

Developing a Qualitative Approach to the Study of the Street Art World

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Abstract

Street art is a complex social phenomenon where many actors contribute to determining the value of creativities. Street artists, curators, bloggers, photographers, museums, galleries, the public, and other actors interact with street artworks and influence the way they are perceived. In this context, it is clear that both the value and meaning of street art is not exclusively dependent on the intentions of the authors but change according to who views and uses the artwork for their purposes. Although diversity is interesting for the sake of research, finding a research methodology able to comprise the diverse perspectives briefly illustrated above, can be difficult.

A multi-method qualitative study conducted between the 2017 and 2019, attempted to include many aspects of the social structure of street art in order to understand how street artworks become renowned in the digital era. The study proved to be useful to cover the various perspectives of some of the actors mentioned above. Indeed, data collection consisted in conducting semi-structured interviews as well as analysing digital conversations where street artworks are viewed and discussed by both professional and amateur audiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with street artists, street art curators and street art connoisseurs - bloggers, administrators of digital platforms, photographers, etcetera - while digital conversations were considered in order to grasp the significance of the interactions happening between a street artwork and its audience(s), amongst street artists, and within the digital audience. Analysing the data via thematic analysis revealed a multi-dimensional structure of the street artworld and allowed an understanding of how street artworks become renowned in the digital era as well as contributed to the theory of co-creation in the arts. This methodological approach allowed including different professional and personal perspectives, as well as integrating the personal accounts of actors with the observation of in situ interactions.

Keywords

Street art; qualitative research methods; thematic analysis; social sciences research; digital communities.

1. Introduction

This paper presents the methodology used to conduct a doctoral study on street art. The study has been conducted by a researcher with a background in arts management and tourism studies over four years. The research started with the exploration of extant literature on street art with

the intent of defining and conceptualizing the phenomenon. However, both the focus and the articulation of the study was guided by the researcher's personal experience as *consumer* of and interest in street art. Combining both experiences as well as reviewing the literature allowed an initial definition of the phenomenon.

Feature	Street Art	Graffiti
Damage & Permanency	Street art is usually not damaging for its support, and it can be removed either easily or expensively (Conklin, 2012).	Graffiti are made to disrupt the urban order. They have a natural short life.
Aesthetics	Street art has rich aesthetic and visual features.	Graffiti can be aesthetically interesting, but their aim is not to generate an aesthetic reaction.
Sense of Threat	Street artworks can be done as commissions; therefore they are perceived as authorised.	Graffiti are commonly linked to local criminal and unauthorised groups' activity.
Embeddedness	Street artworks are made to interact with the context.	Graffiti appear in the urban environment, but they exist as a form of expression of a subculture.
Understandability	Since it aims at interacting with the audience, street art is made to be easily understood by everyone.	Graffiti and tags are made of codes in order to be understood exclusively by other taggers (McAuliffe, 2012).
What is the purpose of...?	Street art aims at generating interactions with the audience (Bolter & Grusin, 2003)	Graffiti are used as style weapons (Spearlt, 2015)
Who legitimises it?	Unclear who legitimises street art and in which ways?	Graffiti are legitimised and recognised by those who create them (Stewart, 2008).
Recognition	Unclear who are the audience(s) of street art?	
Effect	Unclear what is the effect of street art in the urban environment?	Graffiti are made to communicate amongst marginalised social groups within neighbourhoods (Gastman & Neelon, 2011: Spearlt, 2016).

Table 1: Empirical Differences Between Street Art and Graffiti.

Source: Boscaino (2021).

Street art is a “cultural phenomenon” (English, 2012) where different actors of a subculture (Browne & Browne, 2001; Ferrell, 1996; Spearlt, 2015) use non-conventional means, styles and platforms (Bacharach, 2015) to interact - often illegally (Ferrell, 1996; Young, 2014a) - with the urban context, and express themselves (Haenfler, 2013) via public walls, subway cars (Cooper & Chalfant, 1984) as well as during dedicated festivals (Caldwell, 2015; Riggle, 2010) or as work for commissioners such as businesses, local authorities, charities, and other organizations (Costa & Lopes, 2015). This wide definition (Boscaino, 2021) shows that, to understand street art, one must be aware of the multiple actors that intervene in its generation, consumption, and use. Therefore, valuating street art may depend on different aspects: the location and the context where street art emerges, whether or not the artwork is commissioned, the professional positioning of those who perform the artwork, the stylistic aspects of the creativity, whether is an artwork performed in a marginal urban area, or as a dedicated performance during an event.

The initial definition above has been finalised by adding a more empirical understanding of street art, and by comparing it with both graffiti and public art, which are creative phenomena that frequently the one for the other (Blanché, 2015). To do so, a grid of analysis –available in Table 1 below– was developed to differentiate street art from graffiti, drawing from the initial work by Conklin (2012). The grid is made of nine features that help the identification of street art and differentiate it from graffiti. The five main features are *Damage & Permanency*, *Aesthetics*, *Threatening*, *Embeddedness*, and *Understandability*; whereas reviewing the literature (Bolter & Grusin, 2003; Spearlt, 2015; Steward, 2008) allowed a further differentiation between street art in terms of their different purpose, the actors that legitimate the two phenomena, the sense of recognition, and the effect on the urban context and on audiences.

