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# Exploring the Painting Artist Perceptions Towards Their Career Sustainability in Pokhara

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## ABSTRACT

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*This qualitative study investigates sustainable career perceptions among painting artists in Pokhara, utilizing pseudo names for participants: Ram, Hari, Purnima, and Kalpana. Through purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews was conducted to gather insights. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns and themes within the data.*

*Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and participant confidentiality, was strictly followed. By employing these methods, this study shed light on the intricacies of sustaining an art career in Pokhara. This study reveals how personal passion and adaptability influence painting artists' careers in Pokhara, emphasizing their contribution to personal fulfillment, the art community, and society. It underscores the importance of resilience, personal branding, financial awareness, and gender dynamics in navigating challenges. Art communities and organizations can use the insights of this study to develop collaborative initiatives that support artists, encourage networking, and nurture emerging talents, ultimately contributing to a thriving art community.*

**Keywords:** Adaptability, community engagement, painting artists, personal fulfillment, sustainable careers

## INTRODUCTION

Recent labor market data from the UK and Germany provide compelling proof that a significant majority, up to 90%, of individuals working in the field of fine arts, encompassing

painters, sculptors, and photographers, are engaged in self-employment and primarily operate as independent sole proprietors (Thom, 2017). Although artists typically possess solid expertise in their specific artistic skills, they often lack the necessary entrepreneurial abilities to effectively fulfill market demands (Thom, 2014)

The commercial fine art business represents a dynamic and multifaceted industry that encompasses the creation, distribution, and sale of artistic works for both aesthetic and economic purposes. As a sector deeply rooted in creativity and cultural expression, the commercial fine art business plays a significant role in promoting artists, supporting their livelihoods, and enriching society's cultural landscape. The commercial fine art business involves a wide range of stakeholders, including artists, galleries, collectors, art dealers, auction houses, and art consultants, among others (Art & Collecting, 2021). These entities collaborate and interact within a complex network that drives the production, marketing, and consumption of fine art. Understanding the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities within this industry is crucial for stakeholders to navigate its complexities effectively.

Out of the various fine arts, painting is one of the popular art segment. Painting is a form of artistic expression that communicates ideas and emotions through the manipulation of visual elements on a flat surface. These elements, such as lines, colors, tones, and textures, are employed in diverse ways to evoke sensations of depth, spatiality, motion, and illumination (Owen, 2023).

Qualitative research methods offer a comprehensive and in-depth approach to exploring the commercial fine art business. These methods allow for a nuanced understanding of the experiences, perspectives, motivations, and decision-making processes of various stakeholders within the industry. By employing qualitative research, researchers can delve into the intricacies of the commercial fine art business, uncover hidden dynamics, and generate rich, context-specific knowledge that informs strategic decisions, policy-making, and the development of sustainable business models (Fryer et al., 2012).

The primary objective of this study is to investigate and comprehend the perspectives and opinions of artists concerning the landscape of the fine art painting business within the context of Pokhara, Nepal. By delving into the intricate dynamics of artists' viewpoints, the study aims to illuminate their perceptions of various aspects related to the fine art painting business, including its challenges, opportunities, role in the local economy, cultural significance, and potential for career sustainability. Through a comprehensive exploration of artists' opinions, this research seeks to contribute valuable insights that can inform strategic initiatives, policy

considerations, and interventions aimed at fostering a thriving and sustainable environment for fine art painting businesses in Pokhara.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

How do the fine art Artist understand the art business in Pokhara?

How does the artist perceive their career sustainability in Pokhara?

Nepal as a tourism destination, the main source of income for the livelihood of the people is tourism business. Pokhara is one of the most beautiful tourism destination. Although the area of Pokhara is quite small but most of the wonderful visiting sites of Nepal are situated inside Pokhara valley. So large, medium and small size tourism business are available here and they one of the main source of income for the local citizens. Small size of business like handicraft business, Art business, photography business etc are also existing here. The flow of tourist from domestic as well as international location is gradually increasing after the COVID pandemics. Along with the flow of visitors, the business that were deprived during the worse pandemics are also growing up slowly.

