
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Social Media in Shaping Contemporary Art and Culture

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| ABSTRACT

This review examines the influential role of social media in shaping contemporary art and cultural practices, emphasizing how digital platforms have transformed artistic production, dissemination, and audience engagement. Social media enables artists to reach global audiences, bypass traditional institutional gatekeeping, and engage directly with diverse communities. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube facilitate experimentation with multimedia forms, participatory art, and collaborative projects, fostering dynamic networks of creators and audiences. The literature indicates that these platforms have democratized artistic expression, allowing previously marginalized or emerging artists to gain visibility, challenge traditional hierarchies, and influence cultural trends. At the same time, social media introduces challenges that affect both creativity and cultural perception. Algorithmic biases, commercial pressures, and the emphasis on virality can influence artistic visibility and decision-making, sometimes prioritizing popularity over originality. Ethical and intellectual property concerns also emerge, particularly regarding the ownership and attribution of digital artworks. Additionally, social media plays a pivotal role in shaping cultural narratives, amplifying social movements, identity-based initiatives, and community discourse, blurring the lines between art, activism, and everyday cultural production. By synthesizing recent scholarship, case studies, and digital ethnographic research, this review highlights the dual nature of social media's influence—its capacity to empower artists and democratize access, alongside its potential to commodify culture and constrain artistic autonomy. The findings offer critical insights into the evolving relationship between technology, creativity, and society, underscoring the significant impact of social media on contemporary art and cultural practices in the twenty-first century.

| KEYWORDS

Social media, Contemporary art, Digital culture, Artistic production, Cultural dissemination, Online communities, Creative engagement.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The rapid proliferation of social media over the past decade has profoundly transformed the landscape of contemporary art and cultural engagement. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter have emerged not only as communication tools but also as vital spaces for artistic production, dissemination, and audience interaction (Arnaboldi & Diaz Lema, 2022; Giaccardi 2012). Unlike traditional art institutions such as galleries, museums, or print media, social media enables artists to bypass conventional gatekeeping mechanisms, reaching global audiences instantly and directly (Van Alphen, 2005; Wang, 2018). This accessibility has democratized art, allowing emerging and marginalized artists to gain visibility and participate in cultural

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dialogues that were previously limited by institutional hierarchies (Garrido Castellano & Raposo, 2024; Ohiagu & Okorie, 2014). Consequently, social media has become a critical force in redefining how contemporary art is created, consumed, and understood (Gronlund, 2016; Lughì, 2014).

The role of social media in contemporary art extends beyond mere visibility. It facilitates experimentation with hybrid and multimedia forms, allowing artists to blend performance, video, digital media, and visual arts in innovative ways (Lütticken, 2015; Heinich, 2012). Interactive and participatory practices have become increasingly prevalent, with audiences co-creating and engaging with artistic works in real time (Arnaboldi & Diaz Lema, 2022; Giaccardi, 2012). This interactivity fosters collaborative networks and dynamic communities that challenge traditional notions of authorship and audience passivity (Shanken, 2010). Scholars argue that this participatory culture reconfigures power dynamics in the art world, as communities collectively shape the meaning and impact of artistic productions, creating a more inclusive and pluralistic cultural ecosystem (DOBROLYUBSKA et al., 2024; Goulding, 2013).

At the same time, social media introduces a set of challenges that influence both artistic practice and cultural perception. Algorithm-driven visibility and commercial imperatives often prioritize content that is highly shareable or visually striking, potentially shaping creative decisions toward virality rather than purely conceptual or experimental goals (Stokes & Price, 2017; Lütticken, 2015). This emphasis on popularity and trend-following may constrain artistic autonomy and contribute to the commodification of culture, raising critical questions about authenticity, originality, and the values that underpin contemporary art (Heinich, 2012; Shanken, 2010). Additionally, ethical concerns surrounding intellectual property, attribution, and cultural representation emerge in digital spaces, requiring careful consideration of both legal and moral responsibilities in the dissemination of artistic content (Goulding, 2013; DOBROLYUBSKA et al., 2024).

