Cultural Tribes, Co-Creation, and Platform Intermediation: Rethinking Digital Cultural Entrepreneurship in Romania

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Abstract
The digitalization of cultural industries has transformed how cultural value is created, validated, and monetized - yet these transformations remain poorly understood in countries where cultural institutions are fragile, and data is scarce. This paper investigates digital cultural entrepreneurship in Romania's visual arts through a critical literature review of international academic sources and national evidence, including surveys, market reports, and academic publications from 2019 to 2025. The analysis follows four axes: digital cultural consumption, co-creation and cultural tribes, disintermediation and reintermediation, and sustainability. Findings indicate that digital cultural participation in Romania is growing but unevenly, stratified by education, age, and geography. Co-creation practices appear in institutional settings such as libraries and museums, as well as in informal communities: artist-run spaces, biennials, and online collectives. Disintermediation, often celebrated as democratization, turns out to produce new forms of algorithmic reintermediation, in which platforms concentrate visibility and reshape access. Sustainability, while discussed in adjacent fields, has not been integrated into digital cultural entrepreneurship as a working principle. The paper proposes a conceptual framework that connects audience participation, community-based validation, tensions in intermediation, and sustainability as interdependent dimensions of cultural value creation. By confronting international theory with Romanian evidence, the study addresses a gap in the literature and offers a basis for empirical research and policy development in an understudied cultural sector.

Keywords
Co-creation; Cultural Consumption; Cultural Tribes; Digital Cultural Entrepreneurship; Disintermediation; Reintermediation; Sustainability.

Introduction

The digitalization of culture has changed the rules. How value is created, who validates it, and through what channels it circulates — all of this is in flux. International scholarship has produced a growing body of work on cultural tribes, co-creation, and platform intermediation, concepts that seek to capture how audiences and entrepreneurs interact in environments shaped by algorithms and networked communication (Jenkins, 2006; Cova & Cova, 2002; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Nevertheless, these debates have rarely been applied to Romania, where the cultural field operates under different pressures: fragile institutions, heavy dependence on global platforms, and vibrant yet fragmented community initiatives.

What we do know about Romania points to a landscape in transition. Public institutions - libraries, museums - are beginning to integrate digital literacy and community engagement into their missions (Banciu, 2024; Crișan & Ionescu, 2024). Independent cultural entrepreneurs, meanwhile, rely on platforms like Instagram and YouTube for visibility, audience building, and sometimes revenue (Marian-Potra et al., 2022). National surveys confirm that online cultural practices - streaming, digital ticketing, virtual museum visits - have accelerated, but participation remains unequal. Divides based on education, age, and the urban–rural gap persist and, in some respects, deepen in the digital environment (INCFC, 2022, 2023). In the visual arts specifically, market reports describe growth driven by collectors and digital channels, but that growth is concentrated among elites. General audiences remain largely on the outside (Carp, 2018; Deloitte, 2025; Scemtovici & Benowitz, 2023).

Cultural entrepreneurship in Romania, then, is not only a question of technology or markets. It is also a civic process, shaped by participation and constrained by structural inequalities.

Despite this emerging evidence, no coherent analytical framework for digital cultural entrepreneurship in Romania exists. International theories of co-creation, cultural tribes, platform intermediation, and sustainability have not been confronted systematically with Romanian realities. The domestic sources available — national surveys, market reports, sectoral studies — provide valuable snapshots, but different actors with varying methodologies and interests produce them. Some carry biases that have not been critically assessed.

This paper addresses that gap. Through a critical literature review, it synthesizes international frameworks with Romanian evidence, focusing on the visual arts as a case that is both revealing and understudied. The central question is: how do digitalization, co-creation, and platform intermediation transform cultural entrepreneurship and value creation in Romania's visual arts? The analysis is structured along four axes: digital cultural consumption, co-creation and cultural tribes, disintermediation and reintermediation, and sustainability. Each axis is examined through international theory and local evidence. The paper does not aim to produce new empirical data. Its purpose is to clarify concepts, map what is currently known, identify gaps, and establish a foundation for the empirical work that follows.

Literature review

This review examines four analytical axes - cultural consumption, co-creation and cultural tribes, disintermediation and reintermediation, and sustainability - to assess what is known internationally and in Romania about digital cultural entrepreneurship, with particular attention to the visual arts. The aim is not simply to collect sources, but to identify contradictions, gaps, and productive tensions between international theory and Romanian evidence.

