

Why do Artisans and Arts Entrepreneurs use Social Media Platforms?: Evidence from an Emerging Economy

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Abstract:

Purpose: Despite their importance, artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts are marginally studied in the context of entrepreneurship, especially in emerging economies where local handicrafts and artworks are highlighted. Besides, social media platforms have become useful tools for these artisans and entrepreneurs to promote their artworks and increase their exposure, reputation, and sales. Nevertheless, the question has remained unanswered about why do these entrepreneurs and artisans use social media platforms? Therefore, this research concentrates on this question in an emerging economy.

Methodology: A qualitative research design is used in this study to explore the reasons why artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts use social media platforms. Three focus group sessions with seven experts were held to propose a research framework. The findings were coded through a two-step coding process and were revised two times in the second and third focus group sessions.

Findings/Contribution: Findings reveal that social media platforms and their benefits are currently overlooked, and therefore, more attention needs to be paid to this issue. Policymakers could also use this research's findings to devise relevant policies for improving entrepreneurs in the arts and artisans' status and, therefore, promote their cultural heritage.

Keywords: Artisans; Arts Entrepreneurs; Social Media Platforms; Emerging Economies.

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1. Introduction

Generally, entrepreneurs in the arts and artisans play a critical role in their regions and countries' social and economic development (Elias et al., 2018). As arts are cultural heritages of any society and there is a great deal of know-how among artists and artisans, paying more attention to these individuals and what they do could help societies enjoy economic growth and development (Philips, 2011; Walter, 2015). Nevertheless, there is no clear definition of who artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts are and how one could distinguish them from other types of entrepreneurs (White, 2017). Are there any clear distinctions among them and their cohorts who are not focusing on some other areas rather than arts? Is there any specific characteristic that could be dedicated to them? Are there any differences in how they explore, identify, evaluate, and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities? Is the

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created value by them dissimilar to those of the commercial, social or civic entrepreneurs? Several questions have remained unanswered in this regard, and therefore, it is noteworthy that a new stream of research might be required to respond to the existing questions and needs.

Besides, as mentioned earlier, social media platforms and their use are growing dramatically (Drummond et al., 2018), especially among various types of entrepreneurs and artists (Arsa & Widiastini, 2018; Hughes, 2019). Among these are artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts who have enough knowledge of social media platforms and could access and use those platforms (Foster et al., 2017). Hopefully, a marginal part of the extant literature has already focused on how and why artists use social media platforms (e.g., Salo et al., 2013; Holdgaard & Klastrup, 2014; Wright & Rubin, 2017; Klawitter & Hargittai, 2020), but the literature has marginally paid attention to artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts (Omotosho, 2020). Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts need to learn social media tools and techniques as well as their value creation potential (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015). By doing so, they could create a greater customer base, get followers, increase the number of their buyers and collectors, and take advantage of free or relatively cheap advertising techniques. They are required to learn how to use and benefit from their daily activities on social media platforms. There are various issues to learn, such as getting familiar with various social media platforms and their audience, how to use those platforms to create marketing campaigns and specify their social media strategies, how to improve interactivity with their audience, how to gain more attraction and improve customer retentions, improve their skills to use different relevant programs and software, and so many other things to learn.

This research aimed to investigate various methods that artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts use to benefit from social media platforms and their relevant challenges and issues in an emerging economy. Given the limited number of the experts involved in entrepreneurship in arts, artisans, and social media platforms, in this research, after a literature review, seven experts were selected, and the topic was discussed in three focus group sessions. As a result, the main reasons why artisans and arts entrepreneurs use social media platforms were categorised in a multi-level framework, including individual, firm, and societal/environmental levels.

The first section of this manuscript, after the Introduction, is focused on the literature review. In this section, artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts are viewed as an emerging field of research. Then, their relevance to the emerging economies is discussed. Finally, social media use by artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts and the relevant challenges are explored. In the next section, materials and methods are explained. Afterward, the authors have discussed the results and proposed the framework. Finally, the paper concludes with some significant findings and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts: An emerging field of research

