

French-speaking photo models communication: A comparison across platforms and profiles, a possible evolution by **Alexandre Abellard**

Abstract

Modelling is an important part in the world of both professional and amateur photography, with a multidimensional activity at the intersection of art creation and several sociological and psychological aspects. Since the 2000s, many online tools appeared from specifically art-oriented portfolios to subscription platforms, through social networks. Models can reach a diverse audience, either people implied in photography, followers and paying subscribers. A dataset of more than 600 French-speaking models enabled an exploration of how models use and combine these tools depending on criteria such as age, nude availability and sex/gender. It was possible to draw different photo models communication profiles.

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Introduction

Since the middle of nineteenth century, photography has been used as a medium of art. A founding event was the first meeting of the Photography Society in London (1853), where Sir William J. Newton (1853) gave a presentation entitled “Upon photography in an artistic view, and its relation to the arts”. He noted that “to the public, (photographic) results, as depicting natural objects, ought to be in accordance [as far as it is possible] to the acknowledged principles of Fine Art”. Being considered a way to produce art, it also required models like sculpture and painting. From pioneering Countess Virginia di Castiglione (Muzzarelli, 2007) to “Insta-girls” (Zamboni, 2022), through Cléo de Mérode (Auclair, 2012) and Elite Agency “supermodels” (Soley-Beltran, 2006), photography models emerged in the public eye. Most remain anonymous to the public, with a few exceptions being mostly famous for their work in fashion promotion.

While being important in art and fashion photography with many sociological and psychological implications, photo modelling has not been studied intensely from a research perspective.

A variety communication tools existed before Internet and are still used by models for postal contacts and face-to-face meetings: starter portfolio, comp card in A5 format, agency test, and model's portfolio (Format, 2021; My Model Reality, 2023). Communication evolved with Internet growth, combining specific artist platforms, social media, and subscription-based platforms.

Starting in the late 1990s, online artist portfolios appeared. Even if accessible by anyone, their main target remains those involved professionally in fashion and art. English-speaking [modelmanagement.com](https://www.modelmanagement.com) was created in 1996 and [modelmayhem.com](https://www.modelmayhem.com) in 2004. Francophone [focale31.com](https://www.focale31.com) started in 2000, [book.fr](https://www.book.fr) in 2004 and [Kabook](https://www.kabook.com) in 2011 (*book* being the usual term in France for an artist's portfolio).

In the 2000s, social networks enabled models to share their work to larger audiences of friends and followers. In the 2010s, new platforms enabling monetization from subscribers appeared, either as crowdfunding like [Patreon](https://www.patreon.com) created in 2013 (Lingnau, 2022) or as subscription-based content social media such as the English [OnlyFans](https://www.onlyfans.com) and French [MYM](https://www.mym.com) [acronym for Me. You. More], respectively created in 2016 and 2019. We'll gather these platforms under a "Remunerating platforms" (R.P.) label.

The Internet increased opportunities for models to reach two different kind of audiences: those involved directly in photography (photographers, hairdressers, make-up artists) and a larger community of followers, usually non-specialists interested in photography. Depending on a model's platform choices, some of these followers can become paying subscribers, usually with exclusive content access.

As a result, photo model communication in the two last decades has become easier to quickly reach photographers and agencies while new tools provided access to new audiences.

The next section deals with research questions on preferred communication tools for models, describing the specific influence of remunerating platforms. In [Being a photo model](#) there are details on the legal status of models in France as well as sociological and psychological aspects related to photo modelling. [Online tools](#) details platforms examined in this study, chosen in accordance with interviews with models. [Methodology](#) describes further information on interviews and hypotheses generated as a result, as well as building a representative dataset of French-speaking models. Statistical analysis was performed on this dataset, where results appear in [Analysis and results](#). From these results, we answer our research questions, by building main groups of models according to choices of communication tools, while discussing the limitations of this study.

Research questions

In this paper, we considered three factors could be important in the choice of communication tools: age, nude availability and sex/gender.

Age is known to have an influence on the use of social media, specifically Instagram and Snapchat that are dedicated to photo and video sharing (Hruska and Maresova, 2020). We thought that it could be particularly important for an activity whose expression is image-based.

Nude availability seemed also to be an influential factor. In fact, photo modelling often implies partial to full nudity, some models even specializing themselves in nude modelling. Specific definitions of nude and its opposite pornography are difficult to draw (McDowall, 2008). Clark (1956) distinguished between negative "embarrassing" *naked* and positive *nude* not as "the subject of art but the form of art." These have been since challenged and redefined by critics and art historians (Nead, 1990). In the light of this complexity and considering the applied nature of our study, we used in this study definitions of nude and pornography as considered by the platforms under review (Book.fr, 2024; Focale31, 2024; Patreon, 2024), as they set limits for many photo models. These platforms essentially define their notions of pornography, but do not provide

mirrored definitions of nude. Pornography in all cases is associated with sexual arousal as its main purpose with specific depiction of explicit sexual acts. Nude can therefore be defined as a genre of photography depicting the naked human body as a form of creative expression without explicit sexual activity. In the context of our study, nude specificity is important as many social networks prohibit their users to post content with nudity, except for paintings or sculptures (Mas, 2017). Hence, it may be an important obstacle for sharing nude work and influence choices in communication tools.

Finally, sex/gender (see [Analysis and results](#) for explanation of this expression) is considered since the specific objectification of women is acknowledged, especially in visual media (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; Roberts, *et al.*, 2018), with no equivalence for men. We may wonder if the choice of platforms may be different for men and women.