In terms of technical features, both empirical and conceptual studies on graffiti and street art (Cooper & Chalfant, 1985 to 2015; Irvine, 2012; Kimvall, 2019) underlined how, despite styles and genres have reached a worldwide uni-

formity also thanks to the internet, local street art tends to be linked to the *analogue* space where it elicits. Indeed, the circulation of street art online allowed its reproduction on digital formats, and its appreciation as a community-based phenomenon.

The relationship between street art and public art is a bit different. We have similarities between the two phenomena in the fact that both evolve technically together with the taste of the public, that both are a representation of society (Bach, 1992, 2001), that both can either be site-specific or refer to general meanings (McCarthy, 2006), that both are publicly available (Roberts & Marsh, 1995), and that this public availability suggests an empowered role of audiences and contexts in influencing the value of artworks (Knight, 2008). However, we must keep in mind the one fundamental difference between street art and public art that stands in whether the publicly available artworks are authorised, and where does the authorisation come from. Indeed, if in public art the artwork has been necessarily commissioned by some public body as an effort to educate the population towards *fine art* (Gattinger, 2012; Knight, 2008), in street art it is the authors who create “self-authorised expressions” (Blanché, 2015, p.33).

What characterised street art today is that it circulates audiences in a way that differs profoundly from how it was experienced in the early 2000s or as graffiti (Glaser, 2015; Irvine, 2012; MacDowall & de Souza, 2018; Saunders, 2011). Indeed, the internet has contributed to the diffusion and representation of street art towards different and wider audiences. It is possible to see street artworks on a digital forum, on “blogs, webzines, and online newspapers” (Boscaino, 2021; p. 3) where they are viewed, appreciated, and discussed by both professional and amateur audiences. Nevertheless, to understand the phenomenon of street art in the digital era, one must not exclusively rely on the internet. Indeed, it is important to consider the experiences of early street artists when they took part in street art events in the early 2000s (Blanché & Jonas, 2016).

Indeed, street art has become available on various digital platforms such as social media, blogs, and on digital maps as meta-data of the rich urban context (Glaser, 2015; Saunders, 2011). This digital presence allowed the emergence of new actors that have a role in understanding, defining, and promoting the value of street art towards wider audiences (MacDowall & de Souza, 2018). Together with digital actors, there are also institutional actors which used street art in social and cultural policies as well as employing street art as a tool for urban regeneration projects (Abarca, 2015; Di Brita, 2018; Ulmer, 2017). Therefore, it becomes clear that the phenomenon of street art is characterised by both digital and analogue aspects where different actors intervene to determine a specific component of the value of creativities appearing both on and offline.

What is not completely clear is a complete picture of these actors, how they interact on and offline, and how they contribute to the legitimisation of street art in the digital era. This last sentence is a synthesised version of the overarching question that drove the doctoral study discussed in this paper. Indeed, the purpose of the study was to understand how, in the digital era, street artworks become renowned and who are the actors involved in this process. Therefore, the first step in the research was to adopt a series of methodological choices—discussed in detail in the next sections—that would allow to investigate a social phenomenon with little prior academic attention and that has not got a detailed pre-theoretically formed explanation. Moreover, the characteristics of street art underlined the need to include the different subjective accounts of the actors involved in the phenomenon, and to analyse these accounts in order to generate both an answer to the research question(s), and novel theory.

Therefore, the so-called *Gioia methodology* (Gioia et al., 2012) was considered as an approach to study street art. Apart from being academically well-recognised, and from outlining a rigorous procedure to make sense of qualitative data, the Gioia methodology is particularly inclined to studies that consider multiple data types and offers itself to adaptations related to the phenomenon being studied (Gioia, 2012, Saunders, 2019). The Gioia et al. (2012) methodology suggests approaching social phenomena in four main steps:

Articulate a phenomenon and develop research questions aimed at surfacing “concepts and inter-relationships” (Gioia et al., 2012; p. 14).

Consult with existing literature, articulate theoretical gaps. Collect data by giving voice to informants who hold the knowledge of the phenomenon of interest.

Keep a flexible approach that allows to ask further questions as more concepts arise from the data collection.

Keep a memo/notebook with notes.

Perform data analysis by following both an informant-centric and a theory-centric approach.

Use open coding first, then abstract the codes into first-order concepts, then organise the first-order concepts into second-order themes.

Formulate dynamic relationships between themes and codes, and—if appropriate—distil second-order themes into overarching/aggregate dimensions.

Use a data structure to show how concepts are related to each other.

Tell the story of each theme.

Conduct further literature search to demonstrate the articulation of the emergent concepts and theoretical relationships.

The study was conducted mainly by following the four steps above, but with adaptations. For example, the Gioia methodology has been designed as a grounded theory model, whereas in this study it has been used as a *thematic analysis* procedure. Moreover, the development of themes from the data was informed by the concepts identified in the consulted literature, but this did not contrast with the original inductive—data driven—approach of the study. The sections below discuss how the doctoral study followed this methodology and its methodological choices.

2. Exploring the Literature

Following step 1, the initial part of the study consisted of reviewing literature in order to develop a conceptual framework and identify the theoretical gaps that the study needed to address. Although the scientific literature on street art is vast since it includes the different disciplines that study the phenomenon (Bengsten, 2016), the purpose of the doctoral study discussed in this paper was to understand how the value of street artworks is created in the digital era. Hence, the literature review was developed in order to cover specific aspects of the creative phenomenon object of study as well as to structure a theoretical framework useful to address the research questions, as discussed in more detail below.

