, p.104). Related concepts studied previously are self-marketing, seen as a variety of activities driven by certain individuals that aim to make them known out in the marketplace with the main purpose of a lucrative occupation (Shepherd, 2005); and personal branding, a strategic process that aims to develop an external image and identity that a person projects as a business, managing consumers perceptions to achieve one’s goals (Montoya, 2002).

Shepherd (2005) distinguishes self-marketing circles that have a consumer-oriented approach, often encouraging individuals to attain new and better skills; from the personal branding ones, that look firstly to the individual’s essence and what he already has, discovering what they have to offer and then sell it effectively.

According to Thomson (2006) celebrities and wide-known figures are human brands. Lots of respondents participating in the author’s research considered actors, directors, writers, singers, radio personalities, athletes, politicians, and musicians as a human brand. Inside this field of study, as stated by Kerrigan et al. (2011) a celebrity works as a map that locates the consumers throughout systems of figurative resources.

More recently, Lunardo et al. (2015) described the human brand concept, as one that has different dimensions of personality, that are more or less important for the celebrities appealing, depending on their field, career, and life phase. To describe this changing factors, examples given by the authors are: for an actor or a singer in a career declining, it may be important to invest in the sophistication characteristic of their personality, by putting themselves out in shows and investing on media presence; for a sport celebrity that is ageing, it may be more important to find a different field where his/her attractiveness is not negatively affected by the physical performance; TV and movie stars are advised to find ways to renovate their appeal in the long run, considering sophistication or sincerity personality attributes, that can for example be related with charity actions (Lunardo, et al., 2015). Other studied factors are rarity and stability, which influence celebrity authenticity in a positive way, being rarity more important for younger consumers, while stability more important to the older ones Moulard et al. (2015).

According to Thomson (2006), the human brand should not be seen as an imitator or trying too hard to look like something that it is not, otherwise it will risk losing clients and being perceived as a pretender. Hence, authenticity can be acknowledged as a relevant tool that should be used by artists when engaging with their audience and constructing significant connections

(Preece, 2015). In agreement with Moulard et al. (2015) artist's authenticity, "or the perception that the artist is passionate about her/ his artwork and committed to her/ his craft" (Moulard et al., 2014, p.586) affects the attitude intentions of the audience towards the artist's artworks.

Studies were conducted from modern to contemporary artists that were or still are celebrity brands and successful brand managers of their own brand. Schroeder (2005) studied how modern artists such as Andy Warhol, Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman have a lot to teach to brand managers, as they were able to build attention in their audience, interconnecting arts, brands, identity, fame, culture, and commerce concepts throughout their professional life. Andy Warhol deserved more attention from Kerrigan, et al. (2011), who have proclaimed that his chameleonic personality was the ideal to be branded and that the artist was capable to mobilize his celebrity value, by associating himself with well-established celebrities and by his artworks of his lifetime, in which the self and the community consumerism identities were questioned and criticized. Other distinctive modern artists such as Pollock, Picasso or Koons were seen as capable characters to tell us how brands become iconic (Muñiz et al., 2014).

A more recent artist, Thomas Kinkade developed his brand power in the celebrity marketplace through his high competencies in entrepreneurial marketing, being an expert in narrating his story through different media connections and reaching out easily to his fans (Fillis, 2015). Finally, the contemporary artist Ai Wei Wei's authentic brand has replicated the artist's values across different channels, constructing a coherent narrative that is intersected in different engagement points by the audience and the different stakeholders, being the internet and social media fundamental tools to spread his work, reach the audience and co-create (Preece, 2015).

Ferreiro-Rosende et al. (2021) studied how museum brands relate with the artists' human brands, defending that one artist brand can shape the museum overall identity and increase its associated value, incentivizing museum managers to understand how they can gain competitive advantage by having associated with them a specific artist's name.

The importance of interaction between the human brand and its consumers was defended by Thomson (2006), who proclaims that direct interaction makes consumers see the brand as one that is approachable and that regular interaction between the human brand and the consumer will lead to higher chances of attachment growing.

### **2.3 Consumer Engagement Towards a Brand**

Consumer engagement is described as a concept with different dimensions, aggregating cognition, emotions, and behaviors, being a greatly interactive and experiential process (Brodie et al., 2013), based on several sub-processes that include “learning, sharing, advocating, socializing and co-developing” (Brodie et al., 2013, p.112) and that crucial positive consequences of consumer engagement are “consumer loyalty and satisfaction, consumer empowerment, connection and emotional bonding, trust and commitment” (Brodie et al., 2013, p.112).

Vivek et al. (2012), propose that consumer engagement is primarily the intensity level of participation and connection an individual has concerning the organization offerings and actions. Accordingly, Brodie et al., (2011) state that this intensity can occur in different levels at the time, reflecting different engagement states, and having as foundations for it to occur the customer’s interactive and co-creative experiences when relating with any engagement object, that can be brands, organizations or even members of the brand community (Brodie et al., 2013).

Therefore, brand managers should consider investing in their customer social interaction, building a brand community where there is a resonating brand identity and consumers feel related to it (He et al., 2012). Brand identity can be defined as the unique and enduring characteristics a brand or a company have (Balmer, 2001).

Even more during the COVID-19 pandemic, studies have shown that customers spent more money and time online, switching their preferences to brands that invest on their digital presence, by digitalizing themselves and having appealing offers in the digital world, as well as ensuring quick and trustworthy delivery processes (Wen, 2022). Digital presence can be defined as “the sum total of all the online activities managed by your organization (including websites, blogs, and social media profiles), as well as the online activities carried out by your key stakeholders, such as employees and consumers.” (Cruz & Karatzas, 2019, p. 64)

The interactions that are generated by this presence can make or break brands. Corporate brand managers no longer engineer brands. In a digitally connected world, brands are co-created.

The empirical study developed by He et al. (2012), found that brand identity impact goes beyond a direct and indirect effect on customer perception, satisfaction and brand trust levels, having a huge direct and indirect impact on brand loyalty as well. Trust has been defined in the

past as the perception consumer has of safety and reliability in the interactions the brand makes and considering the best interests of its consumers (Delgado-Ballester, et al., 2003) and loyalty as a “biased behavior response expressed overtime by some decision-making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands” (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978, as cited in He et al., 2012). Brand identification appears as a sort of bridge between the brand identity and consumer’s perceived value, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty towards the brand (He et al., 2012). According to the consumer engagement model developed by Vivek et al. (2012), the current potential customers' level of participation and involvement count as antecedents of consumer engagement, whereas value, commitment, trust, word of mouth, loyalty and even the creation of a community come as possible consequences.

Engaged consumers are highly valuable ones, as they provide brand testimonies with their comments, develop optimistic buzz around the brands they feel connected with and even bring new consumers to the brand circle (Saboo et al., 2016). This view is aligned with the four components of consumer engagement value that go beyond purchase (Kumar et al., 2010), where customers’ lifetime value is considered, as well as their influencer, referral, and knowledge values. However, it is important to consider that engaged consumers can be empowered and play a role in co-creating meaning and value regarding a brand, being the brand level of control transferred away from the brand only by itself, as it used to happen in the past, to the online community where it is integrated in (Brodie et al., 2011).

The marketing landscape was altered by the social media platforms exponential growth, as consumers started to create and share user generated content (UGC), that can impact the firm they communicate about and other consumers (Saboo et al., 2016). As stated by (Dolan et al., 2019), if marketers are looking to increase social media engagement, they should post more rational content (informational and remunerative) than emotional content (entertaining or relational), which will positively influence active social media engagement behaviors, translated in creation and contribution actions of users. Research should explore how individuals interact with the brand not only when purchasing or planning to do it, but also in activities not directly related with decision making, for instance evaluation of alternatives, research, and post purchase activities. (Vivek et al., 2012).

Baldus et al. (2015) claim that consumers should be analyzed and considered for community engagement actions based on their motivational profiles, tailoring communications based on their previously studied motivations, so that community managers do not take the risk of alienating their community members with content that is not of their interest. From the brands perspective, in the opinion of Saboo et al. (2016), brands should frequently provide new offers

and refresh themselves to stay in consumers' minds, as it can easily happen that one is forgotten in the saturated market and plenty of choices available to them. Content planning in social media should be strategically thought and designed in order to create either active or passive social media engagement behaviors (Dolan et al., 2019) and the social media management is way more important for a brand than having a vast product portfolio, as one with a short portfolio can surpass sells of another with a bigger one, by managing better its social media profiles (Saboo et al., 2016).

#### **2.4. Online Art Marketplace**

According to Gere (2012), galleries and museums were not an exception of the technological evolution we are living and that they would be, in fact, deeply touched and challenged by information systems and communications manipulation. Pollack (2011) claims that artists started engaging with the world of web 2.0, where they reached social-networking websites where an online community was created, and user participation was encouraged. Art communities such as DeviantArt or Conceptart.org, started to give artists the opportunity to connect with other artists, not limiting them geographically and providing a worldwide experience; but these communities that were once vibrant have faded away in social media's faster and exponential rise (Ables, 2019).

Never in the past have people been more engaged with the arts world, which is happening with digital channels and social media (Forbes & Derby, 2019). In 2010, Instagram and Facebook became much bigger places than any other contemporary social network and challenged the way we consume information, limiting users to algorithms that provide similar contents and encourage scrolling instead of long looking or reading, making users become passive consumers who do not provide critical feedback (Ables, 2019). The format that started with these social networking systems as Instagram, with a visual preponderance over text, opened a new space for communications and expression that would not be possible when communicating only with text (Griffith et al., 2021). Nonetheless, for managers it is important to consider the efficiency of the different types of social media contents (e.g., informative, entertaining, relational, or remunerative) and the correspondent engagement behaviors taken by consumers when facing them (Dolan et al., 2019).