Another aspect in photo modelling is the occasional use of platforms enabling monetization and commonly associated with sex work. Their use by a photo model may imply expectancies from subscribers in terms of both accessible content and intimate interaction diverging from artistic expression.

Thus, the following research questions emerged:

- *RQ1*: How do models use platforms (alone or combined) and how do various criteria affect their use: age, nude availability, sex/gender?
- *RQ2*: Remunerating platforms have gained popularity recently. Are these platforms, widely known for their use by sex workers, also used by photo models? Do these platforms increase emotional labour by indirectly participating in suggestive activities?

Answering these questions requires a significant and representative dataset of photo models. In this study, we focused on French-speaking models (almost all being in fact French nationals) for two reasons. First, the information was easier to access in this research. Moreover, as detailed in the next section, the legal status of French models, mostly non-professionals, limits remuneration options and thus makes online promotion even more significant.

Being a photo model

Definition and legal aspects

An art model poses for visual artists (painters, drawers, sculptors, photographers) that are interested in capturing images of the human body as part of their creative art process. Posing can be either for individual artists or for groups of art students or aspiring artists. A photo model poses is an art model specifically posing for photographers. No specific education or experience requirements are necessary to enter this activity, hence the large presence of amateur and occasional models.

The notion of a “model” is used for both artistic and fashion work. “Mannequin” is also a frequently used term. In fact, their activities partly overlap. French law retains the term “mannequin” in Law nr. 69-1186 (1969) [1] and Labour Code (Article L.763-1) [2] (Jalabert, 2021). In the latter, mannequin activity is considered as:

- either in charge of presenting a product, a service or an advertising message to an audience, by the reproduction of their image in a visual or audiovisual medium
- or posing as model, with or without any further use of their images. This case implies a more artistic, non-commercial activity. French Law considers therefore modelling as being part of a mannequin activity.

Considering salary, French *code du travail* (article 7123-3) states the necessity of a working contract, which forbids billing and self-entrepreneur status. Unlike descriptions in some online portfolios, the notion of a

“freelance mannequin” is legally impossible in France. As Isabelle Saint-Félix remarked in Spautz and Colombani (2017), France is “the only country in the world where being independent mannequin is forbidden”. Interviews with models (see [Methodology](#)) demonstrated that, even without legal status, many ask for an unofficial cash payment from a given photographer.

In all cases, image rights are important, preventing any unintended exploitation of a model’s image. A model release form is signed by both model and photographer, very similar to those proposed by international agencies, such as Getty Images (2015). The main differences in French documents are specifications on the potential uses (online publication, exhibition, book) of photographs and specific deadlines. French law restricts the collection of personal ethnicity-related data (“Informatique et Libertés” law 78-17) [3]. Droit & Photographie (2017) provides examples of release forms for adult, underage or protected adult models.

The French Mannequin Agencies National Trade Union (*Syndicat National des Agences de Mannequins*, SYNAM) estimates that around 3,000 French individuals make a living from their activities, with considerable income disparities (Spautz and Colombani, 2017). Considering art models as a whole, both professional and occasional, Saffroy-Lepesqueur (2022) estimated that there are several thousand professional models, mostly working in Paris.

Sociological and psychological aspects

Photo model activity is at the intersection of several investigated fields and concepts. It first belongs to arts and is at the heart of art creation, beginning with life drawing workshops in art academies. Confinements in 2020 and 2021, making it impossible for models and artists to meet, led some models to perform online (Clark, 2021), highlighting their importance.

Model activity is also part of gig economy (Woodcock and Graham, 2020) as a fractured, precarious and paid-per-job activity with flexible working hours and the growing importance of digital platforms mediation. As previously seen, most models are amateur and cannot make a living from modelling as a sole activity.

Modelling is also body work, as the work performed with one’s own body (Gimlin, 2007). It requires efforts to display emotions that are appropriate for visual artists in the creative process. This leads to related concepts of emotional labour and aesthetic labour.

Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labour as the “management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display [that is] sold for a wage”, which fits model activity. Hochschild also stated how it disproportionately affected women in the service occupation sector, modelling being concerned by both aspects. Clark (2021) stated from her own model experience that models provide much more than a simple image, but also their “experience, engagement, imagination, presence” and that “even during distance workshops, workshop still include human warmth and depth of focus thanks to actors’ implication and creativity”. This underlies effective emotional labour. Kanai (2019) added that with the development of a highly entrepreneurial sense of individuality, the self has to be constantly working in both public and private arenas, blurring the separation between both. Marwick and boyd (2011) underlined that in celebrity culture, women in particular share personal details in public for maintaining their fan communities and to secure attention, resulting in a complex relation between followers and intermediaries. While most photo models are not celebrities, the youngest among them have grown up in an attention economy. They are thus accustomed to these tactics and to blurred distinctions between the public and private spheres. We can suppose young photo models are ready to accept increasing emotional labour in the context of their activities.

Concerning aesthetic labour (Witz, *et al.*, 2003), embodiment is a major part in model activity since body posture and facial expression are correlated to an artist’s intended emotions to convey to viewers. Yet, there are difficulties for viewers to describe, let alone assess, the aesthetic value of a given work (Freedberg, 2009). Models cannot simply walk away from their product (body/self). There are difficulties in generating distance between a work identity and self-identity. They have to work at unusual times while there are expectations of some maintenance of their bodies (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006). Occasional and art models have fewer physical constraints than professional fashion models.

