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SCIENTIFIC REVIEW

A Female Artpreneur in a Digital Age – Definition, Challenges, and Potential Revenue Streams



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ABSTRACT

Being an artist presents a challenge in a modern world, where more and more activities are happening online and where an entrepreneurial spirit is necessary for success. Artists, being a specific species, often without an entrepreneurial spirit, find this situation discouraging and difficult. This especially goes to the female artists, because living in patriarchal societies such as ones in Western Balkans, they are expected to conduct numerous household chores in addition to the professional life – often on their own. In this article, the author will try to present the situation of a female artpreneur in a digital age first by defining the artpreneur, placing the female entrepreneur in the appropriate digital age and social context, and finally, offering a potential solution or at least ideas that can contribute to the empowerment of female artpreneurs in Serbia. Since the first step in women empowerment is the economic one, providing additional revenue streams, particularly ones that can be generated from home is one of the key benefits of the digital art market.

KEY WORDS: *artpreneur, artist, entrepreneur, female, digital, art market, e-commerce*

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Introduction

The digital age (or information age) brought various novelties to businesses around the globe, but one common feature is that they are increasingly conducted online. This digitalization enables people to develop their business and later promote it from the comfort of their office or home. This possibility reduces or eliminates most of the costs traditionally associated with the business and its development. However, it is impossible to make the most from those benefits of modern times without appropriate knowledge and skills. In this paper, the author will demonstrate why developing artists with new skills to become artpreneurs is not only a great opportunity but also a necessity for many female artists. At the same time, the digital business and marketing skills of the artists in their quest for becoming artpreneurs will be scrutinized.

This topic is of prime importance since the notion of the artpreneur is a fairly new one. While there is a general understanding of this concept, details are still equivocal to the general readership. Raising awareness is important on the notion of the artpreneur, and in particular, a female artpreneur is of utmost importance, since it is the only way to generate suggestions on how to improve their position and instigate their development in the modern, digital age.

Artist, Entrepreneur and our Definition of an Artpreneur

There is no unified, generally accepted definition of the entrepreneur. The reason for that is that entrepreneurship is a dynamic concept that continues to be reconfigured as they adapt to the specific historical, social, cultural, and infrastructural context. Hence, on the one side, Rattern and Usmanij (2020) recognize two views of entrepreneurship: casual and effectuation approach. The casual approach is affiliated to economic plans and strategies and emphasizes how education impact business development rates, and the effectuation approach reflects uncertain environments by suggesting entrepreneurs use available resources. Another view is that entrepreneurs detect profit opportunities, balance supply, and demand, and their profit is a return to alertness (Kirzner & Ricketts, 1992). According to Schumpeter (1975) an entrepreneur is a “person that is innovative in his/her pursuit of making money. The entrepreneur uses their experience and networks to find new and better ways in which they strive to reach and meet

the needs of their customers”, and Landstrom (2005) presents Davidsson’s distinction of “entrepreneurship as a societal phenomenon” and “entrepreneurship as a scholarly domain”. The new economic activities and positive marketplace changes dominate Davidsson’s theory. According to him, only new and successful activities can cause the changes in the marketplace – and thus, constitute an entrepreneurship. The lack of a generally accepted definition is one of the very few shared points between the notion of artist and entrepreneur. Definitions of both artist and entrepreneur are fluid and it is very hard and arguably unnecessary to have a firm definition. Consequently, numerous authors keep questioning if there is a need or possibility to define the art and hence the artist, especially in a general sense (Adajian, 2018). Instead of choosing one definition for an artist, in this article, a functionalist definition that artist is anyone creating art professionally will be used, since it suffices the purpose.

Artists, in general, are not considered to be versatile or interested in entrepreneurship and consequently generating a substantial income (Abbing, 2002). This is why it is of utmost importance for them to develop those skills (Engelmann et al., 2012). Creating art requires solitude, and artists often follow their own creative path – not knowing what is considered a trend or what sells well. Even though most art marketing books suggest “to research needs in the environment and create an offer that can easily be marketable and sold“, it is not an easy task for artists, because it is hard to abandon their artistic exploration and adapt to the market trends, and most of them don’t want to follow that path (Dragičević Šešić, 2020).

The prime question remains - is the combination of an artist and an entrepreneur possible? Are there enough meeting points for somebody to be an artist and an entrepreneur at the same time – an artpreneur? In our view, the answer to this question is an affirmative one.

