

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of various colors including red, blue, green, yellow, and purple, with a textured, painterly quality. A solid blue rectangular box is overlaid on the upper portion of the image, containing white and yellow text.

# **Enduring Blindspots & Infinite Opportunities**

## **Digital Creative Industries in Uganda**

# POLLICY



This report is part of completion of the Pollicy Fellowship Program 2022  
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# Executive Summary

This study aims to understand the experiences of digital creatives in Kampala, Uganda, through a gendered lens. There is a large gap in the availability of data and knowledge on the digital creative industry in Uganda and this paper aims to address some of these blindspots.

To understand these experiences, this body of work explores a number of sector wide concerns through exploratory qualitative research methodologies around issues of access and use of digital technologies by digital creatives, the role of emerging technologies on the sector and finally, the policy ecosystem governing the creative industry in Uganda. The paper also draws from existing literature on the traditional creative industries in Uganda given the limited scholarship on the digital creative industries in the country.

Key findings of the paper include a need to clearly define the digital creative industry, which at present is largely informal. Creatives face a number of structural barriers such as negative or harmful perceptions, policies and practices which hinder the growth of the sector. The study also found a significant discriminatory and sexist trend towards women digital creatives. Lastly, the research identifies a number of untapped opportunities which have the potential to leapfrog Uganda's digital creative sector. The paper concludes by making recommendations to different key stakeholders in the sector.

# Acronyms

**2D** - Two dimensional

**3D** - Three dimensional

**AI** - Artificial Intelligence

**AR** - Augmented Reality

**AU** - African Union

**BFA** - Bachelors of Fine Art

**EA** - East Africa

**EALA** - East African Legislative Assembly

**EU** - European Union

**Fintech** - Financial technology

**GIMP** - GNU Image Manipulation Program.

**ICT** - Information and Communication Technology

**IP** - Intellectual Property

**MSMEs** - Micro, small and medium enterprises

**NFT** - Non Fungible Token

**STEAMD** - Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics and Design.

**UCC** - Uganda Communications Commission

**UNBS** - Uganda National Bureau of Statistics

**UNCTAD** - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

**UNESCO** - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

**URSB** - Uganda Registration Services Bureau

**USA** - United States of America

**VAT** - Value Added Tax

**VR** - Virtual Reality

# Definition of Key Terms

**Blockchain:** Blockchain refers to a shared, immutable ledger that facilitates the process of recording transactions and tracking assets in a business network<sup>1</sup>.

**Fintechs:** Fintech is defined as the innovative application of digital technology for financial services<sup>2</sup>.

**Gig economy:** The gig economy comprises a variety of tasks that are digitally-mediated or transacted through internet platforms and can be delivered either remotely or performed locally<sup>3</sup>.

**Immersive technologies:** These refer to technologies where users will no longer view content but will be placed inside ever-expanding virtual worlds and find themselves at the center, hence the “immersive” nature of the technology<sup>4</sup>.

**Non Fungible Token (NFT):** A Non Fungible Token is a unit of digital information (token) that is stored on blockchain and is not inherently interchangeable with other digital assets (non-fungible)<sup>5</sup>.

**Traditional art:** Creative industries where artisanal production processes continue to dominate and remain mostly resistant to new technologies such<sup>6</sup> as the production of oil paintings.

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<sup>1</sup> (n.d.). What is Blockchain Technology? - IBM. Retrieved August 9, 2022, from <https://www.ibm.com/topics/what-is-blockchain>

<sup>2</sup> (2018, April 9). Financial markets, insurance and pensions: Digitalisation and Finance. Retrieved August 9, 2022, from <https://www.oecd.org/competition/financial-markets-insurance-and-pensions-2018.html>

<sup>3</sup> (2022, August 5). Digital Labour / The Gig Economy - Mark Graham. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from <http://www.markgraham.space/digital-labour>

<sup>4</sup> "Augmented and virtual reality: The promise and peril of immersive ...." 3 Oct. 2017, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/augmented-and-virtual-reality-the-promise-and-peril-of-immersive-technologies>. Accessed 9 Aug. 2022.

<sup>5</sup> (2021, April 21). Non-Fungible Tokens: Blockchains, Scarcity, and Value. Retrieved August 9, 2022, from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3822743](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3822743)

<sup>6</sup> (n.d.). Handbook on the Digital Creative Economy - Edward Elgar Publishing. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/usd/handbook-on-the-digital-creative-economy-9781781004869.html>

# Introduction



There is no single definition of digital creative industries seemingly due to the fairly new scholarship of the area but also due to the rapidly ongoing technological evolution<sup>7</sup>. However, the presently available scholarship on the sector is explored through the lens of creative industries as a whole. This means that the sector is looked at as a subcategory of the creative industry.

The United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) introduced the field of the 'creative economy' in the global and development agenda<sup>8</sup> with the publication of the Creative Economy Report in 2008<sup>9</sup>. Since then, the accepted term for the arts and cultural enterprises now seems to be established in the international sphere as 'cultural and creative industries' or simply 'creative industries.'<sup>10</sup>

Creative industries can thus be defined as cycles of creation, production and distribution of goods and services that use intellectual capital as their primary input.<sup>11</sup> Today, the industry is heterogeneous and cross disciplinary in nature with interplay of traditional, technology intensive and service oriented subsectors.<sup>12</sup> For the sake of this study, the digital creative industry shall be viewed as those sub sectors of the creative industry which utilise Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in their creation, production and distribution. Although not conclusive, some of the sub sectors this paper explores include advertising, architecture, design, fashion, film ,games, music, publishing, research and development, software, immersive technologies, visual and performing arts.

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<sup>7</sup> (n.d.). CREATIVE INDUSTRIES EMERGE AS KEY DRIVER OF ... - UNCTAD. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://unctad.org/press-material/creative-industries-emerge-key-driver-economic-growth-trade-nearly-doubling-decade>

<sup>8</sup> (n.d.). CREATIVE INDUSTRIES EMERGE AS KEY DRIVER OF ... - UNCTAD. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://unctad.org/press-material/creative-industries-emerge-key-driver-economic-growth-trade-nearly-doubling-decade>

<sup>9</sup> (n.d.). Creative Economy Report 2008 - UNCTAD. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from [https://unctad.org/en/docs/ditc20082cer\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/docs/ditc20082cer_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> (n.d.). Handbook on the Digital Creative Economy - Edward Elgar Publishing. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/usd/handbook-on-the-digital-creative-economy-9781781004869.html>

<sup>11</sup> (n.d.). Creative Economy Report 2008 - UNCTAD. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from [https://unctad.org/en/docs/ditc20082cer\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/docs/ditc20082cer_en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> (2013, October 30). The IDB releases "The Orange Economy: An Infinite Opportunity," a .... Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://www.iadb.org/en/news/idb-releases-orange-economy-infinite-opportunity-book-creative-and-cultural-economy>



Generally speaking, data inclusive of facts and figures on creative industries which include the digital creative industries is predominantly available for developed economies with scarcely any found on Africa. For instance, much of the developed world such as the European Union and the United States of America (USA) possess a range of extensive studies carried out quite regularly that show disaggregated data of the various parts of the industry. A notable case in point is the annual Motion Picture Association (MPA) Theatrical and Home/Mobile Entertainment Market Environment (THEME) Report<sup>13</sup> that has been published for decades.

In contrast, in Uganda the data available on the sector is scanty, disengaged and ambiguous. This may be explained by the fact that much of it stems from global reports which usually classify Africa as one collective, eventually leaving very little contextualised understanding of the country to country realities. Furthermore, statistics prevalent on the creative industry in Uganda are typically under the classification of exports and national GDP contribution.<sup>14</sup> This analysis is flawed because the data presented does not capture most of the informal sector activities which are all contained within one measurement indicator.<sup>15</sup> thereby offering less than robust estimations of the sector as seen in national accounts which essentially propose macro evidence but none at the micro level.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> (n.d.). 2021 THEME Report - Motion Picture Association. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from

<https://www.motionpictures.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/MPA-2021-THEME-Report-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> (n.d.). UGANDA BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2020 STATISTICAL ABSTRACT. Retrieved July 19, 2022, from

[https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/11\\_2020STATISTICAL\\_\\_ABSTRACT\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/11_2020STATISTICAL__ABSTRACT_2020.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> (2017, July 10). The Informal Economy in Sub-Saharan Africa : Size and Determinants. Retrieved July 19, 2022, from <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2017/07/10/The-Informal-Economy-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa-Size-and-Determinants-45017>

<sup>16</sup> (n.d.). Full article: The portrait of Uganda's informal sector: What main .... Retrieved July 19, 2022, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322039.2020.1843255>

Global data shows growth of the industry over the years as its valuation is revenues of US\$2,250 billion accounting for three percent of the global GDP<sup>17</sup>. Forecasts estimate the industry will represent around 10% of global GDP in the years to come<sup>18</sup>.

