From Online Community to Entrepreneurship in Romanian Handicraft Sewing Tradition

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Abstract

The paper is an important contribution to scholarship on the relationships between online communities and entrepreneurial initiatives for business-to-consumer (B2C) in the traditional artisan market. The development of social networks based on information and communication technologies is creating the premises for a fluid circulation of people, ideas, and goods, turning the world into a "global village" (Nevzat, 2018). There is a growing market related to the handicraft industry, including the ones related to local traditions and customs. There is an increasing interest in this market, with the cultural sector representing 3.1% of the global GDP and 6.2% of job vacancies (UNESCO Launches… | UNESCO, n.y.). In 2022 the market for artisan market was valued at 752,2 billion USD with an expectancy of 1296,6 billion USD by 2028 (Research and Markets, n.y.), while the yarn and needle arts, that this research is studying, represent a 3 billion USD market in the US (GITNUX, 2023). Business in the artisan field is thriving around the world, bringing together unique local flavours and global communication channels, especially through social media. Even if, from history, the village area was the place for small initiatives and family-run businesses related to traditions and customs, the concept of business modelling in this market is still under development. This paper aims to clarify the role that social media has in defining entrepreneurial initiatives in the field of handicrafts and how online communities are supporting these activities, using the guidelines from Business Model Generation (Osterwalder et al., 2010). Data collection was carried out using netnography framework (Kozinets, 2010) by observing and analyzing the messages from online communities and other online public information and documents (Bowen, 2009). The study draws some conclusions and findings together with limitations and potential new research directions.

Keywords: *Ethno-entrepreneurship; business model generation; tradition; craft; artisan; online community*

Introduction

This section presents how major theoretical concepts relevant to this research were illustrated by scholars in the field: artisan entrepreneurship, tradition, entrepreneurship and business models, and social media impact on entrepreneurship.

Artisan entrepreneurship: The artisan entrepreneur is largely absent from the entrepreneurship literature, but fits into general notions of entrepreneurship within the sub-topic of cultural entrepreneurship (Ferreira et al., 2019). There is a definition of cultural entrepreneurship that fits the artisan one also: "the carrying out of a novel combination that results in something new and appreciated in the cultural sphere" (Swedberg, 2006 *apud* Pret & Cogan, 2019). From the cultural perspective, artisan entrepreneurship is driven by the desire to preserve cultural heritage and traditions. Artisan entrepreneurs are motivated by a sense of pride in their work and a desire to pass on their skills to future generations. There has been a visible growing

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cultural diversity in the marketplace in recent years, also due to the artisan industry that is producing a diverse range of products such as food, textiles, handicrafts, clothing, curtains, tablecloth, pottery (Ferreira et al., 2019). Artisan entrepreneurship is defined as making handcrafted goods or services that are sold to others (Ferreira et al., 2019), especially since there is an increased demand for the ones related to culture and tourism as a destination (Ratten & Ferreira, 2017). The artisan entrepreneurs are mainly in the clothing and food industries, with a clear link to the cultural heritage that they have (Tregear, 2005). This study refers to craftsmanship, as form of popular art with connections to identifying the region (Ferreira et al., 2019).

The popular art is also connected with tradition, that I mention here as "sets of beliefs, customs, teachings, values, practices, or procedures that are transmitted from generation to generation" (Beckstein, 2017:492), that are creating social cohesion and belonging to groups and communities (real or artificial). Traditions have as primary scope socializing, introducing beliefs, value systems or behavioral rules (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012:9)

Globalization and online market accessibility create a more competitive market, therefore a new range of challenges and opportunities arise in which entrepreneurship can be a successful tool to use (Hisrich et al., 2017). From the economical point of view, artisan entrepreneurship is driven by the opportunity to make a profit. Artisan entrepreneurs are skilled craftspeople who can create products that are in high demand. The goods from artisan entrepreneurship are more open to incorporating sustainability principles (Hoyte, 2019). From the psychological point of view, artisan entrepreneurs are often motivated by a desire to express themselves creatively and to make a difference in the world. Artisan entrepreneurs are a powerful combination of skills, talents, traditions, and passions that they use in creative ways for exploiting opportunities (Ramadani et al., 2019).

These are just some of the most important theories about artisan entrepreneurship, but no single theory can fully explain this complex phenomenon. In reality, artisan entrepreneurship is likely driven by a combination of factors, including cultural, economic, sociological, and psychological factors. In addition to these theories, there has been some research on the personality traits of artisan entrepreneurs. This research suggests that artisan entrepreneurs are more likely to be creative, risk-taking, and self-efficacious than the general population. They are also more likely to have a strong sense of community and a desire to preserve cultural heritage.