The true artist introduces something new and innovative - and this is also an important trait of the entrepreneur. Both break with social conventions, in economic terms and with existing equilibriums, to assemble new combinations of elements, materials, and production systems, and show no opposition to change (Vecco, 2019). A modern-day artpreneur increases connectivity and as Schumpeter contemplates the artpreneur is not only an economic entrepreneur. In Castell's (2009) words, this "relational capacity confers power and cannot be characterized as an attribute".

According to Chang and Wyszomirski (2015) art entrepreneurship is a “management process through which cultural workers seek to support their

creativity and autonomy, advance their capacity for adaptability, and create artistic as well as economic and social value “, and Varbanova (2013) defines it as “an economic as well as sociocultural activity, based on innovations, exploitation of opportunities and risk-taking behavior”.

Considering notions of art, artist, entrepreneur, entrepreneurship, and being inspired by definitions of “artpreneur” given by Vecco (2019) and Scott (2012), we came with our own definition: “The artpreneur is an artist discovering and pursuing new artistic and cultural ideas, with a primary life goal to build an artistic career with income from artistic production.”

Level of Digital Skills in Serbia and Modalities for its Improvement

Mastering digital skills is necessary for any artpreneur to prosper and succeed in the modern, digital age. If there was any doubt about this, the COVID-19 pandemic definitely confirmed this statement. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were virtually no cultural and art events at some points and it will be less public investment in artistic work and cultural production in months to come. By acquiring knowledge in digital areas, artpreneurs can easily combat with many challenges, including pandemic-like ones.

Despite a general lack of entrepreneurial spirit, artists are often perceived as “the main influencers on social media”, as stated by nearly three-quarters (73%) in Hiscox Art Trade Report 2020. This is an increase compared to the results collected in 2019, where 67% of the respondents made the same statement. The same source confirms that more artists are “likely to see social media as important in building their careers without the input of traditional tastemakers”. This became particularly evident in the 2017 report when Instagram overtook Facebook as the preferred social media channel for the art world and it remains the most effective way to reach new buyers. This is a rather new trend, and while HISCOX started providing reports in 2013 the question of the artists as influencers were not analyzed and hence did not emerged until 2019.

In line with the previous analysis, it is important to investigate the level of development of digital skills in Serbia. Results of the survey presented by Bradić-Martinović and Banović (2018) demonstrate that the “overall level of digital skills of the workforce in Serbia, measured by Eurostat’s Digital Skills indicator, have much space for improvement”. Nearly half of the

respondents (49%) either have low digital skills or none at all. However, results from Serbia are not meaningfully different from the EU average (17.3% in the EU don't have any digital skills, 25.5% have low skills, 26% have basic skills and 31.2% have above basic skills), but in some EU countries, the situation is much better. In Norway "only 2.9% do not have any digital skills, in Luxembourg, 11.7% have low skills, in the Czech Republic, 35.8% have basic skills, and again in Luxembourg, 55.3% have above basic skills". Bradić-Martinović and Banović (2018) established the presence of a gender gap in digital skills amid the working population in Serbia. "The calculation for women shows that 62.6% of respondents do not have any digital skills or have low skills, while 37.3% have basic and above basic skills. The calculation for men shows that 46.7% of respondents do not have any or have low skills, while 53.2% have basic and above basic skills, and these results are in line with EU average".

The future of art and cultural work in Serbia after the COVID-19 crisis is very doubtful and it only adds up to the marginal position of art and culture in Serbia. Unfortunately, none of the state institutions provided a plan to overcome this strong situation and the only measure they enforced was a highly criticized one – the cancellation instead of the postponement of the public call for projects in 2020 (Dragičević Šešić, Mikic & Tomka, 2020). This should not be discouraging for the artists in their pursuit to become artpreneurs – on the contrary. There are numerous ways to monetize artistic work and consequently being able to live from it. Moreover, now more than ever, with the digital age and digital art being in focus, opportunities are easier to reach than ever – the determination of a real female artpreneur to live from its art despite all social, technical, and administrative obstacles is the first and most important ingredient.