Entrepreneurs in the arts and artisans are relatively new areas of research in the fields of management and entrepreneurship. As the main body of the literature is focused on commercial entrepreneurs, these types of entrepreneurs are overlooked. Nevertheless, some fragmented pieces of evidence might be found in areas such as cultural and civic entrepreneurship (e.g., Schmidt et al., 2018; Kumari, 2020) and creative tourism (e.g., Bakas, 2019). This area has recently drawn scholars' attention, as some relevant conferences put relevant topics in their pillars, most of which were concentrated on artistic aspects of the field. The US Association for Small Business & Entrepreneurship (USASBE) might be considered the first entrepreneurship-related association that raised this topic and dedicated some panel sessions. Nevertheless, the main focus was the connection between arts and entrepreneurship, and even at this event, artisans were neglected. In addition to this, Beckman's (2007) effort to investigate arts entrepreneurship programs was a disruptive move

toward shedding light on this area. Beckman continued focusing on this domain after this seminal work (e.g., Beckman & Cherwitz, 2009; Beckman, 2010, 2011, 2014; Beckman & Hart, 2015). Nevertheless, most of his works were about educating entrepreneurs in the arts. This was followed by the establishment of “*Activate: A Journal of Entrepreneurship in the Arts*” in 2012. However, this journal's focus is still on the artistic aspects of the phenomenon, which is connected marginally to mainstream entrepreneurship research. It is noteworthy that artisans are more studied in this journal, hopefully. The establishment of the “*Society of Arts Entrepreneurship Education*” in 2014 was another turning point in this area (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015). This trend has evolved during the past decade. However, no significant connection has been made between these two fields' scholars yet.

Besides, despite the extensive history of artisans in various societies (Fidan, 2020; Perrin, 2020), the literature has recently used an entrepreneurial lens toward investigating them and their activities. For instance, Bakas et al. (2019) scrutinised the “catalysing artisan entrepreneur networks in rural Portugal” to help them develop their business activities. Even though scholars such as Scrase (2009) had tried to investigate why these artisans are marginalised, there was no significant advancement in this field until the last few years. In their seminal work, Bouette and Mage (2015) distinguished hobbyists, artisans, and entrepreneurs. Although their approach might be mostly implicit, such an approach could help future researchers further develop the extant literature. Hopefully, more recent research has paid explicit attention to artisans and their connection to entrepreneurship. For instance, Solomon and Mathias (2020) have raised a topic called “*the artisans' dilemma*”. They suggest that artisan entrepreneurship deals with the challenge of firm growth. They made significant contributions to the field by elaborating on issues such as how and why artisan entrepreneurs grow their ventures, proposing a new pathway to realise venture growth, and how technological and social changes have empowered them. Proposing such approaches is necessary for developing the field further and publishing more contributions from well-known authors of these fields (Lindbergh & Schwartz, 2021).

2.2. Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts in emerging economies

Artisans in various fields are among the oldest economic players of the societies, which currently exist in different countries (Chappe & Lawson Jaramillo, 2020). While leading economies also take advantage of their entrepreneurs in the arts and artisans, especially in rural and touristic areas, they play a critical role in the economic development of emerging economies. Leading economies like the UK or some European economies take advantage of these artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts to revitalise their cultural heritage, disseminate their culture and values, and, more recently, create significant wealth for their nations unleashing the entrepreneurial power of their artists and artisans (Welsh et al., 2014; Thom, 2015, 2017). Expressions like “*from artisans to artists*” (Kapferer, 2014) witness the existence of such approaches. Meanwhile, emerging economies are paying more attention to these potential entrepreneurs and seek to help them by issues such as training, providing seed money, holding seasonal and international exhibitions, and the like. Evidence of such activities is available in various countries. For instance, improving the level of innovation in Russia by considering artisans as a significant part of their plans (McCarthy et al., 2014) or India (Bettiol et al., 2018), as well as improving market access for artisans in India (Singh-Nagpal & Sebastian, 2021), providing resources for artisans in the Latin American countries (West et al., 2008; Horwitz, 2013; Guerrero & Santamaría-Velasco, 2020), educating artisans to become more successful in Brazil (Nelson et al., 2016), or developing culture through entrepreneurs in the arts and artisans in Iran (Toghraee & Monjezi, 2017) are among the efforts made in emerging economies during the past decade. Nevertheless, artisans have lower social status than other social classes in some emerging economies, such as in China (Atherton & Newman, 2016). This might affect their propensity to become entrepreneurs in the arts and make significant economic changes in their countries.