Therefore, the literature review was developed in order to provide an understanding of the (I) social aspects of street art, the (II) practical and theoretical aspects underpinning contemporary art valuation, and the (III) models of collaboration and co-creation able to explain how different actors come together and create value in different occasions. The literature strands have then been reorganised into two *pillars* since they supported the theoretical underpinning of the study, as well as the generation of the research questions.

In the first pillar, street art was approached by looking at its historical, conceptual and practical evolution in the past six decades, as well as its relationship with graffiti (Bacharach, 2015; Blanché, 2015; Brewer & Miller, 1990; Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987; Currier, 2010; Ferrell, 1996; Friedman, 2008; Gastman & Neelon, 2011; Spearlt, 2015; Young, 2014). The reviewed literature revealed the complex social structure of street art, but also showed that this phenomenon is characterised by both virtual and analogue settings, as well as used by various institutional actors (Abarca, 2015; Costa & Lopez, 2015; Di Brita, 2018; Glaser, 2015; MacDowall, 2008; Ulmer, 2017). To further characterise street art and provide an understanding of the social elements that surround the consumption of art placed in the streets, the first pillar also included a review of the concept of public art (Bach, 1992; Doezema, 1977; Knight, 2008).

Reviewing the literature in the first pillar allowed the identification of knowledge gaps related to understanding all the actors that contribute to the legitimation and valuation of street art, to their role in defining the value of street artworks, to the composition of the audience of street art, and to the degree of *digital-ness* of the phenomenon of street art. Therefore, the first pillar prompted further exploration of the street artworld in order to answer three *research questions* related to the gaps above.

With the second pillar, the purpose was to construct a theoretical framework that included contemporary art valuation as well as understanding how multitudes of people can come together and create value. Indeed, the literature reviewed in this pillar allowed an understanding of contemporary visual art valuation as an interactive process (Edmonds et al., 2019) happening between the artist, the audience, the artwork, and other entities (Candy & Edmonds, 2002; Candy et al., 2018) such as curators, galleries, critics, scholars, and others (Drummond, 2006; Rodner & Thomson, 2013; Thornton, 2009). In this interactive system, the value of an artwork depends not only on its visible characteristics, but also on how audiences perceive the artwork's features in the form of stimuli (Hagtvedt et al., 2008; Kleiner, 2019), especially if the artwork is placed outdoors (Bach, 2001; Hein, 1996). The literature consulted in the second pillar, also allowed the identification of theory on the economic valuation of visual art which is done by considering both intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of artworks (Coslor, 2016; Robertson, 2005; Sagot-Duvauroux, 2011). Another concept explored in the second pillar was value co-creation. This was done in order to understand how crowds collaborate and create value both on and offline. According to the literature co-creation is an alternative way of organizing production (Seran (Potra) & Izvercian, 2014) which sees consumers participating in the production process together with the producer (Boscaino, 2021; Prahald & Ramaswamy, 2004a, 2004b; Seran (Potra) & Izvercian, 2014). In co-creation, consumers participate in the definition of the value of the goods and services they consume (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Ritzer, 2014, 2015; Toffler & Toffler, 2006) and are named *prosumers* because

they simultaneously consume and produce value (Lang et al., 2020). This simultaneous activity generates benefit for both the producer and consumers (Estellés-Arolas & Gonzalez-Ladron-de-Guevara, 2012), and is widely applied in different industries (Benkler, 2006; Wolny, 2013), including creative ones (Deuze, 2007; Saragih, 2019).

Indeed, different authors (Aitamurto, 2017; Burnes & Choi, 2015; Gateau, 2014; Piller et al., 2011; Quero et al., 2017; Saragih, 2019) showed that co-creation can happen either as a form of value generation, as a form of collective and collaborative creative work, or both. What the different available forms of value co-creation have in common is the existence of a community that uses a material or a virtual setting where co-creation happens (Banks & Deuze, 2009). This can be referred to as creative communities or creative crowds (Acar, 2018; Lakhani & Panetta, 2007; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000) that interact online and/or are organised in order to co-create value. The literature reviewed within the second pillar allowed the identification of further theoretical gaps that were used to develop the study. In particular, the study aimed at understanding whether the value of street artworks is defined in a co-creation process, and what is the value chain of street art, together with understanding to what extent the value of street artworks has digital elements.

Therefore, reviewing the literature and *building the pillars* allowed fundamental learning and identified the gaps that were addressed in the study. Five research questions were developed with reference to the theoretical gaps identified in the literature. The research questions were worded in “how” (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 14) and were used to develop the methodology discussed in the next section.

3. Approaching the Data

Following the Gioia (2012) methodology, after the articulation of theoretical gaps within the existing literature, the study progressed towards data collection (step 2). However, before collecting the data, philosophical positions were taken with reference to ontology and epistemology. Indeed, one of the considerations made towards street art is that it has a subjective nature which depends on the perceptions and the actions of the actors that are part of it (Saunders et

al., 2019). Therefore, the diverse stories, perspectives and experiences of different actors were considered as data in the study and characterized street art as a socially constructed phenomenon. On the other hand, the epistemological position also considered the articulation of opinions, experiences, and subjectivities in street art, and identified these subjectivities as *acceptable knowledge* to be collected and analysed to answer the research questions. Giving importance to the respondents’ voices is also what is recommended by Gioia et al. (2012) as a tactic to *give voice* to participants since they are “knowledgeable agents” (p. 5) of the phenomenon.

