



Global Craft Markets
NAVIGATING PATHWAYS
TO SUCCESS

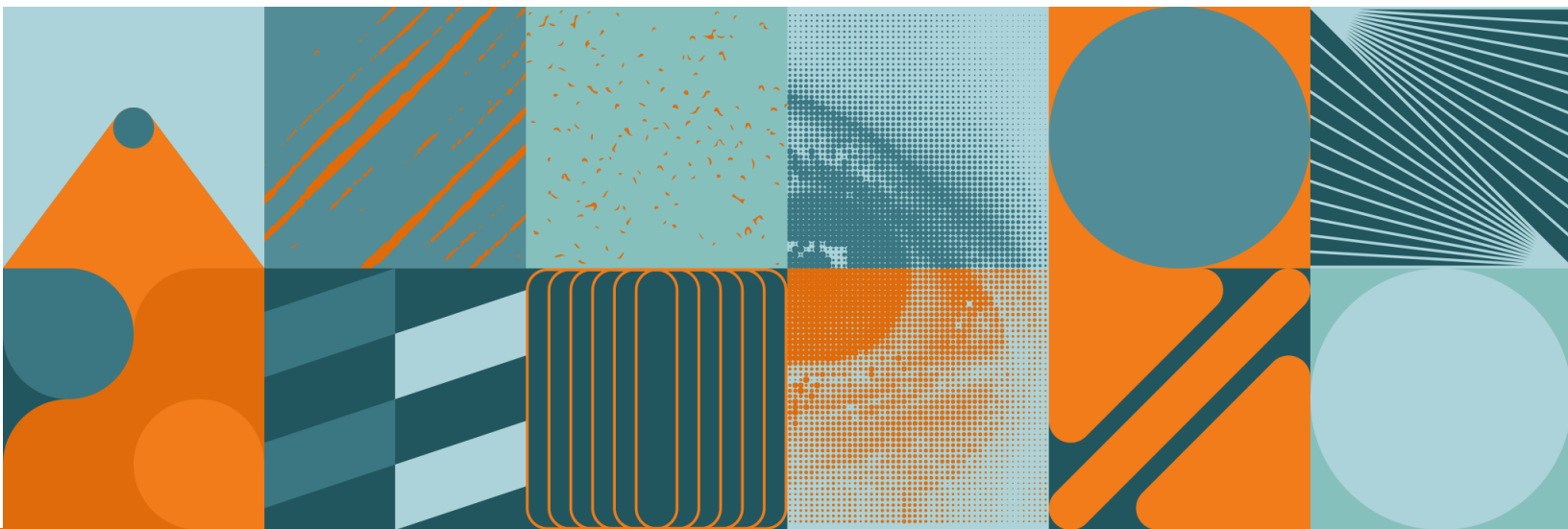


Canada Council
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ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN CRAFT
CRAFT ALLIANCE ATLANTIC ASSOCIATION

International Focus Groups



**NARRATIVE
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PREPARED BY NARRATIVE RESEARCH
NOVEMBER, 2022

About Global Craft Markets

Global Craft Markets: Navigating Pathways to Success is a comprehensive two-year, progressive study on Digital technologies and developing digital strategies for makers, galleries and the broader community. Individual consulting reports will be compiled with other consultants' work into a larger strategy document and will then be used to develop new directions and processes in further study and recommendations as the project moves forward. As research is completed, we will be sharing results and doing further consultation for discovery to inform decisions on future direction.



It is important to note that this research initiative has not been developed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and is intended primarily, as described in the following pages, to offer insights into the developing digital economy for craft & art work worldwide. We recognize however that the pandemic is an important force affecting the worldwide economy and may affect findings.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Craft Alliance Atlantic Association supports the growth of craftspeople working on the ancestral and unceded territories of the Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, Wolastoqiyik, Beothuk, the Inuit of Nunatsiavut and NunatuKavut, and the Innu of Nitassinan. We support the upholding of the Peace and Friendship Treaties of 1752 and 1761 which re-affirmed the land, hunting and trading rights of this land's original people and encourage clients and partners to explore the fundamental impact of First Nations craftsmanship on the current craft traditions enjoyed here today.