In Uganda, creative exports in 2020 stood at an estimated Uganda shillings 427 billion<sup>19</sup>. Revenue sectoral estimates show a decrease in the sector's contribution over the past few years with the 2017/2018 contribution being Uganda shillings(UGX) 73 billion, 2018/2019 being UGX 87 billion and 2019/2020 being UGX 82 billion.<sup>20</sup>

This means that unfortunately, Uganda, like most developing countries, is yet to harness creative capacities for development despite an abundance of creative talent which remains highly underutilised.<sup>21</sup>

This research seeks to understand why this industry with infinite opportunities remains largely untapped in Uganda and to also propose probable ameliorations to this current reality.

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<sup>17</sup> (n.d.). creative\_economy2021-unesco-roadmapen-ok2.pdf. Retrieved July 20, 2022, from [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/creative\\_economy2021-unesco-roadmapen-ok2.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/creative_economy2021-unesco-roadmapen-ok2.pdf)

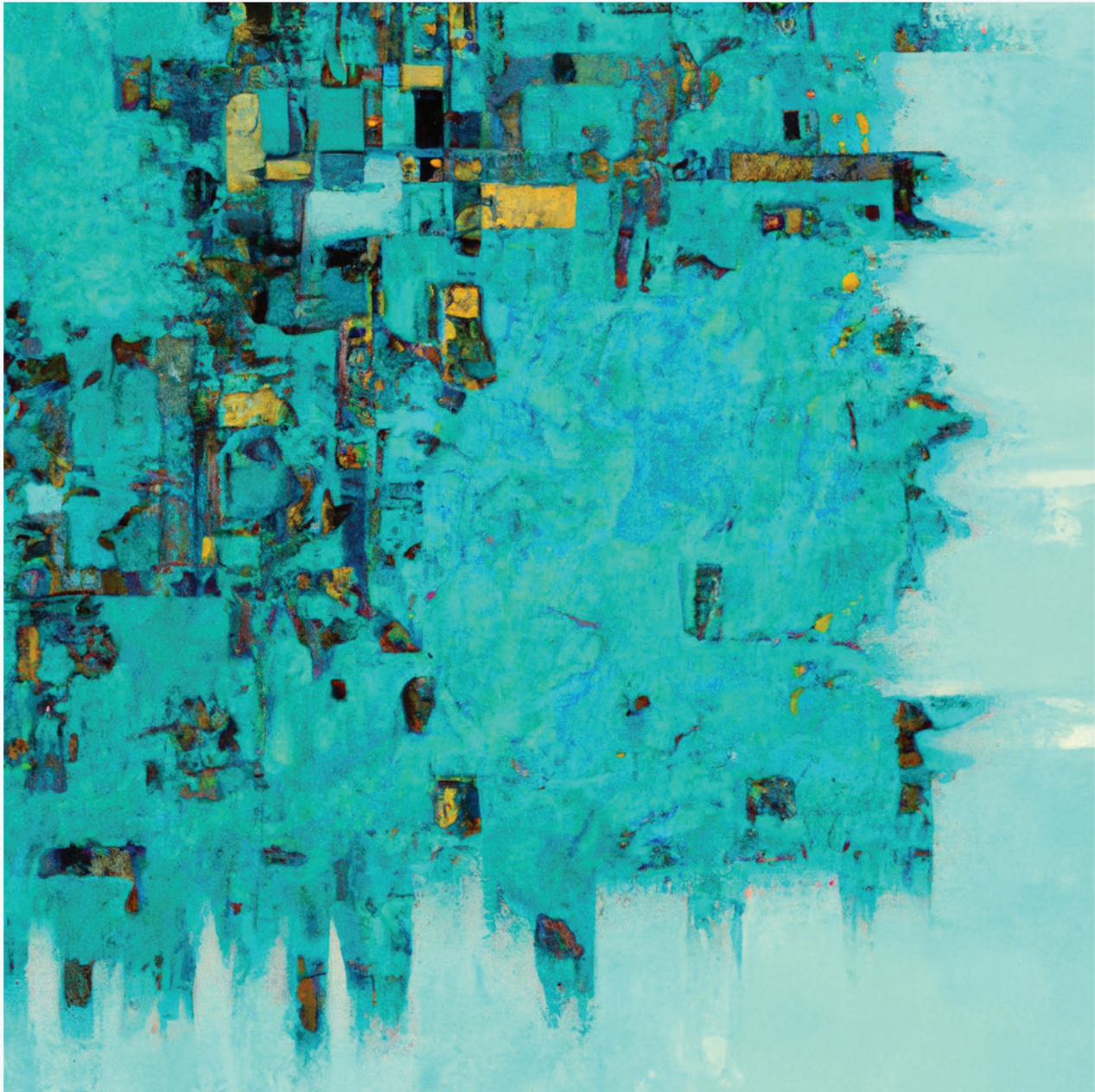
<sup>18</sup> (n.d.). re i shaping cultural policies - UNESCO. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from [https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/global\\_report\\_fact\\_sheet\\_en.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/global_report_fact_sheet_en.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> (2021, January 3). Hidden potential of creative industries - Daily Monitor. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/business/prosper/hidden-potential-of-creative-industries-1777434>

<sup>20</sup> (n.d.). ANNUAL REVENUE PERFORMANCE REPORT FY 2019/2020. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from [https://www.ura.go.ug/openFileController/execute?path=/webupload//upload//download//staticContent//TOPMENU//9907//10192\\_RPR.pdf](https://www.ura.go.ug/openFileController/execute?path=/webupload//upload//download//staticContent//TOPMENU//9907//10192_RPR.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> (n.d.). Creative Economy Report 2008 - UNCTAD. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from [https://unctad.org/en/docs/ditc20082cer\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/docs/ditc20082cer_en.pdf)

# Methodology



An exploratory qualitative research approach was adopted for this study to explore and map the digital creative landscape in Kampala, Uganda. Study participants were selected from various areas of Kampala and purposive sampling was employed in selecting them based on their lived experiences as digital creatives or stakeholders in the cultural and arts sector.

In total, 23 participants were selected including fourteen digital creatives, seven of whom are female and seven of whom are male. In addition, eight male and female key informants were also selected including three artist collective leads, two art and design instructors, one Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies' employee, one creative technologist and artistic thinker as well as one person affiliated to a civil society organisation working in the creative sector in Uganda.

Data was collected through both in-person and online interviews using a semi structured interview guide. The fourteen digital creatives were interviewed using Focus Group Discussions of either gender and the key informants were interviewed individually. (Appendix 1). In addition, a desk review was conducted which is jointly presented with this study's findings.

Data collected was then transcribed in Google documents and then analysed using the Braune and Clarke thematic analysis method done by manual coding. It is from this that the key themes discussed in greater detail below were drawn<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> (2008, July 21). Using thematic analysis in psychology - Taylor & Francis Online. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

# Results



## **Overview of the Digital Creative Ecosystem in Uganda**

### ***Sector trends***

With regard to the most commonly found kinds of digital creative goods and services in Uganda, the most widespread are digital illustration or graphics design, videography, photography and music (Interview 4). Motion graphics are also seen more (FGD\_1) especially in the advertising space as well as a widening spectrum of online content creation (FGD\_2), mostly using Youtube and TikTok. Other forms which are just starting to take off include 3D animation, 2D animation, 3D architectural designs, blockchain art (NFTs), digital comics and film and video game production (Interview 2).

These different forms of creative goods and services are preceded by other forms which were not native to computers and other digital technologies, which we commonly refer here to as 'traditional art.'

### ***Advantages over traditional art forms***

Digital creative industries have been celebrated for the multiple benefits they offer as a new medium of creative expression often in comparison with traditional art. This, however, as mentioned by a number of the digital creatives interviewed (FGD 2) does not per se mean one is better than the other, but rather that they can co-exist to enhance the creative realm.

Among the advantages brought up during this study is the fact that digital creative industries have democratised tools to access and use (Interview 2), enabling more widespread creative expression which wasn't possible a few decades ago. Examples mentioned here are open technologies and softwares. For example, smart phones offer an array of multimedia functions such as cameras which have made it more accessible for just about anyone with one to take photographs or videos which was restricted to owners of cameras before their advent. Android, which is the world's most used mobile operating system,<sup>23</sup> also offers open access to many tools which enable creative expression such as through the applications it hosts. Other notable examples here are GIMP and Blender (FGD 2).

Furthermore, the boundaries of creative expression have been pushed (FGD 1) as a result of digital technologies. There are more realms of expression, and certain individuals who would not be conventionally considered artists are now well within the creative realm (Interview 2). An illustration of this in Uganda's digital creative industry is one of the most common forms which is Online Content Creation (OCC) or user generated content including but not limited to podcasting, photography, vlogging, blogging, photo and video editing is mostly enabled by free platforms and softwares (Interview 7).

Another advantage is that thanks to various ICTs and the internet in particular which defies geography,<sup>24</sup> one can now easily share their work to an unimaginable reach (Interview 6). The presence of multiple platforms where one can share their work too has simplified the ability to reach wider audiences which was not possible before, now offering multiple income streams.

