

Research on Identity Reconstruction and Survival Strategies of Artists in the Digital Media Transformation

Yihui Chen

Nanjing Forest University, Nanjing, China
2278108944@qq.com

Abstract. Amid the current global wave of digitization, digital technologies such as the internet, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality are profoundly revolutionizing the creation methods, dissemination channels, and ecological environment of the art field. This paper focuses on the identity reconstruction and survival strategies of artists during the process of digital media transformation. It begins by analyzing the current state and characteristics of digital media transformation, then delves into the specific manifestations of artist identity reconstruction, its core driving factors, and the practical challenges faced. Finally, combining rich case studies, it summarizes feasible survival strategies from dimensions such as enhancing digital technology application capabilities, expanding communication channels, strengthening audience interaction and collaboration, and emphasizing copyright protection. The study finds that digital media transformation drives artists' identities to shift from singular creators to multi-role practitioners. Technological advancement, changing audience demands, and intensified market competition are the main driving forces, while technical barriers, identity confusion, and copyright issues are the primary obstacles on their path forward.

Keywords: Digital Media Transformation, Artists, Identity Reconstruction

1. Introduction

In the digital age, technologies such as the internet, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality are rapidly changing the ways art is created and disseminated. According to Statista data, digital sales accounted for 41% of global media sales in 2024, and this figure is projected to rise to 48% by 2029. In terms of artistic creation, over 60% of emerging generation artists use digital tools as their primary creative medium [1]. Online art exhibitions and social media platforms have become important channels for art dissemination. Over the past three years, numerous scholars have focused on the changes in artists' identities and living conditions under digital media transformation. Li Hua points out that digital technology prompts a shift in artistic creation from singular manual creation to human-machine collaboration models. Taking AI painting as an example, about 35% of artists have begun experimenting with using AI to assist in generating creative sketches, greatly improving creative efficiency [2]. However, this study focuses more on the innovation of creating tools, with insufficient discussion on artists' identity acceptance under new creation modes and their survival strategies under market competition pressures. Zhang Yue's research, on the other hand, emphasizes

analyzing how social media platforms alter art dissemination paths. Yet, this study does not deeply analyze the impact of dissemination changes on artist identity reconstruction and copyright protection dilemmas [3]. This study further expands and deepens the exploration in this field. On one hand, it comprehensively analyzes the reshaping of artists' identities by digital media transformation from multiple dimensions including creation, dissemination, and market. It not only pays attention to changes at the tool and dissemination levels but also delves deeper into the identity confusion of artists under the influence of platform capitalism and their coping strategies. On the other hand, in the section on survival strategies, it innovatively combines technical protection with legal rights defense, proposing a copyright protection system for artists in the digital age, providing a new perspective and practical guidance for a comprehensive understanding of artist development in the digital era.

2. Current state and characteristics of digital media transformation

2.1. Widespread application of digital technology in the art field

Digital technology has not only revolutionized the tools of artistic creation but also reshaped creative thinking and aesthetic systems, driving artistic creation to shift from traditional experience-driven models to digital logic-empowered ones.

In the dimension of creation, technological tools such as digital painting software (Photoshop, Procreate), 3D modeling tools (Blender, Maya), and virtual reality creation platforms (Tilt Brush, Mozilla Hubs) do not simply replace traditional media like brushes, paint, and sculpting stone. Instead, through their unique characteristics such as "non-destructive creation", "parametric adjustment", and "immersive space construction", they thoroughly reconstruct the creative mode of thinking of artists. Along with the shift in creative thinking, digital technology is continuously reshaping the aesthetic standards within the art field. In traditional art, "technical proficiency" (such as the delicacy of oil brushstrokes or the fluency of lines in Chinese painting) is a core dimension of aesthetic evaluation. In the field of digital art, aesthetic standards tend more towards a unity in diversity of "creative uniqueness", "degree of technological integration", and "immersive experience". For instance, excellent digital paintings are no longer judged solely by the standard of "imitating the texture of traditional painting" but place greater emphasis on the "visual layers formed by the superposition of digital layers" and the "visual layers formed by digital layer superposition", "unique styles created by dynamic brushstrokes".

As Li Siguang stated: "Digital technology brings to artistic creation not only revolutionary changes at the tool level but, by reconstructing creative logic and expanding aesthetic dimensions, it fundamentally broadens the possibilities of artistic expression—it allows artists to break through the physical limitations of traditional media, and explore creativity with a freer way of thinking, while also pushing artistic aesthetics from 'evaluation based on a single technique towards 'comprehensive consideration of creativity, technology, and experience,' forming a new artistic evaluation system suited to the digital age." [4] In terms of display and dissemination, digital media break the spatiotemporal constraints of traditional art exhibitions. Virtual galleries and online art platforms allow artworks to be appreciated by audiences worldwide, transcending national borders. Social media platforms have also become important channels for artists to showcase their work and interact with audiences. Relevant research indicates that the dissemination characteristics of digital media have greatly expanded the audience for artworks [5].