Cultural consumption

Global research landscape

Any serious discussion of cultural consumption must acknowledge Bourdieu (1984), whose analysis of taste, cultural capital, and social distinction remains foundational. His argument — that cultural preferences are not expressions of individual freedom but markers of class position — has proven remarkably durable, even as consumption contexts have shifted from concert halls and bookshops to streaming platforms and social media feeds. The question is whether digitalization disrupts these hierarchies or merely reproduces them in new forms. The evidence is mixed. Weingartner (2021) describes a phenomenon called digital omnivorousness: educated, urban elites consume across platforms and genres, but this breadth of engagement does not erase the asymmetries Bourdieu identified — it reconfigures them. Access to platforms is not the same as meaningful participation.

More recent scholarship has pushed the analysis further. Caliandro and Gandini (2024) and Lewis (2022) argue that platforms are not neutral distribution channels; they actively shape what is consumed, by whom, and on what terms. This point is crucial. When an algorithm determines which artist appears in a user's feed, it performs a curatorial function — one that is neither transparent nor accountable. DiMaggio (1982), whose earlier work on the classification of culture showed how institutions create and enforce boundaries between high and popular culture, provides a useful framework for thinking about what platforms do: they sort, classify, and hierarchize cultural content, but according to commercial logics rather than aesthetic or civic ones. Patterns of digital consumption also include ephemeral engagement driven by social media temporality, nostalgic revivals, and radicalized consumption tied to identity politics (Capestro & Di Maria, 2023; Svirina, 2021) - trends that complicate any linear narrative of digital democratization.

Romanian research landscape

The Cultural Consumption Barometers (INCFC, 2022, 2023) offer the most comprehensive picture of how Romanians engage with culture digitally. They confirm growth in online participation — streaming, digital ticketing, virtual museum visits — but the growth is uneven. Divides persist along predictable lines: age, education, and geography. The 2023 edition is notable for introducing the concept of cultural consumption communities, which function as local analogues of what the international literature calls cultural tribes — groups organized around shared tastes and symbolic identities. Reports on urban cultural vitality add a spatial dimension, documenting territorial disparities in cultural infrastructure and access (INCFC, 2021).

Other studies fill in parts of the picture. Fanea-Ivanovici (2018) approaches cultural digitization through the lens of sustainable development, noting that Romania ranks among the least digitally integrated EU countries — at the time of her study, only 28% of citizens possessed basic digital skills. Haller (2024) adopts a macroeconomic approach, using the European Cultural Index to show positive correlations among cultural investment, digital infrastructure, and GDP growth. What these studies share is a structural perspective: cultural consumption in Romania is constrained not primarily by a lack of interest but by deficits in infrastructure, skills, and policy coherence.

In the visual arts, the picture is more polarized. Deloitte Romania Art Report 2025 identifies a growing collector base and highlights Instagram as the dominant digital influence on acquisitions. Scemtovici and Benowitz (2023) report a 122 million lei turnover in 2023, with Artmark commanding the largest share. However, Carp (2018) is right to point out that these market figures obscure the fact that general audiences remain largely excluded from the contemporary art scene, and that the market serves a narrow segment of collectors and professionals.

Critical synthesis

Taken together, the literature shifts the discussion from what people consume to who gets to consume - and under what structural conditions. The integration of Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital with the empirical findings of Fanea-Ivanovici and Haller reframes consumption as a systemic rather than individual issue. In Romania, the digital divide is not only a technological problem; it is a cultural one, determining who participates in the digital sphere of value creation and who does not. What the literature does not yet address — and this is a significant gap - is the role of algorithmic mediation in shaping cultural visibility and taste within the Romanian context.

Co-creation and cultural tribes

Global research landscape

The idea that value is co- created rather than delivered has become commonplace in management and marketing scholarship, but the concept has a specific intellectual history worth tracing. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argued that value creation is shifting from a firm- centric model to one in which consumers participate actively, where the market becomes a forum for dialogue rather than a site of one-directional exchange. Vargo and Lusch (2008) formalized this intuition through their service-dominant logic, which treats value as inherently relational: it is always co-created, never simply produced and then consumed.

In the cultural domain, these ideas take on particular resonance. Jenkins (2006) showed how participatory culture — fan fiction, remix, collaborative production — blurs the boundary between creator and audience. Cova and Cova (2002) introduced the concept of consumer tribes: communities held together not by demographics but by shared passions, rituals, and symbolic attachments. These tribes do not merely consume cultural products; they validate, contest, and reinterpret them. The process is collective, unstable, and often outside the control of the original producer.