2.3. Social media use by artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts

Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts use social media platforms to reach various goals. Their use is affected by many issues such as their literacy, media literacy, level of access to the Internet and new technologies, their audience, and the like. While some use it as a promotional tool, others use it for performing their business and selling their products (Hudson & Hudson, 2013). For instance, Omotosho (2020) argues that African artisans use these platforms for performing their business. Some artists use social media platforms to sell luxury brands or make potential brands more well-known for their audience (Athwal et al., 2019). According to Bocconcelli et al. (2017), these platforms could be used as a resource for sales management by artisans. Some other scholars went beyond these applications and proposed that artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts could customise products using social media platforms as their marketing tool (Hudson & Hudson, 2013; Tikima, 2014). Besides, artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts have greater attention to specific social media platforms, such as Instagram, Pinterest, Behance, Tumblr, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, as studied by researchers (Kang & Chen, 2017). Generally, they choose some of these platforms due to several issues such as ease of access, level of use in society, and their target groups (Hapsari, 2020). Then, the extant literature is focused variously on some of these platforms in each study (O'Meara, 2019). In addition to the platforms mentioned above, artisans use Dayflash, ArtStation, DeviantArt, The Dots, and Dribbble. Interestingly, Instagram has been the most studied platform for artists and entrepreneurs in the arts in extant literature (Kang et al., 2019). The types of media used by them include but are not limited to, social networking, photo and video sharing, and microblogging platforms (Lee & Youn, 2020). They use these platforms to expand their social network, share pictures and videos, interact with their audience, build their communities and fan pages, and [micro]blogging (Omotosho, 2020).

2.4. Challenges of artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts in using social media platforms

As generally, artists and, more specifically, artisans spend long hours creating their artistic products, they might be less concentrated on how they use new technologies, such as social media platforms (Klinger, 2013). Therefore, this has become a paradox that what if the artists focus on their own jobs, or become more like successful businesspersons? (Roberts, 2012; Branagan, 2017). Various schools of thought follow different approaches toward arts and artistic products (Panofsky, 1957; Sheldon & Corcoran, 2019). Sitting in an Ivory Tower, as a well-known artist, one might not like to sell his/her masterpiece, and even some old views consider it a betrayal; while others might consider it a fact that artistic products must be sold to make the artist able to succeed in his/her business (Masè, 2020). Hopefully, the second view's prevalence has led to teaching business and entrepreneurship courses and programs in business schools and art schools worldwide (Gangi, 2017). The entrepreneurial approach toward arts and artisans even goes beyond this view and believes that artists and artisans must become artisan or entrepreneur in the arts to make significant contributions to their societies' socio-economic development (Thom, 2015, 2017).

According to the extant literature, there are pieces of evidence of the challenges artisans and artists face at various levels, including individual, firm, and societal/environmental levels, to use social media platforms. At the individual level, there are issues, such as non-business mindsets or approaches (Win, 2014), lack of relevant soft and hard skills (Bridgstock, 2013), lack of access to the Internet (Waters, 2017), lack of knowledge about their potential target markets and characteristics of their audience (McCurdy, et al., 2019), and lack of intention to deal with potential headaches of using social media platforms which might waste their time or harm their fame (Thom, 2016).

At the firm level, most artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts who have established firms to do their business must deal with several corporate governance and management issues, which are time-consuming and problematic (Preece, 2015). Then, they might need to hire staff to deal with such activities (Andrews, 2019). This makes them more sensitive to what would happen to them on such

platforms. Lack of enough control over social media platform management tools might become a concern for them (Williams, 2018). Besides, they might like to keep some of their masterpieces as secrets or keep them for some special customers due to their artistic spirit. Also, the lack of knowledge about relevant rules and regulations might keep them away from engaging in social media platforms (Radbill, 2016). Without paying attention to some details, some large companies might sue them or make problems for them (Santore, 2019).

Finally, at the societal/environmental level, their societies might expect them to be sensitive to their peripherals and what happens in society (Bridgstock, 2013). Then, by getting engaged in some movements, artisan and entrepreneurs in the arts' artistic aspects might be affected. Then, some kind of glass ceilings might keep them away from getting involved in social media activities proactively (Jones, 2016). Besides, some societies' lack of enough digital literacy would affect their social media practices (Jackson, 2004; Bretholz, 2020). These are among the most studied issues and challenges of the artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts in using social media platforms.

3. Materials and Methods

The areas of artisan and arts entrepreneurship are emerging. Besides, this research's primary focus has made these areas more complex by concentrating on why artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts use social media platforms in emerging economies. Therefore, as an exploratory field of study, after reviewing the literature, this research used three focus group sessions to gather the data which were analysed through a two-phase coding process. The output of each focus group meeting was used in the next meeting, and therefore, the extracted model was revised two times by the experts who engaged in the focus group sessions. The information related to the experts who attended the focus group sessions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Information of the experts who attended the focus group sessions.