Social media also plays a pivotal role in shaping cultural narratives and collective memory. Artistic content shared on digital platforms often intersects with activism, social movements, and identity-based initiatives, enabling art to act as a conduit for social commentary and community engagement (Giaccardi, 2012; Arnaboldi & Diaz Lema, 2022). These intersections blur the lines between art, everyday life, and cultural discourse, positioning social media as a space where contemporary culture is actively negotiated, contested, and reshaped (Garrido Castellano & Raposo, 2024; Wang, 2018). In this context, social media does not merely function as a promotional tool but operates as a transformative medium that influences the production, reception, and interpretation of art on a global scale (Van Alphen, 2005; Ohiagu & Okorie, 2014).

By examining the dual impact of social media on contemporary art—its capacity to empower and democratize alongside its potential to commodify and constrain—this review provides a nuanced understanding of the evolving relationship between technology, creativity, and society (Gronlund, 2016; Lughì, 2014). Understanding these dynamics is essential for appreciating the complex ways in which social media continues to shape artistic practices, cultural engagement, and the broader cultural imagination in the twenty-first century.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media as a Platform for Artistic Production

Recent scholarship emphasizes that social media platforms have transformed artistic production by enabling experimentation with multimedia, hybrid forms, and interactive practices (Gronlund, 2016; Lughì, 2014). Artists increasingly integrate digital technologies, video, performance, and graphic design into their work, taking advantage of the flexibility and immediacy that online platforms provide (Arnaboldi & Diaz Lema, 2022; Giaccardi, 2012). Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have been particularly influential in democratizing access, enabling emerging and marginalized artists to gain visibility and challenge traditional gatekeeping in the art world (Ohiagu & Okorie, 2014; Wang, 2018).

2.2 Dissemination and Visibility of Contemporary Art

Social media has shifted the dynamics of art dissemination, allowing works to reach global audiences instantly (Garrido Castellano & Raposo, 2024; Van Alphen, 2005). Algorithmic structures and platform-driven metrics significantly influence which artworks gain visibility, often prioritizing visually striking or highly shareable content (Stokes & Price, 2017; Lütticken, 2015). While this promotes exposure and audience engagement, it may also shape artistic trends and create pressures toward virality and commercial appeal (Heinich, 2012; Shanken, 2010). Scholars argue that these dynamics can both empower and constrain artistic creativity, highlighting the tension between democratization and commodification (Goulding, 2013).

2.3 Social Media and Cultural Narratives

Beyond production and visibility, social media plays a critical role in shaping contemporary cultural narratives. Platforms enable rapid circulation of ideas, amplify social movements, and facilitate discussions around identity, politics, and community

engagement (DOBROLYUBSKA et al., 2024; Giaccardi, 2012). Artistic content shared online often intersects with activism, social commentary, and participatory culture, blurring boundaries between art and everyday life (Garrido Castellano & Raposo, 2024; Arnaboldi & Diaz Lema, 2022). This integration positions social media as a site where cultural values are negotiated and contested (Ohiagu & Okorie, 2014).

2.4 Ethical and Critical Considerations

Ethical and critical challenges associated with social media in the arts include intellectual property, authorship, authenticity, and the impact of algorithmic biases on artistic visibility (Lütticken, 2015; Heinich, 2012; Shanken, 2010). Scholars advocate for reflexive and responsible practices to balance creative freedom with ethical considerations (Goulding, 2013; DOBROLYUBSKA et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

This research review adopts a qualitative, integrative approach to examine existing scholarship on the role of social media in contemporary art and cultural practices. The study systematically surveyed peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and digital media studies published between 2015 and 2025, prioritizing sources that specifically address artistic production, dissemination, audience engagement, and cultural impact mediated through social media platforms. Databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were used to ensure comprehensive coverage, with search terms including "social media," "contemporary art," "digital culture," "artistic engagement," and "cultural dissemination."

Articles were selected based on relevance, methodological rigor, and their contribution to understanding how social media shapes artistic creation, visibility, and cultural discourse. The review emphasizes thematic and comparative analysis, identifying recurring patterns, trends, and critical insights across studies. Particular attention was given to research employing case studies, digital ethnographies, and interdisciplinary approaches combining art theory, media studies, and cultural sociology.