The concept of cultural entrepreneurship adds another layer. Gehman and Soublière (2017) proposed a useful typology distinguishing three waves. The first (CE 1.0), rooted in sociology, examines how high-culture organizations and popular-culture products are created — what they call "making culture". The second (CE 2.0), drawing on organization theory, examines how entrepreneurs deploy culture as a toolkit for legitimating new ventures. The third wave (CE 3.0) is the most relevant here: it emphasizes cultural making, understood as distributed, intertemporal processes through which value is co-created across multiple and fluid repertoires of meaning. This is not a tidy, planned process. It involves negotiation, improvisation, and sometimes failure. Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) complemented this perspective by showing how storytelling and narrative construction serve as mechanisms for acquiring legitimacy and resources - a dynamic particularly evident in contexts where formal institutional support is weak.

Romanian research landscape

Romanian evidence of co-creation is scattered across sectors and institutions, yet the fragments form a coherent picture. Diaspora libraries serve as grassroots hubs that combine physical and digital participation, sustained largely by volunteers and informal networks (Hrib & Zbuchea, 2024). The Barometer 2023 segments audiences into consumption communities. In the visual arts, Carp (2018) identifies artist-run spaces such as Etaj and Fabrica de Pensule, along with biennials like Art Encounters and Bucharest Biennale, as key sites where co-creation occurs - where artists, curators, and audiences collectively negotiate meaning. Deloitte (2025) observes that galleries increasingly operate as social hubs, and Scemtovici and Benowitz (2023) note the emergence of young collectors as a distinct cultural network.

What is less well documented is the role of public institutions. Crișan and Ionescu (2024) offer an important corrective. Their evaluation of public library services reveals that empathy, digital literacy programs, and a diverse range of activities significantly increase users' perceptions of quality and inclusion. Libraries, in their account, are not passive repositories but active spaces of co-creation where audiences, professionals, and technologies converge. Banciu (2024) makes a similar argument for museums, positioning them as catalysts for social innovation and digital learning. These studies suggest that co-creation in Romania is not confined to the art market or creative industries; it extends into public cultural infrastructure in ways that have not been sufficiently theorized.

Critical synthesis

Romanian literature usefully expands the concept of co-creation beyond its origins in digital fandoms and consumer marketing. Libraries and museums emerge as arenas of collective cultural production — spaces where the logic of CE 3.0 operates, even if it has not been named as such. Yet the evidence remains fragmented. There is no systematic research on how digital tribes form, sustain themselves, and dissolve in Romanian cultural spaces. Nor is there analysis of how algorithmic systems shape these communities — who gets amplified, who gets silenced, and by what mechanisms. Gehman and Soublière's (2017) framework offers a productive lens for future inquiry, but applying it requires empirical work that does not yet exist.

Disintermediation and reintermediation

Global research landscape

The early promise of the internet was disintermediation: artists could reach audiences directly, bypassing galleries, publishers, and broadcasters (Jenkins, 2006; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). For a time, this narrative held. However, it did not survive contact with the realities of digital platform economics. Nieborg and Poell (2018) describe the process of platformization, whereby cultural production is increasingly shaped by the economic logics and technical infrastructures of a small number of dominant platforms. The shift is not subtle. When Spotify decides how to rank a song, or Instagram determines which artist appears in a collector's feed, the platform is performing an intermediary function — one that is arguably more powerful than the gatekeepers it supposedly replaced.

Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck (2019) argue that platforms now function as central governance structures in the cultural economy. They mediate relationships among creators, audiences, and advertisers through algorithmic systems that are opaque by design. Smith Maguire and Matthews (2014) updated the concept of cultural intermediaries to include algorithms alongside human critics and curators, while Gillespie (2014) examined the politics of algorithmic selection - the choices embedded in code that determine what becomes visible and what remains obscure.

Throsby (2001, 2010) provides a complementary perspective that deserves more attention in the digital context than it typically receives. His concentric circles model positions creative arts at the core of the cultural economy, surrounded by layers of cultural industries and related economic activity. The model is useful for thinking about what platform intermediation actually does: it may leave core creative practices relatively intact, but it fundamentally reshapes their distribution, visibility, and economic viability. An artist can still paint in a studio, but whether anyone sees the work depends increasingly on algorithmic decisions made elsewhere.

Romanian research landscape

In Romania, disintermediation and reintermediation coexist in ways that are sometimes contradictory. Publishing studies show the adoption of direct-to-consumer strategies (Osadci-Baciu, 2022; Zbuchea & Hrib, 2019). In the visual arts, collectors continue to buy directly from artists (Deloitte, 2025). Nevertheless, the market is simultaneously dominated by powerful intermediaries: Artmark held 63% of the secondary market share in 2023, and new fairs such as MoBU and RAD reinforce institutional channels (Scemtovici & Benowitz, 2023). Carp (2018) highlights a telling paradox: artists like Adrian Ghenie achieved international recognition and market validation abroad before being acknowledged domestically — a pattern that exposes the weaknesses of Romania's intermediary structures.