Overall, there is a growing body of research on artisan entrepreneurship that is helping us to better understand the factors that drive this type of entrepreneurship and the characteristics of artisan entrepreneurs. This knowledge can be used to support and develop artisan entrepreneurship, which can play an important role in economic development and cultural preservation.

Entrepreneurship and business models: In defining business models, Bourdieu's (1986) approach to entrepreneurship capital brings an important input on sociological, business and management levels, by interplaying through different forms of capital and how craft entrepreneurs utilize them to operate their businesses (Pret & Shaw, 2013). There are four types of capital as follows: cultural (technical expertise, cultural goods, education, personal qualities, and dispositions), economical (monetary assets, income, intellectual property, and tangible business assets), social (trade association memberships, network, relationship and alliances)

and symbolic (awards, trophies, diplomas, legitimacy, prestige, status, and reputation). All these aspects of a business are modeled in coherent plans that help the entrepreneurs in their quest of putting ideas into action. Although business models are more used in design services and products, especially IT, this instrument brings its value also in craftsmanship.

From past business models that were focusing on generating money and profit, scholars shifted to value creation (Ovans, 2015). The Business Model Canvas is one of the tools that is showing very easily the focus on creating and delivering value with revenue on return (Osterwalder et al., 2010). Business model is used for creating customer value by creating synergies between different components, while the organization strategy relates to overall business planning and functioning better than the competition (Richards, 2021).

Creating social value is an important goal for many artisan entrepreneurs, many of them pursuing altruistic goals as the well-being of the community. However, there is an interest in generating profits and growing the business, which just validates them as artisans instead of hobbyists (Pret & Cogan, 2019).

There is a biased opinion that artisans are poor managers in developing their business, and studies show that they are very good in exploiting opportunities, in implementing innovation and internationalization (Pret, 2019). They engage very often in product development and experimental techniques, while they can monetize quickly the craft and cultural heritage at an international level, reaching two main indicators of growth: innovation and export (Tregear, 2005). They are known as hobbyists, artisans, and entrepreneurs (Bouette & Magee, 2015).

Artisan entrepreneurs create social value through work in the community and engaging in prosocial business practices (Pret & Cogan, 2019b). They engage in deep levels of cooperation by sharing knowledge (Drummond et al., 2018) collaborating on product development and lending material support to each other (Pret et al, 2016), and also to advance the industry as a whole (Pret & Shaw, 2013). Coopetition is widely used, by creating collaborative activities among competitors. All collaborative activities are facilitated and governed by the norms of the crafts (Drakopoulou Dodd et al., 2018) Within their communities, they share trust, mutual commitment, and an overall sense of solidarity created by shared passions and experiences. This environment creates an ethos of collaboration (Drakopoulou Dodd et al., 2018) and sets norms against unaccepted behavior.

The Business Model Canvas (BMC) developed by Osterwalder et al (2010) can be used in analyzing and comparing value-creation processes from different environments. The model is an organized way of arranging the assumptions about nine areas of the business: value proposition, channels for delivery, relationship with the clients, revenue streams, key activities, key resources, key partners, and costs structure. By using this framework we are creating value for the customer and once we are beginning to iterate and compare several models we are entering the realms of strategy (Ovans, 2015) (Figure 1).

From the cultural point of view, the value "is located in the encounter or interaction between individuals (who will have all sorts of preexisting attitudes, beliefs, and levels of knowledge) on one hand, and an object or experience on the other" (Holden, 2006, p. 15). There are three types of value that culture can generate: intrinsic value (how culture affects people"), instrumental value (when culture has an economic or social purpose), and institutional value

(processes and practices that organizations adopt in order to create value for the public) (Richards, 2021).