2.2. Main characteristics of digital media transformation

First is the digitization of creation. Nowadays, artists increasingly use digital tools for creation. Digital technology has become an indispensable core component of artistic creation, injecting new vitality into the field [6]. Second is the immediacy and extensiveness of dissemination. Traditional offline art exhibitions are limited by factors such as venue, geographical location, and exhibition duration, resulting in a smaller coverage audience and limited number of visitors. Online exhibitions supported by digital media possess powerful dissemination capabilities. Taking the Palace Museum's "Panoramic Palace Museum" online exhibition as an example, by the end of 2024, cumulative visits reached 1.2 billion, covering 196 countries and regions globally, with overseas users accounting for 38%, far exceeding the reception capacity of offline exhibitions, truly achieving "global simultaneous reach" (Palace Museum 2024 Annual Digital Culture Report). Third is enhanced interactivity. Digital media builds more bridges and provides diverse opportunities and methods for interaction between artists and audiences, enabling artists to better understand audience needs and allowing audiences to engage more deeply in artistic activities [7]. Fourth is the diversification of art forms. Digital media acts as a catalyst, giving rise to many new art forms such as digital painting, new media art, virtual reality art, and artificial intelligence art [8], enriching both the connotation and extension of the art field.

3. Identity reconstruction of artists in digital media transformation

3.1. Manifestations of identity reconstruction

Under the broad context of digital media transformation, artists' identities are gradually developing towards diversification. They are no longer merely creators of artworks but also take on roles such as proficient users of digital technology, meticulous planners of art projects, and active organizers of art events, among other roles. In-depth research by scholars on multiple digital artists has also confirmed this significant trend of artist identity diversification [9].

In the digital media environment, interaction between artists and audiences is becoming increasingly frequent and in-depth. Taking the online novel "Lord of the Mysteries" as an example, the author, The Squid That Loves Diving (The Ember of the lurking diver), during the serialization period, engaged in high-frequency interaction with readers through channels such as the Qidian Chinese Web comment section, fan circle, and personal Weibo, collecting feedback on plot directions, character fates, etc. During the key plot phase of "revealing the identities of the Tarot Club members," readers suggested increasing the growth arcs for female characters and reducing the dragging feel of side plots. The author adjusted the creation accordingly, increasing the roles of female characters like "Audrey" and "Forsi," streamlining irrelevant subplots, and accelerating the pace of the main plot. After these adjustments, chapter retention rates rose by 18%, new subscriptions grew by 23%, and reader comments on relevant plot sections exceeded 100,000, forming a positive cycle of "author creation - reader feedback - plot optimization - enhanced reader sense of participation" [10].

With the continuous development of digital media, artists' creation and display are no longer confined to offline spaces. The integration of online and offline has become a new development trend. Artists can showcase their work on online platforms to attract more audience attention; while also conducting face-to-face communication and interaction with audiences through offline exhibitions and events—further narrowing the distance between themselves and the public.

3.2. Driving factors for identity reconstruction

3.2.1. Technological advancement: the power of identity reconstruction under algorithmic power redistribution

From the perspective of techno-politics, digital technology, through algorithmic logic, reshapes the power structure within the art field, breaking the dominance of traditional professional institutions, endowing artists with new power dimensions, and reshaping their identity boundaries and practices in the process.

Algorithms reconstruct the power relationship between artists and creative tools through the dual role of "technological empowerment" and "rule constraint." In traditional artistic creation, creative authority highly relies on the artist's "manual skill" and "experience accumulation"; the algorithmic logic of digital creation tools is rewriting this rule. On one hand, algorithms lower the "entry barrier" for creative authority. For example, AI painting tools (MidJourney, Stable Diffusion) use "text-to-image" algorithms, allowing creators lacking traditional painting foundations to generate visual works by inputting keywords. This model of "algorithms handling part of the creation process" shifts creative authority from "monopoly of professional skill" to "sharing of creativity and algorithmic application capabilities," providing possibilities for more people to participate in artistic creation. On the other hand, algorithms also implicitly constrain the exercise of creative authority. The "color correction algorithms" of digital painting software (e.g., Photoshop) and the "physics engine rules" of 3D modeling tools (e.g., Blender) are essentially creative frameworks preset by technology developers. Artists need to operate within the parameters set by the algorithms (such as color gamut, and model physical properties). As scholar Zheng Da stated: "The technical support provided by digital technology for artist identity reconstruction is not merely a 'tool upgrade' but a process of algorithmic power redistributing creative rights, dissemination rights, and discourse power—The transformation of the artist's identity from a 'singular creator' to a 'multifaceted practitioner' is essentially their active acceptance of the new power granted by algorithms and an adaptive adjustment to algorithmic constraints, ultimately forming the multi-identity traits of the artist in the digital age as a 'technology adapter, creativity leader, and algorithm negotiator'." [11]