The pandemic added a new chapter to this story. Marian-Potra et al. (2022) document how independent cultural organizations, cut off from physical audiences, migrated rapidly to digital platforms. Using a grounded-theory approach, they identify improvised practices — online performances, virtual exhibitions, crowdfunding campaigns — that redefined visibility and engagement. These adaptations were born of necessity, not strategy, but some proved durable. The study is valuable because it positions the independent cultural field not as a passive victim of digital disruption but as an informal laboratory where new forms of entrepreneurship are tested, sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

Critical synthesis

Disintermediation in Romania does not follow a clear narrative of liberation. It produces new hierarchies, dependencies, and forms of precarity. The pandemic revealed that digital platforms function as both lifelines and traps: they provide access to audiences but offer no guarantee of financial sustainability. Throsby's (2001, 2010) distinction between cultural value and economic value is illuminating here. The Romanian cultural field generates considerable cultural value — meaning, identity, community — but its capacity to convert that value into economic sustainability remains weak. What is almost entirely missing from Romanian literature is an analysis of algorithmic reintermediation: how platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok redistribute visibility and power among cultural producers. This is not a marginal question. It may be the central one.

Sustainability and cultural entrepreneurship

Global research landscape

Academic research on sustainability in the cultural and creative sector has increased significantly over the past few years, especially in investigating the complex relationships among sustainability, sustainable development, and cultural heritage (Osadci-Baciu & Zbuchea, 2025). Sustainability in cultural entrepreneurship has multiple dimensions, and the literature has struggled to integrate them. Throsby (2010) framed the issue as preserving cultural capital while generating economic returns - a balancing act familiar to anyone who has managed a cultural organization. Kagan (2013) took a different approach, arguing that artistic practices can catalyze ecological awareness and social transformation. Soini and Dessein (2016) attempted a synthesis, proposing a tripartite framework that treats culture as capital, as a way of life, and as sustainability itself. Hybrid business models - combining public funding, market revenues, and community participation - are frequently cited as the most viable path for cultural enterprises operating under structural precarity (Bonet & Donato, 2011; Comunian & England, 2020).

A significant recent contribution to this debate comes from Mazzucato (2025), whose discussion paper for the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose reframes arts and culture as essential to economic development - not peripheral to it, and not merely instrumental for GDP growth. Her argument is that culture has a market-shaping capacity: it shapes collective imagination, civic identity, and the very direction an economy takes. This is a departure from conventional sustainability discourse, which tends to treat culture either as an object of preservation or as a sector to be made financially viable. Mazzucato proposes instead that cultural investment should be understood as mission-oriented industrial strategy - a framing that carries significant implications for countries like Romania, where culture is chronically undervalued in policy terms.

NFTs and blockchain technologies have introduced additional tensions, raising questions about the environmental costs of digital art economies and the speculative dynamics they introduce (Stublić et al., 2023; Gazzola et al., 2022).

Romanian research landscape

Romanian research on sustainability focuses primarily on adjacent fields: circular business models in the social economy (Barna, Zbuchea & Stănescu, 2022), traditional crafts (Zbuchea, 2022), and generational differences in responsible consumption (Zbuchea, Ivan & Mocanu, 2021). In the art market, Deloitte (2025) reports that collectors increasingly frame acquisitions as intergenerational investments. Nevertheless, Scemtovici and Benowitz (2023) document systemic obstacles that undermine sustainability in the sector: no fiscal incentives for art acquisition, no public art price index, and no recognition of art as financial collateral. Carp (2018) notes the field's heavy dependence on private actors. The Romanian Cultural Institute Strategy 2022–2026 identifies sustainability as a strategic priority, but implementation has been limited.

Meșter, Șipoș, Begu, and Vasile (2024) connect sustainability to digital transformation and tourism, showing, through econometric analysis across 27 European countries, that a 1% increase in GDP generates a 1.41% rise in tourist arrivals, with Romania performing below the European average due to insufficient digital integration. Banciu (2024) links sustainability to institutional renewal, arguing that libraries and museums cultivate digital citizenship and serve as guardians of collective memory. These studies point toward a broader understanding of sustainability - not as ecological rhetoric, but as a question of digital and social resilience.