Current challenges forced us to move out of the comfort zones we previously knew to embrace the connectivity the online world has in arts education and exhibition audiences (Matthews, 2020). Digital activities in the arts world became part of it in pandemic times, where

galleries redoubled their efforts inside the digital world, investing in virtual exhibitions with online viewing rooms and being part of the online marketplace (Sutton, 2021). Previously, it was stated by Louise Shannon, as curator of contemporary art of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London at the time, that the possibilities were never-ending ones in the digital world, having organized herself one exhibition with many social media artworks and believing that with networks growing, opportunities would exponentially grow with them (Pollack, 2011). Sales were conducted exclusively online as a pandemic result, occurring from the dealers' websites, online viewing rooms, email or social media channels (McAndrew, 2021).

Over the last years, health emergency rules forced most art events to move to an online format, and artists to find ways of contacting their current audiences and finding new interested ones in their social media and other digital channels. (Sutton, 2021) As a COVID-19 pandemic lockdown result, social media managers of four museums around the world (Met's Instagram manager, Royal Academy's twitter manager, Uffizi's TikTok manager and Van Gogh Museum's Facebook manager) stated that these organizations have lost 77% in visitors, but made their social media followers community grow, as they kept on sharing viral content to entertain and engage with their arts' passionate audiences around the world, when everyone was living a more virtual life (Silva, 2020). Galleries were also quite active in developing their online content available through their websites, including webinars, artists' interviews and other editorial materials, alongside with increasing their social media strategy and presence (McAndrew, 2021).

According to Dawson (2021a), Instagram enhances the auction houses world possibilities as well, and not even Sotheby's can get away from a strong social media strategy, having one that explores different features of the app, as IGTV as a webinar host and Reels as a tool able to catch behind the scenes footages. However, Instagram had an even bigger role in the art market world, as it brought the possibility of chatting with possible clients and interested people, in an easy to use and visually appealing format that allows artists to enlarge their brands visibility even internationally, without having to wait for industry approvals (Dawson, 2020).

During pandemic times, it is recommended for artists to focus on providing immersive experiences to their audiences, passing them the feeling of togetherness, and belonging (Levordashka et al., 2021). Studies have been made to understand how the screens can expand and liberate emotions, opening space where different cultures and localizations can be connected (Matthews, 2021). Besides that, Griffith et al. (2021) explored how mental health awareness gained floor in artists' social media channels and online communities through verbal

(emotions translated in text captions) and non-verbal information (representational art imagery).

#### **2.4.1. Digital Creators**

If some years ago people used to navigate on the internet, today we are submersed in it (Ables, 2019). Recently, a new creative category has emerged – the creators – one that aggregates a variety of creatives that produce digital content, such as podcasters, writers, vloggers or visual artists, making money from their online activity (Chayka, 2021). Lois Van Baarle, who has 1.5 million followers on her Instagram account, states that creators should play with the algorithm to gain visibility, posting content with small size as continually as possible (Ables, 2019). Not all social media managers should, however, invest on the increase of the community grow through increase of followers' number, as Saboo et al. (2016) proclaim, music artists' brand value decreases with the increase of followers, which means that managers should focus on emphasizing fan engagement in this case, rather than attracting more people into their online community.

According to Levordashka et al. (2021) it is also important for content creators to understand their audiences' behaviors and experiences, providing them interactive content to enhance the feeling of togetherness; considering their feedback and insights to develop better experiences and creating a sense of place where inclusivity is crucial. However, the fact that the creator culture requires fast producing and posting, leaves small room for practices that do not fit the preconceived digital structures (Chayka, 2021) meaning that creators without a charismatic personality or not producing content daily or weekly, will probably not reach an engaged audience. This way, posting simpler artworks is more attractive to gain visibility, which makes the extra time and effort to produce time-consuming artworks not worth it and less online space to cultivate strong artistic communities (Ables, 2019), as the art kind that is difficult to be understood and takes time to become popular is not adequate for the creator culture and economy (Chayka, 2021).

It was stated by the head of Instagram that one of the top 2022 priorities would be continuing to focus on creators, helping them out on how to make a living through Instagram, with new creator monetization features (Mosseri, 2021a). Accordingly, *New ways for creators* (2021) claims that creators that have their own product line already established, can now connect their Instagram personal profile to an online shop, which facilitates direct sales to followers and fans. More transparency on how Instagram works was another highlight from

Adam Mosseri (Head of Instagram) for 2022, that already started to be explored in 2021 with a series of posts in article format that aimed to provide clearance regarding Instagram's technology, starting by explaining posts' visibility in followers' profiles and in the explore feature (Mosseri, 2021b).

#### **2.4.2. Digital Users and Collectors**

Moreover, 57% of the most recent individuals entering the art market report in the year before the pandemic said they had future intentions to buy more artworks online (Forbes & Derby 2019). With the pandemic hit, almost all in-person events of the arts world transitioned to digital ones and purchasing online turned out to be the only way collectors could support galleries and artists, as well as participating in fairs or auctions, which made the online art sales more than doubled in value and became 25% of the art market in 2020 and in 2021 having almost all art collectors available to collect online (Sutton, 2021).

As claimed by Lee & Lee (2019), users are attracted to use digital platforms of the arts world as they are useful and easy to use, even surpassing barriers of the offline world, such as geographical restrictions, lack of information and the intimidating culture of the galleries.

However, these new digital collectors are used to having rapid access to the information they are looking for, spending the research phase by themselves, and only reaching out to the gallery or auction house when they already know the artwork they want to buy (Forbes & Derby, 2019). Platforms such as Saatchi Art provide this efficient and easy experience the digital collectors are looking for, emphasizing the important role of intermediaries in arts marketing (Lee & Lee, 2019). One advantage social media and online marketplaces have is the mobile optimization option, a key to deliver new-generation art collectors the experience they look forward to having according to the report from Sutton (2021), where it is stated that 64% of them prefer to look for new artists in their mobiles, 56% that they prefer to buy from a mobile app or website, whereas 44% still prefer to make their purchases in desktop format.

Instagram was the social media channel most used by collectors in 2020, having one third of them found artworks there they purchased either there or from direct links that would take them to the artists, galleries or other selling platform (McAndrew, 2021). According to Schachter (2021) everyone including old people will soon buy art on Instagram, believing that buyers with ages between 20 and 50 already do it a lot, as it is the most convenient channel to find, experience and purchase art. However, according to Dawson (2021b) Tik Tok app is



already being a threat to Instagram's art world, as it is being more and more used by young users, whereas Instagram is starting to be stagnated and used by millennials.

When analyzing the digital collectors, it is identified a motivation tendency between Gen-Z consumers, as they buy according to how related they feel with the brand (the artists' themselves) and how they can speak towards their self-identity, community or causes they are involved with (Forbes & Derby 2019). When analyzing online collectors' preferences to purchase, 60% replied that they prefer to buy artworks from new emerging artists, which was even emphasized in the next generations collectors, where 63% of them pronounced this preference. (Sutton, 2021)

Young generations of collectors as millennials are more likely to be active online and to search artworks in social media (McAndrew, 2021). Nevertheless, a different ship of internet usage should probably now be considered, as online users are getting interested in digital wellness and more sustainable and meaningful ways to spend their time online (Ables, 2019).



**Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework**

As previously reflected in the Literature Review chapter, the present study is in agreement with the vision of the artist as a brand manager and strategist (Andy Warhol, 1975; Peng, 1992; Schroeder, 2005; Muñiz et al., 2014; Toghraee & Farsi, 2018; Petrides & Fernandes, 2020), one that to succeed in the art market world has to manage his reputation (Oosterlinck & Radermecker, 2019) and overall his personal brand – a human brand (Schroeder 2005; Moulard et al. 2015; Lee & Lee, 2017; Kerrigan, et al. 2011; Muñiz et al., 2014; Fillis, 2015; Preece, 2015).

In the current world we live in, even more in the post pandemic era, the online art market place deserves more attention than before (Matthews, 2020; Sutton 2021), as well as the artists’ digital channels and social media management (Forbes & Derby, 2019; McAndrew, 2021). As engaged consumers are highly valuable ones for the brand (Saboo et al., 2016), it becomes fundamental for artists and creators to understand their audiences’ behaviors when using their online channels (Levordashka et al., 2021).

With this background vision, the conceptual work of this investigation will be based in the four types of social media objectives raised by Medjani et al. (2019), that came across when analyzing how managers quantify and evaluate social media within an emerging market. These four categories are Brand, Engagement, Relationship and Conversation (Medjani et al., 2019).

<b>Brand</b> Visibility Awareness		<b>Engagement</b> Interaction Community
	<b>Digital Presence Objectives &amp; Impact</b>	
<b>Networking</b> Work opportunities Recommendation		<b>Conversion</b> Acquisition Sales

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework** – Adapted from the four types of social media objectives according to Medjani et al. (2019)

The structure above is relevant for the present study as it aims to provide insights on How do emerging visual artists manage their digital presence? (RQ1) What is the impact this presence has on their career growth? (RQ2) Even though it was developed by interviewing different

digital, communication or social media managers across different industries, it can be applied in the artistic careers as well, as in this study we see the artist as a brand manager and strategist, which makes it useful for him to consider these 4 aspects, as brand managers from different sectors do. Furthermore, it helps on grouping different types of actions and consecutive impact the artists may have in the digital world, according to the following sections: (i) Branding, considering the artist visibility and awareness, as branding is fundamental for the artist and many art entities around him (Schroeder, 2005); (ii) Engagement, considering the audience interaction and the creation of a sense of community, as it is believed that engaged consumers are highly valuable ones, as that provides testimonies with their comments and develop optimistic buzz around the brands they feel connected with (Saboo et al., 2016); (iii) Networking, considering relationships and opportunities with gatekeepers that may be developed, as these skills may allow artists to launch, sustain, and advance their careers (Petrides & Fernandes, 2020) and the recommendation artists' may receive (iv) Conversion, considering artworks acquisition and sales, as ultimately these will provide “the necessary financial resources to continue producing art” (Petrides & Fernandes, 2020, p.312).