Another position taken during the study is related to identifying its geographical scope. Indeed, since the doctoral study was the first of its type in terms of research questions and aspects of a phenomenon being investigated, the study was performed in what is considered to be one of the birthplaces of street art in the world (Blanché & Jonas, 2016): the UK. Moreover, the British street art scene has demonstrated being rich with examples of street art genres, collectives, festivals, galleries, and other events which articulate both on and offline (Blanché, 2015; Inspiringcity, 2017).

3.1 Multi-Data in Street Art

To consider the multiple aspects of street art today and to include as many perspectives as possible, a qualitative multi-method approach seemed to be adequate (Saunders et al., 2019) to answer the overarching research question and explain how street artworks become renowned in the digital era. Indeed, the study considered the interactions happening both on and offline amongst the different actors involved in street art. Therefore, the adopted research approach considered elements of netnography (Kozinets, 2015) in order to make sense of the interactions happening within online street art communities, as well as *analogue* data collected in the form of face-to-face interviews (Saunders, et al., 2019), together with personal insights and *memoing* of the researcher (Gioia, et al., 2012). This multi-method approach was useful in the study since it allowed the consideration of both digital and analogue data: the accounts of users that participate in street art as well as the observation of digital data in the form of user generated content available online.

3.2 Articulation of Methods

The research methods adopted in the study are of qualitative nature and used to make sense of social phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Flick, 2019). The methods are semi-structured interviews, transcription of conversations on digital platforms, and field notes. The reason behind the choice of different qualitative methods is the need to address specific research questions as well as understanding an articulated phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, (2018). Moreover, using three types of data allowed to access the many perspectives related to street art and triangulate the results, so to allow an articulated explanation of the studied phenomenon.

4. Collecting the Data

As primary data, 45 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with three types of participants: street artists, street art curators, and street art connoisseurs. The interviews have been conducted either in person, via email, or via digital messaging/call services. Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed the gathering of rich information from participants and enabled interactions during the interview in order to achieve further data about a specific topic (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Fifteen interviews with each of the three participant types were conducted. Each of the three groups of interviewees received dedicated questions aimed at exploring specific aspects of the participants' relationship with street art. Conducting 45 interviews with three groups of participants allowed the generation of data rich in relevant information (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). The selection of participants followed a heterogeneous purposive sampling approach for the three groups together but was homogeneous within the groups apart from the connoisseurs which is a broad term and for which the heterogeneous purposive sampling criterion was used (Saunders et al., 2019).

In terms of secondary data, archival data available on digital platforms were considered. The archival data used in the study is made of different elements: (I) a visual part related to the representation of a street artwork on digital platforms, (II) a textual part related to the caption that accom-

panies the visual part, (III) a textual part related to the comments of/interaction amongst users on the digital platform, and (IV) the reactions available on the specific digital platform¹. The archival data were selected following Kozinets' (2015) seven criteria for the sampling of online data. This allowed the identification of six "Conversations on social networking sites" (Boscaino, 2021) featuring the seven criteria indicated by Kozinets (2015). Data collection was performed using search engine functions, as well as navigating popular digital platforms on street art, combing the data for content with a satisfying mix of the seven characteristics identified above. The data collection consisted of taking a screenshot of the webpage where the conversation was happening, downloading the visual element, and transcribing both captions and comments available on social media. It must be noted that both interviewees and archival data were identified also through a snowballing approach, which consisted of interviewees indicating and recommending potential content/participants that could have been suitable for the study.

The final data form is field notes, generated in two types. A first type resulted from the fieldwork² and is related to observing interviewees and digital users reacting to the researcher's presence and questions. These notes were considered to be observational (Schwandt, 2015). A second type of notes are a frequent tool used during qualitative research (Gioia et al., 2012; Kozinets, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019) and were used to keep track of the researcher's thoughts and reflection about the conceptual patterns that emerged from the analysis.

Extracts of the collected data are available in Table 2 below. The table is divided in three parts, each related to one of the three types of data. In the first part, interview extracts are linked to two interviewees—namely a street art curator and a street art connoisseur—who answered interview questions about the behaviour in, and use of social media of a specific social group within the street artworld, and who described the "follow-unfollow" game on social media that users involve in to achieve numbers. These extracts have been analysed with the thematic method—illustrated

1) Evidence of actors' behaviour in monothematic groups:

Group2_No2 referred to groups when they said that "especially on Facebook, there are street art groups". One of these social groups is referred to as admins and Group2_No2 said they are "playing their own light game with our artwork", suggesting there is a group of admins on social media that exploit the value of street artworks to engage with online communities.

2) Playing the follow-unfollow game on social media:

Group3_No7 said: "you just follow like a thousand people, 200 follow your back. Then you unfollow everybody, and you are left with the followers", but also said that some artists "don't want to go that way. They want to grow organically and naturally, not to the point where it hurts their own business". Finally, Group3_No7 said that "playing that kind of game in social media [...] would make a load of help them get like a contract work that makes them money".