EQUITY STATEMENT

We also acknowledge the diverse communities in our region that make up our population, including Indigenous Peoples, the many descendants of African Nova Scotians, the Black Loyalists and other racialized individuals including immigrants and refugees; individuals from the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community; and physically and intellectually disabled persons. We recognize that the lived experiences of these groups can often vary dramatically, and that considering the intersectionality of those lived experiences is also an essential factor when discussing issues pertaining to them.

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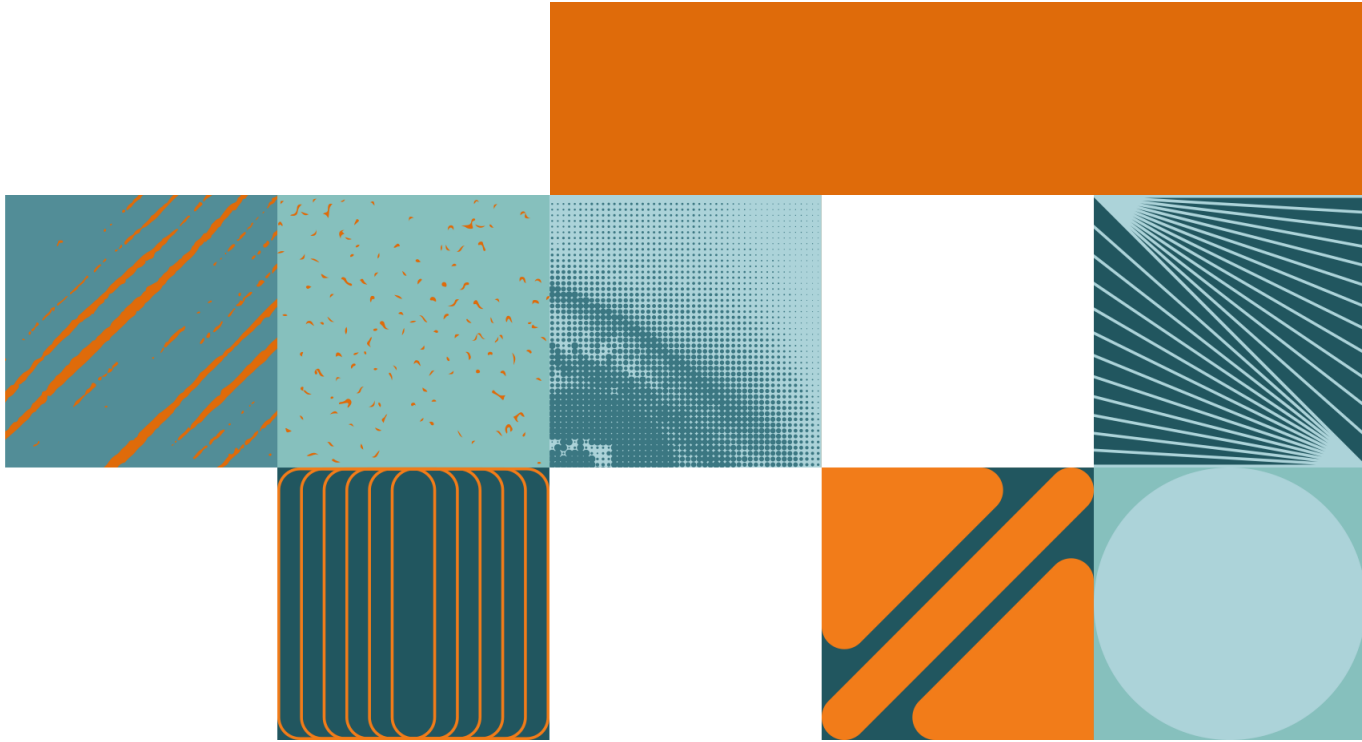
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Background & Methodology

BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of new technologies and changed the way many people interact and purchase. These changes have affected all industries, including the arts. Craft Alliance Atlantic is working on a two-year research project (entitled: *Global Craft Markets – Navigating Pathways to Success*), which has a broad aim of uncovering strategies to help craftspeople and artists to access international markets. Funding support for the project is provided by the Canada Council for the Arts.