Critical synthesis

The sustainability discussion has matured considerably over the past decade. It is no longer only about reducing environmental footprints or securing funding. The convergence of economic, social, and digital dimensions means that sustainability in cultural entrepreneurship increasingly involves building durable hybrid infrastructures - technological, institutional, and human. Mazzucato's (2025) argument that culture functions as mission-oriented investment offers a powerful framing for the Romanian case, where the gap between cultural vitality and institutional support is particularly stark. The challenge is not a lack of creative energy; it is the absence of policy frameworks that translate that energy into sustainable ecosystems.

Table 1. Cultural entrepreneurship in Romania. Knowledge and gaps

Analytical axis	*What is known (Romania)*	*Gaps*
Cultural consumption	Barometers (2022, 2023): digital growth, rise of "consumption communities," persistent inequalities (age, education, urban/rural). Deloitte (2025) & Scemtovici & Benowitz (2023): collectors drive the art market; Instagram key channel. Carp (2018): polarized access. Fanea-Ivanovici (2018): low digital skills. Haller (2024): correlation between cultural investment and GDP.	No analysis of algorithmic mediation (how platforms filter visibility/taste). Limited evidence on general audiences in the visual arts. No Bourdieu-informed analysis of digital cultural capital in Romania.
Co-creation & cultural tribes	Diaspora libraries as grassroots hubs (Hrib & Zbuchea, 2024). Barometer (2023): "consumption communities." Artist-run spaces & biennials as co-creation sites (Carp, 2018). Deloitte (2025): galleries as social hubs; SB (2023): young collectors. Crișan & Ionescu (2024): libraries as hybrid co-creation spaces.	Fragmented evidence, mostly sectoral. No systematic research on digital tribes and the algorithmic structuring of communities. The CE 3.0 framework (Gehman & Soublière, 2017) has not been applied to the Romanian context.
Disintermediation / reintermediation	Direct purchases from artists (Deloitte, 2025). Homemade culture as informal disintermediation (Sterian, 2019). Artmark dominance (63% share, 2023), fairs MoBU/RAD (SB, 2023). Validation abroad precedes domestic recognition (Carp, 2018). Pandemic-driven digital mediation (Marian-Potra et al., 2022).	No research on algorithmic reintermediation (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok). The duality between informal and formal channels is not theorized. Throsby's distinction between cultural/economic value does not apply.
Sustainability	Circular/social economy (Barna, Zbuchea & Stănescu, 2022, 2023). Crafts (Zbuchea, 2022). Responsible consumption (Zbuchea, Ivan & Mocanu, 2021). Deloitte (2025): art as intergenerational legacy; SB (2023): systemic obstacles. Meșter et al. (2024): digital tourism.	Sustainability is rarely linked to digital cultural entrepreneurship. Weak policy implementation; ecological dimension absent. Mazzucato's (2025) mission-oriented framework has not been applied to Romanian cultural policy.

Source: Author's research

The four axes reveal a gradual yet profound digital restructuring of the Romanian cultural field. Institutional modernization (Banciu, 2024; Fanea-Ivanovici, 2018), community-based participation (Crișan & Ionescu, 2024), independent resilience (Marian-Potra et al., 2022), and the economic potential of digital tourism (Meșter et al., 2024; Haller, 2024) point toward a model of cultural entrepreneurship that transcends traditional distinctions between public and private, physical and virtual, and central and peripheral. What emerges is a networked ecosystem - fragile, uneven, yet real - in which cultural value is co-created, mediated, and sustained through technology, collaboration, and improvisation.

Methodology

This paper employs a critical literature review. The choice requires justification, as the method is sometimes seen as less rigorous than a systematic review. It is not. It serves a different purpose. A systematic review aims for exhaustive coverage through standardized screening procedures. A critical review aims for interpretation: it selects, evaluates, and synthesizes sources to clarify concepts, expose contradictions, and identify gaps (Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019). The distinction matters here for two reasons.

First, the field of cultural entrepreneurship in Romania is still emerging. Peer-reviewed literature in international databases is scarce. Many of the most relevant sources are industry reports, market studies, and national surveys. These are valuable, but they would not meet the inclusion criteria of a systematic review. Second, the research question demands conceptual work, not just data aggregation. The aim is to confront international theories with Romanian evidence to see what holds, what breaks, and what needs rethinking. A critical review is suited to this task.

The review is organized into four analytical axes: cultural consumption; co-creation and cultural tribes; disintermediation and reintermediation; and sustainability. These axes were not predetermined. They emerged from an iterative reading of both international and Romanian sources and reflect the main tensions visible in the field. For each axis, Romanian evidence was contrasted with international frameworks. The goal was to identify overlaps, contradictions, and blind spots.