Insight from Analysis

Street art renown-ness is related to reputation which goes hand in hand with digital following.



Exploring the field

Curators are not very present on conversations
street artists only reply to good comments and compliments

Insight from Analysis

support in the community is very important. "Even if you don't like the work of somebody, you tend to keep a contact with them and show support".



Exploring the field

street artists are generally not happy when the conversation is about their presence on social media.

Table 2: Examples of Data
Source: Boscaino (2021)

below—and formed part of the *Components of the Process* theme, within the *Social Process* aggregate dimension of the studied phenomenon.

The second part of Table 2 below has an example of archival data—conversation on SNS—considered in the study. This artwork was considered since it is a meaningful example of a conversation on SNSs rich in visual and textual information, as well as of metadata. Indeed, the Instagram post in Table 2 presented a carousel of five pictures where the artist wanted to illustrate the making of the artwork, had a rich interaction available in the comments feed, and was accompanied by both a detailed description with hashtags and mentions, as well as digital reactions. Hence, the archival data item in Table 2 is an example of using the seven features identified by Kozinets (2015) to select qualitative data.

Finally, the bottom part of Table 2 presents the two types of field notes generated during the study. The left part has what we called observational field notes and result from the observation of the field, while the right part presents reflective field notes and were generated during the analysis procedure. To keep track of the two types of field notes and use them properly in support of the analysis, observational field notes were labelled “Exploring the field”, while the reflective field notes are called “Insights from Analysis”. Both types of field notes have been kept online using the Google Keep service.

5. Bringing the Data Together

As indicated in point three at the end of the introductory section, after collecting the data it is the time to perform analysis. The Gioia et al. (2012) methodology offers a structured procedure to analyse qualitative data and suggests performing a first-order or informant-centric analysis together with a second-order, or theory-centric analysis. This two-level analysis approach has been followed in order to perform a single rigorous qualitative analysis of the different data types. However, it must be noted that the *Gioia methodology* has been used as a thematic analysis procedure for the homogenised data, not as a grounded theory approach.

However, the data analysis did not start immediately as a thematic analysis. Indeed, following Figure 1 below from bottom to top, the analysis started with transcription and familiarization with the collected data. Indeed, after—and during—interviews and while navigating webpages on street art, observational field notes have been generated in order to keep track of both the respondent’s behaviour and of salient information that could have helped the development of themes during the thematic analysis. As mentioned earlier, these field notes have been labelled as *observational*.

After data collection and generation, the data has been transcribed in a format suitable for qualitative analysis. Transcribing interviews is quite a straightforward process, but it is evident that collating the archival data considered in this study needed more than verbatim transcription. Indeed, as visible at the centre of Figure 1, the Conversations on SNSs have been subject to an initial analysis in order to identify patterns. This is due to the characteristic of the archival data considered in this study for which there is more than just textual information. Indeed, the initial analysis consisted of identifying the different components of the archival data and assigning a code to small portions of text and/or visuals according to whether these portions had relevant qualities able to explain the phenomenon object of study. As an example of how archival data have been analysed, one can refer to Figure 2 below where portions of visuals, text, and reactions have been selected and coded. As visible in the right-bottom part of Figure 1, the observational field notes informed the initial analysis which, in turn, allowed the generation of reflective field notes. Once the initial analysis of archival data was completed, open coding was performed on all collated data. This allowed the generation of 67 open codes that were then used in the thematic analysis according to the Gioia et al. (2012) methodology. During open coding, further reflective field notes were generated and, as visible in the top right part of Figure 1 above, they informed the thematic analysis.