#	Age	Education	Relevant expertise (years)	Type
INT 1	53	PhD	17	Academic
INT 2	36	Bachelors degree	15	Artisan
INT 3	63	PhD	12	Policymaker
INT 4	38	Masters degree	15	Arts entrepreneur
INT 5	43	PhD	14	Policymaker
INT 6	42	PhD	12	Academic
INT 7	31	Masters degree	13	Digital arts entrepreneur

The participants were notified one week before the next session, and the output of the previous sessions was shared to let them review the new version before each session. Each session took between 120 to 150 minutes, and the sessions were recorded accordingly. Despite their consent to record their voices, their information is not disclosed in this paper to respect their privacy. An assistant was taking notes during the sessions. The interview protocol was semi-structured and included some open-ended questions, followed by a series of follow-up questions. All the panelists were proactively engaged in the sessions, and the interviewer was moderating the discussion.

4. Results and Discussion

As discussed in the previous sections, this manuscript aims at answering the question "*why do entrepreneurs in the arts and artisans use social media platforms?*" Although the question seems to be easy to answer, there are controversial issues to be considered while answering this question, mentioned in the previous sections. Based on the results of the focus group sessions and the coding processes, the answer to this question is proposed in a multi-level framework (Figure 1). It is noteworthy that

this framework tries to point out and highlight the major reasons that focus group panelists have mentioned.

4.1. Individual level

The individual-level elements refer to the applications of social media platforms by artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts. In better words, these elements indicate for which reasons these artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts use social media platforms. The followings are the reasons why they might use social media platforms.

4.1.1. To build and develop their personal brand and social status

Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts care about their social status and personal brand, as their products' value is a function of such elements. They proactively engage in social media activities and share posts about their thoughts and views. The interviewees believed that educating them could help artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts know more about their personal brands and social status to improve their status quo. One of the interviewees argued that personal branding is a critical domain that is a two-sided fact that could help them succeed or make them fail.

4.1.2. To communicate with their followers

Another reason for artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts to use social media is to communicate with their followers. This will help them hear from and talk to them about the critical issues for potential buyers. Such communications might be both manual or automatic, as many software could facilitate the communications. Today, machine learning and other data science-related technologies have made communications smarter than before. As one of the respondents mentioned, such communications are the lifeblood of their businesses. Without followers, an artisan or an arts entrepreneur might be marginalised.

4.1.3. To follow their cohorts and competitors

One of the reasons that artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts use social media platforms is to become aware of the trends created by their cohorts and competitors. By knowing these, they could notice the possible market changes or new trends. One of the interviewees argued that, according to their study, new trends had been created dramatically during the past decade, as artists and their audience constantly use social media platforms.

4.1.4. To share their creative works, revise and sell their products

Finally, they use social media platforms to share their creative ideas and works, to make necessary changes to them, and eventually sell them online. Exposing creative works have many benefits, which are mentioned explicitly in the literature. Nevertheless, making revisions to the existing works is a significant achievement for them using social media platforms. Besides, such platforms have become new marketplaces for choosing products, negotiating the prices, and purchasing them.

4.2. Firm level

Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts might establish firms to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities. Generally, artisans and artists do not intend to establish and run a company, as they have significant concerns regarding how to manage the firms and handle company-related issues, such as taxation, insurance, and the like. Nevertheless, they might register companies to expand their businesses. At this level, they might use social media platforms to help them better operate and sell

their products. According to this study, their firms might use social media platforms for the following reasons.

4.2.1. To improve their brand image

Corporate branding is a critical issue for almost any company that competes in a market. An essential aspect of corporate branding is the brand image which is critical for artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts. Although the personal brand will absolutely affect their business, the brand image is of paramount importance in its success or failure. Then, they use social media platforms to improve their brand image in the customers' eyes. As an interviewee mentioned, several entrepreneurs in the arts in the country are using social media platforms for their businesses, while they are not so active on their own personal social media accounts.

4.2.2. To improve social commerce activities and co-create value

Other critical reasons for using social media platforms are social commerce and value co-creation through those platforms. Social commerce deals with selling products through interactions on social media platforms, through which customers could co-create value. Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts use social media platforms for their firms to get closer to [potential] customers and improve their business activities. The interviewees noted that the value might be most appropriately co-created at the firm level since typically relevant experts, not the artisans or art entrepreneurs themselves, deal with the customers more professionally.

