

## EXPLORING FACTORS INFLUENCING VISUAL ARTS CONSUMPTION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MALAYSIAN MIDDLE-CLASS ARTS

Liong Mei Yin  
Faculty of Creative Industries  
University of Tunku Abdul Rahman, 43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia  
Email: liongmy@utar.edu.my

Chang Yun Fah  
School of Business  
Taylor's University, 47500 Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia  
Email: yunfah.chang@taylors.edu.my

Chin Yee Mun  
Faculty of Creative Industries  
University of Tunku Abdul Rahman, 43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia  
Email: chinym@utar.edu.my

---

### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the perspectives of middle-class Malaysian art consumers regarding their initial engagement with visual arts, and the development of visual art consumption patterns. Despite the growing recognition of the Malaysian art industry's importance in shaping the nation's cultural identity, brand, and tourism, as highlighted in the reports of the Malaysian Creative Industries Final Report 2017, Cendana Report 2018 and 2021 respectively. There is a lack of research exploring the unique characteristics of visual arts consumption in Malaysia. Unlike Western nations, Malaysia's diverse socio-economic and cultural landscape influences art consumption in distinct ways. To address this gap, in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 middle-class non-art practitioners from Peninsular Malaysia, specifically in locations known for numerous tourist attractions, art and cultural events, galleries, and art retailers. Participants were selected based on two criteria: (1) middle-class non-art practitioners, and (2) who have engaged with visual arts consumption for two years. The findings revealed that Malaysia's visual arts consumption in Malaysia, a diverse Southeast Asian nation with a rich mix of ethnic and cultural traditions. This research contributes to understanding of visual arts consumption in developing in developing Asian countries, and its relationship with Malaysia's tourism industry amidst its growth.*

Keywords: Socio-economic, antecedent factors, experiential, cultural capital, middle-class consumer

---

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of Study

Malaysia has experienced significant economic growth, and rapid development of art galleries and expos over the years, with many visual arts exhibited in galleries and art expos in the Klang Valley, and popular art and tourist cities in Malaysia, including both highbrow arts such as fine arts products, and lowbrow arts like handicrafts and digital prints. According to the Malaysian Creative Industries' final report 2017, and the Cendana Report 2018 as well as the latest 2021, it is crucial to focus on visual arts and crafts in order to shape a vibrant, sustainable, and ambitious cultural economy for Malaysia, further raising the profile of Malaysian arts and culture, and solidifying its identity as an arts destination, thus strategically putting Malaysia on the global map.

#### Research Problem

The visual arts and crafts sector, as a sister industry of tourism, can boost the country's GDP and create job opportunities. However, the antecedent and consequent factors influencing visual arts consumption, especially among the middle-class, who possess the highest purchasing power and consume the most art and cultural products, remain underexplored (Eto et al., 2017; Koh & Sethi, 2024). Furthermore, the consumption of visual arts in the context of developing Asian nations has not been fully investigated. This research targeted areas of Peninsular Malaysia that are home to the top tourist and cultural spots, such as Johor, Selangor, Penang, Malacca, and Negeri Sembilan. Among these, Penang and Malacca are UNESCO heritage sites. Existing Western literature on arts consumption has offered insights for this study. Using DiMaggio (1978) and Bourdieu's (1984) frameworks, the research identified factors specifically for Malaysian middle-class non-art practitioners (MMCNAPs).

#### Research Aim and Objective

The central aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding, from the perspective of art consumers, of the factors influencing their initial engagement with visual arts consumption and how these factors shape their subsequent consumption patterns. The literature review, particularly in Western contexts, revealed that art and cultural consumption patterns are primarily stratified by education, occupation, cultural capital, and habitus.

Hence, the main objective of this study is to explore and develop a theory of visual art consumption patterns among Malaysian Middle-Class Non-Art Practitioners (MMCNAP). To achieve this, the study will focus on the following specific objectives:

To RQ 1: To investigate the socio-economic factors, such as income, education, occupation, that influence MMCNAP's initial engagement and sustained participation in visual arts consumption.

To RQ2: To analyse the experiential factors, such as cultural capital, habitus and field, that influence the MMCNAP's visual art consumption.

To RQ3: To examine how cultural capital and habitus interact with socio-economic and experiential factors to influence MMCNAP's visual arts consumption pattern.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this study, a review of the existing literature has been conducted for the key concepts relevant to this research paper.

### **Factors Influencing Art and Cultural Consumption**

Research shows that the consumption of art and cultural products varies by socialisation, social class, and lifestyle (Alderson et al., 2007; Bennett et al., 2008; Bourdieu, 1979; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Chan & Turner, 2017; DiMaggio & Useem, 1978; Katz-Gerro, 1999). Social class and occupation have been found to significantly influence art consumers' tastes (DiMaggio, 1982; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Peterson & Simkus, 1992; Reeves & de Vries, 2019). Among these consumer characteristics, social status is more strongly linked to individualisation than class and income. Other studies have examined socio-economic factors like social class, income, and education, which affect the consumption of high arts and pop art (Bourdieu, 1987; Katz-Gerro, 1999; Katz-Gerro & Gavit, 1998).