Research assumptions

The review of Romanian literature suggests several working assumptions. These are not hypotheses in the strict sense. They are informed conjectures that will need empirical testing:
Cultural consumption in Romania is increasingly digital but remains stratified by socio-demographic factors. Communities resembling cultural tribes exist — diaspora libraries, artist-run spaces, and consumption communities identified by the Barometer 2023 — but their digital dynamics are poorly documented. Independent cultural entrepreneurs depend heavily on global platforms, which amplifies reintermediation rather than reducing it. Sustainability is discussed in adjacent domains — social economy, crafts, and collecting — but is not yet integrated into digital cultural entrepreneurship as an operational principle.

Corpus

The corpus spans 2019–2025, with a focus on Romania. It includes four types of sources. National surveys and reports: Cultural Consumption Barometers (2022, 2023), Vitalitatea culturală a orașelor (2021), Romania in Figures (INS, 2023, 2025), and Eurostat statistics. Sector-specific market reports: Deloitte Romania Art Report (2025), Deloitte Art & Finance Report (2023), Scemtovici & Benowitz Art Market Report (2023), and Artmark Market Report (2022–2023). Academic works: Carp (2018), Hrib & Zbuchea (2024), Osadci-Baciu (2022), Zbuchea & Hrib (2019), Zbuchea (2022), Barna, Zbuchea & Stănescu (2022), Zbuchea, Ivan & Mocanu (2021), Crișan & Ionescu (2024), Banciu (2024), Fanea-Ivanovici (2018), Haller (2024), Marian-Potra et al. (2022), and Mester et al. (2024). Policy documents: Romanian Cultural Institute Strategy 2022–2026.

Search procedure

Keyword searches were conducted using the following terms: "digital cultural entrepreneurship," "cultural consumption Romania," "cultural tribes," "co-creation," "disintermediation," "reintermediation," and "sustainability." These were complemented by citation chaining - following references from key articles to locate additional sources. Databases consulted, in approximate order of relevance: Scopus, Elsevier ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, SAGE Journals, SpringerLink, Wiley, De Gruyter/Brill, and ProQuest Central.

Outcome

The searches confirmed an asymmetry that shaped the study as a whole. The international literature is abundant. Theoretically sophisticated work on co-creation, platform intermediation, and cultural sustainability is readily available. However, no conclusive results specific to Romania were retrieved from these databases. This is not a failure of the search. It reflects the state of the field. Romania's digital cultural entrepreneurship has not yet been studied in terms indexed by international databases. This gap necessitated relying on industry reports and market studies: Deloitte, Scemtovici & Benowitz, Artmark. These sources provide data not available elsewhere. However, they are not neutral. They are produced by private actors with commercial interests in the art market. Throughout this paper, they are used critically, with awareness of their potential biases and limitations.

Analytical procedure

The selected corpus was coded thematically along the four axes. For each axis, Romanian evidence was compared with international frameworks. The analysis sought to identify three outcomes: where Romanian evidence confirms international theory, where it contradicts it, and where the evidence is absent. The gaps identified through this process inform the research assumptions listed above and point toward the empirical investigation that this paper argues is necessary.

Results and discussion

The digital transformation of Romania's cultural field is not a single process. It is several processes occurring simultaneously, at different speeds and across different sectors, with varying outcomes. What follows is an interpretation of the evidence, organized along the four analytical axes developed in the literature review. The aim is not to summarize what has already been said, but to draw out implications and tensions that the existing literature does not fully address.

Cultural consumption

The digitalization of cultural consumption in Romania exposes a tension between accessibility and literacy. More people than ever have access to digital cultural content. But access alone does not translate into participation. National surveys (INCFC, 2022, 2023) and institutional analyses (Fanea-Ivanovici, 2018; Haller, 2024) converge on one point: what limits digital cultural participation is not a lack of demand. It is unequal infrastructure and unequal skills. The data are blunt. Broadband penetration, device access, and digital education differ sharply between urban and rural areas. This produces what can be called a cultural digital divide - not in the sense that rural populations lack interest in culture, but in the sense that the digital means of accessing, producing, and sharing culture are distributed unevenly. Online cultural participation becomes a function of connectivity and competence, not just inclination.

There are, however, signs of change. Banciu (2024) describes public libraries and museums as accessible entry points into digital culture. These institutions serve populations that the creative economy tends to overlook. They provide more than access to content. They build competence - the ability to navigate digital environments critically and to produce, not just consume, cultural meaning. If Bourdieu (1984) was right that cultural participation reproduces social hierarchies, then institutions that actively cultivate digital cultural capital may be one of the few mechanisms capable of disrupting that reproduction. The shift in cultural consumption is, at its core, a shift in agency. Audiences can evolve from spectators to participants. However, this evolution depends on conditions that are far from universal in Romania.