Female Artpreneurs

Female artpreneurs share the same challenges that male artpreneurs are facing, but also have one's characteristic due to the pre-determined roles to its gender in society. Challenges for female entrepreneurs, particularly ones living in dominantly patriarchal societies in Balkans and hence in Serbia, are numerous. In the still active and ongoing social division and gender roles, women have a very dense and demanding schedule and are generally expected to do numerous chores alongside their work. In one research, women entrepreneurs were asked a question about their activities after work

hours. The results showed that women entrepreneurs in Serbia spend most of their time on house and family duties (61%). On the other hand, only 23% of their time is spent on working on their professional improvement which leads us to a conclusion that women entrepreneurs, regardless of their numerous business duties, don't want to neglect their house and family. They are paying special attention to their families by balancing between work and house and family duties. (Ravić & Nikitović, 2017).

A particular challenge for women in digital industries is the fact that due to their possibility to work from home, it is often expected that they can do many housework and other chores during working hours. Women are less likely than men to use online social networks to access funding, training and skills, and business services. Men, on the other hand, are less likely than women to access creativity and ideas, emotional support, and information and advice (Red & Wu, 2020). Stereotypes and social norms are just some of the factors why women are less likely to become entrepreneurs, according to the literature. (Vukmirović, 2019). In Serbia and other transitional countries, Radovic-Markovic (2015) demonstrated that are more often part of the less profitable business and are rarely starting their businesses.

For female artpreneurs, mastering digital skills can be of crucial importance. Access to the internet has eliminated many barriers and obstacles to accessing people, skills, training, financial resources, etc. (Sadowski, Maitland & Van Ongen, 2002). Since the internet and digital environment present an environment where many gender-based biases are eliminated, it is of utmost importance for women artpreneurs to become proficient in it. In the following chapter, we will present some possibilities for online revenue for artists.

Online Revenue Streams for Artists

In the contemporary world, shopping is more and more conducted online. This trend is increasing and it is present throughout the globe. For example, in India, the online art market is increasing rapidly, because the youth culture mostly shops online. At the same time, more and more people want art and other collectibles to be part of their wealth record, and they can easily purchase art pieces of their choice online. The online art market is increasingly becoming a new "profit bonanza" in India (Rani, 2017). Online trading transcends borders and digital artpreneurs need to master online trading skills regardless of the part of the world they are coming from.

When it comes to the platforms themselves, according to the annual Hiscox Art Trade Report 2020, Instagram is unavoidable as a buying and research platform, a platform where art and millennial buyers are especially active. Just to mention a few statistical data, more than 200 million Instagram users visit at least one business profile every day, spend around 30 minutes on the platform, and in that time, a large percentage of Instagram users are visiting business profiles whereas over 80% use Instagram to research products and services. Having that in mind, with Around 130 million Instagram users tap on shopping posts every month, it is obvious that people buy directly from Instagram, which is easier than ever with many new shopping and e-commerce features developed this year (Newberry, 2021).

While Instagram presents an important place for digital marketing and art management, there is much more than Instagram and social media when it comes to the potential revenue streams for artpreneurs. We will point out several of those.

Selling Art Prints on a Personal Website

The first option that comes to mind is the direct one - selling art on a personal website. This option requires numerous investments in advance: creating a website, paying for hosting, connecting the website with an application that allows you to receive payments and sell your art, etc. After that, an artpreneur needs to promote the website and it requires both skills, ideas, and again, investments. Even after selling, for example, an art print, it needs to be sent to the buyer and this process is also associated with additional costs and in many countries, including Serbia, one administrative procedure.

Before leaving the Republic of Serbia, an author has to obtain permission from the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia. The procedure requires taking the artwork to the expertise, paying the fee, and picking up (in person) the permission and after that an artwork. Hence, only authors have the right to bring along a photograph of the object and they have to declare a final destination of the artwork. Finally, this procedure has to be repeated for each artwork.

This procedure aims to protect the unregulated export of artworks that are considered of high value for the Republic of Serbia (although the question is if this procedure has any effect on that). While the goal of the

procedure is clear it is also clear that this procedure is not in line with the modern, digital world and presents a substantial obstacle for law-abiding artists in Serbia trying to launch their international careers.

Online Art Markets with Built-in Search Engines – The Example of Etsy

Etsy is an online marketplace for handcrafted goods, connecting independent sellers with potential buyers. Founded in 2005, with constant operational and technological progress, from payments to search engine, marketing capabilities, shipping, and creating reliable sellers, by 2018, this e-commerce platform attained about 2 million sellers with 50 million products (Gebel, 2020).