As part of this undertaking, Craft Alliance Atlantic commissioned Narrative Research to conduct a multi-phase research project to ensure an in-depth understanding from makers, gallerists, those experienced in virtual reality, collectors and non-profits, in terms of how they are using digital platforms in marketing, exhibiting, purchasing, and disseminating craft. This report outlines the findings from Phase 1, online focus groups.

The qualitative research aimed to identify how each group is interacting with digital platforms, what their expectations are, and what their experiences have been. Discussions explored advances in digital media (photography, 3D, video content), e-commerce, social media sales and brand awareness.

In essence, this phase of the research aimed to uncover how craft artists evaluate the suitability of the platforms and tools available for their own practice, as well as how galleries, collectors and non-profits interact with those platforms.

The primary benefits of qualitative discussions are that they allow for in-depth probing with qualifying participants on their opinions, perceptions and attitudes on a specific subject matter. Qualitative research allows for more complete understanding of the segment in that the thoughts or feelings are expressed in the participants' "own language" and at their "own levels of passion." Qualitative techniques are used in marketing research as a means of developing insight and direction, rather than collecting quantitatively precise data or absolute measures. As such, results are directional only and cannot be projected to the overall population under study.



METHODOLOGY



Approach

A total of 20 participants took part across five online focus groups, each with a different audience.

Participants were invited to take part by Craft Alliance Atlantic and directed to a brief online survey to determine their availability, and to determine which group would be most appropriate for them.



Target Audience

Individuals involved in marketing, purchasing, exhibiting and disseminating craft including: Makers, Collectors, Galleries, Non-Profits, and VR Experts.



Length and Date

Each focus group lasted for approximately 90 minutes.

Groups took place between October 25 and November 24, 2022.