Ganzeboom (1982) found a strong correlation between income and arts consumption, with higher-income individuals having more discretionary spending to purchase art, attend exhibitions, and support visual arts institutions. Sullivan (2001) explored how socio-economic status (SES) and family impact cultural consumption, showing that higher-SES families have more resources to expose their children to diverse cultural experiences. Chan and Goldthorpe (2007) demonstrated that lifestyle choices, including leisure activities and hobbies, significantly impact cultural engagement. Those with intellectual and creative pursuits are more likely to attend art exhibitions, and literary events.

Education has emerged as the most significant factor among socio-economic aspects like social class, status, and income (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Chan & Turner, 2017). Heath (1999) showed that early art experiences, particularly in community settings, predict adult cultural participation, aligning with Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital, which emphasises that early exposure to the arts develops cultural knowledge and skills that influence lifelong cultural practices.

Peer influence through social networks also impacts cultural consumption patterns as individuals are often swayed by the cultural practices of their peers. Katz-Gerro (1999) highlighted that social interactions, and peer recommendations shape cultural tastes, and encourage participation in cultural activities. This aligns with Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), who found that early exposure to the arts creates a habitus, a set of dispositions guiding lifelong cultural consumption.

Bennett et al. (2009) explored how personal interests and preferences, shaped by lifestyle, influence cultural consumption, finding that individuals with eclectic tastes participate in a wide range of cultural activities. Hence, the factors influencing cultural product consumption are diverse, and require further study (Reeves, 2019; van Rees, Vermunt, Verboord, 1999).

### **Middle Class and Art and Cultural Consumption**

Past studies indicate that countries with a robust middle-class experience stronger economic growth. A strong middle class supports demand for luxury products and services, and plays a crucial role in sustaining small-and-medium enterprises, boosting the entrepreneurial sector (The Edge Market, 2020). In China, the middle class is seen as a leading force in consumption (Zhao, 2005), while in Japan, middle-class individuals use art consumption as a tool for social mobility (Oh, 2014).

Globally, the middle-class is considered an aspirational group that can afford more than basic needs, measured through consumption metrics, aspiration levels, and wealth (The Edge Market, 2020). In advanced Western capitalist societies like Canada, France, England, and the Netherlands, the middle class dominates cultural product consumption. Studies consistently show that attendees of museums and art events, such as the theatre, opera, and ballet, are primarily professionals, managers, and middle-class individuals who are affluent and well-educated (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004; Oh, 2014; Ponte & Campos, 2018; Rick, 2019; Sintas & Álvarez, 2004).

In Malaysia, the middle-class benefits from global trends predicting that Asia will host the world's largest consumer market. This growth will enhance the middle class's role in global demand for goods and services in the coming decades. While this emergence presents challenges, it also offers significant business opportunities. Understanding middle-class consumption patterns within Malaysia's economy would be essential for marketers as this segment grows in size and importance (Koh & Sethi, 2024).

### **Visual Arts Consumption**

In this study, visual art consumption refers to the engagement with visual art products and activities. Following Chan and Goldthorpe's (2007) expansion of visual arts as a third cultural domain in social stratification and cultural consumption studies, it

includes: (i) Cultural Festival Participation: Attendance at cultural festivals featuring crafts and other art forms. (ii) Personal Space Aesthetics: Home and office decorations, including wall displays of artworks, prints, paintings, drawings, and artifacts. (iii) Domestic Art Engagement: Activities such as reading high-quality art books, reproducing art digitally, and downloading digital images of artworks. (ii) Public Art Interaction: Appreciation of public art forms like advertisements and graffiti. Hence, visual art products referenced in this study include paintings, drawings, sculptures, crafts, digital prints, high-quality reproduction art books, internet-downloaded art images, and public art (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Halle, 1993; Laumann & House, 1970).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed in-depth interviews to explore the experiences, motivations, and patterns of visual arts consumption among Malaysian middle-class non-art practitioners (MMCNAPs). In-depth interviews, a qualitative research technique, were chosen for their ability to provide rich, detailed data on participants' personal experiences and subjective perspectives (Creswell, 2014). This method aligns with the approach recommended by Seidman (2013), who emphasised the value of open-ended conversations to understand the meanings individuals attach to their experiences. By focusing on a small sample, the study aimed to uncover the nuances of MMCNAPs' engagement with visual arts, allowing for a deeper understanding of the factors that shape their consumption behaviours.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at participants' chosen locations, which facilitated a more comfortable environment and encouraged participants to share their thoughts openly (Kvale, 1996). As an unstructured method, the interviews followed a semi-structured guide consisting of open-ended questions, which allowed for flexibility in exploring participants' art consumption history, preferences, motivations, and the factors influencing their decisions. This approach mirrors the recommendations of Patton (2015), who highlighted the importance of flexibility in qualitative interviews to adapt to the emerging themes and issues raised by participants.

Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and analysed in English. The transcription process followed the standards outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), ensuring accuracy in capturing participants' narratives. The data were analysed using a thematic coding process, drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu (1984) and DiMaggio (1978) to categorise and interpret the findings. Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and field (1984) provided a lens for understanding the social and cultural factors that influence art consumption, while DiMaggio's (1978) framework on cultural participation helped contextualise the motivations and patterns of engagement with the arts within a broader social stratification context.