Figure 1. Business model canvas framework
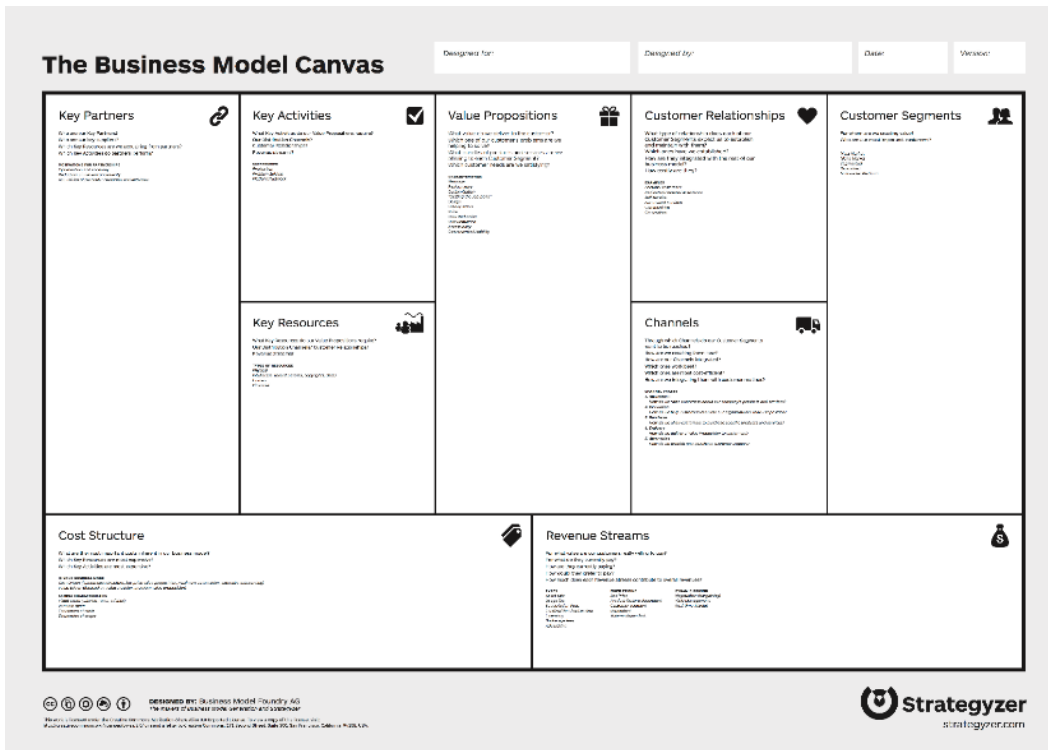
Source: Strategyzer[2]

All these types of value can be easily applied in craft entrepreneurship that is aligning in this way also with social entrepreneurship aspects, in which they generate economic value while their main purpose is directed to the society's welfare. In the context of innovative entrepreneurship done for a greater social good, there is an increasing need for dynamic organization design processes created more around values and ethics than around secure financial success (Banerjee & Mazzarella, 2022). The „social entrepreneur's value proposition targets an underserved, neglected, or highly disadvantaged population that lacks the financial means or political clout to achieve the transformative benefit on its own" (Martin & Osberg, 2007:35). The business model is adapting to the need of social aspect, and adds to value proposition also the social innovation that refers to (*Social Business Model Canvas*, n.y.).

Social media impact on entrepreneurship: User-generated content is created and exchanged through internet-based applications (Drummond et al., 2018), so that social platforms are becoming the main instruments in people socializing and creating relationships, in communicating ideas, brands, news, and information. In 2023, at mondial level the most popular social networks s are Facebook (with 2958 million users), Youtube (with 2514 million users), Whatsapp and

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[2] https://www.strategyzer.com/, accessed in 25 July 2023

Instagram (each with 2000 million users), WeChat (with 1309 million users) and TikTok (with 1051 million users), ranked by number of monthly active user (*Biggest Social Media Platforms 2023*, n.y.).

They have an important impact on the business strategy through creating new markets, communicating more efficiently with industrial partners, and creating customer relationships. Online platforms are making easier to launch new products or services, even marketing and distribution, and it is also used by entrepreneurs to increase their network identity or to develop their brands (Drummond et al., 2018).

Identity in social platforms is connected with the idea of community and belonging to a group, of making connections with others for recognition and validation (Hanson, 2014). The online community can be seen as a new way of bringing people together, with specific rules and dynamics, which interact with other forms of community, that can co-exist with the "physical communities" without opposition (Castells & Castells, 2010). Furthermore, there are virtual groups that function as communities of practice (Baym, 2010), since they are functioning around a common interest, they are building a community in virtual space, and they have a clear definition of the common practice (Wenger et al., 2002:45).

The sophisticated communication devices are fostering and sustaining the process of creation of online communities (Bowler, 2014), while these forms of gathering are "forming or manifesting cultures, the learned beliefs, values and customs that serve to order, guide and direct the behavior" (Kozinets, 2010:12). People come together for a shared purpose, while the members should be differentiated as newbies, minglers, devotees, and insiders (Kozinets, 2010), which resembles the typology of members in a community of practice (coordinator, heart of the community, active members, peripheral group, outsider) (Wenger et al., 2002).