## Chapter 4: **Methodology**

### **4.1 Research Context**

As explained in the previous chapter, the research problem emerged in the digital era we live in deeply influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, where the online art market increased its importance and attention (Matthews, 2020; Sutton 2021) which made it fundamental for artists to manage their human brand (Schroeder 2005; Moulard et al. 2015; Lee & Lee, 2017; Kerrigan, et al. 2011; Muñiz et al., 2014; Fillis, 2015; Preece, 2015) across digital and social media channels (Forbes & Derby, 2019; McAndrew, 2021).

Within this context, the research questions (RQs) of this study are: How do emerging visual artists manage their digital presence? (RQ1) What is the impact this presence has on their career growth? (RQ2)

To understand in which way it impacts their career, the study will follow the four areas adapted from Medjani et al. (2019) social media objectives (fig.1 - Conceptual framework): Branding, Engagement, Networking, and Conversion.

To reach results an analysis will be made considering the opinions and experiences of people directly related with this investigation purpose - emerging artists with similar characteristics inside the Portuguese market, that invest on their digital presence as part of their career growth.

### **4.2. Methodology Applied and Procedure**

The present study was developed through a qualitative analysis that aimed to collect information related with the emerging visual artists' experience regarding their digital presence and the impact it has on their career.

The adoption of a qualitative method was chosen based on the necessity of getting closure to a specific reality (Quivy & Campenhout, 1998) and to assist an investigation of complex issues that comprise human experience, behaviors and points of view (Kelly, 2017).

The qualitative researcher has different methodologies to collect data available, being interviews one of them. An interview can be simplified as “a form of consultation where the researcher seeks to know more of an issue as opinionated by the individual being asked” (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017, p.3). This technique is used with the mainly goal of collecting the maximum amount of information through the interviewees about a certain topic, being one of

the most qualitative methods applied given to its capacity of collecting information. (Aborisade, 2013). It allows more space than a quantitative method for the interviewees to tell us what their thinking and way of acting really is, it can even happen that they don't know the answers until they find the space to reflect on them – the interview (Kelly, 2017).

However, it is important to keep in mind that qualitative research is inductive, its ambition is to reach a generalization that comes from a concrete case study, and as researchers we study the area, ask questions, check if any patterns exist, and conclude with an observation regarding those patterns (Kelly, 2017).

In the methodology used, the visual artists interviewed are considered agents from the field of the study, as they live immersed in the investigation context, being able to answer and provide insights to the research investigation questions.

There are three different types of interviews. In this investigation it was used the semi-structured one, where the interview guide has general guiding questions, but there is flexibility for the interviewer to make modifications through the interview, according to the interviewee's responses. (Aborisade, 2013; Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Therefore, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted, oriented by a flexible interview guide (Annex 1), adapted into the interviewees' context and responses development.

In each interview the questions are made in the same format and order within a specific area. Nonetheless, the answers obtained will differ based on the subjectivity of each participant's experience and perspectives, that are unique and diverse (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). There is an enormous diversity of artistic careers in the arts world, where artists' differences are undeniable in different areas: production techniques and practices; personalities and behaviors, some may be more strategic and entrepreneurial, others may be more extrovert and social; and background contexts (Martin and Frenette, 2017, as stated in Petrides & Fernandes, 2020). Even if the artists chosen are inside of the same context, each career path, ways of working and personal experience are very different, as it will be described in the following chapter.

All the eight interviews were conducted via video call through the Zoom online application, which became more frequently used during and after the pandemic, facilitating the interview format without the need of the interview and the interviewee to be in the same physical place. The average duration of the interviews was 39 minutes. As the interviews were semi-structured, the interviewees had freedom to express and develop their opinions and experiences, having the minimum time one occurred in 22 minutes, and the maximum one in 51 minutes.

Interviews started with a general explanation about the dissertation purpose, already shared

in the message sent to the artists prior to the interview asking for their collaboration, a thanking note for their participation, and a confidentiality statement about their personal and professional data. After that introduction, interviews followed a previously prepared interview guide (Annex 1) divided in three main parts: (i) career context and COVID-19 impact, as this was a time that marked the artists and the art market, as previously reflected in the literature review chapter; (ii) the artist's digital presence, related with their digital channels and social media used (iii) the impact on the artist's career, assessing questions related with the four areas described on the conceptual framework: branding, engagement, networking and conversion. All interviews were conducted between the months of July and August of 2022.

### **4.3. Participants and Data Collection**

On this analysis, interviewees can be considered “privilege testimonies: people that from their position, action or responsibilities, have a great knowledge of the problem” (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1998, p.11).

In this investigation, the purposive sampling method was applied, as the interviewees were intentionally selected to contribute to a sample that would be effective and in the right context to explore and in the end answer the research questions (Farrugia, 2019). Some variables were considered to unify the interviewees, mainly the artists' working area (illustration focused), market context (Portuguese market) and with a significant digital online and/or social media presence.

The interviewees are eight Portuguese visual artists, all living and working in Portugal with a career mainly focused on illustration and that have a regular use of their digital channels and/or social media as part of their career. The artists' career stage was also considered even if diverse between the interviewees, artists' careers vary from four to twelve years of working experience in illustration. This way, none of them is a newly graduate worker so they can all reflect upon some years of work experience when being asked the investigation questions.

Although the artistic area of focus of the interviewees was taken in consideration, it is important to notice that there is an enormous diversity of artistic careers in the arts world, as stated previously. Every artist's path and experience are unique, as their business model and income sources differ from case to case. According to Petrides & Fernandes (2020), the successful artists are the ones who manage either to create their own market, or to co-create with other market gatekeepers.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

After conducting the eight interviews mentioned above, their transcriptions were made. These will not be present in the annexes to guarantee the interviewee data confidentiality that was assured to the participants.

To analyze the data, the four steps of data analysis to reach better qualitative evidence from Green et al., (2007) were used. These four steps consist in: (1) data immersion, where the researcher reads and re-reads the interview transcripts and ears the recordings to start to “incubate ideas about the possibilities of analysis” (Green et al., 2007, p.547); (2) coding, where the researcher organizes the information contained in the interviews, starts to make judgement and mark transcript parts with code labels; (3) creation of categories, the phase where the code labels that share the same information are linked; and (4) identification of themes, where the researcher moves from the categories objective narratives and turns to an interpretation, which tends to be more subjective.

During this process, the three main categories of the interview guide described previously were considered one at a time: (i) career context and COVID-19 impact, (ii) the artist’s digital presence, and (iii) the impact on the artist’s career. The first category was needed to understand the context of the artists’ business and career stage during the current time impacted by COVID-19 pandemic, so that after it would be possible to answer to the research questions of this study - How do emerging visual artists manage their digital presence? And what is the impact this presence has on their career?



## Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

To start the analysis of the obtained results, it is important give context about the interviewees. Eight Portuguese visual artists with a career focused on illustration were interviewed. Two are men and six are women. Being the interviewees almost all born in different cities and towns, the majority are based in Porto (five of them), whereas only two live in Lisbon, and only 1 in town called Cinfães (Viseu).

In terms of age, the average age of the is 32 years old, being the oldest interviewee 42, and the youngest 24 years old. Regarding years of professional experience, the average is 8 years with a maximum of 12 years and a minimum of 4 years.

### 5.1 Career Context and COVID-19 Impact

The answers differed based on the subjectivity of each participant's experience and perspectives, that are unique and diverse (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Even if all working in the same sector, their business model and income sources are individual and dependent on each experience and path, as reflected in the table below (table 1) and in table 12 in annex 3.

**Table 1: Artists' Business Model and Income Sources**

<b>A4</b>	<i>My business is very much based in social media and individual clients. My career during 6 years was based in customized illustrations for clients. (...) During the pandemic my business evolved to also providing illustration and aquarelles classes for my Instagram followers. After COVID restrictions ended and nowadays it is more focused in live sketching in weddings.</i>
<b>A6</b>	<i>The main source of income comes from private clients, people that invite me to do images for their brands, posters, CD covers... Anything that a drawing can be applied to, is a work opportunity. Apart from being present in a gallery [Ó Galeria], I also have an online store. It made sense for me to keep exposing originals and serigraphs, showing a more artistic side that reflects where I started and is aligned with my ambition to express in a free way. (...) Working for clients is more commercial.</i>
<b>A8</b>	<i>I work in a mixed regime. Essentially as an architecture illustrator, in a company, in the architecture division. For that my architecture studies helped. (...) This is a fixed schedule, from 9am to 17pm, Monday to Friday. Apart from that I have three other</i>

<i>income sources: occasional illustrations requests, for brands, portraits as well... The other one that is becoming the most lucrative one is the live sketching in weddings and other events. And finally, the one that was the biggest one in 2020-21, that is facilitating workshops.</i>
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From the data presented above, we can see how diverse artists' careers can be, which is aligned with the enormous diversity of artistic careers in the arts world, where artists' differences are undeniable in different areas: production techniques and practices; personalities and behaviors, some are more strategic and entrepreneurial, others more extrovert and social; and background contexts (Martin and Frenette, 2017, as stated in Petrides & Fernandes, 2020). As stated on the table above, only one of the interviewees has a fixed schedule from 9 am to 5 pm, apart from other income sources outside of those hours. Most of the artists (all except one) mentioned to work a lot with individual clients (people, companies, or brands) and one said to collaborate with brands aligned with her values, acting as an influencer illustrator. It seems that she managed to create her own market successfully when noticing a market gap.

Despite the differences of the core business and income sources, COVID-19 pandemic has affected most of the artists' careers and ways of working in terms of work opportunities, business model or content creation.