Using this methodology, the study was able to identify patterns and associations within the data, facilitating a comparative analysis of the participants' experiences. The coding process followed the guidelines of Saldana (2016), with codes assigned directly from the transcripts to ensure the findings were grounded in the participants' own words. This approach allowed for a rich, grounded understanding of the factors influencing visual arts consumption among MMCNAPs, contributing to the growing body of literature on art consumption in middle-class populations.

## **Data Collection**

### **Interviewee Profile**

Participants consisted of 30 art consumers, who were Malaysian middle-class non-art practitioners (MMCNAPs) from Peninsular Malaysia, particularly from locations with the most tourist spots, art museum galleries, art expos, and cultural events. These locations included Johor, Selangor, Penang, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, and Perak (Cendana Report 2021, Tourism Malaysia, 2021), with Penang and Malacca also being UNESCO heritage sites. The participants selected were aged 18 years and above, and had been consuming visual arts for at least two years. Among the interviewees, male and female participants were coded # and \* respectively.

This section presents and discusses data on the factors influencing visual arts consumption among MMCNAPs, organised by theme. The analysis was based on the research objectives and supported by key interviewee quotes. Propositions about the antecedent factors affecting initial engagement and outcomes of visual arts consumption were developed from the qualitative data.

### **Socio-Economic Background of MMCNAPs in Visual Arts Consumption**

To specifically examine the socio-economic factors that influenced the MMCNAPs' visual arts consumption, Table 1 presents the details of the participants' socio-economic background, including occupation, education, and income level, and how these factors influence the visual arts consumption of MMCNAPs. There were four socio-economic categories that influence the visual arts consumptions of MMCNAPs. Interviewees were asked how they started, and if these factors influenced their visual arts consumption pattern. Table 1 also shows that the most significant socio-economic factor that influenced MMCNAPs' visual art consumption was their income. The least significant factor was occupation and education, followed by the combination of occupation, education, and income. A total of twenty out of thirteen were influenced by socio-economic factors. Only four interviewees (\*1, \*11, #12, #13) were not influenced by these socio-economic factors whatsoever. The income level of the males was higher than that of females, as there were 10 males out of 11 with M4 income from RM8,700 to RM10,957. In this category, there was only one female. Hence, the male interviewees earned more than the females.

Refer to Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Socio-economic factors (Occupation, Education & Income) in visual arts consumption of MMCNAPs (n=30)**

No	Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Visual Arts Consumption	Interviewee	Total no. of incidences
1.	Occupation	Art exhibitor/art gallerist	#8, #14
		Art gallerist & art insurer	*16
		Chinese orchestral performer	#30
		Informal art exhibitor	#28
2.	Income	RM 4,850-RM 5,879 (M1)	*6, *15, *24
		RM 5,880-RM 7,099 (M2)	*18, *19
		RM 7,110-RM 8,699 (M3)	#13, *22, #27
		RM 8,700-RM 10,957 (M4)	#17, #10, #23
3.	Occupation		*9*, #29
	Income		
4.	Occupation		
	Education		#21, #26
	Income		

# male  
\* female

### Socio-Economic Factors' Influence on Visual Arts Consumption of MMCNAPs

Previous research has highlighted that socio-economic factors, such as income, occupation, education, and gender, significantly influence arts consumption behaviours and patterns (DiMaggio & Useem, 1978; Jancovich, 2017). This study corroborated these findings through in-depth interviews, identifying key themes that explain how these factors affect visual arts consumption.

#### (i) Influence of Occupation on Visual Arts Consumption

Occupations within Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) often show varied patterns of arts consumption. Individuals with roles such as art gallerists, art entrepreneurs, and orchestral performers generally exhibited higher levels of art engagement (Campbell, 2018). The following quotes illustrate how occupation influences arts consumption:

Participant #8: "My background as an event organiser has significantly influenced me."

Participant #14: "I have been involved in cultural participation and consumption from 1985 till now, starting with selling books and art products."

Participant #16: "Occupation is the main reason for my active art consumption."

Participant #28: "I like to collect. Trading art has improved my quality of life."

Participant #30: "I acquired my first collection through performing in a Chinese orchestral association."

These responses aligned with past research suggesting that occupation can enhance arts consumption due to increased exposure and opportunities related to cultural capital (Reeves, 2018; DiMaggio & Useem, 1974).

### **(ii) Influence of Income on Visual Arts Consumption**

Income was a critical determinant in shaping arts consumption patterns. Higher income enabled individuals to participate in and support diverse art activities. The interviews revealed that many participants began consuming and purchasing art when their financial situation improved:

Participant #10: "I started consuming visual art when I began earning my own living."

Participant #13: "I began serious art collecting after achieving a stable income."

Participant #24: "I started buying art pieces as soon as I had my own income."

Participant #27: "I began collecting art as soon as my financial situation allowed it."

Participant #6: "My art consumption power increased significantly with my rising income."

These findings were consistent with existing studies showing that higher income correlates with increased participation in art activities (Bone et al., 2021). Price sensitivity also emerged as a factor, indicating that income level affected purchasing decisions:

Participant #18: "I have to consider my budget when buying art."

Participant #19: "My income level affects my art consumption and collecting."

Participant #22: "My choices were limited by my earnings, so I focused on affordable pieces."

Participant #23: "I only started serious art collecting when my income improved."

These observations confirmed that price sensitivity varied with income, and impacted arts consumption decisions (Goldsmith et al., 2010; Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015).