The research aims to understand the state of the art business in Nepal, particularly in the Pokhara valley, with a focus on the creative and appealing field of Art and Craft. It explores how artists in Pokhara view the sustainability of their careers, giving insights into their happiness, career growth, economic contributions, cultural enrichment, tourist attraction, policy effects, art education, creative industries, societal influence, and academic knowledge. The study seeks to grasp artists' perceptions about their long-term prospects in Pokhara. This exploration reveals various important points: firstly, it shows how artists feel, highlighting both challenges and opportunities that affect their well-being and mental health. Secondly, it looks into the things that help or hinder artists' career progress, offering advice for personalized approaches to skill development and mentorship. It also looks at how artists' activities impact the economy, emphasizing their role in generating income, jobs, and potentially boosting local economies.

Moreover, it investigates how artists' work can make a positive impact on society, focusing on how they engage with societal issues. Lastly, the study adds to our understanding of artists' viewpoints and experiences, especially regarding career sustainability, by building on current academic discussions. In summary, the study deeply explores how art and artists contribute to various aspects of society, culture, economics, and individual happiness, offering insights with broad implications.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The sequence of the work experiences that evolves in the individual's life course is defined as career (De Vos et al., 2021). Career management involves strategically outlining the stages of professional advancement to align with personalized objectives. A comprehensive career plan encompasses resources, educational pursuits, opportunities, and achievements (Xing et al., 2019). While expectations lay the groundwork for a career management approach, their realization is shaped by an individual's intentions, actions, and external factors such as opportunities and obstacles (Swanson, 2013). Arthur et. al (1989) as cited in De Vos & van der Heijden (2015) stated that there are four central elements in the definition of the career they are time, social space, agency and meaning. Where the element 'time' denotes the length of the career, 'social spaces' reflects the relationship with the colleagues, family, relatives and peer circle, 'meaning' indicates that careers undergo changes in terms of their impact on individuals, particularly regarding the significance of specific career outcomes. Astutely highlight this shift when discussing the progression of careers from 'a means of earning' to 'a means of learning' whereas the 'agency' element of career definition states the peculiar traits shape and connect an individual to his/her world of work and to respond along with it to make them stable or change them according to it (Briscoe, J.P. & Hall, 2006). In recent decades, significant changes have occurred in the realm of employment, carrying significant consequences for these aspects. These developments necessaries a reevaluation of the concept of modern careers, prompting us to introduce the concept of 'sustainable careers'.

The Handbook of Research on Sustainable Careers reinforced the theoretical conversation on career sustainability by defining sustainable career as "the sequence of an individual's different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, crossing several social spaces, and characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual" (De Vos & van der Heijden, 2015). According to Baruch (2015), Sustainable careers offer advantages to various stakeholders beyond individual employees, including employers who benefit from their employees' expertise, abilities, enthusiasm, and other capabilities to secure long-term performance, survival, and prosperity.

Agency (2016) stated that Although our society occasionally discourages creative professions, deeming them unstable with numerous associated risks, an increasing number of individuals are now embracing their aspirations and pursuing unique, nontraditional career paths. The primary rationale behind this shift is that by choosing to pursue an artistic endeavor, one transforms their passion into a sustainable livelihood (Nathan, 2019). Consequently, their

unwavering enthusiasm for their work ensures they remain motivated. Even in the face of setbacks and failures along this journey, artists possess the determination to rise again and persist. While numerous obstacles may arise, it is important to remember that without enduring hardships, one cannot achieve personal growth and success (Nathan, 2019). Considering these facts, it is essential to obtain the information regarding the current performance of the fine painting artist and their future career in the painting world.

Centered on the present career development curriculum, subjects, timing, and success parameters tailored for visual artists, the research done by Hendricks (2013) assesses the existing provisions, identifies gaps, and presents an inventive model for ensuring sustainable career advancement within the visual arts realm. In light of the transformations occurring in the visual arts field, this investigation asserts that artists should exhibit not only dedication and discipline in their artistic pursuits but also entrepreneurial acumen when engaging with global social and cultural challenges.

The art market in Nepal is still in nascent stage where the artists are struggling to capture the market in large amount. Because there is a severe lack of full-time, permanent job openings for fine artists within the arts industry, and given that freelance and self-employment are the predominant avenues for finding work, fine artists are required to adopt an entrepreneurial approach. This is essential in order to effectively navigate the complex commercial and opportunity-based obstacles and to sustain a livelihood within the arts sector Schumpeter & Backhaus (2008).

The traditional solo artist career model, which involves creating artwork for individual buyers through channels such as studio sales, commissions, art fairs, or galleries, is less relevant today than it was a century ago. Few artists can rely solely on this for-profit approach because it is difficult to generate enough consistent and profitable artwork sales to sustain a studio or livelihood (Hendricks, 2013).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Scotland (2012) has proposed four paradigm components: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methodologies. Among the various paradigms, the ontological approach of this study is relativism. It is because the perception of the respondents regarding the truth are not similar with each other. Subjective and contextual realities were the epistemological position of this study. This indicates that the entire study relied on the interpretive paradigm.