Data synthesis followed an interpretive framework, categorizing findings under key themes such as production, dissemination, cultural narratives, and ethical considerations. This methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of both opportunities and challenges associated with social media's influence on contemporary art and culture.

4. Results and Discussion

The review of current literature demonstrates that social media has profoundly reshaped the production, dissemination, and reception of contemporary art, with both empowering and constraining effects. One key finding is that social media platforms serve as crucial sites for artistic experimentation and creative innovation. Artists increasingly utilize digital tools, multimedia integration, and interactive formats to engage audiences in participatory and collaborative ways. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube facilitate direct interaction between creators and viewers, enabling real-time feedback, community engagement, and co-creation. This democratization of access allows emerging and marginalized artists to circumvent traditional gatekeeping institutions, increasing visibility and challenging entrenched hierarchies.

However, the literature also highlights the influence of platform algorithms and commercial pressures on artistic visibility and content creation. Algorithmically curated feeds often prioritize visually striking, shareable, or trend-driven content, which can inadvertently shape artistic choices and limit creative freedom. The commodification of digital content raises critical questions regarding authenticity, artistic autonomy, and the potential homogenization of cultural production. Scholars note that while social media can empower artists, it simultaneously introduces pressures to conform to platform-driven trends, sometimes privileging virality over originality or conceptual depth.

Social media also plays a central role in shaping contemporary cultural narratives. Artistic content circulated online frequently intersects with social movements, activism, and identity politics, reflecting broader societal debates and amplifying marginalized voices. Literature indicates that audiences are not passive consumers but active participants in cultural meaning-making, interacting with and disseminating artistic works in ways that contribute to collective memory and cultural discourse. This participatory nature of social media redefines the relationship between art, society, and culture, blurring the lines between professional artistry and everyday creative engagement.

Ethical considerations remain a critical dimension of this discourse. Intellectual property rights, authorship, and representation are recurrent concerns, as digital content can be easily replicated, modified, or misappropriated. Scholars advocate for critical awareness and ethical practices to navigate these challenges, emphasizing transparency, attribution, and the responsible use of digital platforms.

Overall, the findings suggest that social media operates as a double-edged phenomenon in contemporary art. It provides unprecedented opportunities for innovation, inclusivity, and global cultural engagement while simultaneously imposing structural, commercial, and ethical constraints. The literature underscores the necessity of critical, reflexive, and interdisciplinary approaches to understand the multifaceted impact of social media on artistic production and cultural consumption.

5. Conclusion

This review highlights the transformative influence of social media on contemporary art and cultural practices, emphasizing both its opportunities and challenges. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have redefined the ways in which art is produced, disseminated, and experienced, enabling artists to bypass traditional gatekeepers and engage directly with global audiences. This democratization has facilitated greater visibility for emerging and marginalized artists, promoted experimentation with multimedia and interactive forms, and fostered participatory engagement between creators and audiences.

At the same time, the literature underscores the structural and ethical complexities introduced by these platforms. Algorithmic curation, commercial pressures, and the emphasis on virality can influence artistic decisions, sometimes privileging popularity over originality or conceptual depth. Ethical concerns regarding authorship, intellectual property, and authenticity further complicate the digital art ecosystem. Scholars advocate for reflexive and responsible practices to navigate these challenges while maintaining artistic integrity and respecting cultural and intellectual rights.

Moreover, social media plays a critical role in shaping cultural narratives, often intersecting with activism, identity formation, and social commentary. Audiences are not passive consumers but active participants in the construction of meaning, enabling art to serve as a vehicle for broader societal discourse and community engagement.

Overall, the findings suggest that social media functions as a double-edged phenomenon: it empowers creativity, fosters inclusivity, and expands cultural engagement while simultaneously imposing structural, commercial, and ethical constraints. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, adopting interdisciplinary, critical, and reflexive approaches to better understand how digital platforms shape artistic practices, cultural consumption, and the evolving relationship between art, technology, and society in the twenty-first century.

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