### **(iii) Influence of Education on Visual Arts Consumption**

Education played a pivotal role in shaping arts consumption habits. Higher educational levels were associated with greater engagement in cultural activities. However, educational background also limited exposure to certain art forms:

Participant #21: "My educational background in drawing influenced my interest in art."

Participant #3: "I avoid certain art forms like Chinese ink paintings due to my English education."

These statements reflected the idea that education shapes both the ability to appreciate, and the preferences for different types of art (Bourdieu, 1984; Peterson, 1992).

### **(iv) Influence of Occupation and Income on Visual Arts Consumption**

The combination of occupation and income also affected arts consumption. Participants indicated that both factors together shaped their art engagement:

Participant #9: "My occupation and income level allowed me to continue my art consumption and engagement."

Participant #29: "I began collecting art and running a gallery when my income increased."

These insights aligned with previous research suggesting that socio-economic status, through both occupation and income, facilitated higher arts consumption due to increased resources, and cultural capital (Katz-Gerro, 1999; Bourdieu, 1984).

### **(v) Influence of Occupation, Education, and Income on Visual Arts Consumption**

The interplay of occupation, education, and income collectively influenced visual arts consumption. Participants shared how these factors worked together to shape their art engagement:

Participant #21: "I began purchasing art in my 40s when my income improved, influenced by my background in art and running a gallery."

Participant #26: "My art interest started in secondary school, but I only began collecting seriously after gaining financial stability and starting an art enterprise."

These findings underscored the complex relationship between occupation, education, and income in influencing art consumption. This aligned with Western studies that link these socio-economic factors to art purchase intentions, and consumption patterns (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; DiMaggio & Useem, 1978; Jancovich, 2017).

**Experiential Background of MMCNAPs in Visual Arts Consumption**

Table 2 presents the empirical findings on the experiential factors that encouraged MMCNAPs’ involvement in visual arts consumption. These findings were analysed in relation to the dimensions of cultural capital, habitus, and field. Table 2 is as follows:

**Table 2: Experiential factors (Cultural Capital, Habitus & Field) in visual arts consumption of MMCNAPs (N=30)**

No	Experiential Factors Influencing MMCNAPs’ Visual Arts Consumption	Interviewee	Total no. of incidences
1.	Cultural Capital	Always travelling abroad	*1, #10, #27
		Studying in UK and always travelling	#3, #23, #25
2.	Habitus	Brother is an art collector	*2, #13
		Influenced by family background and the whole community in art and cultural practices; Mother loves making arts & crafts, and the sister is an artist	*18
		Early exposure from environment and schooling	*22
3.	Cultural Capital & Habitus	Early exposure from the environment and travelling a lot  Parents love travelling & visiting museums & galleries, and consuming arts & crafts; they always took her to do that since young, so she also enjoys doing that now.	*11, *15
4.	Cultural Capital & Field	Always travelling abroad to visit museum galleries, and also in the art business trading artworks	#8, *14, *16, #17, #28
5.	Cultural Capital, Habitus & Field	Great grandfather was an art collector; father is an art teacher, artist & art collector; since young, father cultivated consuming & learning art, mingled with lots of father’s artist friends.	#5
		Father is an art teacher, artist & art collector; since young, father cultivated consuming & learning art, mingled with lots of father’s artist friends.	*7
		Mother is art lecturer in art & design school & consumed lots of arts & crafts products; always went to visit arts & crafts exhibitions since young	*9
		Travelled a lot, been working & living abroad for more than 15 years in Singapore & Shanghai, having a good friend working in Christie’s auction house in mainland China, been attending Christie’s auction house, acquired lots of contacts and knowledge; parents are art collectors.	#12

---

The tradition of her community and personal culture.	*19
Husband and she have been involved in art collecting & operating private home galleries, always attending museums and galleries & auction houses; now, inherited the legacy from late husband	*20
Studied diploma in fine arts; brother is art collector; operating a gallery now.	#21
Lived in European countries when she was young, so have been attending museum galleries, and mother and grandpa are art collectors. Currently travel abroad for work, and able to visit lots of art galleries and museums.	*24
Influenced by art teacher; used to work as a building illustrator before operating art galleries, and is also a private art collector apart from the gallery's art collection; travelled a lot to visit museums and galleries since his early 20s.	#26
Travelled a lot, family influenced; exposure to art during secondary school; and occupation as an oriental orchestral performer.	#30

---

# male  
\*female

### Experiential Factors' Influence on Visual Arts Consumption of MMCNAPs

This study explored how experiential factors, informed by Bourdieu's (1984) theories of cultural capital, habitus, and field, influenced visual arts consumption.

#### (i) Influence of Cultural Capital on Visual Arts Consumption

Experiential factors, such as travelling and studying abroad, significantly shaped cultural capital, a key element in determining arts consumption, and status display (Bourdieu, 1984). Participants frequently mentioned that such international experiences influenced their art preferences.

Participant #3 noted, "It started when I studied and travelled in the UK...went to a lot of museums, galleries, art auctions, and art showcases."

Similarly, Participant #25 stated, "When I was a student overseas and travelled around, I always made it a point to visit art museums and galleries."

These experiences illustrated how cultural capital, formed through travel and study, impacted ongoing engagement with the visual arts (Lizardo, 2006; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007).