In terms of work opportunities (table 2 and table 13 in annex 3), only one interviewee said it negatively affected the business, three that it did not affect either positively or negatively, and four that it affected positively.

Agreeing with the idea that there have been challenges forced us to move out of the comfort zones we previously knew to embrace the connectivity the online world (Matthews, 2020), two out of these four mentioned that their business models have transformed during this time, where they felt the necessity of creating new work opportunities, more aligned with their values, needs, and the current market – “I started to think about possibilities, all the options available, what was happening at that moment, where all brands were becoming more digital (...) and I found a market gap, there were no illustrators working like influencers advocating the brands they identify with” (A1); “During the pandemic I felt the need of creating a community around illustration, so I started to give illustration classes to my followers every Saturday morning” (A4).

**Table 2: COVID-19 Impact in Work Opportunities**

<b>A1</b>	<i>During COVID-19 pandemic I managed to transform the problem “I have no work” into creating a new type of work that went well.</i>
<b>A2</b>	<i>I lost my fixed work opportunities. I couldn’t organize fairs or work for galleries as everything was closed. My online store sold some artworks but not that many.</i>
<b>A4</b>	<i>My business passed from only selling customized illustrations to also giving illustration and aquarelle classes.</i>

Digital activities in the arts world became part of it in pandemic times (Sutton, 2021). In terms of content creation, most of the artists assumed to have changed their behaviors, either by posting more content and/or trying to interact more with their audience (table 3 and table 14 in annex 3). The fact that most of the artists was posting more often can be related with the creator culture and economy surrounding them, that makes posting simpler artworks more attractive to gain visibility, and the art kind that is difficult to be understood and takes time to become popular not adequate (Chayka, 2021). One of the artists mentioned that “I was sometimes making drawings purposely to post on Instagram but I am embarrassed to call those illustration work” (A3).

**Table 3: COVID-19 Impact on Social Media Posting and Content Creation**

<b>A1</b>	<i>During the pandemic my digital presence changed because I was producing a lot and thinking what I would be doing with my life (...) as a new influencer illustrator, my work was doing illustrations and sharing illustrations [for brands].</i>
<b>A4</b>	<i>My digital presence became much more personal and interactive, people started to see my face, I started to show up more, talk with my community, exchanging insights with other illustrators.</i>
<b>A7</b>	<i>I used to post more during the pandemic, as I was at home. I have even created a sort of hobby where every day I posted a game, cross words, illustrations that people had to see and complete a sentence... It brought engagement with people.</i>

When analyzing each artist’s experience during the pandemic period, it became clear that the ones that changed less their behaviors were the ones who were already well-established in

the market and did not feel they had to adapt as their business was not decreasing.

For the younger artists it was a time to share their work more frequently and invest on their social media accounts by interacting more with the community. Also, it was a time to reflect and explore different areas that in some cases became their main work source, which shows that the capacity of adapting adds value to their careers. The fact that they invested more on their brand digital presence during this time is aligned with studies that customers spent more money and time online, switching their preferences to brands that invest on their digital presence, by digitalizing themselves and having appealing offers in the digital world, as well as ensuring quick and trustworthy delivery processes (Wen, 2022)

**5.2 The Artist’s Digital Presence**

All the artists have shown to have had a digital presence dating back to the beginning of their career as an illustrator or even before that (table 4), exploring opportunities where they could expose their creations in the digital world. This shows that from a young age, the artists saw potential in investing time and presence in the digital world.

**Table 4: The Beginning of the Artists’ Digital Presence**

<b>A3</b>	<i>I created a blog when I was a teenager, that had illustrations and texts. Since always I wanted to do things and show them. In college I had a collective blog with friends where I used to write and do comics. After that I created a more professional Facebook account and had a Tumblr account as well.</i>
<b>A6</b>	<i>I think my career started digitally and that I went through all stages. I started by having a Facebook profile and had a blog that worked like a website.</i>
<b>A8</b>	<i>I have my Instagram since 2016, when I started to work in architecture illustration. Before that I didn’t use almost anything but had a blog where I used to share my daily drawings and write to tell their stories.</i>

When asked if they had to adapt their process/ artworks to a digital format most of the artists said they did not have to, either because they were doing it digitally already, or because they did it in an analogical way and passing to digital was something that came after the creation.

Only two artists said they did, as they work analogically with aquarelles – “I tried to

improve the quality without compromising what was essential, that was drawing and showing it. I bought a phone with a better camera, to record some drawing processes, and looked for video editing apps (...) I have a mobile supporter that allows me to record my drawing table while drawing” (A8); “Even if it was something intuitive I had to adapt (...) mainly now with the new Instagram algorithm that prioritizes video over static images, I had to take simple actions as buying a tripod and adapting content to create more videos. [Nowadays] It is like the artist is an entertainer that must entertain the community apart from showing what he does. (...) I have also found a way of digitalizing my illustrations so they have a white background.” (A4).

Nonetheless, a physical work presence in galleries is still very important for most of the artists interviewed. Most of them are present in galleries – “I think we should invest in both worlds [digital and physical], as it is dangerous to live only from the digital or a social network (...) I sell in galleries apart from my online store, as I believe it is important to have a more direct relationship with the consumer” (A1); “Even if it is not what I like to do the most, I sell in galleries and sell prints as I think it is one of the easiest ways to reach people” (A5); “I think galleries are super important because they will show my work to a different type of audience (...) also they have an important digital role, as they are constantly doing posts about you and your work, and have themselves an online store.” (A7).

Only a few are outside of this system, as these are two artists that do not have usually work to exhibit, their work is commissioned by each client and sold before being developed. “For those who are artists’ that want to express themselves in the paper and sell to those who want to buy it, a gallery can benefit them a lot, as it provides a space for exchange, critic and dialogue that goes much deeper than the comments you can get on Instagram (...) but for me at this point where the work that I do that is usually already sold it doesn’t make much sense” (A4). Therefore, even if we live in a digital era, artists that want to sell the creations that come from their own expressions and are not pre-determined for someone, should probably consider having a physical presence of these artworks as well.

### **5.2.1. Current Digital Channels**

Most of the artists interviewed manage their digital channels by themselves with no external help. Only one said to have a friend that helps managing the online store orders and an agency that helps with content and email exchanging with brands.

When analyzing the digital channels used by the artists (Figure 1), one evident result was that Instagram is the most used channel across all of them and considered to be the most

important one. This can be related with the fact that social networking systems as Instagram, with a visual preponderance over text, opened a new space for communications and expression that would not be possible when communicating only with text (Griffith et al., 2021).

Right after the Instagram profile, the online store came as the second most important channel, used by seven out of eight artists, and seen as the next thing to build for the only artist that does not have it currently. The majority have their online store built on the Etsy marketplace, one has it built on Big Cartel (an online store platform for artists), and only one incorporated in her website. All the interviewees using Etsy have a direct connection from their Instagram Profile to the store and said that the majority of people accessing it are coming from there, and smaller parts from the Etsy Marketplace itself, or from search engine tools when typing their name directly - "I think that for someone starting their career Etsy is a great option as it allows to have people from other countries buying our artworks, as it is a marketplace and some of the people that are there will find you" (A7). In addition, the artist using Big Cartel store, also mention that she is almost sure that most people accessing the online store are coming from her Instagram profile.

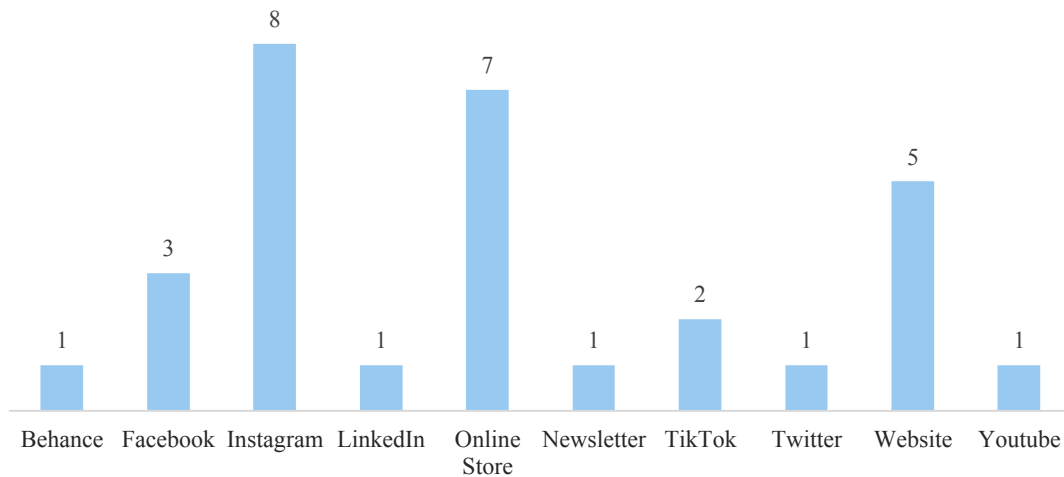
Besides the Instagram profile and online store, most of the artists interviewed have a professional website, but a few have mentioned that it is not updated now. For all of them, their website has a different purpose from their Instagram profile: "I only put on my website the final works that I really like" (A7 ); "From a certain time I felt I needed a more condensed size portfolio with final works, for someone that wants to get the essence of my work and can do it easily" (A6); "I don't show everything in my website, it is more thought as a visit card, something that is more static" (A3).

After the website, Facebook was told to be used by only a few artists. However, this is not an important channel for any of the three using it. "I rarely go there and don't have any traffic coming from there" (A2); "I only do the automatic post there [posting the same as on Instagram]" (A7); "I sometimes forget about Facebook" (A1). All the artists that said not to use this channel, have used it in the past but quit at some point as they felt it was not worth to invest on it anymore.