Co-creation and cultural tribes

Participatory culture redefines what it means to be an audience. In Romania, co-creation takes the form of both institutional and informal processes, sometimes overlapping and sometimes operating in parallel, with little contact between them.

On the institutional side, the evidence is encouraging. Libraries host digital literacy programs, workshops, and collaborative events. Crișan and Ionescu (2024) show that these activities increase not only engagement but also users' sense of belonging and inclusion. Libraries are becoming what sociologists call third spaces - civic environments where knowledge is produced collectively, not transmitted from expert to public. This is co-creation in practice, even if the institutions themselves do not use that language.

On the informal side, the picture is more fragmented. Online cultural communities form around shared aesthetics, practices, or identities. Photography networks, independent art collectives, and online cultural magazines operate according to a tribal logic, in Cova and Cova's (2002) sense. Value circulates through collaboration and mutual recognition, not through market hierarchy. But this collaborative model is precarious. It depends on economies of visibility governed by algorithms. Whose work gets amplified and whose gets buried is not a neutral process. It is determined by platform architectures that optimize for engagement rather than cultural value.

Co-creation, then, is two things at once. It is an opportunity for democratization - for voices that lack institutional backing to find audiences and build communities. And it is a field of symbolic competition, where digital literacy and platform power intersect in ways that are not fully understood. Gehman and Soublière's (2017) concept of cultural making - distributed, temporal, negotiated - captures this dynamic well. Nevertheless, in Romania, the concept has not been applied. The evidence exists. The theorization does not.

Disintermediation and reintermediation

Intermediation in Romania's cultural landscape has been redefined, though not in the direction early digital optimists predicted. Independent creators bypass traditional gatekeepers. Artists sell directly to collectors. Writers reach readers without publishers. Performers find audiences without venues. This is real. However, it is not the whole story.

Marian-Potra et al. (2022) document what happened during the pandemic. Independent cultural actors moved online out of necessity. They improvised. Online performances, virtual exhibitions, and crowdfunding campaigns - these were not part of a strategy. They were survival tactics. Some of them worked. New revenue streams appeared. New audiences materialized. New cross-sector partnerships formed. The independent sector proved resilient in ways that surprised even its own members.

But the resilience was partial. The same period exposed deep vulnerabilities. Dependence on social media algorithms made visibility unpredictable. Lack of stable funding meant that every innovation carried financial risk. Limited digital marketing skills meant that reaching an audience required more effort than producing the work itself. The Romanian independent sector embodies what might be called the paradox of digital intermediation: it expands access and creative freedom while deepening structural precarity.

At the institutional level, the picture is different but related. Artmark's dominance of the secondary market - a 63% share in 2023 - is a form of reintermediation that has nothing to do with algorithms. It is market concentration, plain and simple. New fairs like MoBU and RAD reinforce formal intermediary channels. Artists still seek validation abroad before being recognized at home. Carp (2018) documented this pattern in the case of Adrian Ghenie. It persists.

What connects the informal and institutional dimensions is a structural point. Disintermediation and reintermediation are not sequential stages. They coexist. They sometimes operate within the same transaction. An artist can sell directly to a collector found through Instagram — bypassing the gallery — while being entirely dependent on Instagram's algorithm for that connection. The intermediary has not been eliminated. It has been replaced by one that is less visible and less accountable.

Sustainability and cultural entrepreneurship

Sustainability in cultural entrepreneurship has evolved in meaning over the past decade. It once referred primarily to environmental concerns. It still does, in part. Nevertheless, in Romania's cultural field, the more pressing questions are economic and social. Can independent cultural actors survive? Under what conditions? With what support?

Digital transformation can contribute to sustainability, but only when it is part of a longer-term strategy. Meșter et al. (2024) show measurable correlations between technological investment, visitor engagement, and GDP growth in the cultural tourism sector. The data suggest that digital integration has economic effects. Nevertheless, Romania underperforms relative to the European average, in part because investment in digital cultural infrastructure has been inconsistent. Banciu (2024) reframes sustainability as institutional renewal. In her account, libraries and museums are not just cultural institutions. They are educators in digital citizenship. They preserve collective memory while building the competencies required for future cultural participation. This is sustainability understood as capacity building - a long-term investment in human and institutional infrastructure.