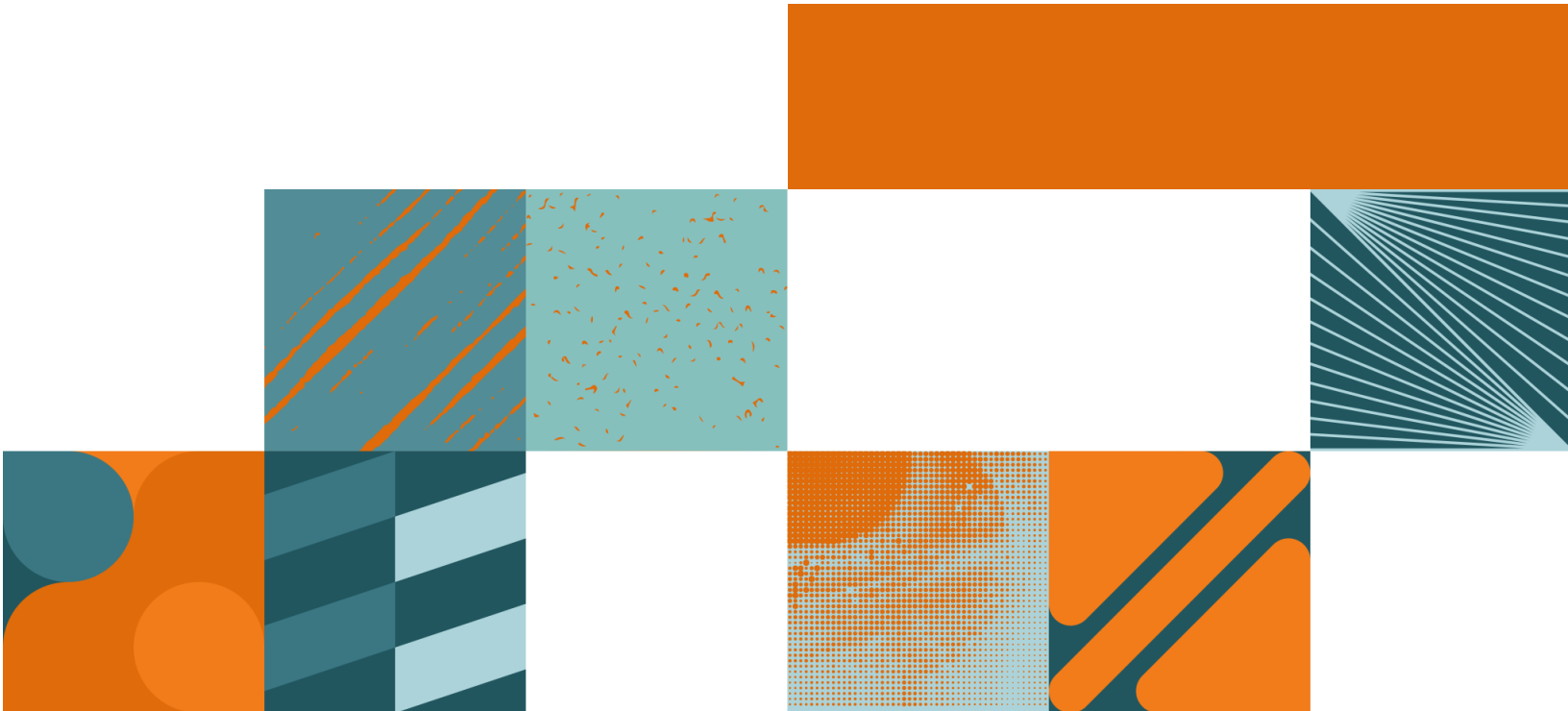


Highlights

The following key highlights are derived from the five qualitative sessions:

- Audiences including, makers, collectors, gallerists, non-profits and those with experience in virtual reality (VR) have a variety of reasons for using digital methods as a means of marketing, purchasing, exhibiting and disseminating craft with the primary reason being **necessity** (others doing it, expectations of key clients or audiences, as well as the pandemic), although there are other perceived advantages and reasons for using digital tools including improved **reach**, **accessibility**, **convenience**, **preservation** and **enjoyment**.
- Despite the prolific use of digital in the craft community, there is consensus that **digital is supplementary** to traditional means and will never be a replacement.
- That said, digital is a growing area that **works in tandem with traditional means** in many ways. Some of the ways the craft community has begun to use digital includes the circulation of **educational and process videos**, the use of **online auctions**, ongoing maintenance of personal **websites** and **social media pages**, **live streams** and **360 cameras**, as well as the use of **online directories**.
- Members of the craft community articulate that such trends are made possible through a variety of digital platforms for functions including **community management**, community engagement via **social media**, selling craft via **online marketplaces**, development of **personal websites**, dissemination of work through **websites and directories belonging to other organizations**, participating in the **virtual reality** space, and showing work via **virtual galleries**.

- The use of such platforms and adoption of digital technology in general has afforded the craft community several benefits including **global reach** (and wider reach more locally), **increased awareness** of craft, access to **new ideas**, **increased control** over dissemination of work, **lower costs** than traditional means of showing and selling work, and **process documentation**.
- However, the increased use of digital means does pose barriers to the craft community because it is **time and resource intensive**, **depends on a stable internet connection** (which may not be available to all), creates **challenges in balancing the needs for an in-person experience** with craft, raises concerns with **shipping sold items**, can suffer from **technical glitches**, relies on **social media**, and opens craft up to **copyright issues**.
- To help address these barriers of using digital, members of the craft community suggest **grants**, **education and training opportunities**, **engagement of younger/student artisans**, more **standardization across online directories**, **aid in connecting makers and collectors**, **improved information sharing**, and the introduction of a **Crafter's Guild** to help give credibility to professional makers.