The fact that work involved in most fields in the digital creative economy barely requires physical workspaces is another crucial advantage (Interview 4). Office space is

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<sup>23</sup> (n.d.). Usage share of operating systems - Wikipedia. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usage\\_share\\_of\\_operating\\_systems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usage_share_of_operating_systems)

<sup>24</sup> (n.d.). The Impact of the Increasing Popularity of Digital Art on the Current .... Retrieved July 20, 2022, from <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=110725>

not affordable to most people in Uganda, making it quite cost effective in that perspective. In addition, digital creative industries have enabled the mass production of creative goods and services which was barely possible with traditional art forms, enabling work to be done faster due to automation of certain parts of the production process (Interview 2) and is more durable because it's stored on cloud technologies (Interview 3).

### ***Gender perspective***

Men and women in the digital creative economy in Uganda have varied work experiences due to how gender affects their work circumstances. This study found the advertising industry to be the highest consumer of digital creative goods and services in Uganda. With this industry having been known to be prejudiced in many ways against women,<sup>25</sup> this research unsurprisingly found that the female digital creatives bore complaints about discrimination, sexism and misogyny under creative departments in advertising agencies.

Women are often victims of objectification and other issues regarding ethical representation in the advertising industry. Women still remain a minority in the creative advertising industry in Uganda, which is perceived as a “boy’s club” (FGD\_1). As a result of this, the few women in these spaces are faced with sexism and discrimination (FGD\_1) which forces many to eventually quit this type of work. This usually takes the form of hindering creative expression on the pretext that some industries are not for women, as elaborated by one female creative saying;

**There was also a lot of sexism in the regard that I was really interested in directing and cinematography, but I was always told that it is for boys, girls you should produce because you're organised and I think I just suppressed all that and pretended I loved everything. - FGD\_1**

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<sup>25</sup> (2022, July 5). Creative Women in Advertising Agencies: Why So Few “Babes in .... Retrieved August 7, 2022, from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/47668892\\_Creative\\_Women\\_in\\_Advertising\\_Agencies\\_Why\\_So\\_Few\\_Babes\\_in\\_Boyland](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/47668892_Creative_Women_in_Advertising_Agencies_Why_So_Few_Babes_in_Boyland)



Sexism towards women creatives in creative advertising spaces also takes the form of few women ever making it to executive creative director roles (FGD\_1) as it is always males that are granted these positions. The women that make it to managerial positions tend to embrace hegemonic masculinity and ambivalent sexism by choosing not to contest elements that marginalise women so as to become ideal workers.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, women creatives interviewed pointed to misogyny they faced in the form of more stringent hiring conditions they undergo compared to their male counterparts (FGD\_1). This is also coupled with lower salaries they are paid for their work compared to men doing the same or even less work than them. One female creative mentioned that;

**They never question them (male counterparts) about their prices and why they are doing what they are doing and when I'm recommended they want to make it seem like this is easy work and you're overpricing. - FGD\_1**

with another adding;

**Men are hired on potential basis but women are expected to be the very best. - FGD\_1**

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<sup>26</sup> (2021, December 31). Exploring Women Managers' Gender Role Experiences ... - DergiPark. Retrieved August 7, 2022, from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/akil/issue/67055/989050>

Finally, the working conditions in advertising agencies characterised by late nights and long hours which do not allow a healthy work-life balance particularly for women who usually have families to support is another form of discrimination in the industry (FGD\_1). Under such inflexible schedules, many women working under this industry are usually forced to quit or give up pursuing other parts of their lives beyond work.

### ***Cultural perceptions***

There are significant cultural attitudes towards the creative and cultural sector as a whole in Uganda. Oftentimes, the arts have been viewed since prehistoric times as a means to communicate our collective experience or culture,<sup>27</sup> by depicting our traditions, norms, values, beliefs, ideas or customs. With the change in environment, especially in terms of technology, artists now create in digital landscapes, moulding the digital creative industries.

Studies from colonial East Africa show the colonisers claiming that the EA region was unlike West Africa and the Congo as it did not possess a rich heritage of the arts. It is this colonial attitude that later spilled over to post colonial governments<sup>28</sup> in East Africa inclusive of Uganda towards the arts that lives on through government's non prioritisation of the sector despite being fully aware of the opportunities to be realised through maximum support of the sector.

The key stakeholders in the digital creative industries in Uganda including the creatives and key informants interviewed for this study mentioned the perception of digital art in Uganda not being very different from that of traditional forms (Interview 3) as well as the fact that the culture of art in the nation is one that still needs to be cultivated (Interview 2). This is because art is generally barely appreciated both for purposes of beauty and aesthetics (Interview 5), as well as for utilitarian purposes (FGD\_2).

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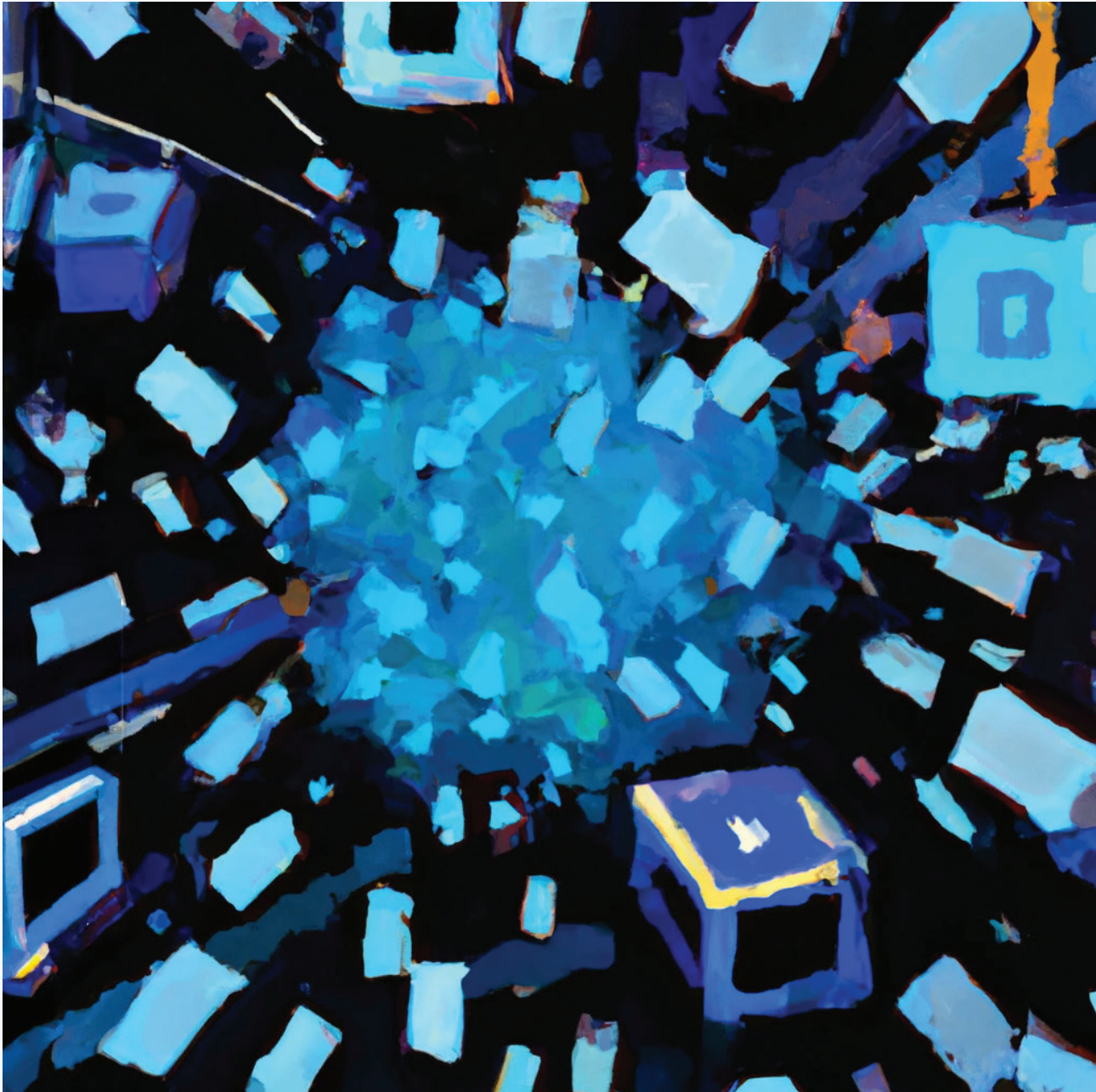
<sup>27</sup> (n.d.). Stylistic Tendencies Charactering Ugandan Visual Arts. Retrieved July 20, 2022, from

<https://pub.nkumbauniversity.ac.ug/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/551/Mike%20Nandala.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>28</sup> (n.d.). Contemporary attitudes to the visual arts in East Africa ( an analysis .... Retrieved July 20, 2022, from [http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11295/65684/Kagaba\\_%20Contemporary%20attitudes%20to%20the%20visual%20arts%20in%20East%20Africa.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y](http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11295/65684/Kagaba_%20Contemporary%20attitudes%20to%20the%20visual%20arts%20in%20East%20Africa.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y)

Digital creatives like other Ugandan creatives are largely looked at as misguided and frivolous in Ugandan society (Interview 4) in comparison to the more traditionally accepted careers like law, medicine and engineering. Furthermore, there appears to be little valuing of the creative process by clients of digital creative products. Most people working in the industry are young people who are looked down upon by society (Interview 3).