The view point of each individual is different and they interpret the same scenario in various ways.

Four fine art artist from Pokhara, who were engaged in fine art business for more than 10 years are were chosen purposefully. Out of the four participants two are male and another are female with the age of 65, 35, 30 and 35 respectively. All of the artist are fully engaged in fine art business at Lakeside, Pokhara. In terms of the number of participants, only four artists were selected because having fewer participants can still provide valuable information. The choice depends on the depth of the interview, the research goal, the research question, and the amount of data being analyzed and interpreted. The study tries to generate the rich information so the qualitative study was conducted from the samples that were selected purposefully. The purposeful method helps to select the best candidate with rich knowledge and experience.

During the period of the data collection, the fine art artist were interviewed with the unstructured questionnaire for time and again. The each and every information that the participant shared were valuable and preciously worthy. To record all the information, recorder of Mobile phone was used so that meaning making could be done easily form the information like the story of the participants, proverbs, metaphors, quotations etc. The physical layout of their business, their attire, etc. were observed because these indicates the living standard of the artist. Therefore, field notes, observation, unstructured interview, and the interpretation of his/her personality and living standard.

In order to delve into the intricate landscape of painting artists' perceptions towards the sustainability of their careers in Pokhara, this study employs a qualitative approach that encompasses in-depth interviews (Fryer et al., 2012) with three accomplished artists. Qualitative data analysis serves as the lens through which these artists' rich and nuanced viewpoints are examined and interpreted. These interviews provide a platform for the artists to express their personal experiences, aspirations, challenges, and insights, ultimately offering a profound exploration of the multifaceted dimensions (Knott et al., 2022), that shape their understanding of career sustainability within the realm of art. By delving into the narratives of these artists, this qualitative analysis seeks to unearth invaluable insights that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between artistic practice, personal perspectives, and the larger context of Pokhara's artistic ecosystem.

Based on the interviews with Ram, Hari, Purnima and Kalpana, critical analysis of their responses in the context of sustainable careers and the benefits they provide to various stakeholders is conducted.

## **RESULTS**

### **Individual Agency**

Ram and Hari's emphasis on individual agency and passion for their art careers underscores the intrinsic motivation that drives them to pursue art. Their commitment to dedicating time and effort to their artistic endeavors reflects their personal agency in shaping their careers. For them, art is not merely a job but a meaningful and fulfilling way of life. This resonates with the concept of sustainable careers, as described by De Vos & van der Heijden (2015), where individuals find purpose and satisfaction in their career experiences over time.

Ram's statement about starting his art gallery and engaging in art-related work even before his return from abroad indicates that his passion for art was a driving force behind his career decisions. Similarly, Hari's journey from a part-time art teaching job to becoming a recognized artist and art educator shows how her dedication to art led to the evolution and growth of her career. Similar to Ram and Hari, Purnima and Kalpana also exhibit strong individual agency and passion for art. Purnima's motivation stemmed from recognition, while Kalpana's passion was evident from childhood.

All four participants exhibit a strong sense of individual agency and passion for their art careers. They emphasize the importance of dedicating time, effort, and creativity to their artistic pursuits, indicating that their careers are driven by intrinsic motivation rather than solely financial considerations.

### **Continuity**

Both artists' experiences exemplify continuity and crossing social spaces in their art careers. Ram's transition from signboard writing to commence an art gallery shows how his passion for art remained consistent throughout his career trajectory, even as the specific roles changed. Likewise, Hari's evolution from a part-time art teacher to an established artist demonstrates her ability to cross social spaces within the art field. Purnima's art journey began later, marked by recognition in an art exhibition. Kalpana's lifelong passion for art led her to actively participate in workshops and pursue improvement.

Their experiences align with the notion of sustainable careers, where individuals integrate their passions, expertise, and skills across different roles and social contexts. By maintaining a connection to art throughout their career journey, they have found continuity and a sense of purpose in their work.



Both artists have experienced continuity in their art careers, with Ram transitioning from signboard writing to running his own art gallery and Hari evolving from a part-time art teacher to a recognized artist and art educator. Moreover, they demonstrate adaptability in response to challenges, such as the disruption caused by digital technologies or the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their businesses.