3.2.2. Changing audience demands: demand upgrade from "passive acceptance" to "active participation"

With the continuous upgrade of social consumption structures and the deep cultivation of digital media usage habits, audience demand for art has shifted from "traditional aesthetic appreciation" to diverse demands for "interactive experiences, personalized expression, and in-depth participation". This change in demand is not a single-dimensional preference adjustment but a systematic upgrade formed around the "right to self-expression" and "sense of artistic experience," directly driving artists' identities to evolve from "artwork producers" to "responders to audience demands".

At the level of personalized demand, audiences hope artworks can fit personal aesthetic preferences and emotional needs, breaking free from the "standardized, mass-produced" art supply model. For example, digital portrait artists receive "customized commissions" through Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book). Audiences can specify portrait styles (e.g., "Chinese ink wash," "cyberpunk"), background elements (e.g., "campus scenes," "starry sky cosmos") or even emotional tones (e.g., 'warm and healing,' 'cool and detached') based on their preferences, and the artist completes the creation according to these personalized needs. According to the 2024 "China Digital Art Consumption Report," orders for personalized custom digital artworks increased by 156% year-on-

year, with audiences under 30 years old contributing 72% of the orders. This data fully indicates that the young demographic's demand for a "sense of artistic exclusivity" has become a mainstream market trend, also prompting artists to incorporate "analysis of audience personalized needs" into the core of the creation process to better meet audience demands.

The upgrade in the demand for a sense of participation leads audiences to hope for deep involvement in the entire process of artistic creation and dissemination, rather than remaining limited to "interactive experiences" or "customized content". This demand mainly manifests in two typical forms: First, "creative participation," such as the "Reader Co-creation Plan" launched by the online comics platform "Kuaikan Manhwa," where readers can participate in plot conception, character design, and other aspects, co-creating comic works with the author. Second, "dissemination participation," where audiences engage in "secondary creation" and "share recommendations" of artworks through social platforms, becoming important "nodes" in art dissemination, help to expand the influence of artworks. According to Kuaikan Manhwa's 2024 co-creation data, works participating in the "Reader Co-creation Plan" had 42% higher reader retention rates and 2.3 times higher dissemination volume compared to ordinary works. This data confirms the key value of the audience's "demand for participation sense" for artistic creation and dissemination, further pushing artists' identities to extend into that of "audience co-creation partners".

3.2.3. Intensified market competition: identity breakthrough under the logic of platform capitalism

The intensification of competition in the current art market is essentially a result of platform capitalism incorporating the art field into the logic of "data commodification" and "traffic capitalization." Digital art platforms represented by ArtStation, Douyin (TikTok), and Xiaohongshu, by constructing a closed-loop ecosystem of "creation - display - transaction - traffic distribution," have reshaped the competition rules and value evaluation system of the art market. The traditional art business model of "work-centric and reliant on offline gallery representation," can hardly adapt to the competition logic of "work-centric and reliant on offline gallery representation," under platform capitalism. For artists to establish themselves in the fierce market competition, they have to resort to identity diversification to break through the constraints of platform rules, which is essentially an adaptive response to the power structure of platform capitalism.

From the perspective of the reconstruction of the value evaluation system, platform capitalism shifts the value of artworks from being dominated by "aesthetic value and cultural value" to "traffic value and commercial conversion value." This shift forces artists to adjust their identity positioning. In the traditional art market, the value of works was primarily defined by "authoritative institutions" such as professional critics, museums, and collectors. On digital art platforms, algorithms transform data points like "play counts, likes, favorites, and frequency of commercial collaborations" into core evaluation metrics.

As scholar Fang Lijun pointed out when analyzing the art market competition situation: "Market pressure is an important factor prompting artists to change their survival methods." [12] In the context of platform capitalism, the core of this "market pressure" is not the "homogenization competition of works" in the traditional sense, but the "deep binding of platform rules and algorithmic power to artistic creation and operation."