Detailed Findings

MOTIVATIONS FOR USING DIGITAL

Audiences including, makers, collectors, gallerists, non-profits and those with experience in virtual reality (VR) have a variety of reasons for using digital methods as a means of marketing, purchasing, exhibiting and disseminating craft:

Necessity

- Some participants suggested that they were propelled into using digital tools as a result of the **pandemic**, given that closures made it impossible to exhibit work or connect with others in the global craft community by traditional means.
- Others have more **reluctantly adopted** digital practices as a result of their colleagues using digital first, and as a result of an expectation from audiences for a digital presence.

Reach

- Despite some using digital tools out necessity, others gravitated to digital means as a **marketing tool** to increase exposure and become known to a broader audience, even if its use may not result in sales.
- Digital allows craft to be **exhibited on a global scale** more easily, to a much broader audience. This allows those in the craft space to expand their network and receive more feedback from a wider audience. Collectors indicated that digital allows them to explore a wider range of offerings and artists. Gallerists, similarly, felt that digital expands audience and reach.

Accessibility

- Digital was indicated as an opportunity to increase access for **people who cannot travel** for socio-economic reasons and those who reside in rural areas. It also increase access to sales and exhibiting for those with disabilities.
- Digital also allows for use of a pseudonym/avatar and greater anonymity **among those with concerns about facing oppression** at in-person events related to racism, homophobia, ablism, etc.

Convenience

- **Avoids shipping** large-scale or fragile items to shows internationally, or taking items out of storage to exhibit locally.

Preservation

- Digital was noted as an important tool in **documenting craft**, practices and culture, helping to create an archival database for the younger generation, and to look back on later, among the busyness of our lives.

Enjoyment

- Use social media and websites were noted more as ways to preview artwork and **create anticipation** before seeing it person.
- Participants also noted that VR tools are **fun to use** and learn about.

Audiences including, makers, collectors, gallerists, non-profits and those with experience in virtual reality (VR) share the following quotes with respect to their motivations for using digital:

“You're just not going to be visible [without a digital presence].”

“Speaking to [the younger generation] in their language.”

“I love that it democratizes the art world for artists...those who would never be able to afford to showcase their art in a gallery or be ‘picked up’....”

“I have a website, not for sales, but to promote me. I don't find that my target audience is likely to buy my work through the website. I use it as a marketing tool.”

TRENDS IN DIGITAL

The craft community describes several trends that have emerged in recent years:

- **Educational videos** and **process videos**, both of which involve showing the steps to make a piece, helping the viewer feel more connected to the process, and in some cases to become interested in a field or practice that might otherwise not appeal. This type of introduction or new interest was noted by collectors particularly.
- **Online auctions** were mentioned as a way to generate sales when in-person exhibiting is not an option for logistical or other reasons.
- Another noted trend or change in how digital is implemented was the continuous **upkeep of personal/organization websites** to ensure content is straightforward, imaged-focused, minimal, and eye-catching. Participants noted that this type of change and improvement was continually evolving.
- Use of **social media** to promote and share work, follow organizations, galleries and individual artists and hashtags was noted as a trend, whereby artists are challenged by the continuous adaptation of strategy to use the algorithm to their own advantage. Collectors and galleries noted the change or trend in digital of having to continually work to improve reach on social platforms, and stay up with trends to try to reach new and existing audiences.
- Virtual exhibiting through **live streams** of craft fairs and shows, and use of **360 cameras and similar applications** to do virtual gallery shows was another trend that was noted.
- Selling and promotion by listing in **online directories** was felt by many participants to be a strong means of gaining reach.

“For potters, there are **educational videos where you can watch their hands and not necessarily have an explanation**. You can learn even without language.”

“**I’ve redone our website five times** since we opened. I’m still not satisfied. Research [shows that] to have presence that is actually **current, [website must be] contemporary and straightforward for users**, with minimal writing.”

“These **directories have exploded online**. I get ones for Alberta and BC [craft organizations]. This is like an old-school phone-book that lists businesses that are itemized by craft. Very useful for gaining an audience.”