4.2.3. To increase their web presence and expand marketing activities

Marketing activities, both online and offline, are of paramount importance for almost any firm. Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts also need social media platforms to increase their web presence and expand their marketing activities. By doing so, they can present their products more extensively to a broader population, let their customers know that they are still operating, and eventually help them sell their products and provide customer services if needed. One of the interviewees mentioned that social media platforms provide them with less expensive and more effective marketing tools, which are more affordable, especially for artisans.

4.2.4. To position their products in potential markets and create new trends

The process of positioning goes through segmentation and targeting activities. Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts need to position their products in potential markets and become a part of a trend or create a new one. Therefore, social media platforms could help them reach more specific customer segments and target the optimum ones accordingly. As artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts generally offer a range of services at the firm level, they are more prone to succeed. As one of the interviewees mentioned, the government has studied the current trends and is investigating future ones to help them succeed.

4.3. *Societal/environmental level*

Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts are a significant part of any society, as they deal with their cultural and social heritage. At this level, they might use social media platforms for various reasons; some of the major ones are pointed out below as a result of this study.

4.3.1. To fulfill social responsibility

Social responsibility is a critical issue for all the citizens of a country. Individuals must care about their social responsibilities to help their societies grow. Artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts, like other types of entrepreneurs, are the change agents of their societies. They deal with their societies'

cultural and social heritage and must try to pay enough attention to those issues. Thus, one of the primary reasons they use social media platforms is to fulfill their social responsibility. As mentioned by interviewees, artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts are the role models for their people, and their behaviours on social media platforms could create norms and values.

4.3.2. To communicate creative works to society

At this level, artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts use social media platforms to communicate their creative works to their societies. Such communications could be useful for both sides, i.e. artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts and their people. It could affect their creative works significantly by considering what society has to share with them. Although some artists deal with abstracts, artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts mostly deal with real-life facts. To sell their creative works, they have to connect them to the facts of society.

4.3.3. To strengthen cultural aspects of their creative works

As mentioned earlier, creative works have cultural aspects. Those aspects might be strengthened by using social media platforms. A significant part of any creative works' value depends on its connections with the sources of inspiration, which are embedded in any context. According to the interviewees, they shall use social media platforms to strengthen their creative works' cultural aspects, which is considered hopefully by the policymakers in the national plans.

4.3.4. To be a part of the global society of arts

Although artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts live in specific contexts, they generally share artistic aspects worldwide. That is why arts has always considered being a shared language among people. Thus, artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts could use social media platforms to be a part of the world's general movements, which could facilitate their access to other markets and increase the chance of innovation. Several examples of successful artisan or arts entrepreneurship business models could be imitated or disruptively innovated by them. One of the respondents mentioned that they continuously monitor global trends and follow successful players on social media platforms.

5. Conclusions

This paper has focused on a specific question of "*Why do Artisans and Arts Entrepreneurs use Social Media Platforms?*". To answer this question, the authors reviewed the literature first. Then, three focus group sessions led to proposing a framework (Figure 1). Clear evidence was found demonstrating that artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts must use new technologies- more specifically, social media platforms- to improve their personal status, help their firms develop, and impact their societies.

Thus, this paper makes important contributions to the literature in terms of considering artisans and entrepreneurs in arts in an emerging context with great art heritages (*exploring a less studied context*). Besides, it explores why these individuals use social media platforms at three levels (*answering the question of why that could identify the main reasons for using social media platforms by them*).

Firstly it proposed that at the individual level, they do that to (i) build and develop their personal brand and social status, (ii) communicate with their followers, (iii) follow their cohorts and competitors, and (iv) share their creative works, revise and sell their products. These are in line with the findings of Bridgstock (2013), Win (2014), Thom (2016), Waters (2017), McCurdy, et al. (2019). At the firm level, they use social media platforms to (i) improve their brand image, (ii) improve social commerce activities and co-create value, (iii) increase their web presence and expand marketing activities, and (iv) position their products in potential markets and create new trends. These issues are in line with Preece (2015), Radbill (2016), Williams (2018), Andrews (2019), and Santore (2019). At

the societal/environmental level, they might use social media platforms to (i) fulfill social responsibility, (ii) communicate about creative works with the society, (iii) strengthen cultural aspects of their creative works, and (iv) be a part of the global society of arts. Some of these issues are also implicitly mentioned by Jackson (2004), Bridgstock (2013), Jones (2016), and Bretholz (2020).