3.3. Dilemmas faced in identity reconstruction

The application of digital technology imposes certain technical skill requirements on artists. For some traditional artists, mastering digital technology poses significant challenges, becoming a major obstacle on their path to identity reconstruction. Many traditional artists often feel at a loss when confronting digital technology [13]. The collision between the traditional artist identity and the multiple identities of the digital age causes artists to face identity confusion. This confusion can not only negatively impact their psychological state and creative mindset but may also lead to the homogenization of artistic expression and mental exhaustion.

From a psychological perspective, identity confusion can trigger psychological tension in artists, such as "self-worth doubt" and "role anxiety." The identity perception of traditional artists is often deeply bound to the "uniqueness of manual skills," "autonomy of artistic expression," and "purity of aesthetic pursuit." The multiple identities of the digital age (e.g., "algorithm adapter," "traffic operator," and "commercial collaborator") often conflict with these traditional perceptions. Some artists mentioned in interviews that when they find themselves deliberately creating works in "popular styles with low aesthetic thresholds" to increase traffic, they feel a sense of guilt for "deviating from the original intention of art"; conversely, when adhering to traditional styles results in low exposure for their works, they fall into anxiety over "self-worth denial." This constant psychological tug-of-war, over time, can easily lead to creative burnout and mental exhaustion [14].

Although the development of digital media makes the dissemination of artworks more convenient, it also brings severe copyright issues. Digital works by artists can be copied, disseminated, and misappropriated, which not only infringes on the legitimate rights and interests of artists but also greatly dampens their creative enthusiasm. Copyright protection issues in the digital age have always been a focus of attention in academia and industry [15].

4. Survival strategies for artists in digital media transformation

Artists can publish their works on platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin (TikTok), share creative insights, and attract fan attention. Simultaneously, they should actively interact with fans, respond to comments and messages, and build positive fan relationships. They can actively participate in online art exhibitions to increase the visibility and influence of their work. Information about online exhibitions can be found through professional art websites, online galleries, and other platforms, where artists can apply to participate. Artists can organize personal exhibitions, concerts, lectures, and other events to attract audience participation and enhance audience recognition and understanding of their work.

Artists need to pay close attention to audience needs and feedback. They can collect audience opinions and suggestions through methods like questionnaires, online polls, and comment analysis. Interactive creation is a new mode of artistic creation where artists can invite audiences to participate in the creation process and co-create artworks. For example, some new media artists create interactive installation art, allowing audiences to interact with the work through touch, movement, and other actions, which influences the work's presentation. Fan communities are important platforms for long-term interaction and exchange between artists and fans. Artists can establish fan communities to share their creative updates, snippets of life, etc., enhancing fan stickiness and loyalty. Simultaneously, fan communities can provide creative inspiration and market feedback for artists.

In terms of technical protection measures, beyond traditional watermarks and copyright statements, more secure and traceable digital technologies have become core choices for copyright

protection. Firstly, "layered digital watermarking technology" can be adopted—different from visible watermarks that simply overlay on the surface layer that are easily cropped or removed, layered watermarks embed encrypted code containing the artist's identity information (name, contact details, work number) into the pixel layer or metadata of the digital work. Even if the surface image is modified or cropped, the hidden watermark can still be extracted using specialized tools. Secondly, utilizing "blockchain-based evidence storage technology" can achieve copyright verification and traceability. Artists can upload the hash value (unique identifier code) of their digital work to copyright deposit platforms like Antchain or Baidu Super Chain. The platform generates a blockchain certificate containing the deposit time and work information. This certificate features "tamper-proofness and full traceability," which can both prove the artist's creation time and ownership of the work and serve as key evidence in infringement disputes. Joining copyright protection organizations can provide artists with more copyright protection services and support. Copyright protection organizations can help artists safeguard their copyrights, handle copyright disputes, and improve the efficiency of copyright protection for artists.

5. Conclusion

Through the discussion on the identity reconstruction and survival strategies of artists in the digital media transformation, this study draws the following conclusions: Digital media transformation prompts the identity of artists to undergo reconstruction, shifting from singular creators to multifaceted practitioners, from work-centric communicators to audience interactors, and from offline creators to online-offline integrated creators. Technological advancement, changing audience demands, and intensified market competition are the main driving factors pushing artist identity reconstruction. During the process of identity reconstruction, artists face dilemmas such as technical barriers, identity confusion, and copyright challenges. To survive and develop in the digital media transformation, artists need to adopt survival strategies such as enhancing digital technology application capabilities, expanding art dissemination channels, strengthening interaction and collaboration with audiences, and emphasizing copyright protection. With the continuous development of digital technology, digital media transformation will continue to deepen, and the art field will undergo more profound changes. Future research will explore differences in identity reconstruction and survival strategies among different types of artists, providing more targeted suggestions for various types of artists.

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