At another level, social media development provides possibilities for any user to directly interact with a given model. This factor was nearly absent a few decades ago where communication was restricted to people involved in photography and postal mail addressed by fans to famous models via their agencies (with no guaranteed reply). Social media increased emotional labour already performed by models in the context of their activities. This may combine with aesthetic labour and viewers' sexualization to a form of sexualized labour. Drenten, *et al.* (2020) defined it as “an embodied performance that involves a complex, interrelated dynamic of emotion, aesthetics and sexualization that cannot be separated from where it is placed”, despite initial artistic intentions. Sexualization leads to sexual objectification, as demonstrated by Fasoli, *et al.* (2018).

We therefore see how these activities imply important sociological and psychological concepts, making it an interesting topic for research. This paper focuses on promotion and communication aspects, while keeping in mind underlying potentially influential aspects.

Online tools

As it will be explained in [Methodology](#), interviews with French models (confirmed by quick verifications on the Internet) enabled us to focus our study on platforms briefly earlier. Details for each platform will be provided in following subsections.

Portfolios

Several platforms provide services for people involved in art (including models) to present online portfolios where they can present themselves and organize selected photos in galleries. All model profiles in portfolios have common features including:

- location, age (optional), sex/gender (see [Analysis and results](#) for details)
- physical features
- introductory text, style availabilities, possibilities to move around, considered types of collaboration, links
- photos organized in galleries with optional password protection
- contact forms

Search options usually include sex/gender (“men”, “women” and “indifferent” being sole choices), age, style availability, experience, physical features and location.

[Table 1](#) provides details on subscribed models as of March 2023. Since Focale31 offered no option to search by style, only a selection of 102 models of some 472 (21.6 percent) had analyzed, randomly selected based on the proportion of models by region.

Table 1: Number of online portfolios on three major French platforms in March 2023			
Note: * estimation based on 102 random profiles.			
	Book.fr	Kabook	Focale31
Search date	20 March 2023	20 March 2023	27 March 2023
Number of models	3,401	4,368	472
— percentage of which were available nude	24.8	20.3	88.2*

Ratio of women (all models)	72.3	85.2	98.0*
— <i>percentage among models available nude</i>	72.7	81.1	97.8*

Table 1 confirms the estimation of “thousands,” mostly amateur, models given in Saffroy-Lepesqueur (2022), indicating that this activity is very feminized. Two explanations can be suggested. First, the gender pay-gap in favor of women models in fashion industry has been acknowledged (Shah and St. John, 2021; Karnavat, 2022). We can assume that even in amateur art photography, this trend also exists. Moreover, a gender gap exists also in viewing, especially nudes. Eck (2003) noted based on interviews that while men and women easily discuss pictures of naked women (even if the reasons are different), heterosexual men are mostly uncomfortable looking at pictures of naked men while female responses were split, some positive answers mixed with guilt. Male gaze in popular culture and countless portrayals of women in art for centuries also has an influence according to Berghman, *et al.* (2023), resulting in both men and women more likely to find beauty in female nudity than male nudity, though this trend is more pronounced among men. This general situation may explain the reduced space for men in art photography, gay male photography still being marginal in museums and fine arts galleries (Gonzalez-Day, 2002). While they absolutely do not exclude gay men in the creation of photo model accounts, main online portfolios reflect a traditional situation, with women being the large majority of users as photo models, with women and heterosexual men being main targets as audiences.

For each platform, nude (un)availability changed only marginally man/woman ratio, indicating a likely limited correlation between sex/gender and accepting to pose for nude photoshoots.

Focale31 has fewer models, probably due to an automatic account restriction after three months in the absence of a logon. However, Focale31 attracts a much larger proportion of models with nude availability.

Social networks

Interviews with models (see **Methodology**) demonstrated frequent use of social networks. We focused on Instagram and X (still called Twitter at the time of database construction) based on interview details.

Instagram

Each photo and video can be associated to captions and hashtags, enabling easier searching. Searching can be accomplished by username, biography or hashtag. For example, a search on *modele* yields results where user name or description includes *modele*. Online tools, like Inlact (<https://inlact.com>), allows searches on Instagram biographies, combined with the number of followers. **Table 2** shows Inlact search results on Instagram biographies.

Table 2: Search on Instagram biographies by keyword (3 May 2023).			
Word or hashtag in biography	Accounts (0–1k followers)	Accounts (+5k followers)	Accounts (total)
modele	1,405	2,211	2,574
modelephoto	172	240	256
frenchmodel	24	46	57
modelephotos	15	16	16
photomodele	7	9	11

Modele and #modele were by far the most used, in 2,917 Instagram profiles. On the same day, 3,788 profiles indicated mannequin in their biographies, with 578 indicating France as their location. Despite difficulties in securing precise figures, we can estimate they reach thousands, aligning with previous estimates.

Twitter/X

Twitter/X permits the sharing of images, in association with hashtags. A search engine on words or hashtags exists, with some restrictions, including location. Similarly to Instagram, external tools are necessary to extract statistics on the number of models. [Table 3](#) provides FollowerSearch search results on Twitter biography keywords and location (3 May 2023), indicating smaller numbers for models compared to Instagram. Nevertheless, an important point is that nudity is not censored, which enable models to post content unavailable on Instagram.

Table 3: Search results on Twitter biographies by keyword (3 May 2023).	
Word or hashtag in biography	Number of accounts
modele	158
modèle photo	144
frenchmodel	72
photo model (location: France)	9
mannequin (location: France)	128

Remunerating platforms (R.P.)

