

The Impact of Social Media on the Commercialization and Market Value of Visual Art

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Abstract: With the rapid development of social media, every aspect of people's lives has been affected. The art field is also transforming under the influence of social media, which has changed the value of artworks in the market and the commercialization process. This study will delve into the impact of social media on the commercialization and market value of artworks, reveal the intricate relationship between social media and the art market, and provide suggestions for relevant personnel. This research will use a qualitative analysis method to analyze the case of Zhao Xiaoli, a famous TikTok artist. The research results show that social media has democratized information in the art field, thus changing the traditional art market regarding selection, promotion, and transaction. In addition, social media has altered aesthetics in the art field and created more added value for artworks. Faced with such an impact, artists and social media face new opportunities to think and change. Artists should seize the opportunities given by social media, and social media should also give artists enough support to realize the free trade of artworks on social media. Simultaneously, under the influence of technology and the preference for trending content on social media, the art domain may witness issues such as art plagiarism and a tendency for artworks to prioritize popularity over creativity. Social media platforms should increase moderation and support different types of artwork equally. Artists should also maintain their original intentions and create unique works.

Keywords: Social Media, Commercialization and Market Value, Visual Art

1. Introduction

In today's era, social media affects all aspects of human social life, including the field of art. In this landscape, the symbiotic relationship between social media and visual art is becoming increasingly apparent. In the past, art was mostly presented and sold in galleries or museums. Now, the emergence of social media has enabled the democratization of information [1]. "Democratization of information" refers to making information more widely accessible, participatory and shared. People can easily access tens of thousands of works of art and learn about them on social media. This also gives artists a broader platform to display their artistic works and obtain information, thus bringing new impetus to the art field. What follows is a change in the value standards and consumption patterns of art.

In recent years, more and more scholars have noticed the impact of the emergence of social media on the commercialization and market value of artworks and have conducted a large number of studies. The research covers a variety of topics, from the analysis of Instagram art accounts to the role of

social media in art marketing today. Despite the vast volume of research in this field, there is still a gap in specifically analyzing the impact of social media on the commercialization and market value of art. Most studies only linger on extensive analyses of some positive aspects of the impact without specifically delving into a multifaceted analysis of the phenomenon from different perspectives, such as potential risks and consequences. This deficiency hinders artists from facing the changes in the new media era correctly and rationally. This article will build upon past research to delve deeply into the impact of social media on the commercialization and market value of visual artworks. This provides artists, galleries, collectors and scholars with valuable insights, ideas, and inspirations when using social media to market their works.

This article will focus on studying the changes in the commercialization and market value of visual artworks under the influence of social media. To achieve this goal, the research will center around a specific case for qualitative analysis. Drawing upon existing literature, the study will explore the phenomena reflected in the chosen case from various perspectives, aiming for a better understanding of the complex relationship between social media and the art market. This article will compare the current state of information democratization in the art market with the traditional art market. It aims to explore the transformative impact of widespread social media usage on the art market, identifying the evolving standards for the value of artworks today. The article seeks to provide multidimensional insights into the ongoing changes in the present art landscape.

2. Case Description

The artist Zhao Xiaoli has been studying fine arts since childhood. However, her works were first appreciated and discussed by many people not through galleries but through the Chinese short video platform TikTok. In 2019, she released her first short video; in this video, she documents the process of painting with lipstick. Then, she continued to think about and change her short video style. She first chose to use the theme of turning waste into art. She transforms discarded items like broken guitars or chairs through artistic reconstruction into brand new artworks, documenting the process and sharing edited videos on the TikTok platform. Her short video on this theme earned her tens of thousands of likes and comments. However, what made her famous was how she focused her videos on her wild and uninhibited creations. She uses splashing ink to prime the canvas and then uses her hands or a large brush to apply it randomly. In the process, her clothes, skin, and even the walls and floors were stained with paint, but she did not care. After she finishes an oil painting, the audience will see that the initially neat room and the artist have become full of color, which gives the audience a significant visual impact. At the same time, her ink-splattering method, accompanied by sad music, seems like an emotional release. Even ordinary viewers cannot help but be influenced by her emotions and may even understand her creative intent. While some admire her, many others hate her. Her haters thought her way of splashing ink was wasteful and merely for show, and they thought her painting skills were average and her works had no artistic value. However, these haters added to her buzz and made her even more popular. After that, she seemed to have found the secret of traffic and maintained the wild, creative method of splashing ink. So far, she has gained 8.986 million fans on the TikTok platform.