There are five strategies can be used to increase the active involvement in an online community: (1) general community engagement, (2) ideas competitions, (3) interactive value creation, (4) participatory design, and (5) product design (Helms et al., 2012). From the lowest method, of community engagement through conversations we can reach more active members through participatory design (asking from support from members, working together) and product design based on user-input, using consumers as producers, or prosumers (Helms et al., 2012).

Methodology

An inductive empirical approach was used, following the netnography framework in the case of this study design in order to investigate and define the business initiative and models that are used in Romanian handcraft sewing traditions. As shown by the literature review, the content analysis of social media data is almost absent (Pret & Cogan, 2019b), therefore this study is looking for filling this gap. Through observation and qualitative analysis, we immersed ourselves in the online conversations in order to analyze the "reflexive conversations" that occur within the community (Bartl et al., 2016).

Due to the inquiry into the impact of online communities on entrepreneurship initiatives, this research is an instrumental case study, willing to provide insight into this phenomenon (Håkansson, 2013; Zucker, 2009). Netnography methodolodgy offered the framework for social media platforms research, while the data was enriched with information from blog, website and Youtube (Kozinets, 2010, Bowen, 2009).

In choosing the study case, Kozinets (2010) recommends that the online community (1) be relevant, (2) be active with recent and relevant communication, (3) be interactive with a rich flow of communication between members, (4) be substantial with a critical mass of communicators, (5) be heterogeneous with different kind of participants and (6) be data-rich, offering more detailed data (Kozinets, 2010, p. 89). These characteristics became observations (N) to be made for the multiple case studies documented in the first phase (Gerring, 2017).

Table 1. Applying step one for communities in Facebook for Romanian traditions and sewing

Name of the groups	Nr members	Criteria for choosing an online community (Kozinets, 2010)				
		Relevant	Rich flow	Critical mass of communicators	Heterogeneous	Data-rich
Semne Cusute în Acțiune (SCiA) (*Semne Cusute în Acțiune FB*, n.y.)	47.894	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Oltena coase ie (*Oltenia coase ie*, n.y.)	11.663	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Tesături și tehnici de cusut (*Tesături și tehnici de cusut*, n.y.)	6.658	yes	yes	no	yes	no
Invață să țeși (*Invață să țeși*, n.y.)	911	yes	no	yes	yes	no
Zestrea din Moldova (*Zestrea din Moldova*, n.y.)	20.913	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Ie Romanească pe comandă (*Ie Romanească pe comandă*, n.y.)	14.089	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Iia mea românească (*Iia mea românească*, n.y.)	5.544	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Ie Românească cusuta manual (*Ie Românească cusuta manual*, n.y.)	1661	yes	no	yes	yes	no
Păstrătorii tradiției (*Păstrătorii tradiției*, n.y.)	32.051	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
La Blouse Roumaine (*La Blouse Roumaine*, n.y.)	n/a	-	-	-	-	-
Sezatori …. (various locations)	Max 3000 each	yes	no	yes	yes	no
Tradiții … (various regions)	Max 3000 each	yes	no	yes	yes	no

In Romania, in 2023 Facebook is still the most used social media platform, this is why also the research is focused on these online groups (*Digital 2023*, 2023; *Facebook Users…*, 2023). The first step was done to create the codes "tradition", "Romanian blouse"and "gathering". As seen in Table 1, there is only one group that fits all the criteria related to the richness of the online community. "La Blouse Roumaine" was one of the initial promoters of the tradition of sewing Romanian Blouse in 2014 (Călin, 2022) and it was included in the research in order to document that they still didn't develop any online community as a group on social media.

In order to get an insight related to entrepreneurial activity in the online communities, a content analysis was made as the second step by using the Facebook search option and APIFY online software. Each group was analyzed to find out if the initiators created goods and services for the members or if the only purpose of the community was to share knowledge and show support. I analyzed if these actions were run by the founders of the community or by the members. Using the search tool from Facebook, in each group I looked for terms like: "order", "delivery", "meeting", "workshop" and "gathering". For a more detailed analysis, the last 200 posts from each online community were selected in APIFY to check the accuracy of the results. The results showed that the only online community that created an entrepreneurial initiative for the members is Semne Cusute in Actiune (SCiA).

Based on this information, a third step was made in developing a single case study research, related to the business model of the initiative that was based on the online community.