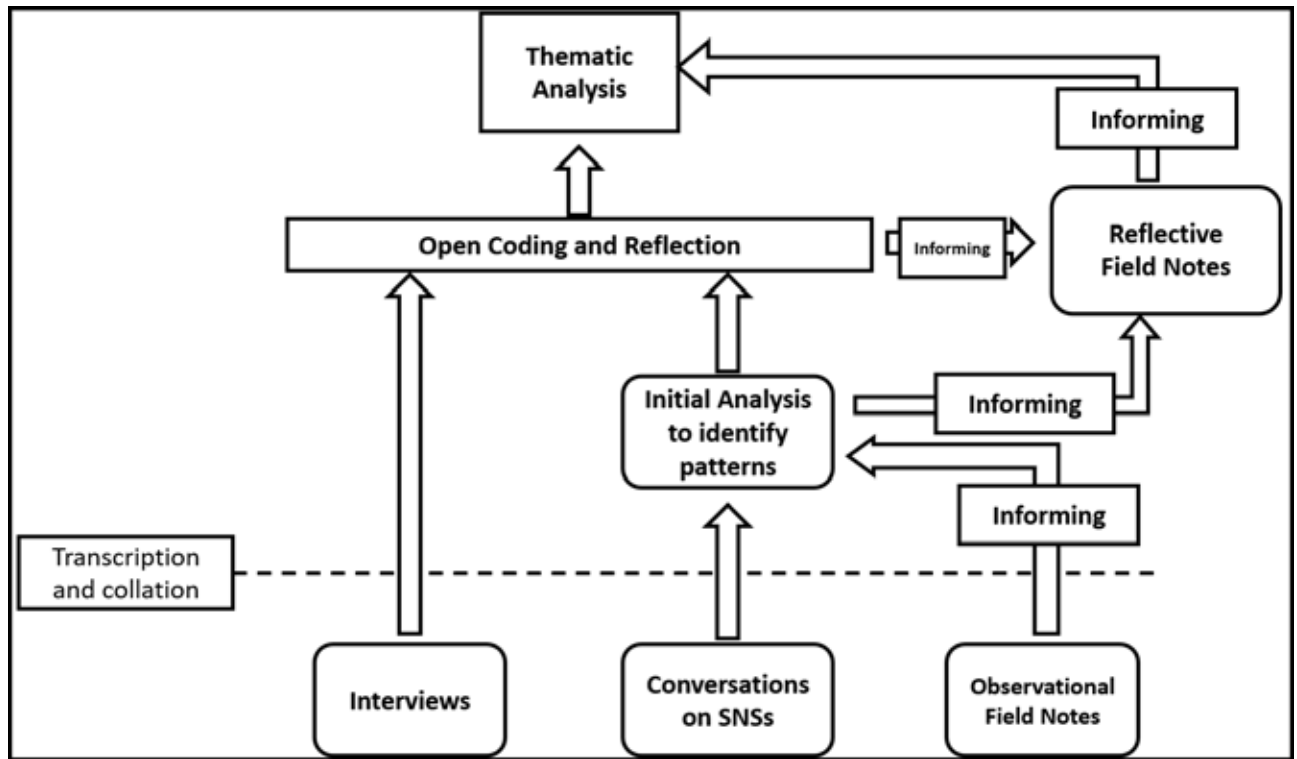


Figure 1: Data Analysis Procedure. Source: Boscaino (2021).

5.1 A Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis started with the generation of the 67 open codes, as mentioned above. This represents an initial step of analysis since it is the first systematic organization of the meanings eliciting from the data (Miles et al., 2018). Once all the codes were generated, they were grouped and categorised in more abstract constructs and concepts. However, in this phase, the labels/categories/codes were developed using informant terms. This is what Gioia et al., (2012) refer to as informant-centric analysis and/or first-order analysis. What is important to know at this stage is that, following indication of the methodology authors, the researcher performed a “willing suspension of belief” (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 9) with regards to the theory discussed in the early stage of the research, so to give respondents—participants—the importance they deserve. The categorization of open codes allowed the development of first-order concepts which kept informants’ terms without “going native” (Gioia et al., p.19), but their meaning was influenced by the concepts identified in the literature review.

The categorization activity resulted in 33 first-order concepts. Each of these concepts represents one of the relevant aspects of the phenomenon for which street artworks become renowned in the digital era and has enough meaning to address a specific aspect of the research questions.

After the initial first-order categorization of concepts, the analysis continued with the purpose of understanding what is happening theoretically within the concepts. This is what Gioia et al. (2012) refer to as second-order or researcher-centric analysis. It means that the researcher should cease suspending their knowledge of the theory and start making sense theoretically of the categorised concepts. The result of the second-order analysis is to come up with themes—or higher-order categories—that explain a specific aspect of the studied phenomenon. Seven initial themes were identified, but the researcher started an evaluation of the themes by following Patton’s (2015) guidelines on categories in qualitative data analysis. Indeed, the categorised



Figure 2: Example of Archival Data Source: Boscaino (2021)

data extracts were re-read different times in order to verify internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, as well as to verify the consistency of the data extracts with the theme they belonged to, and the consistency of each theme in relation to the whole dataset.

The evaluation of consistency of each initial theme allowed a further elaboration and review of the meaning of each theme and resulted in the development of eleven refined theme. At the end of the review, the researcher was concerned in making sure that every theme was able to explain

one relevant aspect of the phenomenon (Gioia et al., 2012). Finally, the eleven finalised themes were further grouped into aggregate—overarching—dimensions of the phenomenon for which street artworks become renowned in the digital era. The final organisation of themes and dimensions is available in Figure 3 below which has been referred to, in the thesis, as *coding tree*. It is important to notice how some of the second-order themes may look like they are repeating themselves in the list, however, each theme describes one of the aspects of the aggregate dimensions of the phenomenon studied here.