KEY TECHNOLOGIES AND PLATFORMS

The following offers an overview of mentioned technologies and platforms for marketing, purchasing, exhibiting and disseminating craft noted by participants across groups.

Platform Type	Current Use	What works well
Community Management	• Mailchimp • Discord • MembershipWorks	Connect and get in touch with members, and colleagues to promote work
Social Media	• Instagram • Facebook • Twitter • YouTube • TikTok (more recent)	Digital ads, marketing, outreach to new members Good for generating awareness, but less so sales Different platforms target different demographics and media (i.e., Facebook is 35+, TikTok is younger, more performative art and video).
E-marketplaces & Directories:	• Salvage Magazine (Britain) • Homo Faber (Europe) • Amazon (International) • Jumia (North Africa) • Etsy (North America) • Citizens of Craft (Canada)	Shows all kinds of products, their makers, and description. Can link to makers' own websites or allow purchase directly through the third-party website Sites have brand recognition, helps to increase exposure, purchasers feels more secure
Personal/ Organization Website	• Wordpress • Canva	Brings website design in-house, removing the requirement for a graphic designer
External Websites	• Galleries • Provincial/National Craft Organizations	Offers more control over look and feel to gallery owners or organizations
Virtual Reality Tools	• ArtGate (specifically for craft) • Meta	Offers a built in community 2D images show well, 3D work but have glitches
Virtual Gallery Tools	• Matterport (for real-estate sale) • Twitch (a gaming platform)	Works well when the quality of the camera work is high, and when the curator is entertaining

Social Media



Community Management Platforms



E-Marketplaces & Directories



Virtual Reality Platforms



Virtual Galleries Tools



TRADITIONAL VS. DIGITAL

There is consensus that digital is supplementary to traditional means and will never be a replacement:

- Traditional will always have a place in handmade work because audiences are *interested in the makers, the projects and the process* as well as the sensory experience of interacting with individuals and work.
- Craft is a *tactile experience*, and often purchasers need to touch the piece or at the very least see it up close before they will buy.
- This finding is reinforced by that notion that *digital means tend to translate into exposure* on a broader scale, but not necessarily sales.
- Digital craft display is *only as good as the photography*, which can be a barrier for some media as well as those with limited funds and/or time and expertise in photography.

That said, digital is a growing area that works in tandem with traditional means in many ways:

- The approach for use of digital *varies depending on the medium* of the craft because it must reach the appropriate audience whether on social media, an enthusiast group, etc.
- Digital plays a role in the *promotion of events that get people back out into 'real life'* and away from their phones/ computers.
- Social media acts as an *efficient form of 'digital word of mouth'* for craft, when one person in social group has a new item that they share and recommend online.

Who is interested in digital?

Audience	Why?
Craft organizations	Digital is a means of marketing the work of makers.
Tech sector	Interest in NFTs and exhibitions in the VR space.
Young people	Have grown up with technology and there is less of a learning curve. University are courses focused on digital art production and exhibition are becoming more common to prepare the next generation for where art is headed.
Museums	Digital immortalizes artwork.
Art lovers	Tend to be more open to new ideas, fall under early adopters or innovators.
General population	Everyone also has a phone/ various devices. Since the pandemic, everyone is less hesitant to purchase online.

The following quotes outline some participants' views of the interaction between traditional and digital means:

"All of the craft galleries I participate in now **require the work to be put online**. I am doing that, but I haven't noticed an increase in sales. I've also noticed that galleries want **smaller works because these are easier to ship**."

"**Good to have online awareness of our work but also have to have a place where there can be a physical encounter with our work**. In terms of awareness, online is good but in-person is what is going to translate into sales."

"There is a certain **authenticity and magic with having a real-life experience with art**; not to discredit some of the amazing work in the digital. I don't where it will land in overriding real-life art experiences."

"**People appreciate 'handmade' because it's an experience**. They did not make it, but they relate to the experience of it having been made. It's a tactile experience."