Crowdfunding platforms enable individuals to secure funds either for a particular project or for regular activities. Patreon was the most used by French-speaking models in this category. It has already been examined by Regner (2021) and El Sanyoura and Anderson (2022). Platforms like OnlyFans or MYM combine subscription-based content access and social media tools. Unlike Patreon, these platforms provide explicit sexual content. Our preliminary studies demonstrated that photo models occasionally use these platforms as well.

Publicly accessible content on these platforms is very limited in order to prompt users to subscribe. In the context of this study, it meant that we do not have access to the large majority of the content, and even information on update frequency was difficult to retrieve. This study examined the presence of photo models on remunerating platforms, with creator accounts.

Patreon

Content creators affiliated to certain categories can be funded by *patrons* monthly or for accessing certain creations. In return, patrons access exclusive content uploaded by a given creator. According to Bonifacio, *et al.* (2021), Patreon popularity among creators generates income even with a small following, as Patreon does not require a minimum audience level. A patron can choose between different subscriptions determined by a content creator, providing access to different content. Patrons numbers and monthly income were public.

Graphtreon (<https://graphtreon.com>) provided the means to secure detailed stats by creator or category. According to Graphtreon, on 21 May 2023, 225,851 creators had at least one patron. Photography (photographers and models both falling into this category) was a minor activity (see [Table 4](#)). Adult

photography includes nudes.

Table 4: Patreon stats by categories as of 21 May 2023 (Source: Graphtreon).				
Category	Creators with at least one patron (percentage)	Public memberships	Monthly payouts (US\$) (excluding hidden earnings)	Estimated average monthly payouts per creator (US\$)
All	225,851 (100)	14,327,861 (100)	25,633,075 (100)	113.50
Photography	2,773 (1.23)	69,977 (0.49)	132,403 (0.52)	47.75
Adult photography	3,407 (1.51)	59,022 (0.41)	104,091 (0.41)	30.79

OnlyFans and MYM

On OnlyFans, subscribers (*fans*) are granted access to exclusive video and photo content, direct contact with the content creator and can request exclusive media at additional costs. It inspired sites like French MYM ([MYM](#)).

Easterbrook-Smith (2023), Lippmann, *et al.* (2023) and Rubattu, *et al.* (2023) already examined OnlyFans for their use by sex workers. According to Fabiyi (2022), it offers creators a safer way to participate in the adult entertainment industry, with an ability to create their own content and control their own intellectual property. For its part, MYM has been the subject of national newspaper coverage (Boucher, 2021; Nasi, 2022; Trevert and Bussigny, 2023).

When navigating these platforms, sex workers were not put forward, not on the main page nor on their official blog. OnlyFans stressed women, mostly in sexy outfits. On MYM, creators defined themselves as “coach”, “journalist” or “lifestyle” were put in the limelight. While the platform includes a search engine, it provides no direct access to adult content producers.

Accessing an OnlyFans or MYM account without a subscription provided limited content at the discretion of a given creator, most media being blurred or invisible. In the case of adult content creators, public content was usually limited to few lingerie or suggestive pictures, not showing nipples and genitalia. A monthly fee, defined by a model, is proposed to the subscriber to access private content. Contrary to Patreon, the number of subscribers is not public.

OnlyFans and MYM are thus very comparable platforms, their main difference being language. The MYM interface is only available in French while the OnlyFans interface is multilingual, where English was most frequently used, at least in the biographies of creators. In this study, we focused to Francophone photo models. A French language platform like MYM is probably more user-friendly to Francophone models. However, it must be noted that OnlyFans had 120 million registered users in 2021 (Cooban, 2021), compared to 14 million users for MYM in 2023 (Younan, 2023). We assumed that some Francophone photo models were using OnlyFans to reach an international audience of subscribers, even if the actual numbers are unknown.

Landing pages

Biographies on social media usually have a limited number of characters, creating difficulties for a model to post several links. Web sites such as AllMyLinks (<https://allmylinks.com>), Linktree (<https://linktr.ee>) or Instabio (<https://instabio.cc/en>) provide the means to create a single page with many relevant links. For a model, these sites could include links to portfolios, social media or remunerating platforms.

Methodology

interviews

As part of a larger project, semi-structured interviews with eight French photo models (ages: 21 to 42; 7 woman/1 man) were performed between March and July 2023. They were contacted either via Instagram or portfolio contact forms. Questions focused on their beginnings, activities, personal motivations, income received from their activity, platforms in use, audience targets, interactions with photographers, followers and subscribers and processes for selecting publication options. These interviews targeted specific platforms noted earlier, allowing the creation for this study of a representative database of French-speaking (mostly French) models on the Internet. As a result of these interviews, we generated the following hypotheses:

- *H1*: Portfolios and Instagram are the main tools used by models;
- *H2*: Remunerating platforms are used only by a minority of models for nude content;
- *H3*: Twitter/X is mostly not used as a main platform, but as a complementary tool for posting nude content or promoting a specific remunerating platform.

Building the database

We focused on models who had an online portfolio and/or a social media account for their photo model activity, to have a representative panorama on how models promoted their work. We selected two online portfolio French platforms: Kabook and Focale31. Kabook hosts the majority of online portfolios and includes a complete search engine and other useful information (*i.e.*, update history or last connection). The latter required an active presence for its members since portfolios were deactivated after three months without activity. Moreover, its nude specificity made it interesting concerning *RQ2* and *H2*.