# Examination of Core Themes



## Production

### *Access*

The creative industry is arguably one of the most to have been highly affected by digital transformation yet at the same time it still has been hesitant to move to a more digitised world due to challenges in access to the technologies necessary to create digital creative goods and services.<sup>29</sup> This is the case for Uganda.

Acceleration of technology has led to the use of powerful devices and applications with high performance computational engineering employing cloud computing (Interview 3), big data analysis, blockchain, AI and immersive technologies such as AR and VR (FGD\_2) in the high level production of various digital creative goods and services.<sup>30</sup> 3D printing, 3D animation, 3D architectural design and the gaming industry are some of the common products and services under here.

Uganda's digital creative industries' landscape is predominantly informal and thus faced with widespread socioeconomic constraints on creatives (Interview 8). As such, sporadic high level production of digital creative goods and services is observed with low level production that uses cheaper to access devices such as smartphones, personal computers with moderately powerful microprocessors, affordable cameras being the more ubiquitous kind (Interview 3). This explains the most common forms of digital creative goods and services in the country.

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<sup>29</sup> (n.d.). Challenges and Practices from the Creative Industries - CORE. Retrieved July 20, 2022, from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/301372553.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> (n.d.). Handbook on the Digital Creative Economy - Edward Elgar Publishing. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from <https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/usd/handbook-on-the-digital-creative-economy-9781781004869.html>

Unfortunately, there is a downside to these dynamics of production as higher level production of digital creative goods and services which necessitates heavier investment also ultimately leads to higher return on investment (Interview 3). This is in contrast to the lower levels of production which do not yield much in the longer run generally driving the low revenues of the digital creative industries in Uganda and the meagre income levels of digital creatives (FGD\_2) as well. In addition to the financial aspect of production is also the fact that a considerable portion of the digital creative work produced in Uganda is of a low quality as a result of low level production from outdated or old devices that aren't comparable to current world standards. An illustration here is a lot of the filming equipment used and the resultant video quality (Interview 1).

Participants also mentioned limitations in accessing the internet in Uganda which is integral to the production of digital creative goods and services being a challenge in access. The first limitation is the excessively high internet costs from local Internet Service Providers (ISPs). One creative mentioned how internet bundles take up the largest share of their income monthly (FGD\_2) and another stating that *'With our work, one needs at least 5GB or even more to deliver on a task.'* (Interview 6). In 2020, Uganda was ranked as the East African country with the most expensive Internet: One gigabyte costs \$2.67 USD, compared to Tanzania, where one gigabyte costs \$2.18.<sup>31</sup>

The second issue brought up around the internet by this study's respondents is the slow internet speeds and poor connectivity issues even around Kampala (Interview 7) yet production of digital creative goods and services is a data intensive task. The slow speeds are visible from the time it takes to upload or download digital material as one creative respondent mentioned;

**It takes close to two days for me to upload my vlogs on Youtube.  
- FGD\_1**

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<sup>31</sup> (2020, July 19). Why Uganda's Internet cost is highest in East Africa - Daily Monitor. Retrieved July 21, 2022, from <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/business/prosper/why-uganda-s-internet-cost-is-highest-in-east-africa-1873090>

Participants also mentioned that the high cost of devices such as computers, smartphones, tablets and cameras is inflated in Uganda (FGD\_1) due to low regulatory standards around pricing and subsequent variable merchandise pricing (Interview 1). Importing a phone to Uganda comes with a 10% import duty, 18% VAT, 6% withholding tax and 1.5% infrastructure levy. A camera is charged 25% import tax, 18% VAT, 6% withholding tax and 1.5% infrastructure levy.<sup>32</sup> Participants also raised the common occurrence of counterfeit devices (Interview 4) . In 2020, UCC mentioned being ready to enforce a crackdown on fake devices,<sup>33</sup> which did not happen.

### **FOCUS BOX: Tax on devices**

**Importing a phone to Uganda at the moment comes with an Import duty of 10%, VAT of 18%, Withholding tax of 6% and an Infrastructure levy of 1.5%.**

**Importing a camera to Uganda at the moment comes with an Import duty of 25%, VAT of 18%, Withholding tax of 6% and a 1.5% infrastructure levy.**

**Importing a computer to Uganda currently comes with VAT of 18% and a Withholding tax of 6%.**

Access to digital devices to create varying digital goods and services is sometimes attained through targeted open calls by established studios for specified training in, say 3D printing (Interview 3). Here, the creatives join the studio and get to be trained and work from the creation hubs where they might have the chance of accessing devices owned by the studio. Majority of the open call participants have their own devices although they often have low carrying capacity for the work they intend to do.

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<sup>32</sup> "Uganda Revenue Authority on Twitter: "How the customs value of ...." 27 May. 2021, <https://twitter.com/urauganda/status/1397800033752391682>. Accessed 9 Aug. 2022.

<sup>33</sup> (2020, October 19). UCC now ready to enforce fake mobile phone switch off. Retrieved July 21, 2022, from <https://www.independent.co.ug/ucc-now-ready-to-enforce-fake-mobile-phone-switch-off/>

A few creatives also mentioned being able to access tools for their work from media and advertising agencies many of which have state of the art in-house equipment (FGD\_2) which makes connections of this sort a powerful form of access here in Kampala, Uganda.

Lastly, digital creatives get to access devices for their work by collaborating within platforms such as the DigiArt Fest (Interview 3).

### **FOCUS BOX:**

*DigiArt Fest is an event which celebrates different digital art forms bringing together content creators and makers and also users together. The event happens annually in December over three to four days. There is always a build up – so there are activities that happen throughout the year to make sure that there is a lot of content, a lot of skills training that happens to get more people interested in it but also demystifies the entire digital art space. It is not just a hobby but an actual occupation that someone can earn from and it has the potential to change lives and create an impact.*

- Organisers, DigiArt Fest (Interview 3, Interview 6)

### **Use**

This research found that there is variations in usage of different digital technologies by male and female digital creatives in Uganda (FGD\_1,FGD\_2) with males frequently outnumbering female digital creatives in most digital creative industries (FGD\_2) with the exception of Online content creation which a significant number of female creatives fall under (Interview 7).

According to this study's respondents ,differences in usage of various digital technologies to produce creative goods and services depends on a number of factors. The first mentioned is the expertise, experience and familiarity that the creatives possess as



one participant mentioned *“the more comfortable you are with a particular set of technologies the more likely you are to use it in your work.”* (Interview 2). According to participants, this tied in naturally with the education a digital creative possesses on any technologies. Lastly, they mentioned interest as another factor that brings about varied usage of different technologies in digital creatives’ work (Interview 2).

Participants shared that most Ugandan digital creatives typically use “cracked” or pirated softwares in their work. The SaaS (Software as a Service) model, a delivery model in which a third party provider provides software as a service rather than as a product over the Internet for multiple users,<sup>34</sup> is where majority of this pirating is done since creatives are compelled to pay per use model instead of a large upfront investment.

One respondent mentioned that the SaaS model *“is not sustainable for an ordinary Ugandan”* (FGD\_2) ,hence the need to find pirated software or alternatively software models that offer perpetual licensing. One of the most commonly used software is the Adobe Creative Cloud which has a set of applications that give subscribers access to a collection of software for graphic designing, video editing, photography among others all backed by a monthly subscription over the Internet. Access to all applications on Adobe is \$39.99, Photoshop is \$20.99 and Premier Pro is \$20.99. Respondents also mentioned some free softwares that a number of artists use in their work, including Blender, GIMP and Sketchbook (FGD\_2).

Furthermore, this research found that the majority of the tools on the various digital platforms creatives in the digital creative industries use to produce and disseminate their work are;

**...easy to use with simple functionality including social media platforms, Wordpress and Youtube. - FGD\_1**

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<sup>34</sup> (2019, March 19). Empirical Investigation of Key Factors for SaaS Architecture. Retrieved July 21, 2022, from <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/8669948>

### ***Human capital development***

Participants of this study shared varying opinions on the subject of whether most digital creatives are formally trained in their field of work. Majority of respondents believe that *“most digital creatives in Uganda have no formal or school training and are instead self taught especially via YouTube”* (Interview 6) while other respondents believe that the ratio is one to one meaning *“half the population may have a formal training while the other half are self taught.”* (Interview 5).

This study found that the digital creatives with a formal training are usually *“trained in graphic design and illustration and only at the higher learning institutions within Uganda through courses such as the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Makerere or Kyambogo Universities”* (Interview 4). One respondent also remarked that;

**... universities do not have much to offer that is relevant to today's ever changing digital creative economy landscape and as such most students still have to upgrade their knowledge and skills after school on their own. - Interview 7**

Participants raised that this is mostly done via YouTube but also peer to peer education as well as trainings and workshops occasionally organised by different studios or art organisations.