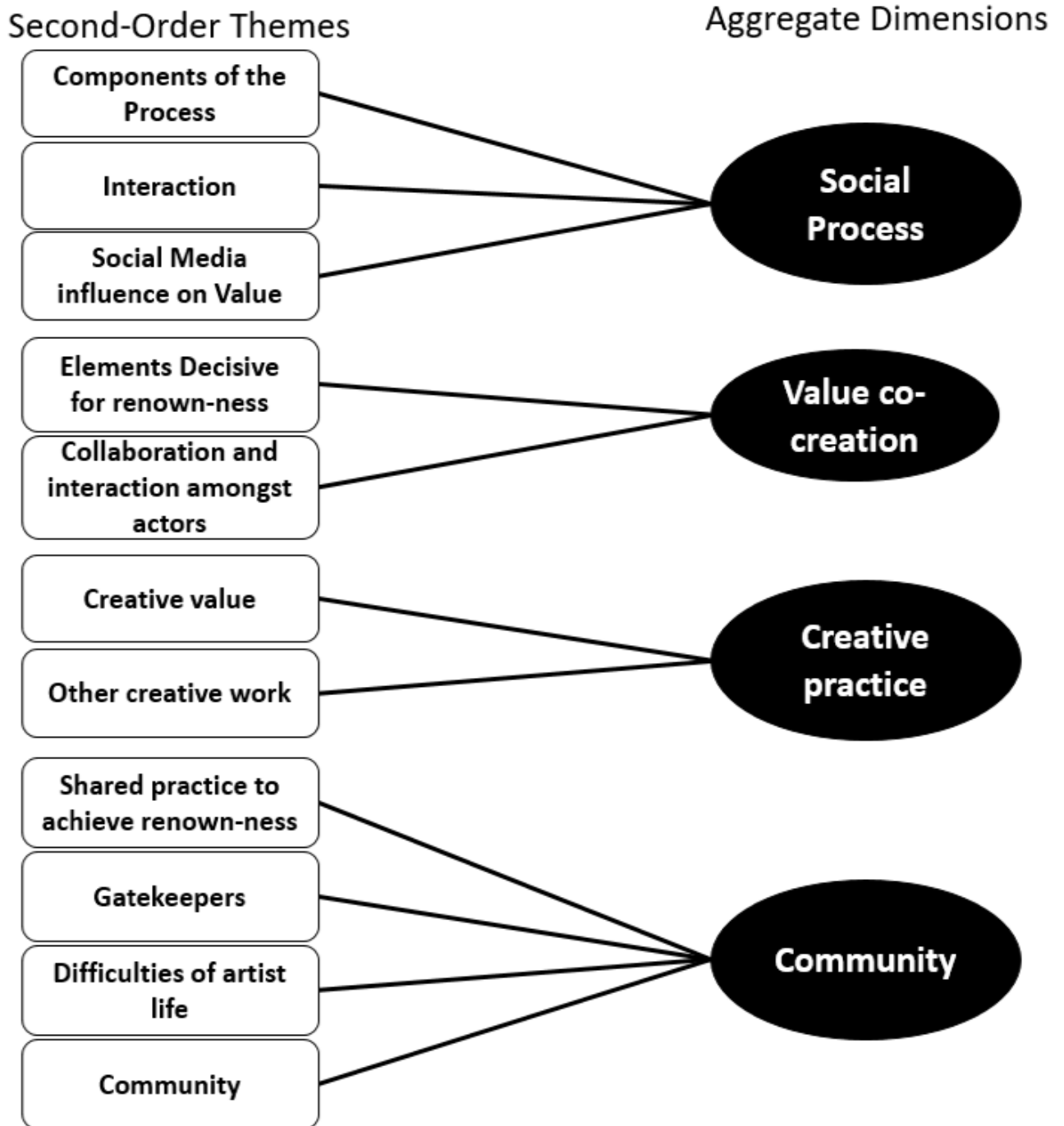


Figure 3: Data Structure
Source: Boscaino (2021)

6. A Complex World

As indicated in step four of the bulleted list at the end of the introductory section, after analysing the data, it is the researcher’s job to explain the dynamic relationships that have become evident from the data analysis. This task consisted of writing the relationships between themes, codes, concepts, and dimensions, and Gioia et al. (2012) suggest drawing a data structure that can visually support the discussion of the findings from the analysis. Indeed, the final stages of the doctoral study consisted of writing a *Findings* chapter where the story of each theme was illustrated and explained, as well as discussing the findings in relation to both the literature already reviewed earlier in the thesis, and further literature that was not previously considered. Using a data structure diagram was helpful both in terms of organization of the findings chapter, and in terms of showing the results of the analysis. The findings chapter also illustrated how the different concepts, themes, and dimensions inter-relate the one to the other, and showed the complexity of the phenomenon for which street artworks become renowned today. The data structure diagram has three levels: first-order concepts which are the first abstraction and grouping of the open codes; second-order themes, which result from including theory in the analysis and grouping concepts into higher-order categories; and aggregate dimensions, which represent, each, a key aspect of the phenomenon for which street artworks become renowned in the digital era. A representation of the second-order themes and aggregate dimensions resulting from the analysis is available in Figure 3 above.

The four aggregate dimensions are the *social process*, the *value co-creation*, the *creative practice*, and the *community* dimension.

Each of them has been illustrated analytically in the thesis, and next is an example of data extract related to a concept/ theme/dimension. In the extract below, an interviewee described how today different actors take part in the *making* of a street artwork, and contribute to its documentation and distribution towards audiences:

[Before the internet] “an artist who painted the wall, had to go home, wash hands, leave the spray cans at home and then go back out and photograph [the street artwork, while today] you have people who are behind you photographing it, before you’ve even finished it. So, there are other people who are kind of following, and documenting it while you’re actually doing it” (Group3_No15).