In the art market, sustainability remains aspirational. Collectors speak of art as an intergenerational investment (Deloitte, 2025). Yet the conditions for long-term market health are absent. Scemtovici and Benowitz (2023) list what is missing: fiscal incentives, a public price index, and recognition of art as collateral. Without these structural supports, sustainability depends on the willingness of private actors - a foundation too narrow for a sector that claims public value. Mazzucato (2025) offers a framing that cuts through much of this debate. Her argument is that culture is not a marginal sector waiting to be made financially viable. It is a form of mission-oriented investment that shapes collective imagination and economic direction. In Romania, the question is not whether the cultural sector can sustain itself, but whether the state is willing to treat cultural investment as strategic - on par with education, infrastructure, or industrial policy. The evidence from this review suggests that the answer, so far, is no. But the evidence also suggests that the independent actors who fill the institutional void are, through improvisation and persistence, building something that resembles a sustainable cultural ecosystem. Whether it can endure without policy support is the open question.

Overall discussion

The synthesis across these four dimensions suggests that Romania's cultural digitalization is not a linear progression. It is a mosaic. Institutional actors build digital literacy and policy frameworks (Banciu, 2024; Fanea-Ivanovici, 2018). Community initiatives foster participatory learning (Crișan & Ionescu, 2024). Independent entrepreneurs experiment with resilience and adaptability (Marian-Potra et al., 2022). Economic analyses demonstrate links between culture and growth (Haller, 2024; Meșter et al., 2024). These efforts are not coordinated. They occur in parallel, often without awareness of one another.

The Romanian context is transitional. It sits between analog heritage and digital innovation, between institutional aspiration and operational fragility. The key challenge is not digitalization itself. It is coordination - aligning fragmented initiatives into a coherent strategy. This would require integrating cultural, educational, and economic policy in ways Romania has not yet attempted. What emerges from the evidence is not a finished model but a pattern. A networked cultural economy in which technology is not an external tool applied to culture but an embedded dimension of cultural creation and exchange. The pattern is visible. Its sustainability is not guaranteed.

Conclusions

This paper maps what is known about digital cultural entrepreneurship in Romania's visual arts and identifies where the knowledge stops. The answer to the first part is: more than expected, but less than needed. The answer to the second: almost everywhere that matters theoretically.

Across the four analytical axes, the evidence tells a consistent story. Digital cultural consumption is growing but remains gated by education, infrastructure, and geography. Co-creation is happening - in libraries, in artist-run spaces, and in online communities - but it is fragmented and poorly documented. Disintermediation has not delivered the liberation it promised. Instead, it coexists with powerful forms of reintermediation, both institutional (Artmark, art fairs) and algorithmic (Instagram, YouTube). Sustainability is invoked frequently but implemented rarely. Independent actors bear the weight of cultural innovation amid chronic precarity, with minimal policy support.

The paper's contribution is threefold. First, it brings together international theoretical frameworks - Bourdieu on cultural capital, Prahalad and Ramaswamy on co-creation, Gehman and Soublière on cultural making, Nieborg and Poell on platformization, Throsby on cultural value, and Mazzucato on public value - and tests their relevance against Romanian evidence. Some frameworks hold. Others require adaptation. A few have no Romanian data to engage with. Second, the paper identifies specific research gaps: the absence of any study on algorithmic mediation in Romania's cultural field, the lack of empirical work on digital cultural tribes, and the disconnect between sustainability discourse and operational reality. Third, it proposes an integrated conceptual framework in which audience participation, community validation, intermediation tensions, and sustainability function as interdependent dimensions - not separate topics.

The findings carry implications beyond Romania. Small and medium-sized cultural ecosystems across Central and Eastern Europe face similar challenges: institutional fragility, platform dependence, and policy neglect. Romania's case is not exceptional. It is illustrative. The patterns documented here - resilience without stability, innovation without infrastructure, participation without equity - are likely recognizable in other post-socialist cultural economies navigating digitalization.

Three priorities emerge for future development. The first is policy coherence. Romania needs a framework that connects digital transformation with cultural and educational agendas. These domains are currently governed separately, as if they had nothing to do with each other. They have everything to do with each other. The second is empirical research. This paper has mapped the terrain conceptually. What is needed now is a structured survey of Romanian cultural entrepreneurs and audiences - one capable of testing the assumptions identified here, measuring the dynamics described, and producing the kind of data that international scholarship can engage with. The third is support for hybrid collaboration. The most promising developments in Romania's cultural field happen at the intersection of institutions, entrepreneurs, and communities. These intersections are productive but accidental. Making them deliberate would require both funding and a willingness to let different types of actors work together on terms not predetermined by any single one of them.

Digital cultural entrepreneurship in Romania is not a finished phenomenon waiting to be described. It is an ongoing negotiation - between creativity and precarity, between local specificity and global platforms, and between what culture means and what it costs. The research task is to follow that negotiation closely, using better tools and sharper questions than we currently have.

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