The financial cost of formal education in the arts in Uganda and abroad is quite expensive for most people, costing at least about \$3500 annually. One respondent mentioned that *“since people do not see a ‘value for their money’, they end up leaving that option out.”* (Interview 5). There, however, is a proportion of persons of course that pursue this formal arts education usually abroad in countries like Malaysia, South Africa, China and the United Kingdom among others.

One of the key informants shared how the people that graduate from formal art education here and abroad graduate in quite big numbers and they join the industry to compete with people with a solid clientele already, for example those working on the famed Nasser road . Given that typically the formally educated creatives will charge higher fees for their work compared to the self taught creatives, this study found that these usually eventually;

**... adapt to the industry conditions to survive as they notice pay is dictated by the clients and not by expertise or experience which also usually ends up affecting the quality of work output. - Interview 3**

Beyond formal school education, respondents and in particular the digital creatives pointed to a lack of mentors in the digital creative industries in Uganda as one stated that;

**We don't really have anyone to look up to. And it's now our own turn to be the people we want to look up to because now even when I'm training the boys I'm training, they also still have that mentality that this is not work that is paid for because they have no reference to any other existing form that is paying me. - FGD\_2**

Lastly, while globalisation has opened up the job market for people from any part of the world, this paper found that it is difficult for Ugandan digital creatives to get those jobs because of a lack of formal education or specialised high level training, which the majority of these jobs require in one's portfolio.

### ***Access to funding***

Participants in this study mentioned that Uganda has “*major funding gaps*” (FGD\_1) which restrict the growth of the digital creative industries. Comparisons were made with industries that have greater investment such as in the United States and parts of Europe and Asia which have a number of public and private initiatives to provide access to funds for individuals and enterprises mentioning that “*it is no surprise their industries are far more developed compared to ours*” (FGD\_2).

Currently, Uganda’s creative industries largely fall under the micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) sector<sup>35</sup> which have historically not been the focus of the commercial banking sector.<sup>36</sup> Respondents to this study pointed to some reasons for this being a lack of collateral, lack of credit history, inadequate business skills or financial literacy and high interest rates, which are all barriers to access of formal financial services. It is estimated about seventy percent of all MSMEs in Uganda have unmet credit needs.<sup>37</sup>

Capitalization in the cultural and creative industries in Uganda is often by an individual’s personal savings, loans from family and leveraging personal assets for informal debt.<sup>38</sup> This study also found that many creatives open bank accounts primarily to secure contracts from corporate clients and not as a means of securing financing from banks. Given this reality, one respondent mentioned that

**... it is no wonder many businesses in the digital creative industries largely remain in their early stages. - Interview 3**

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<sup>35</sup> (n.d.). national action plan on culture and creative industries - UNESCO. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from [https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/qpr/final\\_creative\\_economy\\_action\\_plan\\_march\\_181\\_2016.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/qpr/final_creative_economy_action_plan_march_181_2016.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> "Challenges and opportunities for MSME finance in the time of ...." [https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/89e3d4d5-209a-4bd9-bf16-3f381895f866/IFC+Market+Bite+Uganda\\_November\\_+2021.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=nRN6Y2U](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/89e3d4d5-209a-4bd9-bf16-3f381895f866/IFC+Market+Bite+Uganda_November_+2021.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=nRN6Y2U). Accessed 21 Jul. 2022.

<sup>37</sup> (n.d.). Challenges and opportunities for MSME finance in the time of .... Retrieved August 8, 2022, from [https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/89e3d4d5-209a-4bd9-bf16-3f381895f866/IFC+Market+Bite+Uganda\\_November+2021.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=nRN6Y2U](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/89e3d4d5-209a-4bd9-bf16-3f381895f866/IFC+Market+Bite+Uganda_November+2021.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=nRN6Y2U)

<sup>38</sup> "New Business Models for Financing the Creative Sector Research." 30 Jun. 2021, <https://www.fsdkenya.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/New-Business-Models-for-Financing-the-Creative-Sector-Research.pdf>. Accessed 21 Jul. 2022.

The digital creatives and a number of key informants interviewed for this study also mentioned knowing of no financial support from the government. They alluded to in fact “giving up on waiting for government support and moving things on their own” (FGD\_2) . On the other hand, one respondent mentioned that “unless digital creatives organise themselves in say an association then government is unable to meet them halfway and address their needs like the way other sectors are organised” (Interview 8).

Foreign funding was brought up as a form of funding to the sector. About twenty-six percent of donors in Uganda provide funding through impact investment grants.<sup>39</sup> Impact investment is about alignment of an investor’s beliefs and values with the allocation of capital to address social or environmental issues essentially meaning that a lot of this funding is usually entangled in politics, agendas and bureaucracy. One respondent spoke about this saying “This funding only exists within the caveat that you do that kind of work and I feel like it's odd because the same institution like the Smithsonian in America when giving American artists money they let them do what they want. But when they're coming here, it has to be on this condition” (FGD\_2).

Lastly, digital creatives are now starting to embrace the usage of crowdfunding which belongs to the fintech revolution. Crowdfunding is a term used to describe a new form of funding for projects, companies and ideas by raising many small amounts of capital from a large number of people typically via online platforms which are also reward-based.<sup>40</sup> Participants mentioned that Crowdfunding has democratised the process of funding artistic and cultural ventures away from the control of venture capitalists and grant making bodies.

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<sup>39</sup> "Challenges and opportunities for MSME finance in the time of ...." [https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/89e3d4d5-209a-4bd9-bf16-3f381895f866/IFC+Market+Bite+Uganda\\_November+2021.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=nRN6Y2U](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/89e3d4d5-209a-4bd9-bf16-3f381895f866/IFC+Market+Bite+Uganda_November+2021.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=nRN6Y2U). Accessed 21 Jul. 2022.

<sup>40</sup> "Financing the cultural and creative industries through crowdfunding." 18 Jun. 2022, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10824-022-09452-9>. Accessed 21 Jul. 2022.



**CASE STUDY: Crowdfunding for 'I Eat What I Like' - a Ugandan short sex dramedy.**

Filmmaker Shari Mwanika has been crowdfunding for her film "I Eat What I Like," which she terms the first Ugandan sex dramedy (drama-comedy) exploring women's pleasure in a positive way via Kickstart. Mwanika has managed to raise \$9,500 USD to bring the story to life.

Kickstarter is a Crowdfunding platform focused on creativity and it shows the breakdown of how the money will be utilised through cast and production timelines but also contributions as they come in. Some rewards such as viewing of the film on its premiere are attached to certain levels of contribution.

## Trade

Digital creative industries and the trade associated with them is one of the fastest rising components of global trade.<sup>41</sup> This is despite an economic approach to the cultural and creative economies being a fairly recent phenomenon.

### *Demand*

Benchmarked against the creative industry as a whole including traditional art, participants stated that demand for digital creative goods and services is still generally low albeit growing with a more artistic culture envisioned by majority in the coming years. For instance, participants highlighted the fact that even for the demand that exists, people do not want to pay for digital creative work as mentioned by one respondent saying, “They want it but at their convenience without going the extra mile to spend money for the craft” (FGD\_2). Other respondents added to this saying this might have to do with the general economic conditions in the country which may render many people unable to spend on creative goods as they are looked at as a luxury yet most people are just trying to survive.

Additionally, participants in this study raised the point that Ugandans typically have a higher demand for digital creative goods and services that they have seen before or are at least more familiar as one respondent elaborated that:

**The market is also different since the clientele want what they've already seen without appreciating the artists' creative guidance taking lead. - FGD\_1**

Another added similarly that;

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<sup>41</sup> (2013, October 30). An Infinite Opportunity,” a book on the creative and cultural economy. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from <https://www.iadb.org/en/news/idb-releases-orange-economy-infinite-opportunity-book-creative-and-cultural-economy>

**It feels like you're always kind of trying to explain value and convince people of it, yet it's inherent. - FGD\_2**

This research also found that the biggest proportion of demand for digital creative goods and services in Uganda is by the media and advertising industry whose consumption is inherently for commercial ends. One respondent mentioned that;

**In the particular sense of demand for digital creative works, the biggest way most artists have to make money is through the advertising industry here in Uganda and most of Africa in fact. - FGD\_2**

Furthermore, respondents to this study mentioned that there is also predominant demand for particular creative goods in Uganda particularly photography and videography for memory keeping purposes by the ordinary populace.

In light of the biggest consumer of digital creative goods and services in Uganda being the media and advertising space, respondents also remarked the downside to this situation with one elaborating that;

**Even with all the power and the money it has especially relative to most other institutions in Uganda, it is also one of the places where art is least valued. And so you're kind of in this space where the biggest customers of your work are also the people who are the most uninterested in it as reflected in the working conditions in the space. - FGD\_2**

Finally, this study also noted from the participants, particularly the creatives themselves that a big part of their most rewarding clientele in terms of pay isn't Ugandan but is rather foreign as buyers of digital creative goods and services from outside Uganda are usually more willing to pay better than the local clientele.