The company sees itself as the incubator of women entrepreneurship since more than 87% of Etsy's sellers are Women. Knowing that 97% are operating from their home and 80% of sellers are individuals, makes this e-commerce platform a perfect fit for female artists living in Serbia.

Even though this important community of microbusinesses provides supplemental income and jobs to makers, it is often overlooked as the engine of economic development. With that in mind, in 2019, Etsy organized a meeting in Washington where sellers could talk directly to policymakers. The most important topics were internet sales tax, international shipping, internet access, economic security, and other ways to support sellers.

When it comes to people from Serbia selling art on Etsy, according to Erank, the top sellers (ones with more than 1000 sales) are all selling digital downloads. This is one of the best-selling categories on Etsy since it doesn't require a shipment. Another popular item is miniature because it is easier and cheaper to ship them than larger items and they are generally less expensive.

Standing out from the crowd is the most important feature of success in general art and it also stands for Etsy. To be successful on Etsy, sellers should try to pick a unique shop name, create high-quality photographs representing their work, and master search engine optimization (SEO) to attract potential customers.

Online Art Galleries – The Example of Saatchi

According to the research presented in Hiscox, the new as well as younger buyers favor online marketplaces, with 71% of them buying on marketplaces like SaatchiArt, Artspace, Artsy, RiseArt, or Artnet. More than half of 56% of the younger collectors preferred mentioned platforms, even though that number decreased from 2019 when it was 66%.

Saatchi Art is an online art platform that guarantees direct communication between artists and potential art buyers. It enables buyers to purchase art immediately and it has open access for all artists, who can upload artworks without limitations. This can easily overwhelm buyers and confuse them.

Keeping that in mind, artists can gain recognition from the platform (through curatorial collections, or “Artist of the week”) and increase their chances to make a sale, in addition to marketing and promoting themselves. Potential buyers can have concerns about their value, so the valuation system in the online art market is the same as that in the offline market where the intermediaries co-construct the meaning and value of the artwork.

There are several online art galleries in Serbia (Prodaja umetničkih slika Online, SerbianaArt, Art Berza, and Art Galerija Online, to name a few), however since none of them have a great number of artists involved, and anyone can make their gallery, it makes the quality of the majority of artworks questionable, and with their website designs and user interfaces, they are yet to rise to the level of the internationally recognized online art markets mentioned in this article.

Print on Demand Market Places with Built-in Search Engine – The Example of Society6 and Redbubble

Print-on-demand market places, such as Society6 and Redbubble, are suitable for any artist with basic digital skills. It only requires an artist to upload the work and the platform handles all of the production, shipping, customer service.

The first step is a creation of an account, followed by design upload and selecting products on where designs should be printed on. Society 6 and Redbubble have different pricing systems. Society6 predetermines the percentage (around 10%) a seller can earn out of every sale. On the other

hand, Redbubble is more flexible and allows the seller to decide on his own on the profit margin.

Transfer of Knowledge

One of the revenue streams for passive income is teaching art classes or providing tutorials. There are many platforms where the artist can share their knowledge (Skillshare, Udemy, Domestika - just to name a few). But to do so, alongside expertise, artists need to know how to film and edit their videos. Artpreneur can learn to do this in various ways and many of those are available online – in the same platforms where tutorials will be given. Skillshare and other similar platforms even encourage their “students” to take the next step and create their own class – through workshops and classes on teaching.

Conclusion

Since Digital Art Market transcends borders, it presents a great opportunity for Serbian female artpreneurs. They are now able to have possibilities for additional revenue streams since the digital art market enables them to work from home. From selling art through a personal website, engaging in online art markets, or creating courses and teaching art online- opportunities are numerous. As demonstrated in this article, an online presence (regardless of the form) is just a start of a modern artpreneur journey. Basic digital skills are not enough anymore to succeed in a digital world. Mastering digital skills, including digital art marketing, is essential in attracting potential buyers. Finally, management skills are also becoming condition sine qua non for any artpreneur.

Just a glance at this list of skills that needs to be acquired demonstrates how challenging, time-consuming and expensive this road to success is. Moreover, while there are some possibilities to acquire those skills through the support of the State or EU and regional initiatives - they are simply not enough. All the stakeholders, particularly States should invest more in helping (female) artpreneurs to fulfill their potentials but artpreneur should not wait for this to happen – if anything it is not in the spirit of artpreneur to wait for the help. A permanent search for new opportunities and exploiting them should be a mindset accepted by all artpreneur-aspiring artists.

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