TikTok was mentioned to be used by only a few interviewees, but not as something that happens naturally for them. "I have TikTok, as I felt a bit obliged to have it (...) I thought it would help my content to become viral (...) I love to see it as a user, but deep down I don't feel I was made to have a very big digital audience" (A4); "Sometimes I make some TikTok videos but this social media platform is not for me, I am a millennial and I don't care about dancing content" (A1).

Lastly, five other different channels are used only by one of the artists: Behance (A5); LinkedIn (A5); Newsletter (A3); Twitter (A1) and Youtube (A8). Nonetheless, apart from the newsletter for A3, and Behance for A5, the other channels did not seem to be very relevant for the artists currently.

**Figure 2: Digital Channels Used by the Artists**



From the Data presented and explained above, we can see that Instagram is the main focus for the artists right now and the one that works more naturally for them as a place to present their work and who they are (related with the branding area of the conceptual framework). Followed by the online store, with a different purpose, more related with facilitating sales (related with the conversion area of the conceptual framework), but still working in connection with their Instagram. Nevertheless, other channels can be valuable for the artists, as described above, depending on their specific context.

### 5.2.2 Social Media Use

One of the most common topics that the artists shared about Instagram (the most important social media channel used by the interviewees), was that it allows more space to show their own identity and not only the final products - “What I do is mixing my personal life and my work, I think it makes sense because my work has something that is very auctorial that people are also interested in” (A6); “On Instagram I show the day to day life, the spontaneity of certain things, or the creative process, not only the final work as in the website” (A7); “I share things that I see, works from other people that I like, funny memes, my daily life and my cat” (A2); “People started to see my face on Instagram, I started to show up more and interact with the

community, sharing insights (...)” (A4); “On Instagram you should show more intermediate points of work, and also more who you are apart from the perfect and finalized product” (A3).

Regarding showing their face and personal identity, most of the artists said they do it on Instagram, even if for some it comes more naturally than for others. Only one said not to do it but seeing it as a brand statement – “I try that my Instagram feed and stories are always drawings, even if I show some parts of my daily life is through drawings, and that is sort of my personal branding, drawing my day-to-day life.” (A8).

When it comes to showing the work processes most of the artists said that they find the space to do it there, as they do not want to show only the final work.

When asked how regularly they post something on Instagram, the majority showed that their way of posting is not always consistent. Only one said to do it always very often (table 16 in annex 3). This behavior taken by most of the artists does not respond to the recommendation of content planning in social media as something that should be strategically thought and designed to create social media engagement behaviors (Dolan et al., 2019). Literature also says that social media management is way more important for a brand than having a vast product portfolio, as one with a short portfolio can surpass sells of another with a bigger one, by managing better its social media profiles (Saboo et al, 2016), but results show that it is not easy for most of the artists to be consistent and plan ahead in time.

**Table 5: Publishing Frequency on Instagram**

<b>A4</b>	<i>This is a hard topic. Before I used to feel a lot of pressure to be always posting, even more by having studied marketing and knowing that the algorithm favors who posts more. But then I understood that this pressure to post was making me feel less creative. (...) As an artist I cannot live depending on an algorithm, neither plan much for the long-term.</i>
<b>A5</b>	<i>Currently I am on vacation, and I don't post anything since two months ago. Sometimes I publish stories because I remember to. But I have periods where I don't feel motivated to do it. When I am active, I publish every day, if not an Instagram post, a story.</i>
<b>A6</b>	<i>For me it only works while it's fun. When it becomes something mandatory and someone tells me that I need to do it three times a week, my reaction is not to do it. I don't like to see social media as work because it stops working for me.</i>



Even if Instagram is the only channel used by all the artists, the majority of the artists said that the most recent Instagram algorithm is not working as well for them as before (table 6). It is noticeable in some of the answers that the artists feel frustrated with it, probably because they do not feel related with this creator culture that requires fast producing and posting, and creators that should be posting daily or weekly, which leaves a small space for creations that are not digitally preconceived or that take a long time to be developed (Chayka, 2021).

**Table 6: New Instagram Algorithm**

<p><b>A3</b></p>	<p><i>I don't know if you heard from other artists because a lot of people are getting frustrated with it, the Instagram algorithm is changing because of videos and the engagement with static posts is very low, even as a user I see many more memes than artists that I like to follow.</i></p>
<p><b>A4</b></p>	<p><i>Nowadays the artist is also an entertainer that must entertain his community, and that was a big difference that the new algorithm and COVID brought with the video being king. (...) As an artist I cannot live depending on it.</i></p>
<p><b>A7</b></p>	<p><i>I think that the Instagram algorithm is sort of ungrateful, it is not great for images now and it's better for reels and that gets me upset. In the last 2/3 months I think it's the worst time for people to see images.</i></p>

Also, most of the artists do not see video as a suitable media for their illustration work, that is usually translated in static images, and it is an extra effort them to create this type of content. All the interviewees referred that the reels tool, to which Instagram gives priority to in terms of visibility now, is not something natural for them to use, being even frustrating for some that it gets the importance it does now (table 7 and table 18 in annex 3).

**Table 7: The Artists' Opinions Regarding Reels on Instagram**

<p><b>A4</b></p>	<p><i>I use reels, but I used to force myself much more before to do that and tiktoks, I really thought I needed to. Now that I arrived from my vacation that was great, I noticed that I didn't make any reels (...) I prefer 1000x more to live, paint, walk and see beautiful things that inspire my paintings, than being recording, editing, and sharing. And I am understanding now that my clients are more in the physical places I go to than in the digital world.</i></p>
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<b>A6</b>	<i>Using reels is a communication method I don't feel safe with. Being an illustrator is usually being able to capture everything we want to say in one image, doing reels seems to me as extending it through different moments and sometimes it doesn't make sense for me.</i>
<b>A8</b>	<i>I try to make more reels but I face the same issue as I did with youtube before, the edition is time consuming. Also, I don't remember always to do it while I am drawing, I only do it when I remember.</i>

### 5.3. The Impact of the Digital Channels on the Artists' Careers

Taking into account the four areas presented in the conceptual framework chapter (Branding, Engagement, Networking and Conversion) I have put together the artists' statements related with each one of these areas (table 8,9,10 and 11 and tables 19,20,21 and 22 in annex 3).

**Table 8: Digital Presence – Branding Impact**

<b>A1</b>	<i>I am sure that my business got noticed and grew thanks to social media, when people started to share (...) The question of social media is that everyone that has a smartphone can access it so easily. If people get to know your work, they have the chance to like and to support it, that's why it is important to invest in our digital presence, even if it is not the only way of getting visibility, but it is an important one.(...) I believe people should not be shy show who they are, we already know we won't please everyone, so it's better to stick to our values and what we believe in."</i>
<b>A4</b>	<i>Instagram has definitely had a role in spreading my brand, as up until recently I didn't even feel the need of having a physical visit card, and I work since 7 years ago. Now in the weddings I felt it was better to have it, as I interact a lot with people there. (...) Most of the people got to know me on Instagram, but nowadays in live sketching I think the most valuable interactions are made alive.</i>
<b>A6</b>	<i>I believe that a lot of people got to know my work through my digital channels, and my Instagram has space for both my personal and artistic identity, even if I don't have probably a strategy. I think it only makes sense to have it in this way, to show the person I am behind the work that I do. But I feel that for it to work for the other side it must be authentic, and that each artist needs to find the presence and voice that</i>

	<i>make sense for him. When it is something too generic, I don't think it works.</i>
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All the eight artists interviewed defend that their digital channels (mainly Instagram) help in terms of visibility, even if for some it is more essential than for others, as that digital visibility is the main source of clients and work offers. However, for the others that get work proposals more effectively from other sources (e.g. people in live events, editors that are fixed clients, clients that know them since a long time ago, etc) they all still mentioned that the visibility it brings is valuable.

It is a way, for all the eight artists, to expose their work and have a portfolio that is easy to be accessed by everyone. Even if for someone they meet in a physical event, it is a point of connection for that person to see the work they do, a sort of confirmation, as stated by A8 (table 11). Also, apart from showing a long portfolio for most of them, it allows most of the artists to have a space where they can show who they are behind their paintings, as reflected previously in the Social Media Use section. Allowing their followers to get to know who they are and what they believe in is relevant as tendentially Gen-Z consumers, follow and buy according to how related they feel with the brand (the artists' themselves) and how they can speak towards their self-identity, community or causes they are involved with (Forbes & Derby 2019).

**Table 9: Digital Presence – Engagement Impact**

<b>A1</b>	<i>For me what is more important apart from comments, from people that have seen what I share, is when I get messages that testify a positive life change for them, for example people that have toxic relationships and are afraid to leave their house. It goes much beyond than the simple digital interactions. (...) There is really a community and I have firstly noticed that when I launched my book and there was a huge line of people waiting for me to sign it and make them a quick customized drawing.</i>
<b>A4</b>	<i>I feel that I have regular people that interact every time I publish something on Instagram, and also that other artists come to talk with me. But I think that with these regular people we always feel the need to move to the physical world and either I find them in an artist community I am part of or I go for a coffee with them. (...) I used to interact more with my digital audience when developing workshops than nowadays in the live events, because I used to ask what they wanted to learn, in which type of media, what day was the best one for them... This year as I will start having</i>

	<i>workshops in person I feel that I will do it more again.</i>
<b>A8</b>	<i>Now it's more a like or a reaction and that's it. I only have more interaction when I make a more pedagogical post with more content (...) I feel like there is a sort of community that comment more, but those are the people that also come to the workshops, that community that wants to learn more. Apart from that there is also a community that does wedding sketching and we end up communicating a lot.</i>

The sense of community was mentioned as something they feel on Instagram by the majority of the artists. Apart this community of followers that exchange with them, a few of the artists have mentioned to feel part of a community of illustrators there. However, the community does not seem to exist on Instagram or other digital networks per se, as half of the artists mentioned that this feeling happens when complemented with physical experiences, or at least more time spent online (e.g., online formations and workshops).