### **Contribution to Stakeholders**

Although the concept of sustainable careers is often associated with individual fulfillment, Ram and Hari's experiences illustrate how their art careers also benefit employers and stakeholders. Baruch (2015) argues that sustainable careers can lead to long-term performance, survival, and prosperity for organizations.

In the case of Ram and Hari, their dedication and expertise in the art field can contribute positively to the growth and reputation of art businesses in Pokhara. As established artists and educators, they may serve as role models for aspiring artists, inspiring a new generation of creative individuals and contributing to the development of the local art community. While Purnima's and Kalpana's narratives focus more on personal growth, their teaching roles and participation in exhibitions also contribute to the art community.

While career sustainability is often associated with individual fulfillment, Ram and Hari's experiences illustrate how their art careers also benefit stakeholders, including employers, the local art market, and the wider community. Their dedication and expertise contribute positively to the growth and reputation of art businesses in Pokhara and serve as role models for aspiring artists.

### **Coping with Challenges**

Ram and Hari's experiences during challenging times demonstrate resilience and coping skills, essential for sustainable careers. Ram's ability to adapt to the disruption caused by digital technologies in the signboard market by transitioning to running an art gallery indicates his capacity to innovate and find new opportunities.

Similarly, Hari's response to the COVID-19 pandemic highlights her adaptability. By offering art classes, she diversified her income sources and navigated the challenges posed by the pandemic. Such adaptability is a crucial aspect of sustainable careers, as individuals who can cope with changes and uncertainties are better positioned to sustain their careers in the long term. Whereas Purnima's transition to teaching during her sister's illness and



Kalpana's response to gender barriers and market changes demonstrate their ability to navigate challenges.

Ram and Hari's experiences in coping with challenges demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and innovation. These qualities are essential for artists to navigate uncertainties in the art market and maintain sustainable careers.

### **Personal Branding**

Hari's emphasis on personal branding and uniqueness in his artwork aligns with the idea of sustainability in careers. In a competitive art market, artists who can establish a distinct identity and style are more likely to stand out and build a loyal following. By focusing on creating unique artwork, Hari demonstrates an understanding of how personal branding contributes to the sustainability of an art career.

Hari's emphasis on creating unique artwork and establishing his personal identity as an artist highlights the importance of personal branding in the sustainability of art careers. By distinguishing themselves in the market, artists can build a loyal following and enhance their long-term prospects. While not explicitly mentioned, Purnima's recognition from established artists and Kalpana's positive feedback from foreign artists suggest the importance of individual style.

### **Self-expression and Well-being**

Ram, Hari and Purnima express a deep connection with art, describing it as a form of meditation, personal enjoyment, and self-expression. This intrinsic motivation and focus on well-being are crucial for sustaining a fulfilling career over time. By viewing art as a form of self-expression and a source of joy, Ram and Hari find intrinsic rewards in their careers, which can contribute to their long-term engagement and commitment to art. They view art as a form of self-expression, meditation, and personal enjoyment. Their intrinsic motivation and focus on well-being underscore the fulfillment they find in their careers, contributing to their long-term engagement and commitment to art.

### **Future Aspirations**

Ram and Hari express a forward-looking perspective, hoping for an improved art market and potential growth in their careers. Their aspirations reflect a desire for continued advancement and development within the art field. On the other hand, Purnima and Kalpana share a collective goal of nurturing the next generation of artists. Purnima's vision of starting

an art academy and Kalpana's belief in art as a respected career choice underline their commitment to fostering artistic talent and contributing to the art community's future.

### **Comparison and Contentment**

Both Ram and Hari convey a sense of contentment and pride in their art careers. Their focus on personal satisfaction indicates that they measure success on their own terms, without feeling the need to compare themselves to individuals in other professions. Similarly, Purnima and Kalpana, though not explicitly mentioned, appear to share a similar perspective on contentment, with Purnima finding fulfillment in teaching and Kalpana dismissing regret. This suggests that all four artists prioritize personal fulfillment and artistic passion over external comparisons.

### **Entertainment and Well-being**

Ram and Hari view the time they dedicate to art as an immersive and enjoyable experience, akin to meditation. This sentiment highlights the intrinsic rewards of their careers, where the process of creating art becomes an enriching journey. Kalpana's emphasis on enjoying her work further underscores this perspective, aligning with Ram and Hari's sentiments. Collectively, their viewpoints emphasize how a strong sense of well-being and enjoyment contribute to the sustainability of their careers.