BENEFITS OF DIGITAL

The craft community describe several benefits to using digital:

- **Global reach** – includes expanding the audiences/markets reached. Although this expanded reach is seen largely positively as a way to reach new audiences without travel, it does present the issue of selling and shipping art to new jurisdictions, which can present challenges in packing, cost and customs.
- **Increased awareness** – Increases the number of eyes on a piece of work or even an area of craft, helping to make it more mainstream (e.g., the growing popularity of Cricut and paper craft). This increased viewership was also noted by makers as a means of getting more and varied feedback on their work.
- **New ideas** – the opportunity to be introduced to new ideas, new influences, media and techniques and for artists, to keep abreast of what colleagues are doing more easily.
- **Increased control** – makers noted the benefit of being able to do all their own marketing without needing to rely on galleries or curators of their work. This provides a degree of control of both how work is presented and messaging about the work. Makers indicated that this lack of gatekeeping is beneficial particularly for newer artists. Another aspect of control and ease of

access was that makers don't need to rent space, or compete for space in the same way as they would with traditional, in-person galleries.

- **Lower cost** – on a related point, makers noted that digital allows them the freedom of not having to rent exhibition space or pay for the expense of shipping to exhibit. Social media is seen as a free form of advertising
- **Process documentation** – looking back at how work was created in the past (e.g., creating a virtual exhibit) and learning from it in the future. Collectors noted that seeing and understanding the process of creation of a work of art allowed them greater connection to the work, and often greater interest.

The following quotes showcase examples of the benefits of digital according to the craft community:

"I think **everyone is able to benefit**. [For example,] NB is very rural, and we have people way out in the woods making craft that no one would otherwise benefit. Benefit to these people if they have tools and skills to show their work digitally. "

"Best advantage of digital is that **I don't have to pay a shipping fee to the gallery**. This is a huge relief."

"There is a **big benefit to start a VR gallery**. The **start-up costs are really low**."

"For those in Northern communities who wouldn't have access to go to a gallery, I love the fact that **[digital is] more direct. It bypasses these gallerists who are gatekeeping**."

"One of my Facebook groups is this group of Inuit sewers, and I **would have never come across them if there wasn't a [virtual] group**."

BARRIERS OF DIGITAL

The craft community describes several barriers to using digital:

- **Time and resource intensive** – participants noted that in order to do digital well, it takes time and funds away from making and producing art. Another challenge was the existence of multiple platforms to keep on top of and the costs associated with some. This multi-platform reality requires makers to invest heavily in photography, as well as time to understand the benefits and detractors of various platforms.
- **Depends on a stable internet connection** – those in remote communities do not necessarily have high-speed connectivity.
- **Challenging to balance the digital and in-person experience** – makers, collectors and gallerists noted that it can be difficult to translate a physical experience into the virtual world.
- **Many crafts look better in person** – some crafts do not photograph well, difficult to show 3D craft virtually without expensive equipment or extensive knowledge of 3D rendering programs.
- **Shipping sold items** – sometimes the cost to ship an item sold online is more than the cost of the work itself. Shipping tends to favour some media (particularly smaller items) over others (e.g. those that are fragile).
- **Technical glitches** – glitches are a part of innovation, but takes away from the craft if there are challenges with the audio or visual elements of a virtual show. Social media glitches can disrupt promotional efforts.
- **Social media challenges** – issues noted with social media included oversaturation of certain types of work, media sites controlling what is shown to each audience, the high cost of advertising, and untrustworthy audience data due to presence of bots. Difficulty understanding how the algorithms work. Some also noted the risk of getting locked out of social media accounts for violating content guidelines or because the account has been hacked.
- **Copyright issues** – sharing work digitally make it easier for it to be stolen and plagiarized.

The following quotes describe specific barriers the craft community faces with respect to digital:

“The Gucci online store has existed for ages, but they still have a store in the Champs-Élysée and a museum for Gucci. **It is difficult to translate the experience digitally.**”

“**[Social media is] very much a pay to play scenario.** There isn't an opportunity for artists to stand out unless they pay, or they have a built-in audience. **Whatever shows up on my feed is controlled by the algorithm,** and the goal of that is to make money.”