#### (ii) Influence of Habitus on Visual Arts Consumption

Habitus, shaped by early life experiences and family influence, was crucial in understanding arts consumption patterns. Participants highlighted how their family environments and early education fostered an art appreciation.

Participant #2 shared, "When I was small, my father always took me to the shop to purchase art and cultural products."

Participant #18 emphasised, "I come from a community where art is held in very high regard. My mother is very artful; she did all the stitching to our clothes in those days."



These insights reflected how family and early exposure to art shaped tastes and practices, aligning with Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Bourdieu, 1984).

### **(iii) Influence of Cultural Capital and Habitus on Visual Arts Consumption**

The intersection of cultural capital and habitus offered a comprehensive understanding of arts consumption. Early exposure to the arts through family or educational settings created lasting dispositions towards art engagement.

Participant \*11 noted, "I think I started when I was young, since my primary school, as I loved drawing and making crafts...planned visits to museum galleries and arts and crafts markets in my itinerary during travelling."

Participant \*15 stated, "My love for experiencing and consuming art has been influenced by my parents; my parents always brought me to visit or travel to local attractions."

These reflections were supported by past studies of how early exposure and family influences fostered long-term arts consumption habits (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

### **(iv) Influence of Field in Visual Arts Consumption**

Professional and social fields significantly impacted arts consumption. Individuals in art-related professions, or with strong cultural networks exhibited deeper art engagement.

Participant #8 shared, "I started consuming art in my early 20s when I started travelling...visited museum galleries and churches to see the artistic value of the artworks."

Participant #14 mentioned, "I have been in cultural participation and consumption from 1985 till now... Gradually, we developed and set up a cultural publisher."

These insights illustrate how professional and social environments enhanced art appreciation and involvement (Bourdieu, 1984; Katz-Gerro, 1999).

### **(v) Influence of Cultural Capital, Habitus, and Field in Visual Arts Consumption**

The combined influence of cultural capital, habitus, and field significantly shaped visual arts consumption. Participants from art-connoisseur families, or those with strong professional ties to art showed sustained interest in art.

Participant #5 highlighted, "I am born into a family of art collectors... A wide range of diverse art collections has been inherited for four generations."

Participant \*9 noted, "My contact with art is because my mother was a lecturer in the UiTM Art and Design faculty... Exposed to the art scene from a very young age."

These statements emphasised how familial and professional environments contributed to enduring arts consumption patterns (DiMaggio, 1982; Bourdieu, 1984).

## **DISCUSSION**

Generally, the research findings revealed that the factors influencing MMCNAPs' visual arts consumption are complex, involving antecedent and consequent factors within socio-economic and experiential dimensions. These included the socio-economic factors of income, education, and occupation, and the experiential factors of lifestyle, early exposure, family, and the interplay of family, personal interests, professional environments, and social networks. These dimensions are further discussed as below.

### **Socio-economic Factors**

In terms of the MMCNAPs' socio-economic background, income was the most influential antecedent factor in influencing visual arts consumption, followed by education, and occupation. Most of the respondents expressed that they began purchasing visual arts and crafts products once they had income. From the empirical findings, they were often concerned with the budget, therefore also indicating a link to price sensitivity, which is supported by past studies comparing the levels of demand and price sensitivity among arts consumers, categorised by socio-economic characteristics, such as age, income, formal education level, and gender (Kolhede et al., 2022; Mumcu & Kimzan, 2015).

Apart from that, more female interviewees expressed how income level influenced their visual arts and crafts consumption, even though they were in the middle-income group in Malaysia with a household income between RM4,850 and RM10,959 (DOSM, 2020). A few of them indirectly mentioned that they could only afford art they liked within their budget, highlighting the inequality in art consumption among Malaysia's middle-income professionals. In this circumstance, their visual arts and crafts consumption was limited by their income, although their taste and preferences evolved along with their purchasing power.



Even the higher-earning males mentioned that they were looking for art that were reasonably priced or inexpensive that they could afford within their budget. This was also the case with the art connoisseurs, who mentioned that their early engagement in visual arts and crafts consumption for this art collection was limited by their income. This aligned with past studies, whereby higher income was associated with increased art consumption and participation (Bone, et.al., 2021). Similar to this study's finding, Chan and Goldthorpe (2007) discovered inequalities in art consumption due to income in their research exploring how income disparities affect participation in cultural activities. Hence, such inequalities do exist among middle-class art consumers in Southeast Asian developing countries. It is aligned with the past studies of Embong (2002); the inequality of income of the Malaysian middle -class has not been resolved, which resulted in the inequality of visual arts and cultural consumption of MMCNAP.

The second significant antecedent factor influencing the MMCNAPs was education. It was found that higher education had a significant impact on cultural consumption among the respondents, as those with higher education levels participated more in different types of cultural and visual arts and crafts consumption activities. Therefore, the finding shows that the impact of education on visual arts and crafts consumption in Southeast Asian developing countries is as significant as it is in the West, which is supported by past studies in Western contexts (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Chan & Turner, 2017), the educational factor is a strong predictor of visual art and cultural consumption.

Hence, the findings of the current study are consistent with other research in that socio-economic status has a direct correlation with participation in art and cultural activities, and the factors of social class and occupation influence the tastes of art consumers of cultural products (Di Maggio, 1982; Peterson & Simkus, 1992; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Reeves & de Vries, 2019).