Profiles were randomly selected with no conditions on location. We define a 80/20 ratio between Kabook and Focale31 to draw analysis on nude models while keeping the database broadly representative of the general situation of models.

We also selected profiles on either Instagram or Twitter with appropriate keywords and hashtags, with the following constraints:

- last Instagram post less than three months ago;
- last Twitter post less than six months ago, in accordance to *H3* and considering Twitter has much fewer model accounts than Instagram;
- no model specialized in pornographic content only (two adult content creators were however included in the database since they developed a parallel photo model activity).

The number of models selected via Instagram was unfortunately limited due to the platform's restrictions on profile searches, to prevent abuse and potential spam.

Online research was performed almost entirely in French, since it was the main (and most often only) language used by models on all of these platforms. In fact, almost all models work only in places close to their home, being amateur and not making a living of this sole activity. English had been used only in the context of a limited number of hashtags occasionally used by models on social media (for example, #frenchmodel).

Removing duplicate entries with both social media and portfolios led to the a selection of 651 models, as described in [Table 5](#).

Table 5: Models dataset by selection platform.				
Note: *Estimates based on 2,917 Instagram profiles and 383 Twitter profiles in March 2023.				
	Kabook	Focale31	Instagram	Twitter
Selected profiles	374	97	115	65
Ratio with total number of profiles (percentage)	8.56	20.55	3.94*	16.9*

Profile details

For each model, the following information was compiled: age, sex/gender (s/g), nude availability (n.a.), use of an online portfolio (OP) / Instagram (IG) / Twitter (TW) / MYM / OnlyFans (OF) / Patreon (Patr) / landing page (LP). Apart from the age, a Boolean value was associated with each item (yes=1, no =0; exception for sex/gender: woman=1, man=0). [Table 6](#) sums up the composition of the database.

Table 6: Model database composition.										
	s/g	n.a.	OP	IG	TW	R.P.:	-MYM	-OF	-Patr	LP
Women	585	324	466	293	79	86	64	25	21	69
percent/W	100	55.4	79.7	50.1	13.5	14.7	10.9	4.3	3.6	11.8
Men	66	37	55	30	9	4	1	2	1	2
percent/M	100	56.1	83.3	45.5	13.6	6.1	1.5	3.0	1.5	3.0
Total	651	361	521	323	88	90	65	27	22	71
percent/total	100	55.5	80.0	49.6	13.5	13.5	10.0	4.1	3.4	10.9

The proportion of models indicating nude availability was higher than percentages previously noted on Kabook or Book.fr., which may be partly explained by the inclusion of 97 models from Focale31, with a much higher attraction for nude models. *H3* may imply models selected from Twitter increased the number of those with nude availability, even if they accounted for 10 percent of the database.

For most criteria, no significant differences could drawn for use related to sex/gender. Main disparities remained in the use of remunerating platforms (14.7 percent for women vs. 6.1 percent for men), especially MYM (10.9 percent vs. 1.5 percent). MYM appeared to be by far the most popular remunerating platform among French-speaking photo models compared to OnlyFans, despite its international impact. A similar difference could be seen in the use of landing pages (11.8 percent vs. 3.0 percent), most including at least one remunerating platform. This confirms the conclusion of Gaenssle (2024) that female content creators may be more successful in monetizing their content than male creators, and we can assume this applies also to modelling activities.

Analysis and results

Age

Only 354 models out of 651 (54.37 percent) provided their age or birth year on at least one of the platforms that they used (min=18, max=72, μ =31.03, σ =9.91). General statistics are provided by age range (Table 7) and platform (Table 8).

Table 7: Models by age.		
Age range	Number	Percentage
18–24	104	29.38
25–29	94	26.55
30–34	61	17.23
35–39	36	10.17
40–44	18	5.08
45–49	15	4.24
50–54	15	4.24
55–59	7	1.98
60+	4	1.13

Table 8: Age of models by platform.							
Note: * to be interpreted with caution due to low number of users.							
	OP	IG	TW	MYM	OF*	Patr.*	LP
Number of models	314	171	41	37	15	14	37
min/max	18/72	19/72	21/49	20/52	21/42	19/35	19/42
μ	31.74	29.99	29.27	28.27	28.93	25.64	27.11
σ	10.14	9.55	6.36	7.17	5.66	4.58	4.74

The average age of models using most platforms is quite close, around 29 years old. While Patreon seems to attract younger models, results have to be taken with caution due to the low number of users. Models using portfolios and/or Instagram appeared to have a similar age distribution. Standard deviation differences indicate that Twitter, remunerating platforms and landing pages appeal less to models over 40 years old. In fact, only three used Twitter (7.32 percent), three MYM (8.11 percent), one a landing page (2.70 percent), one OnlyFans

(6.67 percent) and none for Patreon.

[Table 9](#) provides details on platform use and nude availability by age range.