### **Social Impact**

While Ram and Hari primarily share insights into their personal art careers, they indirectly contribute to their communities through teaching and exhibitions. Their involvement in art classes and exhibitions serves to engage and educate others, reflecting a broader impact on the local art scene. Similarly, Purnima's role as an art teacher and Kalpana's recognition for her artwork indirectly contribute to art education and community engagement. This shared commitment to sharing artistic knowledge illustrates their contributions beyond their individual artistic pursuits.

### **Gender Considerations**

While Ram and Hari's narratives do not explicitly address gender considerations, Kalpana provides a unique perspective by discussing the challenges she faced as a woman in the art world. Her insights shed light on gender-related barriers and the need for equal opportunities, offering a distinct viewpoint absent from the other interviews. This perspective highlights the complex dynamics within the art industry and the experiences of women artists.

### **Financial status and Market condition**

Ram and Hari demonstrate financial awareness by acknowledging income fluctuations and market challenges. Their recognition of these factors showcases a practical approach to sustaining their art careers. Purnima's focus on the importance of networking and Kalpana's observation of changing market dynamics align with this financial awareness, indicating a shared understanding of the economic aspects inherent in the pursuit of a sustainable career in art.

## **DISCUSSION**

The status of career sustainability within the art business in Pokhara appears promising, yet nuanced. The interviews with various painting artists reflect a strong sense of individual agency, intrinsic motivation, and passion for their art careers, indicating a positive foundation for sustainability. Artists such as Ram, Hari, Purnima, and Kalpana emphasize the personal fulfillment, joy, and well-being derived from their artistic pursuits, underscoring a resilient commitment to their careers as like the finding of (Dhiman et al., 2018).

However, challenges and considerations are evident. The artists demonstrate adaptability and resilience in response to obstacles like market fluctuations and external disruptions, such as the impact of digital technologies or the COVID-19 pandemic (Khalil et al., 2022). This adaptability highlights a dynamic approach to sustaining their careers despite changing circumstances.

Networking, community engagement, and personal branding emerge as key factors contributing to sustainability (Innes & Booher, 2004). The artists engage in exhibitions, workshops, and teaching, establishing connections and fostering a supportive artistic ecosystem. Their recognition of the need for financial awareness and an understanding of market realities reflects a practical approach to ensuring their careers' longevity. Gender dynamics also play a role (Azka, n.d.), with Kalpana shedding light on challenges faced by women artists, pointing to potential areas for improvement to create a more inclusive and equitable environment.

Overall, the artists' positive outlook and collective efforts to nurture the next generation, as seen in Purnima's aspiration to start an art academy and Kalpana's vision of art as a respected career choice, indicate a shared commitment to the sustainability of the art business in Pokhara. While there are challenges to navigate, the artists' dedication, adaptability, and engagement suggest a hopeful path for career sustainability within the vibrant art community of Pokhara.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The interviews conducted with four participants provide valuable insights into sustainable careers in the art domain. Ram and Hari emphasize individual agency and passion as pivotal in shaping their artistic journeys, highlighting that art goes beyond being a mere livelihood to offer personal fulfillment. Their careers have evolved over time, reflecting adaptability and continuity. Purnima and Kalpana similarly stress individual agency, triggered by pivotal moments, with teaching and exhibitions contributing to personal growth and community engagement. Challenges, like Purnima stepping into her sister's teaching role during her illness and Kalpana overcoming gender barriers, showcase their resilience and adaptability essential traits of sustainable careers.

All four artists emphasize art's intrinsic value for self-expression and well-being. They find contentment and comfort in their artistic pursuits, considering them meditative experiences enhancing their overall well-being. The significance of personal branding and uniqueness in a competitive market is evident, exemplified by Hari's focus on distinctive artwork and Kalpana's positive feedback from foreign artists.

Collectively, the participants reveal broader contributions beyond personal satisfaction. Ram and Hari's dedication can positively impact the art market and community, while Purnima and Kalpana indirectly contribute through teaching and community involvement. They offer insights into financial aspects, navigating income fluctuations and market dynamics. Their stories demonstrate that while pursuing art can be challenging, their unwavering commitment, adaptability, and focus on well-being align with sustainable career principles. The interviews underscore intrinsic motivation and passion among Pokhara's artists, leading to personal contentment, resilience, and the importance of community engagement, networking, and personal branding. Financial awareness and gender dynamics also emerge, and collectively, the artists express optimism for an improved art market, nurturing emerging talents, and sustaining fulfilling careers within the art field.

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