Table 2. Applying step two for communities in Facebook for Romanian traditions and sewing

Name of the group	Online community	Entrepreneurial initiative		
		Own association and shop	Recommendations for external suppliers	Promotion of individual artisans
Semne Cusute în Acțiune (SCiA)	1	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gatherings for sewing in …. (various locations)	19	No	Yes	Yes
Handloom tradition	2	No	Yes	Yes
La Blouse Roumaine	No	-	-	-
Romanian Blouse groups	3	No	Yes	Yes
Traditions for …. (various regions)	16	No	Yes	Yes

Study case online community Sewed Signs in Action

The Romanian blouse is a central piece of the traditional Romanian culture with rich symbolic meaning that was worn by women in ceremonial occasions. These pieces of the popular costume managed to survive and get re-invented from the ancestral times of village's life to nowadays modern urban. Each original piece is original, because the signs that are sewed are, in fact, a language with identity markers differentiated by regions, social status of the sewer (from materials used to show the role of the woman in the community), purpose (e.g. wedding ones) (Bolocan, 2019; Capraru, 2020; Corduneanu & Drăgan, 2017; Ionescu, 2018). The process of sewing now is easier, since a lot of curators, artisans, designers, and public figures started to promote the meaning, technique, and patterns, especially around the centenary of Romania that was celebrated in 2018 (Capraru, 2020). The online movement started to create a big snowball after 2014, when two designers joined forces[3] for establishing the International Day of Romanian Blouse and women from Romania and diaspora emerged in an enthusiastic group that started to learn how to sew their own blouses and used the online environment to re-enact the transmission of the tradition (Călin, 2022).

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[3] Interview with the initatiors Ioana Corduneanu and Andreea Tanasescu, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCSniq9nYDM accessed at 20 July 2023

Figure 2. Example of post about Romanian blouse (source: Facebook group)
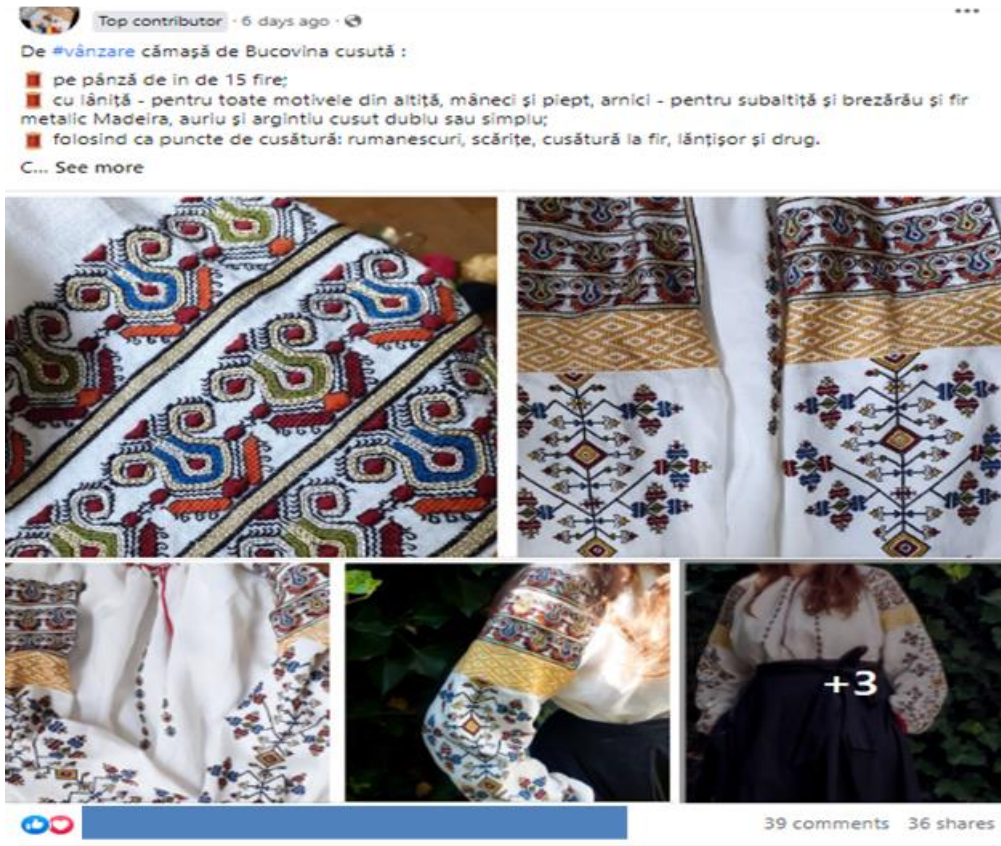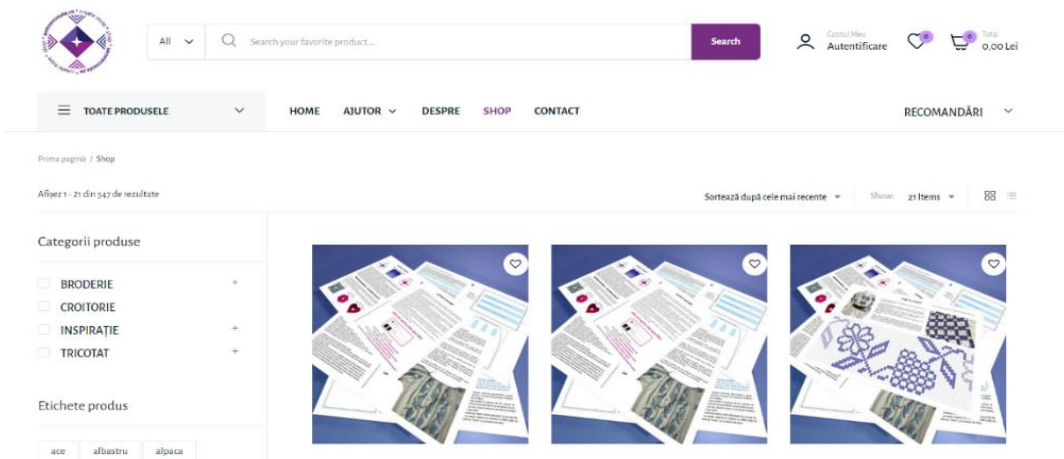