Table 9: Platforms use by age range.								
Note: * to be interpreted with caution due to low number of users.								
Age range	n.a.	OP	IG	TW	MYM	OF*	Patr.*	LP
18–24	36.54	80.77	51.92	10.58	11.54	1.92	5.77	8.65
25–29	61.70	82.98	57.45	17.02	13.83	8.51	5.32	20.21
30–34	72.13	100.00	42.62	11.48	9.84	3.28	3.28	9.84
35–39	80.56	94.44	36.11	11.11	8.33	5.56	2.78	5.56
40–44	72.22	88.89	33.33	11.11	11.11	5.56	0.00	5.56
45–49	80.00	100.00	40.00	6.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	13.33
50–54	66.67	100.00	33.33	0.00	6.67	0.00	0.00	0.00
55+	72.73	100.00	63.64	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Portfolios were widely used for all age groups. Models aged 18–29 had lesser use of portfolios than older models. Instagram was used by a majority of 18–29 aged models and a minority of older models (with the exception of a few that were 55 and older). Twitter was a minority platform for all models, with the 25–29 age group using it the most. The use of Instagram and Twitter confirmed (Hruska and Maresova, 2020) conclusions that American users aged 18–28 were most likely using these platforms rather than older users. French-speaking models appeared to follow this trend. Age gap differences on Twitter also applied to remunerating platforms and landing pages. Finally, even if figures had been increased by the relative importance given to Focale31 in the selection process and the presence of models directly selected from Twitter, nude availability was quite comparable in most age ranges, models aged 18–24 being an exception.

Sex/gender

Concerning models selected from online portfolios, Kabook used *sexe* (sex) in their search engine and the possibility to feature either *sexe* or *genre* (gender) in model profiles. Only one model in our database used *genre* in their Kabook profile, the other preferred *sexe*. Focale31 utilized a search using gender only, and model profiles did not feature explicitly any of these terms. A profile single biography sentence was the only indication for self-description as male or female, with no further precision over sex or gender.

Sex or gender was rarely explicitly provided in biographies from models selected from social media. Physical appearance as well as the occasional use of specific hashtags including words like *femme* or *woman* helped to determine sex/gender.

As a result, we decided to use the combined sex/gender expression to reflect this ambiguity ([Table 10](#)). Women were the majority in the database, close to what was already noted on Kabook. Inclusion of other platforms did not significantly changed this ratio.

Table 10: Models by sex/gender.

	Number	Percentage
Women	585	89.86
Men	66	10.14
Total	651	100

Platforms and social media use

The most used platform combinations by models are given in [Table 11](#). Portfolio alone, portfolio and Instagram and Instagram alone were the three main model choices, confirming *H1*.

Table 11: Most used platforms and platform combinations.			
Platform combinations	Total (percentage)	Among n.a. models (percentage)	Among non-n.a. models (percentage)
OP (only)	306 (47.0)	174 (48.2)	132 (45.5)
OP AND IG	152 (23.3)	73 (20.2)	79 (27.2)
IG (only)	49 (7.5)	10 (2.8)	39 (13.4)
Any with TW	88 (13.5)	59 (16.3)	29 (10.0)
Any with at least one R.P.	90 (13.8)	80 (22.2)	10 (3.4)
Any with a LP	71 (10.9)	58 (16.1)	13 (4.5)

While 470 models were selected from an online portfolio, only 306 (65.1 percent) used only an online portfolio to promote their work, meaning 164 models (34.9 percent) used at least another tool in complement of their portfolio (mostly Instagram). Similarly, 116 models were selected on Instagram, but only 49 (42.2 percent) used only Instagram to promote their work, 67 other models used at least one additional tool.

Nude availability seemed to have limited influence on the use of a portfolio. Instagram was less used by models doing nude, especially when used alone. Nudity restrictions on Instagram probably was an influence in this matter.

Remunerating platforms were used by a non-negligible minority of models, especially those available for nude photography. The same conclusion was reached for landing pages, since these pages often included at least one link to a remunerating platform (see next section). Use of Twitter followed this tendency, though with a smaller gap.

Notably age is a factor in the use of a remunerating platform. For models over the age of 30, the use of a remunerating platform was absent for a model not available in nude, but had some importance with models using a combination *n.a./portfolio/Instagram* (9 out of 38 models used a remunerating platform, 23.7 percent) *n.a./not(portfolio)/Instagram* (3 out of 3 models use a remunerating platform, or 100 percent). Other combinations resulted in marginal to no use of a remunerating platform.

For models aged 18–29, similar observations were noted. There was marginal use of a remunerating platform for no nude availability (1 model out of 90), but an important part of models with a combination

n.a./portfolio/Instagram (12 out of 38 models used remunerating platforms, 31.6 percent) and all models in combination *n.a./not(portfolio)/Instagram* (16 out of 16). Models using a portfolio without Instagram used remunerating platforms at a very small proportion, even when available for nude photoshoots (4.8 percent of 30+ models, 8.1 percent of 18–29 models).

Female models (especially the youngest) using Instagram with nude availability were therefore much more likely to use remunerating platforms even if it was a minority practice.

Correlation between variables

Fisher's exact tests were performed on the dataset with R software (Tables [12](#) and [13](#)).