### **Consumption**

Digital platforms offer potential as dynamic and innovative stages for creative entrepreneurs to reach wide markets and increase their sales. Participants in this research stated that consumption of digital creative goods and services in Uganda is predominantly through social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok and Twitter and through traditional media such television, radio and newspapers.

The respondents added that it is only recently that a portion of Ugandans, most of whom are middle and upper class citizens, have started using subscription based publishing services to access different forms of digital art such as music and movies via platforms like Spotify and Netflix.

This study also found that a lot of digital art in Uganda is consumed unknowingly or indirectly with one key informant elaborating that;

**Those kinds of grand stages always have digital art playing in the background without people particularly paying attention. Generally, I would say that the traditional media industry has been the biggest pusher of digital creative goods and people are absorbing it without necessarily directly going out for it. - Interview 2**

On the other hand, this study noted that consumption of digital creative goods and services in Uganda is happening at a very basic level as the most sought after products are the quicker to produce with faster return on investment. One responder detailed this point saying that;

**So you'll find that most of the digital art work would be in the events space, it will be in celebration space, weddings and fun. That's where they thrive. That's where the consumption is and that's where the quick money exchange is. - Interview 3**

In addition, study participants mentioned the fact that not all digital creative goods are consumed on native digital platforms. Instead, they mentioned that much of it usually ends up in tangible forms especially as printed works with one respondent noting that;

**This may stem from the fact that there is still a considerable part of the population who have no access to online platforms and devices such as smartphones to enable digital consumption. - Interview 3**

When talking about consumption of digital creative goods through publisher platforms such as YouTube and Apple Music, respondents mentioned the fact that they have limited direct control over how their content is discovered and consumed by audiences but also how revenues accrue from these platforms. Application algorithms and advertising were some of the reasons given for this lack of control. Furthermore, respondents raised concerns of relative disparity in remuneration for rights holders on the most prevalent digital platforms. One mentioned that;

**YouTube's payout rates are lower in emerging markets compared to those of the developed world which is not fair. - Interview 2**

### ***Employment landscape***

Digital creative industries present fresh opportunities for employment in non-traditional Creative Industries particularly with the interplay of traditional, technology intensive and service oriented sub sectors in this industry. A report by UNESCO highlighted that the Culture and Creative industries provide nearly 30 million jobs worldwide and employ more people aged 15-29 than any other sector.<sup>42</sup>

In Uganda, digital creative industries are largely informal rendering most of them a part of the “unreported economy” since data on the sector is usually gathered from voluntary replies and tax auditing,<sup>43</sup> thereby capturing so little activity ongoing in the sector. Thus, informality means businesses with no tax identification numbers (TIN) and also may not be registered by local governments.<sup>44</sup>

The lens through which informal work is described in Uganda like in much of Africa is through a monolithic view where it's typically seen as usually run by people unemployed in the formal sector of the economy with low specialisation, low capitalization, low productivity, few protections on one hand and unethical and illegal dealings which happen under the radar on the other hand.<sup>45</sup> With this outlook, formality is often proposed as the panacea to the informal sector. However, a need has been found to dissuade from these fixed notions of informality as it is the predominant and not fringe economy<sup>46</sup> and in lieu work towards rethinking and restructuring the sector which harbours majority of the working population to avail them better working conditions.

Some of the measures respondents proposed to make the sector better is through addressing the tax burden and providing social protection among other measures.

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<sup>42</sup> "re i shaping cultural policies - UNESCO." [https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/global\\_report\\_fact\\_sheet\\_en.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/global_report_fact_sheet_en.pdf). Accessed 21 Jul. 2022.

<sup>43</sup> "The Informal Economy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Size and Determinants." <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/WP/2017/wp17156.ashx>. Accessed 21 Jul. 2022.

<sup>44</sup> "Full article: The portrait of Uganda's informal sector: What main ...." <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322039.2020.1843255>. Accessed 21 Jul. 2022.

<sup>45</sup> (2021, August 6). Informality Study - HEVA Research. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from <https://www.hevafund.com/news/2021/7/27/informality-study-heva-research>

<sup>46</sup> (2021, August 6). Informality Study - HEVA Research. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from <https://www.hevafund.com/news/2021/7/27/informality-study-heva-research>

This study found that the ratio of persons in digital creative industries who are formally employed compared to those who are in the informal or “gig economy” is an estimated 1:4. This means that majority are freelancers with different organisations and as one respondent mentioned, “Digital creative industries in Uganda consist of largely formal jobs that primarily thrive in the informal sector”

Respondents to this study mentioned the conditions under which digital creatives work being precarious and not favourable especially for SMEs. A commonly mentioned occurrence here is unwillingness by the clientele to pay proportionately for the creative work “because of the perception they carry that our work is simple and isn't hard work” (FGD\_1). The participants add that this is made worse by the fact that there are no minimum wage regulations to back the pricing of their works, rendering them vulnerable to the harsh market conditions.

Furthermore, respondents especially the creatives themselves mentioned having to work multiple jobs to make a decent living. One respondent remarked that;

**Something I am struggling with is I am working like five jobs and I am spent so thin. If I don't work those five different jobs I won't make money since each of them don't even pay me enough to survive.  
- FGD\_1**

This study's participants also mentioned how foreigner digital creatives working in Uganda usually end up getting paid more than the local creatives even when they are able to deliver much better or similar work. One participant remarked that;

**...this is discouraging to many Ugandan digital creatives leading to many leaving or considering leaving the country in search of greener pastures. - FGD\_2**

Contrary to the above scenarios, certain respondents mentioned the employment conditions being pretty lucrative particularly for creatives working in collectives as opposed to those working alone. One stated that;

**Working collectively better positions you to find more strategic endorsements and as such one always has work coming in which makes the industry highly profitable to such individuals due to the fact that there is greater organisation and synergy in collectives compared to where a single individual takes on multiple tasks.**  
- Interview 6

### ***Fintechs***

Participants in this study highlighted the emerging and fast evolving fintech sector as one that is enhancing financial inclusion of creatives in the digital creative industries in Uganda. This inclusion has been majorly propelled by the diffusion of mobile money services which are currently used by over thirty million Ugandans majority of whom were previously not able to access any formal financial services. According to the respondents, this has “eased online payments, bankability, credit access but also enables payment from foreign entities.” (Interview 3)

### **New technologies**

New technologies are reshaping all parts of our lives including the creative economy. This can primarily be assessed through the dominant new technologies including AI, AR and VR as well as blockchain. The findings of this research indicate that to a large extent there is surface level understanding of these new technologies in Uganda for the people that are adopting them but even more so a hesitancy and sometimes plain disinterest to learn about them and engage with them.

## **Blockchain**

A third iteration of the world wide web (Web 3.0) has been posited and is generally described as one wherein the user is incarnated as the ultimate arbiter and primary agent of value creation and exchange.<sup>47</sup> To realise this new internet infrastructure that is supposedly decentralised, a blockchain oriented structuring of the internet has been furthered. In recent years, blockchain technologies including cryptocurrencies and non fungible tokens have become widely popular.<sup>48</sup>

With respect to digital creative industries, this paper explores non fungible tokens (NFTs) which are a new class of digital assets that have exploded in popularity the past few years. This popularity has mostly come from record sums some of these digital pieces have sold such as Beeple's *Everydays: The First 5000 days* which sold for \$69.3 million.<sup>49</sup> With more widespread interest some people have come to describe NFTs as a craze and others as the future of digital art.<sup>50</sup>

The idea of decentralisation that is proposed through NFTs has propelled alluring benefits basically promising digital creatives control over their work in terms of remuneration, production rights, 3rd party monetization, data transfer of creative work<sup>51</sup> and therefore suggesting it can allow them to program their IP rights, revenues and royalties. Several questions have arisen however surrounding these precepts of value.<sup>52</sup>

This research found that the majority of participants interviewed had heard about NFTs and blockchain technologies despite many of them also expressing how they had

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<sup>47</sup> (2021, April 21). Non-Fungible Tokens: Blockchains, Scarcity, and Value. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3822743](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3822743)

<sup>48</sup> (2022, April 6). Web 3.0: The Future Architecture of the Internet? - SSRN Papers. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4037693](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4037693)

<sup>49</sup> (n.d.). *Everydays: the First 5000 Days* - Wikipedia. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everydays:\\_the\\_First\\_5000\\_Days](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everydays:_the_First_5000_Days)

<sup>50</sup> (2021, April 21). Non-Fungible Tokens: Blockchains, Scarcity, and Value. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3822743](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3822743)

<sup>51</sup> "The Advantages of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) - 101 Blockchains." 30 Aug. 2021, <https://101blockchains.com/advantages-of-nfts/>. Accessed 21 Jul. 2022.