Her substantial following on social platforms has also brought her vast profits in commercializing her artworks. Her original oil painting was auctioned for a maximum of 184,000 yuan. In addition, she also releases a limited quantity of her print artwork, with an average price of around 3,500 yuan per piece. Simultaneously, the artistic value of her works and the level of discussion surrounding them have caught the attention of many galleries. They have approached her for collaborations to organize exhibitions. For example, on 23 November 2023, she held an exhibition at H Gallery in Shanghai. The success of these exhibitions has allowed her works to move from online to offline. The sale of exhibition tickets and related items also brought her many profits.

3. Analysis from Different Angles

3.1. Transformation of the Traditional Art Market Model by Social Media

From the case of Zhao Xiaoli, it can be found that due to the advent of digitalization and the Internet era, information in the art field is more equally distributed and circulated on social media. This democratization of information in the art field has brought profound changes to the traditional art market in all aspects. The traditional art market is mainly focused on transactions in galleries. Galleries are responsible for selecting artworks, promoting and showing them, and facilitating communication with potential buyers to finalize transactions ultimately. Today, due to the emergence of social media, galleries occupy an increasingly smaller share of the art transaction process. Social media's unique information democratization feature has changed every process of art transactions, bringing the visual art market into a new model.

Firstly, social media has altered the power dynamics in selecting art for display. In the past, most works were chosen by gallery managers and displayed in galleries, which meant that only paintings that met the gallery manager's approval could be displayed on a larger platform. To improve the overall level of the gallery, gallery managers often choose professional painters and works. This prevents some non-professional or unrefined pieces from entering the public eye. From Zhao Xiaoli's experience, what can be found is that many professionals have not recognized the professionalism of her work. This means that professional galleries may not select her works. However, the emergence of social media has allowed a new generation of artists to bypass gallery representation and replace the relationship between the "older" generation of artists and galleries with self-promotion [2]. Zhao Xiaoli uses Chinese short video platforms to display her paintings independently rather than through galleries. This self-promotion gives some less professional but enjoyable works a chance to be shown. For example, Zhao Xiaoli's lipstick painting, which takes only a tiny amount of time to complete and is not exquisite enough, is difficult to select for display by galleries. Still, many people can see and appreciate it through social media.

Secondly, social media has changed the space for displaying and promoting works. Social media has broken the geographical restrictions of traditional galleries, allowing people to appreciate artworks from all over the world. Comments can be seen from around the globe in Zhao Xiaoli's TikTok comment area. This phenomenon reflects that social media has given artists more opportunities to display their works to potential consumers worldwide. Social media has become an online gallery, providing a more expansive display space for artworks.

Finally, social media has shifted the dynamics of buying, selling, and communication away from gallery managers to direct contact between artists and their fans, further promoting the commercialization of artworks. Artists can use social media to establish dialogue and build closer relationships with fans while promoting their work [3]. After Zhao Xiaoli released a video of her artistic creation on TikTok, fans could freely express their opinions in the comment area. Zhao Xiaoli also actively responded to these comments. Such connections enhance the viewer's understanding of the artwork while fostering a more intimate relationship between artist and fan. At the same time, social media also provides artists a way to sell their works directly, such as Zhao Xiaoli's limited edition prints.

3.2. The Impact of Social Media on Aesthetics in the Field of Art

The emergence of social media has liberated art evaluation from the constraints of traditional industry standards. By analyzing the case of Zhao Xiaoli, what can be discovered is how social media has redefined the value and aesthetics of artistic works. On social media, interactive artworks with a strong color impact are more likely to attract viewers and gain more attention and traffic.

Before the Internet age, the value of art was determined by art critics [4]. Nowadays, more than just people in the industry judge whether an artwork is a good work. The likes, comments, and shares of the audience on social media also reflect the recognition of the work. Therefore, some artists began to pursue and explore what kind of works can obtain better data on social media. Zhao Xiaoli initially received mediocre feedback when she first shared her art on TikTok. However, when she started using the ink-splattering creative technique, her works sparked a frenzy of discussions. Some viewers have a deeper understanding of the artist's innovative ideas and feel the artist's emotions through splashing ink. Some viewers believed it was a wasteful use of paint and considered it a form of seeking attention from the crowd. However, all in all, whether it is a positive or negative comment, it means that the interactivity of this work is very high, the social media platform will give more views, and other data will improve. In the process, Zhao Xiaoli discovered that the most popular artworks on social media are interactive and chose to continue creating with splashing ink [4].