Table 12: Fisher's tests on model database.					
Variable #1	Variable #2	P value			Odds ratio
		Two-sided	Greater	Less	
Art. nude avail.	Online portfolio	0.094	0.006	0.962	1.393
Art. nude avail.	Instagram	0.059	0.977	0.034	0.739
Art. nude avail.	Twitter	0.001	8.10^{-4}	0.997	2.265
Art. nude avail.	R.P.	$<10^{-6}$	$<10^{-6}$	1.000	7.823
Art. nude avail.	Landing page	$1.7.10^{-6}$	$<10^{-6}$	1.000	4.071
Art. nude avail.	Sex-gender	1.000	0.591	0.512	0.973
Online portfolio	Instagram	$<10^{-6}$	1.000	$<10^{-6}$	0.060
Online portfolio	Twitter	$<10^{-6}$	1.000	$<10^{-6}$	0.050
Online portfolio	R.P.	$<10^{-6}$	1.000	$<10^{-6}$	0.133
Online portfolio	Landing page	$<10^{-6}$	1.000	$<10^{-6}$	0.143
Online portfolio	Sex-gender	0.415	0.881	0.202	0.700
Instagram	Twitter	$<10^{-6}$	$<10^{-6}$	1.000	6.648
Instagram	R.P.	$<10^{-6}$	$<10^{-6}$	1.000	6.883
Instagram	Landing page	$<10^{-6}$	$<10^{-6}$	1.000	16.536
Instagram	Sex-gender	0.517	0.28	0.800	1.203
Twitter	R.P.	-6	-6	1.000	9.738

		<10	<10		
Twitter	Landing page	<10 ⁻⁶	<10 ⁻⁶	1.000	21.397
Twitter	Sex-gender	1.000	0.601	0.549	0.989
R.P.	Landing page	<10 ⁻⁶	<10 ⁻⁶	1.000	34.947
R.P.	Sex-gender	0.059	0.033	0.989	2.668
Landing page	Sex-gender	0.034	0.016	0.997	4.273

A majority of our variables were strongly related. A strong positive correlation existed between:

- nude availability/using a remunerating platform or landing page;
- using Instagram/Twitter or a remunerating platform or landing page;
- using a landing page/a remunerating platform or being a woman.

Furthermore, we observed a positive correlation between nude availability and Twitter use and a strong negative correlation between the use of an online portfolio and any other platform. Likely correlations existed between:

- nude availability/portfolio use (positive);
- using a remunerating platform and being a woman (positive);
- nude availability/Instagram use (negative).

Some of our previous observations were confirmed.

Drawing conclusions on correlation between sex/gender with other criteria was difficult, since all P values were all greater than five percent. A low number of male models may partly explain this difficulty. We could also suggest that sex/gender did not play an important part, since they were not directly related to economics. On remunerating platforms, women earnings have been shown to be higher than men (Lindner, 2024). Therefore, global independence between sex/gender and either use of portfolio, Instagram, Twitter or nude availability may be a plausible interpretation.

Specific Fisher’s exact tests were performed on a subset of models with at least one remunerating platform (Table 13). Correlation between OnlyFans and Patreon had not been considered since only one model was using both platforms.

Table 13: Fisher’s exact tests results on a subset of models using at least one remunerating platform.					
		P value			
Variable #1	Variable #2	Two-sided	Greater	Less	Odds ratio
MYM	OnlyFans	1.000	0,598	0.609	1.016
MYM	Patreon	<10 ⁻⁶	1.000	<10 ⁻⁶	0.032

A strongly negative correlation between Patreon and MYM was confirmed. Being associated with sexual content, MYM may not fit for some models rather than a platform welcoming a wide variety of creators.

Drawing a definitive conclusion on the correlation between using MYM and OnlyFans was impossible with this test. Both platforms have many similarities, their main differences being language and audience. We might assume that platform choice was mostly related to fluency in English and a recognition of a targeted audience.

Discussion and conclusions

This study was one of the first to examine Internet communication of French photo models. Online portfolios had been the subject of limited research. This study may be a basis for more in-depth studies.

All initial hypotheses appear to be confirmed by this study. The important number of models with nude availability in our database was not only due to the relative importance of Focale31 in our selection process, but also due to models selected from Twitter. In fact, nude availability and Twitter use was positively correlated, thus confirming *H3*.

Concerning *RQ1*, online portfolios were dominated communications for French-speaking photo models, often combined with Instagram. Instagram is a widely used platform but not specifically designed for photographers, while online portfolios have a smaller but an audience specifically interested in photography. Nudity censorship on Instagram may explain an interest in this combination and also why Instagram was rarely the sole communication tool for models.

Twitter, remunerating platforms and landing pages were minor tools, with younger models and those available for nude using them more than others. Most of our criteria were correlated positively or negatively. A gender gap appeared only clearly concerning the use of landing pages and remunerating platforms. Other variables may be independent from sex/gender with Patreon being distinctive from MYM and OnlyFans. Age range played a role in the choice of platforms, with being 30 years old acting as a threshold, resulting in different choices.

Three major representative communication groups of photo models could be drawn from this study. They would be women, all using online portfolios. Their main differences would be:

- Group #1: In their 30s, available to nude photography (73.4 percent in this age range). They tended to prefer portfolio only (56.1 percent in this group) for promotion while 36.1 percent combined portfolio and Instagram for communication. Their use of remunerating platforms (11.9 percent) and landing pages (4.9 percent) was very limited;
- Group #2: Aged 18–29, not available for nude photography (49.5 percent in this age range). Their use of Instagram in addition to portfolio was comparable to Group #1 (35.5 percent), but they were a bit less likely to elect portfolio-only communication (47.7 percent). Overall, they had no use for remunerating platforms with limited use of landing pages;
- Group #3: Aged 18–29, available to nude photography (50.5 percent of this age range). Models in this group were likely to use Instagram (58.7 percent), a remunerating platform (34.8 percent, MYM in most cases) and a landing page (25.0 percent) than all other groups.