Forbes & Derby (2019) stated that people have been more engaging with the arts world than ever before, thanks to social media and digital channels. However, some of the artists interviewed said that after the pandemic people are not interacting online as they were. This can be related with a different online mindset, as users are getting interested in digital wellness and more sustainable and meaningful ways to spend their time online (Ables, 2019).

**Table 10: Digital Presence – Networking Impact**

<b>A4</b>	<i>I have had working opportunities that come from there. The funniest one was being invited to a Portuguese TV Show to talk about illustration, my classes during the pandemic and how my digital channels helped me doing that. Also 95% of the brands find me there [clothing, fashion and cosmetic brands, Deloitte, the European Private World Forum]. My Instagram ends up being my portfolio and it allows me not to have an agency or a gallery, it acts as my work agent.</i>
<b>A7</b>	<i>I got important contacts and opportunities from there. The award I've gained from NIT came from there when they contacted me to participate in their contest for which I had been selected. Individual clients that want to buy something from the store or something customized 99% come from there. And many companies discover me there and contact me for their marketing related works, social media formats, videos, and animations.</i>

<b>A8</b>	<i>I think it helps me on networking, but I don't think I get opportunities that come organically from there. What happens is that people that already know I exist go there to check my work and have a confirmation, and then it works as a conversational channel.</i>
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Even if all artists mentioned that their digital channels (mainly Instagram) help in terms of brand awareness and visibility, when it comes to getting effective contacts for their career, it does not seem to work for many. Half of the interviewees said that it is not the most effective channel for people to get to know them, believing that physical presence is still more important than the digital one, when meeting new people and potential clients – “What I feel is that I get a lot of contacts on Instagram, but when people see the prices, they get scared. On the other hand, those who see us working in events and who contact us through a physical visit card, via email or phone, are much more willing to become clients and make a work proposal. On Instagram maybe one out of fifty contacts converts into a client” (A8).

**Table 11: Digital Presence – Conversion Impact**

<b>A1</b>	<i>Increasing the number of followers translates directly in brand awareness, not in sales. Something that works in terms of sales for me is to use discount codes on Instagram. As I have a good exposure and a community that is already aligned with my values, many are willing to buy my products.</i>
<b>A2</b>	<i>I can assure that increasing the number of followers doesn't translate on sales. One time I have made a jump of 5k, but the people that came from that illustration, even if some bought it, for the number it was it didn't translate in effective sales levels. Sometimes I even notice that for the amount of likes the sales are still really low.</i>
<b>A4</b>	<i>Increasing the number of followers translates in more contacts I get, but not exactly in more sales. The funnel becomes bigger, but the ones converting to clients end up being the same. Currently my clients are more concentrated in real life in the live events I work in.</i>

The conversion area seems to be the one that is less impacted in a direct way. Apart from one artist, all mentioned that increasing the number of followers does not increase the number of sales directly, it increases the awareness and the contacts they get, but the effective ones do

not seem to happen frequently. What one of the artists mentioned that helps on that is to have promotion codes for products advertised on Instagram. One aspect that was brought by a few artists was that having a loyal niche may be better to invest in than trying to reach more and more people that are not high-quality followers willing to buy their products – “the funnel gets bigger, but the ones converting to clients end up being the same” (A4). The results do not support the views expressed by McAndrew (2020) that said how Instagram was used by collectors finding and buying artworks in 2020 and Schachter (2021) who states that everyone including old people will buy art on Instagram soon. The Portuguese interviewees do not seem to be living these realities.

## Chapter 6: **Conclusion**

The current study contributes to the vision of the artist as a brand manager and strategist, (Andy Warhol, 1975; Peng, 1992; Schroeder, 2005; Muñiz et al., 2014; Toghraee & Farsi, 2018; Petrides & Fernandes, 2020), one that to succeed has to manage his personal brand – a human brand (Schroeder 2005; Moulard et al. 2015; Lee & Lee, 2017; Kerrigan, et al. 2011; Muñiz et al., 2014; Fillis, 2015; Preece, 2015).

Contextualizing the artist brand management in the era we live in it made sense to bring the study to the digital world and online presence the artists are working in, in a post pandemic time where the online art marketplace deserves even more attention (Matthews, 2020; Sutton 2021), and social media management plays a huge role on it (Forbes & Derby, 2019; McAndrew, 2021).

The purpose of this study was to understand mainly two topics: how the artists manage their digital presence (RQ1) and what is the impact that presence has on their career growth (RQ2). To explore these topics, participants with common characteristics was purposely selected: eight Portuguese artists and in an early/emerging career stage working in Portugal, with a career focused on illustration were interviewed. A contextualization and introductory part were also needed in the interviews to get to know the artists and understand their business.

To answer to these two research questions, a purposive sampling method (Farrugia, 2019) was applied and eight semi-structured interviews were conducted, where the interview guide had general guiding questions (annex 1), but there was flexibility for the interviewer to make modifications according to the interviewee's responses. (Aborisade, 2013; Adhabi & Anozie, 2017).

The answers differed based on the subjectivity of each participant's experience and perspectives, that are unique and diverse (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Even if the interviewees chosen are inside of the same context, each career path, ways of working and personal experience were very different according to each path and experience (table 1). As seen, the artists have different major income sources (private individual clients, brands, companies, live events, workshops and art courses, art fairs, galleries, etc.).

Despite the differences of the core business and income sources, COVID-19 pandemic has affected most of the artists' careers and ways of working in terms of work opportunities, business model or content creation (table 2 and 3, and table 13 and 14 in annex 3). Some of the artists, that seemed to think more strategically about their brand and the current market needs, have even adapted their core business to what they felt were market and personal needs, aligning

it more with their own values and desires. More well-established artists did not seem to be very affected by COVID-19 and kept on acting the same way they did digitally before, as their clients network was already quite stable.

All the artists have shown to have a digital presence dating back to the beginning of their career as an illustrator or even before that (table 4 and table 15 in annex 3), exploring opportunities where they could expose their creations in the digital world. This shows that since a younger age the artists saw potential in investing time and presence in the digital world.

When asked if they had to adapt their artworks to a digital format most of the artists said they did not have to, either because they were always doing it digitally, or because they do it in an analogical way and converting to digital is something that comes after the creation. It does not seem that the artists are in general willing to abdicate on the artwork's quality and creation authenticity for digital purposes. For most of them adapting it to the digital world is more a necessity than something that they have pleasure in doing. The creator culture that requires fast producing and posting (Chayka, 2021) does not seem to be the place most of the artists want to be.

Nonetheless, the digital presence it is not enough for the majority of the artists, and they are still present in galleries. Only two of the artists interviewed are not inside of this system, as most of their work is done either in live events or is something that is already pre-determined to be sold to someone and is customized for that client. All the others that sell their original creations and prints noted that it is very useful to be present in galleries, as it will reach a different type of audience than social media does and increase sales.

The digital channels used by the artists (figure 2) were mostly common throughout the artists. Instagram is the one that all are using and considered to be the most important one for the majority of the artists, followed right after by an online store, and after a professional website. Other channels were mentioned but used by less than half of the interviewees (Facebook, TikTok, Behance, LinkedIn, Newsletter, and Youtube). However, it is interesting to see how each one of them builds their digital path with the platforms that are more intuitive and useful for them to use.

Even if Instagram comes for all as the top digital channel used in professional terms, it seems that it is hard to post and plan consistently there for most of the artists (table 5 and table 15 in annex 3). Only one said that she does post often and that never stayed for more than four days without posting. Also, a frustration feeling was common throughout all the interviewees, regarding the reels tool that the new Instagram favors, prioritizing video over images (table 6 and 7, and table 17 and 18 in annex 3), which does not seem to be an intuitive and useful format



for an illustrator, that has works with the purpose of representing a reality in a static image. With the previous algorithm it seemed that the illustration work was more exposed to the artists' followers, and some have even mentioned that they get tired of fighting against the algorithm.

In terms of the impact their digital presence has on their career, four main areas were explored (branding/ engagement/ networking and conversion – figure 1), as explained in the Conceptual Framework chapter.

All the eight artists interviewed defended that their digital channels (mainly Instagram) help in terms of visibility and brand awareness. It is a way, for all the eight artists, to expose their work and have a portfolio that is easy to be accessed by everyone. Even if for someone they meet in a physical event, it is a point of connection for that person to see the work they do. Also, apart from showing a long portfolio for most of them, it allows most of the artists to have a space where they can show who they are behind their paintings.

Regarding engagement, the conclusion was that the feeling of community does not seem to exist on Instagram or other digital networks per se, as half of the artists mentioned that this feeling happens when complemented by physical experiences, or at least more time spent online (e.g., online courses and workshops). Also, agreeing with the vision of Chayka (2021), the creators that are not producing content daily or weekly will not reach an engaged audience, and most of the artist said they cannot be consistent and posting as often as they would like. For one that wants to increase their level of engagement in social networks, it is required a fast producing and posting, which on the other hand can compromise the artists' creative processes.

Even if all artists mentioned that their digital channels (mainly Instagram) help in terms of brand awareness and visibility, when it comes to getting effective contacts for their career, it does not seem to work for many of them. Half of the interviewees said that it is not the most effective channel for people to get to know them, believing that physical presence is still more important than the digital one, when meeting potential clients.

Lastly, the conversion area seems to be the one less impacted in a direct way by the artists digital channels. Apart from one artist, all mentioned that increasing the number of followers does not increase the number of sales directly, it increases the awareness and the contacts they get, but the effective ones do not happen frequently. This last part disagrees with the vision of McAndrew (2020) that said how Instagram was used by collectors finding and buying artworks in 2020 and Schachter (2021) that states that everyone including old people will buy art on Instagram soon. For most of the artists interviewed it is not happening that way still. In the results chapter, we saw that some of the artists try to target foreigner clients as they are more willing to buy than the Portuguese. This strategy agrees with the theory from Lee & Lee (2019),

that says that users are attracted to use digital platforms in the arts world, as these are easy to use and surpass barriers of the offline one, such as geographical restrictions.