In addition, Zhao Xiaoli often uses colors with strong color saturation in her creations because this can catch people's attention immediately. The space limitations that social media breaks also mean that thousands of works on social media can be viewed simultaneously. This phenomenon makes the work conspicuous enough to stand out. Zhao Xiaoli noticed this and used colors with more visual impact to make her works attract more attention. In general, in order to gain more recognition, artists constantly adjust their creative direction through feedback on social media. In the process, social media has reshaped aesthetic trends.

3.3. Social Media's Impact on Adding Value to Artwork

Social media gives more added value to artworks. Under the influence of social media, the factors that affect the value of paintings are no longer limited to the artwork itself but include many other factors. Zhao Xiaoli's videos about artistic creation and the number of fans she has on social media both affect the value of the artwork.

First of all, the artistic creation videos shot by Zhao Xiaoli themselves have become a significant added value to her oil paintings. These videos record the artist's inspiration when creating by showing the process of artistic creation. At the same time, these videos showcase clever composition design and visual presentation, highlighting the artist's aesthetic sensibilities and artistic taste. These artworks uploaded on TikTok add storytelling and emotional resonance to her oil paintings. Zhao Xiaoli's work is no longer just a static work of art but an artistic experience rich in emotion and storytelling. This undoubtedly enhances the collection and investment value of the work.

Secondly, social media enables the artist to become a brand, enhancing the value of the artwork. Social media marketing is the fastest way to build brand awareness and a solid brand image [5]. Zhao Xiaoli has built a strong personal brand by actively interacting with fans on social media. A strong personal brand makes Zhao Xiaoli's works more famous and unique in the market. Beautiful data on social media increases buyer confidence [2]. Zhao Xiaoli's personal brand gives more people confidence in her works and improves their value assessment, making them more competitive in the market.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Seizing Opportunities for Artists

In the new media era, Facebook and Instagram are considered the top promoters of new trends in visual art [6]. With social media having such a vast influence, artists should actively seize opportunities and make good use of social media platforms to showcase their works to better cope with the impact of social media on the value and commercialization of artworks.

Artists should fully realize the potential of social media and view it as an essential way to expand their brand and the impact of their artwork. A recent article in Vogue magazine called Instagram "the world's most talked about new art dealer" [7]. Such a move shows that Instagram now occupies a significant position in art sales. Not just Instagram but many other social media platforms can be used as channels to sell art. For example, short videos on the TikTok platform can allow viewers to obtain information vividly and concisely, helping Internet celebrities define unique brand tonality [8]. Such characteristics of TikTok enable artists to establish their brands better and convey information to the audience, thereby better selling their artworks. Thus, social media can help artists in various aspects to enhance the value of their works.

Artists need to do a lot to use social media to enhance their work better. First, artists should post their artwork on social media. The vast audience on social media allows the creation of different artists to find the right audience. At the same time, artists can utilize short videos or live streaming to document the creative process, breaking time and space constraints in art presentations. This enables better interaction with the audience, direct communication, and the conveyance of innovative concepts to establish a strong fan base. Secondly, artists should be keenly aware of the artistic aesthetic trends in today's new media era and consider whether to incorporate them into their works. Social media users favor interactive, creative, and visually impactful content. Artists can pay attention to these elements during the creative process to make their artworks more contemporary and forward-looking. Artists should make good use of the opportunities presented by social media and strive to build their brands and increase the value of their works.

4.2. Empowerment and Support of Social Media

In the age of social media, artists share the roles of curators and marketers[9]. These new roles for artists require more autonomy and flexibility. Social media platforms should give artists more rights and support to help them commercialize their artworks on social media.

First, social media can help artists open online stores to sell their art. In this way, artist fans worldwide can purchase their favorite works of art more simply and directly without having to look for other purchase channels, making transactions more convenient.