This leads to *RQ2* concerning modelling sexualization by a presence on a remunerating platform. Our answer was mostly negative, with some ambivalence. First of all, only 13.7 percent models in our database used at least one remunerating platform, almost solely restricted to those models available for nude photography (88.8 percent of models using at least one remunerating platform were accessible nude). Among all models available to nude photography, only 21.9 percent used at least one remunerating platform. Thus, the use of remunerating platforms appeared to be restricted to a minority of models. *H2* was confirmed.

If we consider age range, 19.2 percent of the models aged 18–29 used at least one remunerating platform

(associated with nude availability in 91.4 of all cases) while 10.4 percent of models over 30 (all available for nude) used at least one remunerating platform. We previously had seen a wider use of remunerating platforms by women compared to men, especially MYM. Models in this subcategory used platforms mostly known for adult non-artistic content without being deterred by reputation. This comes in line with findings by Langenbach, *et al.* (2023) and Swathisha and Deb (2022) where younger individuals tended to consider sex work as a choice and legitimate, more so than older people. Hamilton, *et al.* (2023) were in agreement with the growing mainstream acceptance of OnlyFans. Thus, we can suppose some young models may not have an issue to use these platforms for promoting their activities.

Considering differences in ages, it may be a reasonable hypothesis that more young models will use remunerating platforms in the near future to secure compensation, increasing the significance of Group #3, even if they remain a minority.

The question of effective content posted on remunerating platforms by Group #3 models is still unclear. Portfolios and Instagram content largely post non-sexual nude content. However, the likely growing presence of platforms with sexual content may reinforce the sexualized aspect of this artistic activity in the eye of the public. Moreover, as Eck (2001) noted, context and (sometimes shifting) frames of reference are important for people in interpreting images with nudity. The same nude photography posted on a portfolio and on OnlyFans may therefore be not viewed in the same way by their respective audiences, and likely with a sexualized perspective in the latter case.

This is an important aspect since modelling is already subject to indistinct nudity censorship on major social media, sexualization and sexual objectification. Moreover, MYM and OnlyFans subscribers have expectations of authenticity in their communication with creators, to the point of embodied authenticity (Jones, 2016) even if its reality is relative (Sætre, 2023). As we stated before, this implies a communication type that was previously absent for models. Our initial assumption that the youngest women models were more likely to accept additional emotional labour was confirmed since those aged 18–29 with nude availability were more prone to use MYM or OnlyFans, and thus to engage into intimate communication in addition to typical photo model communication.

We can therefore conclude from *RQ1* and *RQ2* that photo model expression is covering two different realities in terms of online communication:

- A majority group of models focusing on usual tools like portfolios and Instagram, with limited influence of their availability to nude photoshoots. This group combines groups #1 and #2 from *RQ1*). Their target was mostly those involved in photography.
- A minority group mostly made of models aged 18–29, that fit in group #3 (*RQ1*). They are more likely to use remunerating platforms for compensation for posting non-sexual/artistic content there, even if these platforms are widely associated with sex work. They have an additional audience of subscribers expecting a personal and intimate communication, thus adding emotional labour to their activities. Their presence on these platforms may contribute to sexual objectification of some models and blurring lines with sex workers from a general point of view.

Limitations and perspectives

This study is one of the first on online communication by French photo models. Its limitations to French-speaking models introduces bias, such as the importance of MYM compared to OnlyFans. A similar comparison between OnlyFans and other non-English remunerating platforms for models from other countries would be interesting.

Almost all models from our database came from countries where nude photography is socially accepted. A similar study on models from more conservative countries would probably demonstrate differences in choices


of platforms.

Focale31 and Twitter gave more visibility to nude models who are more prone to use remunerating platforms. While it enabled their growing use by models aged 18–29, it also resulted in giving group #3 greater importance.

Qualitative studies should be performed to confirm the reasons why models would select either one or a combination of platforms, to understand the importance of monetization in their activities. We must also examine how personal and professional constraints could lead to pick a remunerating platform, requiring frequent updates and time for communication with subscribers, or a portfolio with less obligations. It would be likewise interesting to know how models choices are influenced by social media such as followers' comments, especially with the acknowledged importance on nudity to gain support (Gaenssle, 2024).

Moreover, social media and remunerating platforms have strong relational and emotional labor aspects (Auriemma, 2023) which were previously absent in the activities of models. It may be interesting to explore if and how models deal with these dimensions. Our answer to *RQ2* was partial since it did not include a content qualitative study. Uncertainty lies in what extent this subcategory of photo models restrict their content on remunerating platforms to work done in the context of photoshoots or if retribution would prompt some to share more intimate content.

Finally, the importance of sex/gender with the use of some platforms is still a pending question that cannot be solved with statistically, even if we can suppose their independence in most cases.

Semi-structured interviews with French-speaking models are undergoing in 2024, performed in addition to those already done to obtain better answers to some of these questions. 

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Notes

1. The Law of 26 December 1969 No. 69-1186, related to the legal status of performing artists and models (JORF 30 December 1969, p. 12,732. See Mathilde Pavis, 2019. “‘*In fashion, one day you are in, the next you are out*’: Comparative perspectives on the exclusion of fashion models from performers’ rights,” *European Intellectual Property Review*, volume 41, number 6, pp. 347–358, and at <http://hdl.handle.net/10871/36334>, accessed 31 May 2024.

2. On *le code du travail* (labour code), see, for example, Elisabeth Logeais and Jean-Baptiste Schroeder, 1998.

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3. See, for example, “Loi informatique et libertés” at https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loi_informatique_et_libertés, accessed 31 May 2024.

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French-speaking photo models communication: A comparison across platforms and profiles, a possible evolution

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