<sup>52</sup> (2021, April 21). Non-Fungible Tokens: Blockchains, Scarcity, and Value. Retrieved August 8, 2022, from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3822743](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3822743)

little to no idea about their functionality. Certain respondents mentioned being disinterested in getting to explore these technologies with one stating that,

**Now survival is what we are looking at. With skyrocketing prices, we need to live. The ability to discover is gone, it's expensive.  
- Interview 3**

Some other respondents added reasons as to why they have not engaged with these technologies with one elaborating that,

**First time I saw NFTs, I immediately told myself I don't have time for this because we are struggling, I can't keep up, that's how I felt and most artists here probably felt like that, like its for people doing way better than them. - FGD\_2**

For respondents who were more familiar with NFTs with some having their own, the majority mentioned understanding it on a surface level. This sect of people also had many questions challenging the widespread notions about NFTs particularly for the Ugandan context. One mentioned,

**We need to first truly come to an understanding of what is this for? What are the capabilities? What does it mean for us to understand it enough to then begin to innovate with it? What does it mean for us as Ugandans to exist in the Web 3.0 space? - FGD\_2**

with another respondent adding that

**It can look like democratising creative space but really what's happening is it is kind of just digitising the system that already exists in the real world. So people who sell the most expensive NFTs are celebrities who already have plenty of followers. If you had to earn from it, you're kind of earning scrubs off the table because we do not really have access like the people who are building in those structures who typically don't look like us. It still goes back to the privileged always make more. - FGD\_2**

Despite these concerns, some respondents were more optimistic about the space pointing out benefits of NFTs such as the fact that they utilise a currency which is not tied down to the Ugandan currency which means if you sell your art piece as an NFT it will most probably be good money (ethereum to Ugandan shillings) as well as the fact that there is a very robust and supportive NFT community online on platforms like Twitter and Discord. More importantly is the fact that they help with intellectual rights and have opened up new marketplaces such as OpenSea.

Furthemore, one respondent highlighted that Africa also has an advantage with NFTs because of the unique content that we have owing to our cultural vibrancy and the opportunity with NFTs to

**Preserve some of our indigenous fabrics, artefacts, and even nature for instance naturalist Gonahasa's 'Home of the Gorillas'<sup>53</sup> aimed at conservation of the endangered mountain gorillas in Uganda. So, I think the interesting use cases, it's still purely experimental but again I also appreciate anybody who is tinkering with a tool or a medium that is very, very, new. - Interview 2**

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<sup>53</sup> "Gorilla Families - Home of the Gorillas." 2 Oct. 2021, <https://gorilla.family/nft/>. Accessed 21 Jul. 2022.



Lastly, some respondents championed the practical or utilitarian use of NFTs to realise value from them in the Ugandan context. One respondent spoke about this saying,

**Then, there's adding utility to the NFTs that have been made to make sure that value is maintained along a product or service attached to it. If you do it here, what utility is actually going to be attached to it? Is it school fees? Is it the purchase of land? Uganda is known as a party nation, is it partying? - Interview 3**

### ***Artificial Intelligence (AI)***

AI is an umbrella term for a collection of technologies ranging from machine learning and rules based systems to natural interfaces including speech, vision and natural language processing (NLP). Participants in this study shared how AI is rapidly affecting the digital creative industries primarily through its changing of value chains for creative content by helping creators to effectively match content with audiences. This is through machine learning algorithms and classifying user's preferences which enables the provision of specifically tailored content. Participants however mentioned a downside to this which is the data the AI uses for predictability might be biased.<sup>54</sup>

Increasingly, AI is also aiding in the production of digital creative goods and services by aiding in complex, time consuming tasks as mentioned by this study's participants. More disruptively, AI has begun to create original content including films, music and fashion. However, despite greater automation, AI is predicted to increase occupations in the digital creative sector.<sup>55</sup>

### ***Immersive technologies (VR/AR)***

Immersive technologies such as AR and VR are fundamentally altering the experience of digital creative content consumption. VR for instance immerses a user in a computer generated simulation of an entire environment. AR on the other hand layers computer generated enhancements over an existing reality that is presented in a user's field of

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<sup>54</sup> "Encoded Biases & Future Imaginaries - Pollicy."

<https://pollicy.org/resource/encoded-biases-future-imaginaries/>. Accessed 8 Aug. 2022.

<sup>55</sup> "Automation Doesn't Just Create or Destroy Jobs — It Transforms Them." 2 Nov. 2021,

<https://hbr.org/2021/11/automation-doesnt-just-create-or-destroy-jobs-it-transforms-them>. Accessed 8 Aug. 2022.

view making the blended experience more interactive.

This study had a few creatives who worked in the immersive technologies' space who mentioned the space being so virgin in Uganda mostly due to issues of access to necessary devices due to limited financial capabilities.

## **Public policy**

Uganda's digital creative industries' public policy is mostly detailed in its National Action plan on culture and the creative industries manual.<sup>56</sup>

With the digital creative industries being a subset of the digital realm, participants of this study noted that our policies in Uganda like in much of Africa have not yet fully factored the complexity of the digital sphere as seen in many of the current digital laws. They mentioned that many of these laws reflect a limited understanding of key issues, an insufficient knowledge of the implementation context as well as unclear and even sometimes contradictory goals.

This, according to many of this study's participants, is a result of inadequate collaborative policymaking where policies for the sector are primarily made in administrative siloes rather than involving external parties who have wider implications on the policy design process in particular for the digital creative economy.

In terms of policies that most directly impact the digital creative industries in Uganda particularly Intellectual Property laws, this study's respondents mentioned how they are either weak, outdated or unenforceable and with one respondent adding that "many of these laws exist only in theory but not in practice." (FGD\_1). The country's IP laws which include the Trademarks Act 2010 under which is the Copyright and Neighbouring Rights Act of 2006 which is most critical to this industry has been deemed mostly obsolete in addressing today's digital advancements but also as largely

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<sup>56</sup> "national action plan on culture and creative industries - UNESCO." [https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/qpr-final\\_creative\\_economy\\_action\\_plan\\_march\\_181\\_2016.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/qpr-final_creative_economy_action_plan_march_181_2016.pdf). Accessed 21 Jul. 2022.

unenforceable due to a multivariate of factors such as the fact that there are so many government agencies charged with enforcing it which isn't so practical.

Additionally, participants mentioned the existence of some policies which are in fact stifling the digital creative industries in Uganda especially in terms of access and usage of digital technologies for their work. Among those mentioned here is the current 12% excise duty tax on the internet which replaced the widely infamous social media tax as well as the current high tax regime on devices such as the 10% import duty, 18% VAT, 6% withholding tax as well as a 1.5% infrastructure tax on phones imported alone.

Lastly, participants raised the fact that there is limited government funding to the digital creative industries especially in terms of investment in infrastructure necessary for the sector to thrive but also the fact that there is limited financial assistance to the industries. Finally, the failure to enact protective and enabling policies for the majority of the workers in this sector who fall under the informal sector is another concern that was raised by participants mentioning the needs for structural adjustments such as tax concessions to SMEs in the industry and enactment of minimum wage laws.

# Opportunities



The research participants under this study identified a number of opportunities that the digital creative industry in Uganda could harness to fast track its overall growth.

First, participants mentioned that with globalisation aided by digital technologies that make possible the digital creative industries, there lies a great opportunity for Uganda to have its creative talent do work around the globe without need for brain drain (FGD\_1).