### **Experiential Factors**

Experiential factors, such as travel and lifestyle choices, early exposure, and family influences, significantly influenced MMCNAPs' visual arts consumption. These align with Giddens' theory that lifestyle choices result from individual agency and social structures, reflecting both personal preferences, and social contexts (Giddens, 1984; Miseng, 2020). Childhood experiences with parental involvement in cultural activities, such as museum visits, increased the likelihood of art engagement later in life. Early exposure through schools, work environments, and social networks contributed to an omnivorous consumption pattern.

Furthermore, the interplay between cultural capital, habitus, and field was critical in shaping visual arts consumption patterns. Family influence, personal interests, professional environments, and social networks collectively influenced cultural tastes and preferences. This supports the theoretical framework of habitus and cultural consumption, where cultural capital and field significantly impact individuals' tastes and practices (Sapiro, 2023).

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus offered a framework for understanding cultural consumption patterns, highlighting the roles of family, community, and lifestyle choices, such as travel, in shaping cultural capital, and consumption practices. Work environments provided access to cultural activities, aligning with DiMaggio's (1987) view on artistic genre classification systems, and their socio-cultural influences. Hence, this finding is supported by Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical framework of habitus and cultural consumption, which described how continuous exposure to cultural activities in both personal and professional life can enhance cultural appreciation and consumption. It also aligns with the recent work that cultural capital, habitus, and field significantly influence art and cultural consumption by shaping the art consumer's tastes, practices, and interactions within various cultural contexts (Newman et al., 2013). Wilken and Lieven (2016) also had similar results, discovering that cultural capital, financial resources, social networks, time pressure (work and family situations), habitus, and field were primary factors in explaining arts participation and consumption.

Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate that Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus provides a robust framework for understanding how MMCNAPs started and continue to engage in visual arts and crafts consumption. The family, community, peers, and lifestyle choices, including travel, play crucial roles in creating the MMCNAPs' respective cultural capital, and their subsequent consumption practices. This aligns with DiMaggio (1987), who postulated that the variety in artistic genre classifications is due to them being influenced by social structure, educational systems, and cultural dimensions, in addition to artistic production methods. Empirical evidence also supports the notion that these factors collectively contribute to the development and reinforcement of habitus, thereby influencing cultural consumption patterns over time.

Generally, the research findings revealed that the factors influencing MMCNAPs' visual arts consumption are complex, involving antecedent and consequent factors within socio-economic and experiential dimensions. These included the socio-economic factors of income, education, and occupation, and the experiential factors of lifestyle, early exposure, family, and the interplay of family, personal interests, professional environments, and social networks. On top of that, consumption patterns represent how people behave to fulfil their physical, emotional, and social needs (Akdoğan et al., 2021), Consumers' consumption decisions are influenced by their personal values and ideologies (Sheth et al., 1991; Gilboa et al., 2020).

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has enhanced understanding of the antecedent factors shaping the visual arts consumption patterns of Malaysian middle-class non-art practitioners (MMCNAPs). The finding revealed that the interplay of socio-economic income, education and occupation, and experiential factors of cultural capital and habitus relating to travelling, personal lifestyle, and early exposure are the antecedent factors in shaping the engagement of MMCNAP's visual art consumption. Particularly, the socio-economic factor of income factors as the most significant factors among the socio-economic and experiential of the personal lifestyle choice, early exposures are the key factors of initial engagement of MMCNAP's in visual art and cultural activities. These factors collectively shape cultural tastes and preferences, underscoring the complexity of cultural consumption. Overall, the factors influencing MMCNAPs' initial visual arts engagement, as an experience in a developing Asian country, differ from those in the West.

Furthermore, this study offered practical insights for stakeholders aiming to promote and support the accessibility of visual arts to encourage MMCNAPs' participation and appreciation. Cultural tourism can enhance exposure to diverse arts and

crafts traditions. Government policy should focus on accessibility initiatives, which include reducing financial barriers, and increasing accessibility for lower-income groups through free admission days, subsidised tickets, and community outreach programmes. The government could also consider enhancing arts education in schools, especially in lower-income areas, to build cultural capital, and foster a lifelong appreciation for the visual arts, addressing art consumption inequality as per Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) no. 10. Policies should also support the development of cultural tourism infrastructures, creating opportunities for travellers to engage with local arts and crafts.

However, the limitation of the study is that cultural factors have not been focused enough. It should be further explored and examined from the perspective of culture. Besides, the target respondents need to be focused on occupational; it needs to exclude the self-employed middle-class. Hence, these socio-economic and experiential factors should be further studied and examined by a larger scale of quantitative survey, including the construct of cultural factors. In addition to the income group of top 20 by professionals, who are not self-employed. Apart from that, the consumption values behind the factors of the MMCNAP in visual art consumption need to be further explored, and the consumption values examined.

Besides, the government policy should emphasise (i) accessibility. Initiatives: To promote equitable access to visual arts, policies could focus on reducing financial barriers and increasing accessibility for lower-income groups. This includes free admission days, subsidised tickets, and community outreach programs. (ii) Arts Education: Enhancing arts education in schools, particularly in lower-income areas, can help build cultural capital early, fostering a lifelong appreciation for the visual arts regardless of socio-economic status. Nevertheless, this can contribute to the government policy to improve the inequality of art consumption according to SDG no 10. Furthermore, the policies should support the development of cultural tourism infrastructure and create opportunities for travellers to engage with local arts and crafts.