Secondly, social media should give artists the right to build their own fan base and fan community. Social media should provide artists with a space to chat more privately with fans, making it easier for artists and fans to build intimate relationships. Social media fan communities allow fans to share content and information about artists freely. Social media can establish some mechanisms for checking in and encouraging fans to post in fan communities, allowing fans to chat and build relationships with each other. Establishing a fan base increases the loyalty of the artist's followers, fostering a stronger connection with the artist.

In addition, social media should also provide support to artists to hold online classes on the platform. Many fans admire and want to become artists. Suppose social media can help artists organize online courses in the form of live broadcasts or videos. In that case, artists can not only communicate deeply with fans but also make considerable benefits to the platform and the artist. If artists have such rights and make good use of them, it will greatly help the sales of their works and the building of their brands.

4.3. Emphasis on Rigorous Social Media Content Moderation

As social media strives to create an online art market, social media should review content rigorously. First of all, social media should promptly identify harmful and false propaganda content in artistic works and strictly abide by laws and regulations to improve the credibility of the online market. Secondly, social media should pay attention to the piracy and infringement of artworks. Social media

should use technology to ensure that the works uploaded on the platform are original or legally reproduced to ensure that the intellectual property rights of artists are protected. Additionally, social media should moderate works that address sensitive issues, such as artwork depicting controversies between different cultures and countries. Some artists may have their subjective stances when creating art, which may cause controversy on social media, so social media should fully consider and review sensitive issues.

While striving to promote the development of the online art market, social media platforms should be based on rigorous review to ensure the healthy growth of the online art market. At the same time, social media platforms should share the principles and standards of review with artists and users so that everyone can better understand the review rules. Only under strict review can the online art market develop in a healthy and long-term way, and the information presented on the platform be accurate, legal, respectful, and of artistic value.

4.4. Emphasis on Diversity in Artworks

Both artists and social media platforms should maintain their genuine love for art and pursuit of creative uniqueness while pursuing traffic and attention rather than unquestioningly catering to traffic.

If an artist designs a work to gain more traffic, the original intention of creating the work is no longer pure and lacks creativity. The popularization of art means the emergence of popular art and the beginning of pop art in the art world. However, if this pop art lacks innovation and unquestioningly caters to the public, it will make the art vulgar and even lose its artistic value [10].

Therefore, while artists pursue visibility, it is crucial to remember that the essence of art creation often stems from personal beliefs, emotional expression, or reflections on society. Artworks should not sacrifice uniqueness and depth. If the sole purpose of creating art is to garner more likes on social media, the work may lose its artistic value and become one-dimensional.

Social media support is also needed to pursue diversity in artistic works in the new media era. When social media platforms support artists, they should give full support and exposure opportunities to artists of all types. Social media should treat different styles and themes equally to promote diversity and innovation in artistic creation. If social media only focuses on a single theme and style, then online art platforms on social media will become monotonous and boring. In addition, social media can also inspire artists to try new creative forms and styles by introducing different creative challenges and traffic support opportunities on various themes. If social media introduces such support, the entire online art platform will become more prosperous, allowing more works that influence art history to be born in the new media era instead of more and more artworks with short lifespans due to excessive pursuit of traffic.

5. Conclusion

This study delves into the impact of social media on the commercialization of visual artworks and their intrinsic value. Through case analyses, it is found that the rise of social media not only transforms the aesthetics of the art market but also adds additional value to artworks. These phenomena provide artists with more commercial opportunities and the opportunity to increase the market value of visual artworks. To face the impact of social media on the art field, artists should seize the opportunity, and social media should also give artists more rights and support. However, while social media has positively affected the arts, it also brings responsibilities and challenges. Social media needs a more stringent review mechanism to ensure the accuracy and legality of artworks while also giving the same support to different types of artworks to ensure the diversity of artworks. At the same time, artists should not unthinkingly pursue traffic and higher market value of artworks and create unique, innovative, and in-depth works.

This study will help deepen people's understanding of the impact of social media on the commercialization and market value of visual artworks.

By revealing how social media propels the commercialization of artworks, this study enables practitioners in both the art and social media domains to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying logic and opportunities, thereby creating more revenue opportunities. However, a limitation of the study is that it did not involve specific technical details. Based on the limitations of this study, future research can focus on the technical direction of social media auditing and explore how social media should build an ethical and diversified online art market.

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