Figure 2. Screenshot of the online shop

The business is corresponding to the cultural perspective of entrepreneurship, of preserving cultural heritage, by transforming the "intangible cultural heritage into objects we can wear,

wash, gift, sell, and exhibit" (Corduneanu, 2022). Analyzing the online messages and documents, it is clear that the main drive was not related to profit, but mainly to innovate materials and processes in order to make the tradition easier to practice and more accessible to the public.

> We embroider to recover heritage techniques, to master the art of the needle and see it as an extension of ourselves. We embroider to bring our heritage shirts home and into the present, from historical exhibits of textile museums from all over the world [...]. We embroider to complete the big tableau of Romanian shirts, so that the public at large may recognize their complexity and stay away from the massproduced copies, made by machines and sold cheaply [...]. We embroider to bring hemp and *altiță* shirts into our concrete cities, in every large Romanian and European city, to prove that our heritage is alive and will live on beyond a dowry chest. We embroider to enrich the UNESCO chapter dedicated to the *altiță* shirts. We embroider to spread the word and encourage beginners to make their own shirts. We embroider to recover heritage techniques, to master the art of needle. We embroider to prove that our generation is playing its part. We embroider to dress our daughters for their graduation festivities at famous international universities. We embroidered to impress the crowds of Paris [....] We embroider to raise the alarm, to preserve and teach ancient symbols, the way we inherited them from our grandmothers. We embroider to put Romania on the map of luxury embroidery, on the international map of responsible fashion, on the map of European heritage, as an example in education. And we will continue to embroider because what we wear is what defines us, influences others and initiates discussions, favoring exchanges of information and creating change." (Corduneanu, 2022, p. 190)

Even though they are presenting themselves as a movement, it has economical dimensions, where the sales are financing the activities. Most of the online messages are from the highest engagement strategies (Helms et al., 2012) of participatory design and product design, that underline the reasons why this group is so alive and rich in comments, posts and active members even after almost 10 years. Applying Bordieu's (1986) typology of capital, the business is reaching all four of them, which shows the richness of the strategy.

Table 3. Bourdieu's types capital (1986) and SCiA

Types of capital Bordieu's (1986)	SCiA
cultural (technical expertise, cultural goods, education, personal qualities, and dispositions)	Sewing Romanian blouse expertise Products
economical (monetary assets, income, intellectual property, and tangible business assets)	Brand Prestige Drawings of the patterns
social (trade association memberships, network, relationship and alliances)	Online community of over 47.000 members Strong partnerships with cultural institutions
symbolic (awards, trophies, diplomas, legitimacy, prestige, status, and reputation)	Excellency diploma from UNESCO, European Heritage Award 2022, Creating virtual exposition by Google Arts and Culture

All the diversity of actions is showing us that SCiA went beyond hobbyist and artisan, by becoming a serious entrepreneur in the market (Bouette & Magee, 2015). We find in documents the express of cooperation and sharing knowledge between members. Also, the initiator is collaborating with the community in product development, by experimenting materials and techniques.