## REFERENCES

- Akademi Sains Malaysia. (2017). *Mega Science 3.0 Creative Industry Sectors Final Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.akademisains.gov.my/asm-publication/mega-science-3-creative-industry-sector/>
- Akdoğan, L., Durucu, A., & Durmaz, Y. (2021). Cultural factors affecting consumer behaviour: Social class. *International Journal of Research Publications*, 79(1), 69-76. doi: 10.47119/IJRP100791620212033Alderson et al. (2007).
- Bennett, T., Savage, M., Silva, E., Warde, A., Gayo-Cal, M., & Wright, D. (2009). Culture class distinction. *Culture Class Distinction*, 1–311. doi.org/10.4324/9780203930571
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture, Volume 4*. The SAGE Publication.
- Bone, J., Bu, F., Fluharty, M., Paul, E., Sonke, J., & Fancourt, D. (2021). Who engages in the arts in the United States? A comparison of several types of engagement using data from The General Social Survey. *BMC Public Health*, 21. doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11263-0.
- Cendana. (2018). *Kuala Lumpur As a Cultural Agency*. The Cendana Report. Retrieved from [https://www.cendana.com.my/clients/asset\\_7133D9E8-5529-4477-AE06-9B65BE281DE3/contentms/img/Library/Report/CendanaReport\\_Option-2\\_FA\\_For-Web\(190220\).pdf](https://www.cendana.com.my/clients/asset_7133D9E8-5529-4477-AE06-9B65BE281DE3/contentms/img/Library/Report/CendanaReport_Option-2_FA_For-Web(190220).pdf)
- Cendana. (2020). *Milestone Report*. Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA). (n.d.). About Us. Retrieved from [https://www.cendana.com.my/clients/asset\\_7133D9E8-5529-4477-AE06-9B65BE281DE3/contentms/img/pdf/reports/Cendana-Milestone-Report-part-3.pdf](https://www.cendana.com.my/clients/asset_7133D9E8-5529-4477-AE06-9B65BE281DE3/contentms/img/pdf/reports/Cendana-Milestone-Report-part-3.pdf)
- <https://www.cendana.com.my/about-us/who-we-are>.
- Cendana. (2021). *CREATIVE ECONOMY 2021 FORUM: FOCUS ON ARTS & CULTURE*. Retrieved from [file:///D:/Report\\_MalaysiaVisualArtIndustries@2023/2021\\_Cendana%20Report\\_Creative-Economy-2021-Forum\\_Focus-on-Arts-Culture.pdf](file:///D:/Report_MalaysiaVisualArtIndustries@2023/2021_Cendana%20Report_Creative-Economy-2021-Forum_Focus-on-Arts-Culture.pdf)
- Chan, T. W., & Goldthorpe, J. H. (2007). Class and status: The conceptual distinction and its empirical relevance. *American Sociological Review*, 72(4), 512–532. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240707200402>
- Malaysia. Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal. (2020). *The source of Malaysia, Household Income & Basic Amenities Survey Report 2019*. [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=120&bul\\_id=TU00TmRhQ1N5TUxHVWN0T2VjbXJYZz09&menu\\_id=amVoWU54UTl0a21NWmdhMjFMMWcyZz09](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=120&bul_id=TU00TmRhQ1N5TUxHVWN0T2VjbXJYZz09&menu_id=amVoWU54UTl0a21NWmdhMjFMMWcyZz09)
- De Vries, R., & Reeves, A. (2020). What Does it Mean to Be a Cultural Omnivore? Conflicting Visions of Omnivorousness in Empirical Research. doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3541022
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DiMaggio, P. (1987). Classification in Art. *American Sociological Review*, 52, 440. doi.org/10.2307/2095290.
- DiMaggio, P., & Useem, M. (1978). Cultural Democracy in a Period of Cultural Expansion: The Social Composition of Arts Audiences in the United States. *Social Problems*, 26(2), 179-197.
- Embong, A. (2002). State-led modernisation and the new middle class in Malaysia. doi.org/10.1057/9781403914286.
- Esman, M. (1991). Growth and Ethnic Inequality: Malaysia's New Economic Policy. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 50, 734–736. doi.org/10.2307/2057637.
- Eto, Kunio & Okubo, S. (2017). The new middle class: Enjoying the finer things. HAKUHODO. Retrieved from <https://www.hakuhodo-global.com/news/the-new-chinese-middle-class-enjoying-the-finer-things.html>
- Ganzeboom, H. (1982). *Explaining differential participation in high-cultural activities: a confrontation of information-processing and status-seeking theories*, in W. Raub (ed). Theoretical Models and Empirical Analyses, Utrecht: E.S. Publications, pp 186–205.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Gilboa, I., Minardi, S., & Wang, F. (2020). Consumption of Values. *Macroeconomics: Consumption*. doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3740458.