After listening to all the artists and analyzing their interviews transcripts, my interpretation in terms of the four areas (Branding, Engagement, Networking and Conversion) is that across the artists interviewed, the most impacted one is Branding. It is the only one that works in a direct and complete way, meaning that the digital channels and social media (many times summarized only as Instagram – the artists' main used channel) have the power to increase the artists' visibility and exposure, only from their presence there.

They can do it in different ways and have other complementary ways of being seen, but this one is non-disposable. Even if they have moments where they do not use it as often, where maybe are not as seen and found out by new people, their work is still there, and it still works as something easy to share with potential clients. It gives them the chance of getting seen or of being confirmed as artists. It shows their portfolio and presents them as artists in a complete way, where they show their character and personality behind the works they produce.

The conclusion that branding is the most impacted of the four areas of the emerging artists' digital presence is relevant as nowadays there is a tendency, mostly between Gen-Z consumers, which are part of the current and future online art market, that they follow and buy according to how related they feel with the brand (the artists' themselves) and how they can speak towards their self-identity, community or causes they are involved with (Forbes & Derby 2019).

As described before, the artists find on Instagram a space to express themselves as artists and people, which agrees with authenticity being a relevant tool that should be used by artists when engaging with their audience and constructing significant connections (Preece, 2015). Artists interviewed that managed to have a big community of followers have mentioned that: *I think it only makes sense to show the person I am behind the work that I do. I feel that for it to work for the other side it must be authentic, and that each artist needs to find the presence and voice that make sense for him. When it is something too generic, I don't think it works (A5); people should not be shy show who they are, we already know we won't please everyone, so it's better to stick to our values and what we believe in (A1)*. This is also aligned with the vision of Thomson (2006), where the human brand should not be seen as an imitator or trying too hard to look like something that it is not, otherwise it will risk losing clients and being perceived as a pretender.

This way, it is recommended for emerging artists to act on their branding in their digital channels. To do that, they should show more than the final artworks, and be willing to show unique content that show who they are behind it (what are their values and believes, personality,

particular points of view) avoiding to be too generic. A community of followers can be based on the sense of identification with the artist.

Planning and being digitally active is important as well for the ones that want to build this online community, as visibility in social media comes with fast producing and posting (Chayka, 2019). Perhaps the artist can consider having faster creation contents that can be shared more easily, but not losing the higher quality ones that can take more time to be developed. Nonetheless, every artistic path is unique and the artist needs to find his authentic path on his or her digital channels, and there will still be many that do not want to get closer to this digital world.

Furthermore, the emerging artists should take advantage of their digital channels to invest on their branding, as apart from branding being essential for the artist (Schroeder, 2005), the artists' brands are now seen as more relevant when it comes to the judgement and evaluation of the artworks in the market than the artworks themselves (Lee & Lee, 2017). At a final stage, the artists digital presence contributes to the creation and management of their artistic brand, the last building block of a successful artistic career (Petrides & Fernandes, 2020).

Artists should still invest on the other three areas (Engagement, Networking and Conversion), but the present study shows that through their digital channels, the most impacted one will be Branding. Starting from this one, doors can be opened, and the other areas can be impacted consequently.

## **6.1. Limitations and Future Research**

Although believing in the relevance of this present study, there were some limitations that could be identified, being the first one the access to reach and interview Portuguese illustrators, as some of them did not reply when contacted via Instagram. Also, for many artists it is not natural to think strategically and with a business orientation view about their art business, which made it challenging during the interviews to get management insights. For some of them their business works in a more spontaneous way than a very planned and analyzed one.

Another limitation was the sample size, that even if it was enough to collect data and reach conclusions, it has been seen that artists careers can be extremely diverse even if they are working in the same artistic sector (illustration, in this case). It could be interesting with a longer time project to interview more illustrators and try to group them within their areas of focus. This could help on understanding how they differ from one another in terms of digital presence and the impact it has for each group of illustrators (e.g., book illustration/ live sketching/

commercial illustration/ customized illustration/ illustration artworks to expose). However, it is not easy to group the artists interviewed within a specific area as in the Portuguese market they tend to adapt their work to different formats and work in different projects at the same time, to increase their portfolio offer and work opportunities. Perhaps they could explore the one that is their main income source. This would allow a more detailed analysis within the variety of paths an illustrator can take.

I believe that more research on Portuguese artistic careers with practical insights could be helpful for emerging artists, as well as for creative students studying in Fine Arts Universities that have a more classic approach, as I feel that was something that would have been very useful for me when I was doing that before this master's degree.

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## **Annexes**

### **Annex 1: Interview Guide**

First of all, let me thank you for your time and availability to participate on this interview that will support my Master's Dissertation on "The Digital Presence of Emerging Visual Artists and its Impact on Career Growth", at ISCTE Business School.

The information that will be shared by you will be only used for Dissertation purposes and kept confidential. Do you agree with the recording of this interview for further data analysis?

#### **Introduction**

I will start with some introduction questions,

How old are you?

Since how many years do you work in illustration?

Where are you from and where do you work?

How does your business and income sources work?

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, was the way you used your digital channels and social media the same?

Did you have at any point to adapt your creation processes to digital?

#### **Digital Presence**

Since when are you present as an artist in the digital world?

How often do you share something in your digital channels?

Do you believe that nowadays having an effective digital strategy can be more important than a relationship with a gallery?

Which digital platforms and social media do you use in professional terms?

Which one do you consider to be the most important one?

Do you manage them by yourself, or do you have someone that helps you?

To manage your art, do you see social media as essential or something extra?

#### **Objectives and Impact**

Do you believe that your digital channels have a role on establishing and spreading your personal and artistic brand?

Do you know if a lot of people get to know your work through your digital channels?

Do your followers interact a lot with what you share?

Do you use interactive tools on Instagram such as reels, questions or polls?

Do you feel that there is a community in your social media?

Did your networking grow from your digital channels?

Did you get important contacts, work proposals or invitations from there?

Do you think that increasing the number of followers translates in more sales?

Why do you think it is important to invest in your digital presence overall, and how does it impact your career growth?

I think I have everything I need. Once more, thank you for participating!

## Annex 2: The Context of the Artists Interviewed

Below is a small description about each artist interviewed (table 12), whom has been attributed a code throughout the dissertation for confidentiality reasons.

**Table 12: The Context of the Artists Interviewed**

<b>A1</b>	Artist 1 lives in Porto and works mostly as an illustrator influencer, collaborating with brands that are aligned with her values. Her work has also social and activist purposes. She has also released her own book. She is 28 years old and works as an illustrator since seven years ago.
<b>A2</b>	Artist 2 lives in Porto and apart from working at Ó Galeria, his art business is split by galleries, illustration fairs and individual clients. He is 36 years old and works as an illustrator since 12 years ago.
<b>A3</b>	Artist 3 lives in Porto and works mainly with book editors in long-time projects (books), but she is also present in galleries. She is 32 years old and works as an illustrator since 10 years ago.
<b>A4</b>	Artist 4 lives in Lisbon and currently works mainly in live sketching, drawing in live events (mostly weddings). She has also been giving online painting workshops to her Instagram community and selling many customized aquarells for individual clients. She is 24 and works in illustration since 7 years ago.
<b>A5</b>	Artist 5 lives in Porto and works as a graphic designer and illustrator. She works mainly with brands and companies, but also exposes her works and prints in galleries and delivers workshops organized by her or other entities. She is 27 years old and works in illustration since 4 years ago.
<b>A6</b>	Artist 6 lives in Porto and works mainly with private clients, brands and people that ask for her drawings. According to her, everything that a drawing can be applied to is a possible work opportunity. She is also present in galleries with her more artistic expression works and has released one book as well. She is 35 years old and works in illustration since 12 years ago.

<b>A7</b>	Artist 7 lives in the Viseu district and works as a graphic designer and illustrator. Her illustration work is mostly with individual clients, companies, and brands. She is also present in galleries. She is 29 years old and works in illustration since 4 years ago.
<b>A8</b>	Artist 8 lives in Lisbon and works from 9am to 5pm as an architecture illustrator inside a company. Apart from that, he has 3 areas he works in as an illustrator: live sketching (mostly weddings), providing training (live and online drawing workshops) and with individual clients that ask for a customized painting. He is 42 years old and works in illustration since 10 years ago.