“**People can steal and repost your photos** as if they are the maker. Or they can duplicate yours and make substandard quality work. You have to have a watermark on your work.”

“Algorithms. Decides which content gets pushed forward and which falls back. **You don't own your profile** and at any given time, the platform can shut you down and then you use your whole follower base. This is why it's **very important to have a website of your own.** There is risk in relying on an outside source that you don't really know how it works. I got locked out of my accounts two days before a big market because of the glitch. That's why I pay for a website.”

SUGGESTIONS TO OVERCOME BARRIERS OF DIGITAL INCLUDE

- **Grants** – need more funding for platform fees, digital content creation (e.g., cameras, mics, etc.), for hiring staff to take on the tasks of maintaining a digital presence, and to help with shipping costs. These grants could come from art or craft councils. Grants should also be used to improve diversity in craft by raising voice of those who are traditionally underrepresented.
- **Education and training opportunities** – workshops and training opportunities outside the post-secondary structure on Photoshop, website building, video editing, search engine optimization. A YouTube channel with short ‘how-to’ videos may serve the same purpose, videos were noted as the most engaging form of training.
- **Engagement of younger makers/artisans** – enlist students in art school to help artisans get set-up online because they have more experience in digital solutions. Facilitate a collaboration between art schools and craft organizations offer these opportunities to students for school credits.
- **Standardized format online for listings** – avoids having to start from scratch with each new directory or marketplace listing. All craft organizations should use the same standard for uploads.
- **Assistance in connecting makers to collectors** – need help from craft organizations targeting audiences interested in craft, perhaps by curating a list of galleries or organizations makers can contact on an international scale.
- **A crafters forum for asking/answering questions** – a platform where makers can collaborate on how they run their social media pages, websites, info on collectors who are interested in particular types of crafts. A community of crafters (e.g., like what StackOverflow is to developers).
- **Crafters Guild** – establish a national framework for becoming accredited in a certain craft, to help give credibility to professional crafters compared to hobbyists.

Suggestions to overcome barriers of digital include:

“**[Education tools] need to be short, easily accessible**, and well thought out. For example, WebFlow or LinkedIn Learning videos. WebFlow is web-builder but their education system amazing. If there could be something like that for the art world, that would be amazing.”

“Education is needed for artists in **how to deal with work being carried out digitally**. [For example,] having the right images and documentation.”

“I'd say we need **staffing costs from grants**. The digital piece of running organizations, both subscriptions and tools, as well as staff hours has increased so much and this isn't recognized by provincial and national funding bodies.”

“It would be great to have **more international level of targeting, a group of galleries we can reach out, or list of organizations**. This would help in connecting makers to groups and galleries in other countries.”

“If I had the money, I would give everyone in the North **dedicated wifi**. Our internet scenario in Canada is really messed up where Bell and Rogers control basically the whole market.”



Next Steps

The following are proposed next steps for further research into the use of digital means of disseminating, purchasing, marketing and exhibiting craft:

1. Validate findings from *qualitative research* using a *quantitative survey* in order to create an action plan for helping members of the craft community overcome hurdles associated with digital means of marketing, exhibiting, disseminating and purchasing craft. In particular the survey should seek to validate:

- Are process videos more likely to generate interest in craft than still photos? If yes, is this an interest in purchasing the craft, or learning more about the style of craft?
- Of the skills members of the craft community need to strengthen their digital presence, which should be the highest priority?
- Are short videos the best format for delivering education and digital skills training to the craft community?
- Other than the identified supports, are there others needed by the craft community – particularly makers and galleries – to expand their reach and strengthen their digital presence?
- Etc.

2. Take action to help members of the craft community overcome the barriers of digital. Initial steps may include:

- Publicize ***available grants*** for makers and galleries on Craft Alliance Atlantic website.
- Share ***how-to-videos*** highlighting various digital skills on the website.
- Advertise ***opportunities for makers and collectors to interact virtually*** to help grow and strengthen ties within the craft community.