- Goldsmith, R. E., Flynn, L. R., & Kim, D. (2010). Status consumption and price sensitivity. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 18(4), 323–338. doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679180402
- Jancovich, L. (2017). The participation myth. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23, 107-121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1027698>.
- Katz-Gerro, T. (1999). Cultural Consumption and Social Stratification: Leisure Activities, Musical Tastes, and Social Location. *Sociological Perspectives*, 42(4), 627-646.
- Koh, S.G.M., Sethi, A. (2024). Case 16: The Rising Middle Class and Changing Consumption Pattern: Its Impact on Businesses. *Springer*. doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51689-4\_17
- Kolhede, E. J., Gomez-Arias, J. T., & Maximova, A. (2022). Price elasticity in the performing arts: A segmentation approach. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*. doi.org/10.1057/s41270-022-00179-2.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interview Views: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Sage Publications.
- Mak, H., & Fancourt, D. (2021). Do socio-demographic factors predict children's engagement in arts and culture? Comparisons of in-school and out-of-school participation in the Taking Part Survey. *PloS one*, 16 (2), doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246936
- Lizardo, O. (2006). How Cultural Tastes Shape Personal Networks. *American Sociological Review*, 71(5), 778807. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240607100504>
- Miseng, D. (2020). Identification and description of individual lifestyles as characteristics of life activity. *Roczniki Psychologiczne /Annals of Psychology*, 3, 233-256. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/rpsych.2019.22.3-3>
- Mumcu, Y. and Kimzan, H.S. (2015). The Effect of Visual Product Aesthetics on Consumers' Price Sensitivity. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 26, 528–534. doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00883-7
- Newman, A., Goulding, A., & Whitehead, C. (2013). How cultural capital, habitus and class influence the responses of older adults to the field of contemporary visual art, *Poetics*, 41(5):456–480. doi: 10.1016/j.poetic.2013.07.001
- Oh, Y. (2014). Shopping for art: The new middle class' art consumption in modern Japanese department stores. *Journal of Design History*, 27(4), 351–369. doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epu027
- Özkan, F. N., & Kurtuluş, S., (2022). The role of consumer characteristics on cultural consumption tendency. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Bussiness of Business Administration*. doi.org/10.1108/apjba-03-2022-0111
- Patton, M. (2015). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Sage Publications.
- Peterson, R. A. (1992). Understanding Audience Segmentation: From Elite and Mass to Omnivore and Univore. *Poetics*, 21(4), 243–258.
- Peterson, R. A., & Kern, R. M. (1996). Changing highbrow taste: From snob to omnivore. *American Sociological Review*, 61(5), 900–907. doi.org/10.2307/2096460
- Ponte, L. F., & Campos, R. D. (2018). Taste transformation in the context of social mobility. *BAR - Brazilian Administration Review*. doi.org/10.1590/1807-7692bar2018170100
- Reeves, A. (2015). Neither Class nor Status: Arts Participation and the Social Strata. *Sociology*, 49, 624–642. doi.org/10.1177/0038038514547897.
- Reeves, A., & de Vries., R. (2018). Can cultural consumption increase future earnings? Exploring the economic returns to cultural capital. *British Journal of Sociology*, 70 (1), 214–240. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12374>
- Rick, A. (2019). The “Art Supermarkets” Catering to China’s Growing Middle Class. *Arts and the Market*. Retrieved from <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-art-supermarkets-catering-chinas-growing-middle-class>.
- Saldana, J. (2016). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Sage Publications Inc.
- Sidiq, H., & Qadir, B. (2023). The relationship between art and education. *Journal of the University of Raparin*. [https://doi.org/10.26750/vol\(10\).no\(1\).paper14](https://doi.org/10.26750/vol(10).no(1).paper14).
- Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. Teachers College Press, New York.
- Shapiro, G. (2023). *The Sociology of Literature*. Stanford University Press.
- Shatilov, V. (2023). Increasing cultural capital through the act of demonstrative consumption of works of art. *Social, Humanitarian, Microbiological Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.37313/2413-9645-2023-25-92-109-117>.
- Sheth, J.N., Newman, B.I. & Gross, B.L. (1991). Why We Buy What We Buy: A Theory of Consumption Values. *Journal of Business Research*, 22, 159–170. doi.org/10.1016/0148-2963(91)90050-8
- Silva, E. (2008). Cultural capital and visual art in the contemporary UK. *Cultural Trends*, 17, 267–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548960802615414>.
- Sintas, J. L., & Álvarez, E. G. (2004). Omnivore versus univore consumption and its symbolic properties: Evidence from Spaniards' performing arts attendance. *Poetics*, 32(6), 471–491. doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2004.08.001
- Sullivan, A. (2001). Cultural capital and educational attainment. *Sociology*, 35(4), 893–912. doi.org/10.1177/0038038501035004006
- The Edge market (2020, March 07). Cover Story: Redefining the M40. Retrieved from <https://theedgemalaysia.com/article/cover-story-redefining-m40>
- Tourism Malaysia. (2021). *Key Performance Indicators*. Retrieved from <https://mytourismdata.tourism.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/KEY-PERFORMANCE-INDICATORS-2021.pdf>
- UNESCO World Heritage Convention. (2008). Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1223/>
- Willekens, M., & Lievens, J. (2016). Who participates and how much? Explaining non-attendance and the frequency of attending arts and heritage activities. *Poetics*, 56, 50-63. doi.org/10.1016/J.POETIC.2016.01.004.
- Zhu, D. (2016). Understanding middle-class consumers from the justification of taste: a case study of Beijing. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*. DOI 10.1186/s40711-016-0035-0