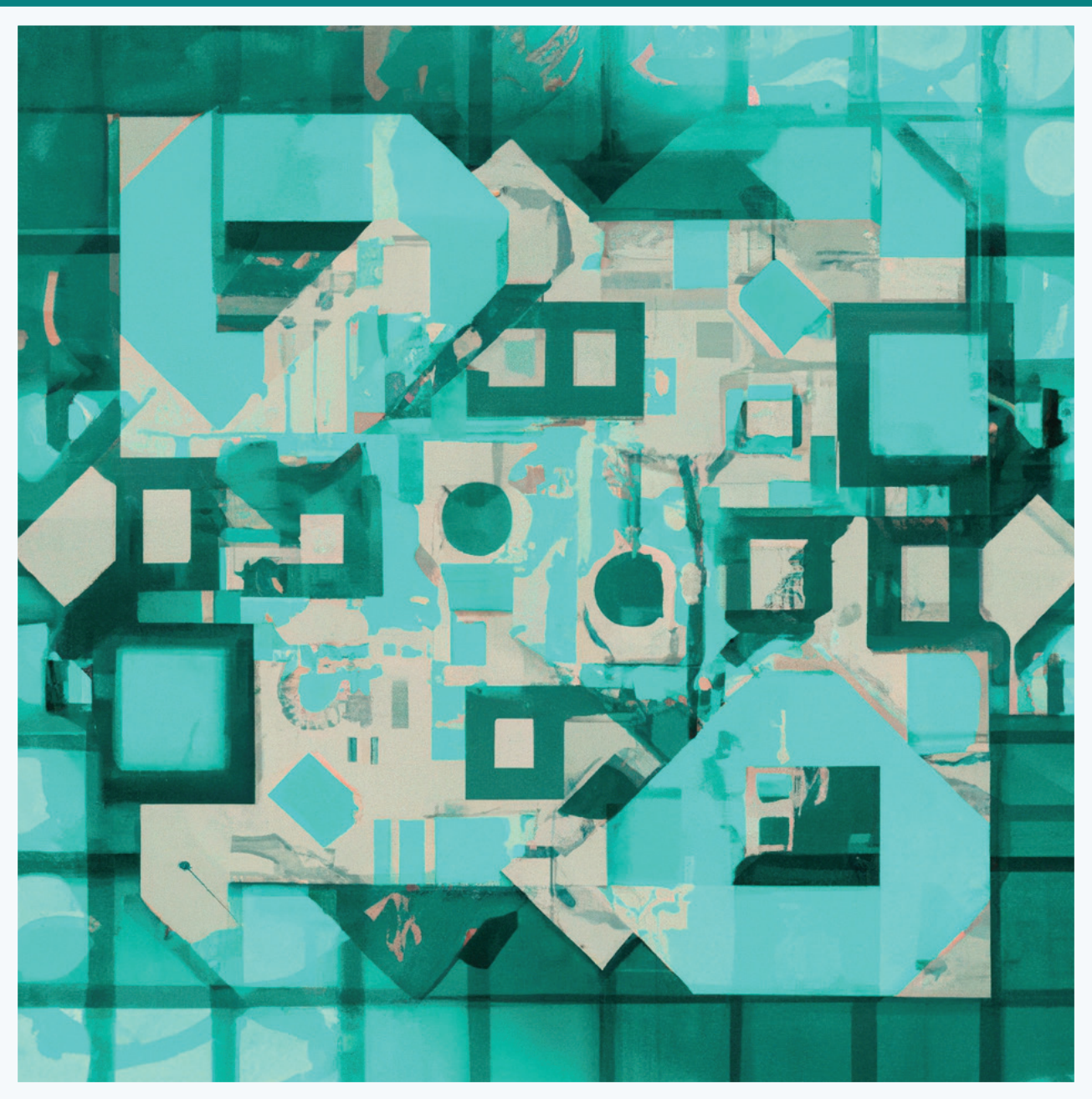
Participants also mentioned the immense opportunity in turning to more high level production of digital creative goods and services as a leapfrog strategy that would inevitably lead to a higher return on investment. One respondent stated that;

**Digital creators also need to diversify and not simply think of social media artwork because it goes bigger than that. They can go into education, they can go into agriculture, literally see a need, fill a need. For instance, opportunities exist in gaming because it's growing. Last year alone gaming in East Africa earned fifteen billion Uganda shillings. - Interview 3**

Additionally, participants mentioned the presence of inclusivity opportunities in the digital creative industry especially since it's still a greatly untapped sector in Uganda. Here, participants explained that the breadth of the sector avails a multitude of opportunities for marginalised groups such as women, persons with disabilities to find meaningful employment. One participant elaborated that,

**Most digital creative goods are multimedia in nature and so if one person on the team is blind they are able to for instance contribute the audio. - Interview 7**

# Recommendations



Informed by the discussion above around various dimensions of digital creative industries in Uganda, this study's participants gave some recommendations for stakeholders in the sector to adopt for a more robust industry.

### **To the stakeholders**

Participants proposed recommendations for all stakeholders in the industry including the artists, government, and the private and public sectors.

The first recommendation participants made was the need for all stakeholders to create networks or converging structures such as platforms or organisations bringing together all players in the digital creative industries (FGD\_2). These were proposed as avenues of facilitating policy advocacy for the industry as well as enabling collective lobbying for mutual industry interests. Additionally, participants mentioned that these spaces would be where experiences can be transferred (Interview 1) and basic concepts agreed on to identify common industry benchmarks (Interview 6) such as pay structures among other things.

Certain participants also proposed the need for different players in the digital creative industry to curate and offer artist-in-residence opportunities (FGD\_1) as a way of providing mentorship and professional development necessary for digital creatives to fully explore and gain from their work. One participant elaborated this saying,

**These residencies encompass a wide spectrum of artistic programs to enable guests to develop their work through trial, error and feedback, collaborate and creatively explore new ideas and this can best happen through cross institutional support. - Interview 1**

Furthermore, participants mentioned the need to invest heavier in ICT infrastructure especially such as in the internet through multiplying broadband connections countywide particularly with the private sector's help (FGD\_2). Similarly, respondents pointed to the multisectoral need to lay out financing programmes focused on bringing digital technologies particularly to small and medium digital creative enterprises.

Participants also suggested the cross sector need to raise awareness of creative professions as viable career paths (Interview 5). This was proposed as a way of demystifying common misperceptions around the sector. To attain this, embedding digital creativity instruction as part of the official school curriculum in Uganda and from lower levels of education was put across (Interview 4) which would in the long term lead to more employment paths for Uganda's predominantly young population.

Lastly, participants mentioned the need for all stakeholders to invest in more research to establish more nuanced insights into the realities of the digital creative industry and propose best industry practices based on the data on ground (Interview 1).

### **To the creatives**

Participants mentioned the need for digital creatives to approach their work more professionally. One respondent remarked that;

**Artists have to gain basic principles of practice and not just technical skills but also an understanding of the business end of their work which is necessary if they are to realise considerable outputs in their work. - Interview 6**

Some of the ways respondents proposed that digital creatives can do this is through specialised skills development courses, vocational training programs as well as financial literacy programs. Another respondent added that;

**This would also help redress the distrust creatives have with other players in the industry such as their managers, lawyers, distributors, editors and others since they'd understand the parameters of each's work. - Interview 7**



Additionally, several participants proposed the need for more digital creatives to work collectively rather than in siloes especially for the business side of their work (Interview 6). This, they said, poses greater benefits for the creatives since they then get to reap the rewards of shared planning, decision making and workload synergy which is critical to the ability to achieve more in the industry.

Lastly, the uptake of Insurance services (Interview 1) in the day to day operations of digital creatives is a key recommendation that was mentioned by a participant doing this already. They explained this saying there are immense benefits that come with insuring one's devices and other creative assets since these devices are costly and as such are hard to replace in case anything compromises them. Like any other valuable business assets, it therefore makes perfect sense to consider insurance of creative work tools as the norm.

### **To the government**

Participants mentioned the development of a comprehensive mapping of the digital creative industries in Uganda (Interview 5) as a starting point to understanding them. With this, participants said the government would then be able to best plan with a more evidence based background of the sector which would ultimately lead to better service delivery to all key stakeholders in it in the long run.

Furthermore, participants raised the need to review existing government policies surrounding the digital creative industries in Uganda. Among the policies commonly brought up by most respondents are the IP laws, specifically the Copyright law which is necessary if the sector is to realise sustainable growth (Interview 3); both in national revenue and creatives' incomes as creative's work is protected. Similarly, they also raised the need to enact more supportive policies around the tax regimes concerned with the sector including taxes on imported digital devices and the internet as well as putting in place more favourable conditions for much of the sector which primarily operates in the informal sector such as tax concessions and social protection measures (FGD\_1, FGD\_2).

Participants also expressed their belief in the essential role of the government in investing in the digital creative sector through considerable direct funding through public initiatives and the like (FGD\_1, FGD\_2). According to these respondents, these funds are necessary to drive growth and expansion of several start ups and individuals in the sector in meeting their costs without which they are unable to realise growth beyond the startup phase.

Additionally, one of the recommendations relayed by this paper's participants is the need to fully integrate art and design into the technical curricula of Uganda as part of available STEAMD subjects from the lower levels of education (Interview 4).

Lastly, participants recommended that the government create a single enabling institution or ministry to represent the interests of creative workers or firms which would help harmonise government policies towards the sector plus their enforcement (Interview 1). In their views, the large number of scattered departments in different ministries would be better replaced by a centralised unit catering to only the digital creative economy.

### **To private sector**

Participants shared that the banking sector can develop specific products such as subsidised loans, creative grants and prize money aimed at supporting and improving the financial inclusion of digital creatives (FGD\_1). On this basis, the participants interviewed added that similar initiatives can be kickstarted by other private entities directed at the digital creative industries through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

# Conclusion

Despite the insufficient availability of data in the digital creative industries in Uganda, several findings from this study are in agreement with previous findings on the creative industries as a whole. These findings point to the endurance of certain structural, institutional and individual barriers and challenges discussed throughout this paper, which have hindered the sector from realising and harnessing its immense potential. To this effect, the digital creative industry in Uganda, like in much of Africa remains largely underdeveloped despite the immense potential. The recommendations provided to the different stakeholders listed above could be pathways towards building up our creative industries, in addition to self-pride, productivity and economic growth.

# Appendix

Civil society organisation affiliate, Key Informant Interview 1  
Creative technologist and Thinker, Key Informant Interview 2  
Artist Collective Lead, Key Informant Interview 3  
Art and design Instructor, Key Informant Interview 4  
Art and design Instructor, Key Informant Interview 5  
Artist Collective Lead, Key Informant Interview 6  
Artist Collective Lead, Key Informant Interview 7  
Ministry Of ICT person, Key Informant Interview 8  
Focus Group Discussion, Females, FGD 1  
Focus Group Discussion, Males, FGD 2