> "The most active members in our community were more interested in the adventure, the opportunity to experiment as much as possible: with cutting patterns, techniques, new embroidery patterns, and exquisite materials. They savored it and found joy in discovery and learning new things. Their interest, their enthusiasm and their results were our driving force. Their mindset was different, oriented towards progress, without the fear of making mistakes, knowing they will find a solution to fix problems that might arise, willing to learn and be enriched by new experiences. Each new product, each new texture was met with trust (as they knew I had tested it beforehand) and curiosity." (Corduneanu, 2022, p. 185)

Analyzing the online comments from the group and the other documents from the corpus, I identified the elements of the business model canvas, as follows:

- **Value proposition:** the cultural dimension of the activity is shown from the discussions of the members of community, and also from the founder's interviews and papers. There is an authentic desire of social innovation through contribution for reviving tradition.
- **Customers:** Since demographics of the groups are not publicly available, we analyzed the information through direct observation. Therefore, we consider that the main target group is defined by women 35-70 years, urban, while in the secondary target we could find diaspora, foreigners curious about the practice and even men (artisans or hobbyists).
- **Channels:** blog, online website, online Facebook group, YouTube channel, expositions, public events.
- **Customer relationship:** Community plays a crucial role in the customer relationships. The community grew organically from 2014 and members were involved in the process of co-creation of the products and services.
- **Revenue streams** have products related to sewing and knitting (standard kits, materials and equipment, books and printed patterns) and services (workshops). No relevant data about financial income was found because there is no public statement that the administrative entity is used exclusively for community's activities.
- **Partners** are promoted in online group with public cultural institutions (museums, ministry, cultural institutions), craft men and women in sewing, artisans for suppliers. Important cultural partners (like ASTRA Museum, Romania Peasant Museum) are mentioned as friends, hosts and big supporters. The artisan suppliers are mentioned through qualities of good people and hardworking, therefore the personal qualities are transmitted also the members of community.
- **Key activities** are present in the online discussions, since the group is like the meeting room where active members are coming with ideas, status of work, feedback.

The main activities found are acquisition of materials, sales and after-sales (shipping), community engagement, events organizing (offline gatherings, expositions), expert work (UNESCO, other cultural institutions), design and research.

- **Key resources** are active people from community, personal and community awareness in the market, good quality materials, experts, drawings and patterns. An important aspect is that all the design work is free to use for domestic work and licensed under intellectual property law, with the right of reproduction by mentioning the source. This set-up helped to dissemination of the designs and to grow the tradition in followers and interested people.

- Personal and community awareness in the market are created through various interviews that the initiator is giving to the press, but also being acclaimed for their work.

- **Cost structure:** This information was not available online.

Table 4. Business model canvas for SCiA (Osterwalder et al., 2010)

Model canvas for business based on online community Semne Cusute in Actiune (SCiA)				
Key partners	*Key activities*	*Value proposition*	*Customer relationship*	*Customers*
Traditional museum (Romanian Peasant Museum, ASTRA Museum etc)	Acquisition of materials Sales and after-sales (shipping) Community engagement	Treasure national heritage Revitalize tradition	Community of practice (online and offline) Accessible information	Main target: Women 35-70 years, Secondary target: Men 35-70 years,
Public institutions (ministry, cultural institutions, embassies)	Events organizing (offline gatherings, expositions)	Creation of a strong community Re-create design patterns for authentic traditional blouses	Moderators from the active online group	Romania and diaspora
Craft men and women in sewing	Expert work (UNESCO, other cultural institutions)	Provide support and knowledge		
Artisans for suppliers	Design and research	Certified materials		
Google Arts & Culture	*Key resources* Active members from community	Prizes Innovation in materials	*Channels* Online shop	
UNESCO			Facebook online group YouTube channel	

Personal and community brand	*Social innovation:* Contributing to revive a tradition with modern tools, materials and equipment	Blog posts Expositions Public events
Good quality materials Experts		
Brand, national and international recognition		

Cost structure	*Revenue Streams*
Not available	Standard kits for blouses Materials and equipment for sewing Workshops
	Figures from financial public data were not relevant

The online community appears in whole business model, and its presence in more blocks shows the importance that it has in developing the products and services.