### Annex 3: Interviewees Statements

Table 12: Artists' Business Model and Income Sources

A1	<i>My biggest income source is from collaborations with brands (...) I also sell to galleries and my online store has good sales level in specific times such as Christmas.</i>
A2	<i>It changes within the year time and opportunities that appear. In the current moment, apart from working in a gallery [Ó Galeria] 30% is from galleries, other 30% from fairs that I participate in and one that I organize, and lastly, 40% is from individual clients.</i>
A3	<i>I work more with book editors and facilitate workshops usually organized by other entities, but also some organized by myself. I don't have much work with individual clients.</i>
A5	<i>I have more individual clients. What I like the most is commercial work with brands, and not as much to exhibit in galleries or sell prints. But I also do it because it is the easiest way to reach people.</i>
A7	<i>I work more with clients, even if they don't repeat much, there are new ones that keep showing up. I would say that 50% of my business is freelance for different clients and that the other 50% are split between galleries and my online store.</i>

Table 13: COVID-19 Impact in Work Opportunities

A3	<i>In concrete work terms, it hasn't changed much, as I don't have a lot of work with clients, I work more with editors.</i>
A5	<i>The pandemic years were the ones where my illustration work was more active, I had much more work.</i>
A6	<i>The pandemic has not change anything in terms of work or even digital presence.</i>
A7	<i>I remember I had a lot of work when we were closed at home, I think people were more available online.</i>
A8	<i>During 2020-2021 my biggest income source was training, giving workshops to people that are not professionals but like to draw.</i>

**Table 14: COVID-19 Impact on Social Media Posting and Content Creation**

<b>A2</b>	<i>I learned to do different things, for example the Throwback Thursday, where I share past works that I like (...) But before the pandemic it was easier to post as I had more work to show.</i>
<b>A3</b>	<i>I started to organize weekly writing meetings during the pandemic. I've posted more Instagram Stories and every Monday I started to share what I was working on.</i>
<b>A5</b>	<i>I was always addicted to posting, but maybe during the pandemic I posted even more often, also because those were the years when I worked more actively.</i>
<b>A6</b>	<i>The pandemic didn't change my digital presence, as I already had one very regular.</i>
<b>A8</b>	<i>During the pandemic I found that people reply very well to Instagram. I think I didn't change much the way I was using it but have sophisticated it.</i>

**Table 15: The Beginning of the Artists' Digital Presence**

<b>A1</b>	<i>In 2015 I created my artistic name and at the same time a Facebook page. At the same time, I was doing street art, which helped because people used to share. Also, during this time, I created an Instagram account but that was personal and not professional.</i>
<b>A2</b>	<i>I used to have a website when I was in school because we were given the right of having a site domain. Then I started with Instagram after starting to work with illustration 10 years ago.</i>
<b>A4</b>	<i>My career started digitally. I started immediately on Instagram and Facebook. Contact via email was never too natural for me, social media allowed me to be more informal and spontaneous.</i>
<b>A5</b>	<i>I come from a generation that almost thinks first in the post than the artwork. I recognize that is from my digital presence I get every work opportunity. My Instagram should date from 2014-15.</i>
<b>A7</b>	<i>I have a digital presence since 2017, when I started to post more things related with my work and illustration specifically, when I registered in an illustration course and started to dedicate full time to illustration.</i>



**Table 16: Publishing Frequency on Instagram**

<b>A1</b>	<i>I post every day. I think that the maximum I have been without posting were 4 days. I don't have a fix plan, but I have fix dates for the sponsored posts.</i>
<b>A2</b>	<i>I am not the best person to talk about that. I sometimes publish every day or two times a week, but for example this current week I haven't done it. Usually stories I share them every day, but not posts. It also depends on what I have to show.</i>
<b>A3</b>	<i>I try to make posts 1 or 2 times a week, but it doesn't always happen. There are weeks where I publish every day, others where I don't do it almost never. I try to organize it though, I put everything in the creator studio and have posts planned beforehand. However, there are busier times where I don't organize it as much.</i>
<b>A7</b>	<i>I don't post always with the same regularity, maybe if I did that I would have more results. I don't schedule, but I usually have around 6 saved posts in the drafts and publish them from time to time. But I prefer not to publish anything than publishing a bad post.</i>
<b>A8</b>	<i>I used to do it more frequently in the beginning and tried to publish something every day. Now I do around one post per week, and stories when I have something to show that I am working in and it's not confidential. In average I would say 1 per day. But I don't really have a plan.</i>

**Table 17: New Instagram Algorithm**

<b>A2</b>	<i>I don't make Instagram posts as often as stories, as we get tired of fighting against the algorithm.</i>
<b>A5</b>	<i>Instagram wants us to be always posting. We have to be thinking about content to post all the time. And now less people see it.</i>
<b>A6</b>	<i>I have been noticing that my posts are not shown to everyone in the most recent Instagram model, and I have been thinking if I should open other channels to share my work.</i>
<b>A8</b>	<i>I've been noticing that people interact less with what I share lately, I am not sure why.</i>

**Table 18: The Artists' Opinions Regarding Reels on Instagram**

<b>A1</b>	<i>Reels require a lot of work to be done, people don't understand that. I wasn't made for video, I can work with it but I am not a big fan.</i>
<b>A2</b>	<i>I found out a photographer that started to share all his static images as reels, and it seems like Instagram loves it and that he has increased a lot his engagement (...) I have some that were well received but I don't do it often.</i>
<b>A3</b>	<i>I've never made a reels. It is not something natural for me.</i>
<b>A5</b>	<i>I don't use reels. I think my career will stop here because I hate reels and it's the biggest trend now. I don't even watch, so I won't develop them.</i>
<b>A7</b>	<i>I've made some reels and I see a really big difference. But it doesn't make much sense for me. It's fun from time to time but my work's essence is neither video nor animation.</i>

**Table 19: Digital Presence – Branding Impact**

<b>A2</b>	<i>I think it has an important role in terms of personal branding because nowadays people tend to relate personally with the artists they follow, even musicians or writers. (...) A lot of people got to know me on Instagram thanks to the "Inktober", that was started by an American artist and consists in an illustration per day in October. I have illustrated a snake in one of those days, and I don't know why but the algorithm took it and it went viral, and brought me 5k followers.</i>
<b>A3</b>	<i>I believe that most people contact me firstly because of my books. I think they see physically the books, and then look for me on Instagram. Portuguese people do it more like that, but foreigners come directly from Instagram.</i>
<b>A5</b>	<i>I think that my digital channels are almost the only vehicles to spread my work, mainly Instagram.</i>
<b>A7</b>	<i>I believe my digital channels did have an impact spreading my artistic and personal brand, but I already started my career in this digital and social media world. I know that more than 50% of people and companies that contact me are coming from Instagram.</i>
<b>A8</b>	<i>I think my digital channels help for people to get to know me, but I play in both ways,</i>

	<i>there and being in places drawing. Most of my workshops' students come from Instagram. But in terms of live sketching, almost all come from word of mouth, and on Instagram is not super effective.</i>
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**Table 20: Digital Presence – Engagement Impact**

<b>A2</b>	<i>I feel that usually people interact if I make a question. Apart from that I get likes when sharing my cat or new works that I share. (...) I don't feel famous to say that I have a community that wants to share what I do. I understood that I had people that followed me and that were really waiting that I shared more of my work, but that didn't translate much on Instagram.</i>
<b>A3</b>	<i>I think I have around 100 people that always see what I share, but a very small percentage comments or writes me. I think they react more to stories (...) I don't feel that there is really a community there but some people I have met there indeed, but for it to be a community I think people would need to interact more with one another, as I felt in a live event I used to organize, called Drink and Draw.</i>
<b>A5</b>	<i>I feel that my followers interact with what I post when I am more active and if I make questions, I love to do that, but sometimes it gets a lot of response and others it doesn't at all (...) I feel that there is a community but that it is constantly changing. It's funny to see that after half a year the people that are always attentive are different from the ones before.</i>
<b>A6</b>	<i>If I use Instagram stories to get questions from people, I usually get many that are interesting, usually from people that work in the area and that are curious about my work or topics related. It's good to have an exchange, also with colleagues, and not being only myself passing content. I like to see that there is someone on the other side that is interested and has also something to share.</i>
<b>A7</b>	<i>I think that people interact when I make the effort to make content that is interactive and challenges them (...) I feel that there is a community, not with the same people every time, sometimes someone answers to something because they feel related with it. But I also have people that effectively see my work and that I may even not know but are there often commenting and supporting.</i>

**Table 21: Digital Presence – Networking Impact**

<b>A1</b>	<i>My digital channels do help on networking, but I felt that my book launch impacted more my networking as at the time I went to the radio and television and that helped a lot. Brands usually contact me on Instagram but can also come through their communication agencies.</i>
<b>A2</b>	<i>I got a few contacts with opportunities from there, but usually when clients come to me, they already know who I am and know my work. It helps more to get clients for my online store. But I don't count on it to bring me a lot of work directly, I have an agent that does more of that.</i>
<b>A3</b>	<i>I have only a few clients so it's hard for me to say it has grown from there. I had a few work opportunities coming from there, but I don't think it impacts much what I do as I work mainly with editors. I had many proposals but for social and non-paid work. With galleries I think it happens more when I am physically on the place.</i>
<b>A5</b>	<i>My networking has grown through my Instagram account, where I had brands contacting me with work opportunities, even on their first approach, not via email. Examples of these were Lemon Jelly, Musa beer, Atelier Pino and also WeTransfer (...) I am not really good at networking in real life, so Instagram helps me a lot on that because I don't even have to go texting people, I tried to do that sometimes but it doesn't really work, so I think it's better to invest on it and keep on showing work there.</i>
<b>A6</b>	<i>I was told that people coming from agencies or advertising will pick the illustrators that have more followers for their works. I don't love this concept, but I don't doubt that having many followers is a factor for me to be chosen for a few works. What I think is that my digital channels allow me the space to expose what I can do, and it happens that when people see I can do something one time that they are interested in, they contact me to do something similar, so it ends up helping on that.</i>

**Table 22: Digital Presence – Conversion Impact**

<b>A3</b>	<i>I think that purchase actions depend on the quality of your followers. I do have many and there is a small percentage that do it. But I think it's possible to have a few that are quite active. Having a viral post also doesn't mean that a lot of people will buy</i>
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	<i>more of your work.</i>
<b>A5</b>	<i>I think that increasing the number of followers does impact sales positively, but overall, I think it's more about being more active and constantly posting for opportunities to appear.</i>
<b>A6</b>	<i>I don't think that increasing the number of followers translates in more sales. One time I have increased a lot with a series of Instastories I was making with drawings of typical Portuguese songs. People started to follow me because they liked it and many used to interact with it, but it wasn't even something that they could buy.</i>
<b>A7</b>	<i>I would like to see if having a bigger number of followers would translate into more sales, but I don't believe so. You may have 20k but if you don't make an effort and dedicate your time to them maybe it's better to have only 500 that are sort of loyal ones.</i>
<b>A8</b>	<i>I don't think that having more followers translates necessarily in having more sales, because my number has been growing and growing but sales levels are the same as when I had 5k, now I have more than 10k...</i>