The data extract above has been used to support the narrative within the *Social Process* aggregate dimension. In particular, this extract is part of the *Components of the Process* theme, as illustrated in Figure 4 below, and is an example of the *Actions Performed in the Process* concept. This extract has been useful, together with others, to populate the *Social Process* dimension with insights on which actors are involved in today’s street art world, and which actions are performed by these actors that are able to influence the value of street artworks. The data provided fundamental learning that allowed the identification of a complex social process

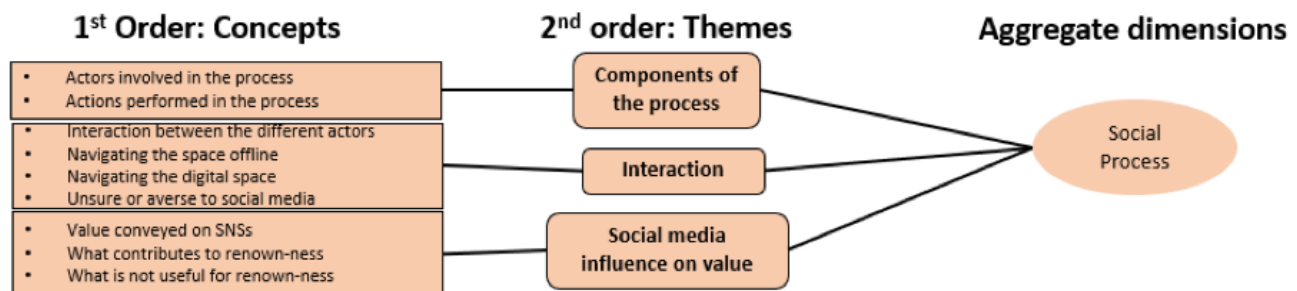


Figure 4: Example of Data Structure
Source: Boscaino (2021)

where different actors get involved in either the actual production of street art, or as influencers of creativities' value. Interviewees referred to a world where digital and analog actions influence how street art circulates within audiences. For example, Group3_No14 said that if "you do have tags in bigger cities, or along places where people travel (...) people tend to take photos of this and then you get up in essence" suggesting that before being noticed by professional actors such as photographers and bloggers, street artworks must appear in *real* places first and be noticed by the general audiences. These extracts above were coded as *(IV) Online vs Offline* and contributed to the understanding of the features of the process for which street artworks become renowned in the digital era.

As evident in Figure 4, the *Social Process* dimension of the studied phenomenon has three themes and each of these have a different number of concepts resulting from the data analysis that have been explained in the *Findings* chapter. After presenting the findings from the three types of data, the thesis continues with a *Discussion* chapter that demonstrated the articulation between the concepts emerging from the data and the theoretical relationships with existing theory. The discussion chapter underlined how the findings of this research contribute to expanding the theory of co-creation as well as providing a wider and more articulated understanding of street art.

7. Conclusions

This paper discussed the methodological choices made to conduct a doctoral study on street art. The method of this study was inspired by the Gioia methodology (2012) with adaptations that are allowed and encouraged by the author of the methodology themselves. Indeed, different studies using Gioia (2012) proceed immediately from open coding to first-order categorization, as well as from second-order thematization to aggregate dimensions. Conversely, in this study a great deal of time was spent in reviewing, refining, and defining themes once they had *emerged* from the analysis before going into organising aggregate dimensions, as visible in figures 2 to 4.

Adopting this procedure allowed the articulation of a complex social phenomenon where different actors intervene

and influence the value of street artworks, making them renowned. The method illustrated in this paper allowed the theoretical gaps identified in the literature to be addressed and answered the overarching research question. In particular, the method discussed here allowed the study to contribute to theory and to formulate relevant practical implication for professionals working within the street artworld. Hence, adopting the Gioia et al. (2012) methodology not only allowed addressing the overarching research question, but enabled the rich data set to serve both in contributing to different theories, and formulating practical recommendations for street artworld professionals.

With a qualitative approach that included the voices of three types of actors, conversations on SNSs, and field notes, the study explained how street artworks become renowned in the digital era: through a cumulative value-generation process that involves various actors interacting at different levels. This process begins with the formulation of the idea of a new street artwork and ends when the artwork becomes renowned amongst both professional and amateur audiences. In this process, the value of creativities is influenced as more actors get involved in the viewing, consuming, and discussing of street artworks.

Using the method discussed in this paper implies looking at street art as a complex social world where the involvement of multitude of actors contribute to influencing and distributing the value and the meaning of creativities. As discussed earlier, street art has been looked at by reviewing its historical and conceptual evolution, but the social dynamics happening within the street artworld have been looked through the lens of value co-creation, which produced the main theoretical contribution of this study. Indeed, the findings expand the theory on value co-creation by highlighting the need to consider a non-linear and multi-dimensional social network where value is influenced, modified, consumed, and re-formulated according to the different audiences that take part in it.

Although there are different theoretical and practical implications of the study, the contribution to theory of co-creation suggests employing a socio-cultural perspective (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015; Rodner & Thomson, 2013) when

the aim is to understand the value dynamics within creative industries. This emerging view of value co-creation goes beyond the traditional understanding of one producer and a crowd/multitude of consumers and suggests considering the complex socio-cultural dynamics that generate interactions, relationships, and conversations amongst actors to figure how value is created, influenced, and distributed within creative contexts such as the street art one. The Gioia et al. (2012) methodology in this study sets the basis to conduct further studies so as to produce studies able to comprise the complex social dynamics of creative industries in the digital era.

Endnotes

- 1 - The platforms considered are Facebook and Instagram because they are rich in visual data. The most common features of these platforms are the *like*, *share* and *comment* actions.
- 2 - Either as interviewing process or navigating the web.

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