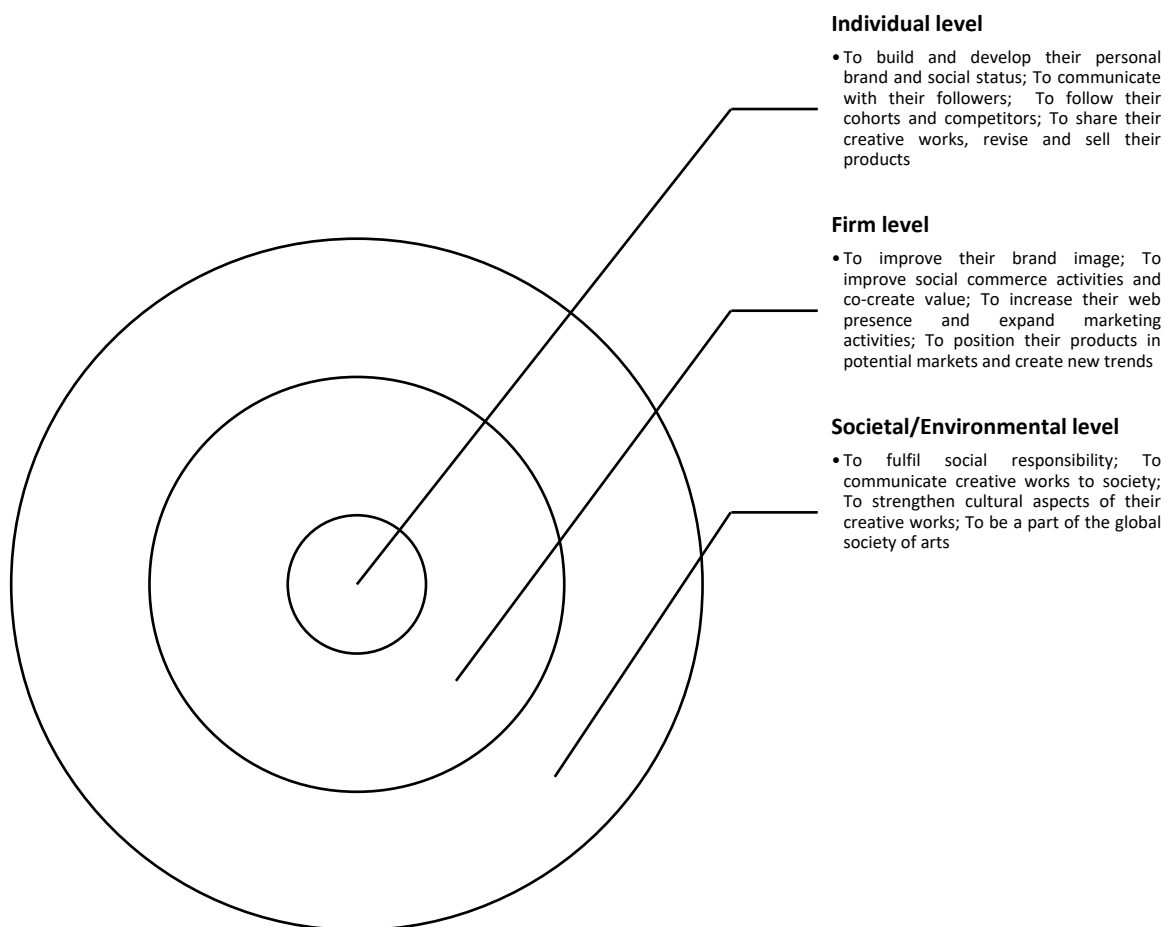


Figure 1. Why do Artisans and Arts Entrepreneurs use Social Media Platforms? (source: authors)

This research was focused mainly on “Why?”. Therefore, future researchers could pay more attention to the questions of “What?”, “How?”, “When?” and “Where?”. By addressing these questions, one could deeply understand the differences and similarities of artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts with their peers, i.e. commercial entrepreneurs. Besides, this study's context was limited to a developing country; therefore, to increase the possibility of generalisability of the findings, one might conduct a survey or consider experts from various countries. It is noteworthy that the proposed framework includes the most important reasons why artisans and entrepreneurs in the arts use social media platforms in an emerging economy. Therefore, several other minor issues might exist even in this context which are not listed due to their lower importance, according to the experts' views in this research.

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