The SCiA online group was established in social media in 2014 and in these nine years, it reached from 500 members in the first week, a big community of 47.912 members[4], 1 administrator (with 2 accounts), 16 moderators, and 1001 contributors. Members are men and women, from Romania and abroad, Romanians and foreigners. Based on the information provided in their group, I can say that the devotees from Kozinets (2010) can be the two categories from Wenger (2011) of active group and heart of community. However, I cannot say for sure that the rest of 46.911 members are creating the peripheral group only, because I do not know the methodology of Facebook for naming the contributors. However, I can see that in online the percentages from the offline community of practice are not respected.

Table 5. Typologies of members in the online community SCiA

SciA online community	Community of Practice (Wenger, 2011)	Roles (Kozinets, 2010)	
Initiator (1)	Initiator	Insiders	
Moderator (16)	Heart of the community (5-10%)	Devotees	
Contributors (1001)	Active group(15-20%)		Newbies
	Peripheral group (70-80%)	Minglers	
	Outsiders		

Besides learning and sharing information about the tradition itself, the activity grew and diversified also in the direction of workshops, and national and international expositions. This offered a big exposure and awareness for the activity and many users created their own communities based on regionality (e.g. a similar online group was established by a user from Republic of Moldova in 2018). We are used to various activities that migrated from offline to

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[4] https://www.facebook.com/groups/semnecusute/members, accessed on 30 July 2023

online through blogs, online communities, and social media (as pages or communities). This online group, started in 2014 created a reinvention of the tradition (by creating online rituals and mobilizing people around learning and transmitting the knowledge), but also a migration in reverse to offline, as a tool of strengthening the community and practice. Therefore, this group is acting like an online community of practice (Călin, 2022) and a digital gathering (Drăgan, 2016), the modern form for artisans and their students to practice, learn and transmit a tradition. In this process of development, the online group created a strong community that demanded new forms of activity: an association as administrative entity (*Semne Cusute – Sustainability and Heritage NGO*, n.y.), workshops and meetings from 2016 (*Scoala de ie*, n.y.), and shop with materials (*Semne Cusute – panze si fire pentru textile traditionale*, n.y.). Therefore, the entrepreneurship initiative came as an answer to the need of the community.

The initiator admits that is using "digital technology, geometry, design, architecture, visual communication to support and promote folk tradition" (Corduneanu & Drăgan, 2017, p. 61).

Conclusions

This research intended to create a connection between online communities in social media and business models, showing that the virtual space can become the opportunity for entrepreneurial initiatives to preserve their cultural heritage of traditional craftsmen.

The qualitative methodology showed how enriched and meaningful the communication can be in this space. Using content analysis of the online messages and documents generated by the members of community, I found how people can gather online around a purpose and a practice, in the nowadays "global village" (Nevzat, 2018). The case's study shown it's unique thanks to the process of formation (from online to offline), and to the development of the business (from informal group to entrepreneurial initiative), which is different that the majority of the virtual groups that I encountered (are going from offline to online in order to maintain the relationship between gatherings). This shows us that the group was organized online around the tradition of sewing the Romanian blouse, and the shop came as an answer to the request of the members.

Promoting traditions online can be seen also as a counteraction to resisting the homogeneity (Tuleja, 1997) that comes with the globalization of the times. No matter how isolated could appear a group, the customs, rituals, and the mechanism of joining are creating a communication space about images and symbols that define them, that, in the end, are differentiating them from others. Online social media become the platform where all these elements of togetherness are easier to promote and more accessible (Călin, 2022:29).

Using the framework of business model generation (Osterwalder et al., 2010), I understood the importance of the online community in the overall processes for creating value for the customer. We can draw the conclusion that online communities can play a significant role in artisan entrepreneurship in a number of ways. **First**, they can provide support and advice from other artisans, mentors, and experts that can be extremely important for entrepreneurs who are just starting out or who are facing challenges in their business. **Second**, they can be a place for sharing knowledge and resources with each other, from materials and equipment, to production and marketing. **Third**, the online communities are the place for building relationships for networking, collaboration, and business development with other artisans, customers, and suppliers. The community of practice taken online can be a pipeline for loyal

customers, that can be involved even in co-creation of new products and services. **Fourth**, these can be a great way for artisan entrepreneurs to market and promote their products, while new media tools (blog, FB group, YT channel) create engagement for the cause. This can be done through sharing photos and videos of their work, writing blog posts, and participating in discussions. Another way through which online communities can support business is by selling their products in other countries, gaining access to global markets. Overall, the online communities can be a valuable resource for any artisan entrepreneur. They can provide support, advice, knowledge, resources, and relationships. This can help the artisan entrepreneurs to succeed in their businesses and to make a positive impact on their communities and for the scholars to deepen the study on how online communities can influence ethno-entrepreneurship.

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