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Photography Exhibitions: Psychological Foundations and Empirical Findings

Notes

- The full report can be found here: <https://foto-psychologie.de/publikation/>. Citations should be taken only from the full report. In this short version, results are presented only in excerpts. Information on methodology and limitations can be found in the full report. In particular, limitations regarding the "neither nor" group should be considered (very high proportion of young academics).
- Legend: * = significant; P = professionals, A = amateurs; Pm = male professionals, Pf = female professionals; Am = male amateurs, Af = female amateurs; A<59 = amateurs up to 59 years, A>60 = amateurs over 60 years; bold print: medium or large effect; value 5 = high expression/approval, value 1 = low expression/rejection.
- Example for interpretation: P+/A*: Professionals have a significantly higher mean value than amateurs, small effect.

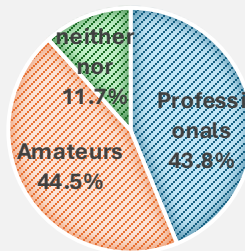
Sample

N = 461

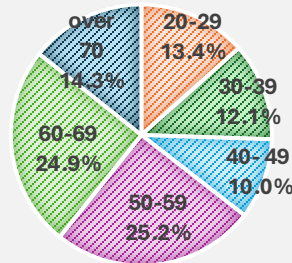
- N = 202 professionals
- N = 205 amateurs
- N = 54 neither nor

Conducted in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, 2024

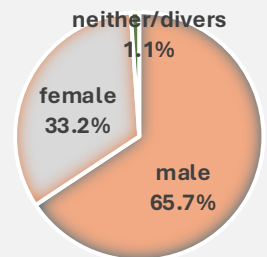
PROFESSIONAL, AMATEURS



AGE



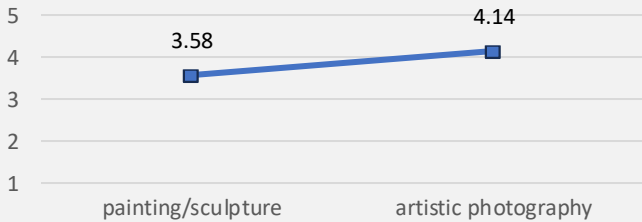
GENDER



Among the amateurs, 62.9% are members of a photography club, while 37.1% are not.

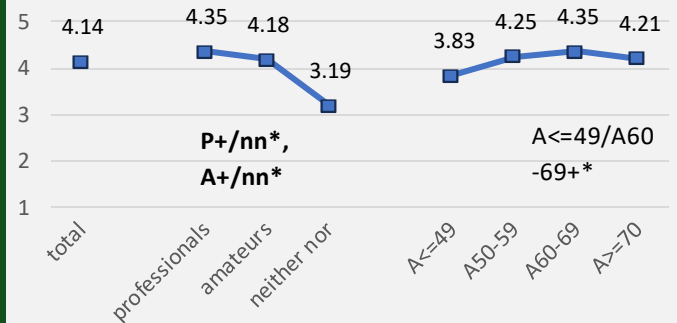
Motives and behavior at photography exhibitions

Interest in artworks in the field of painting/sculpture vs. artistic photography



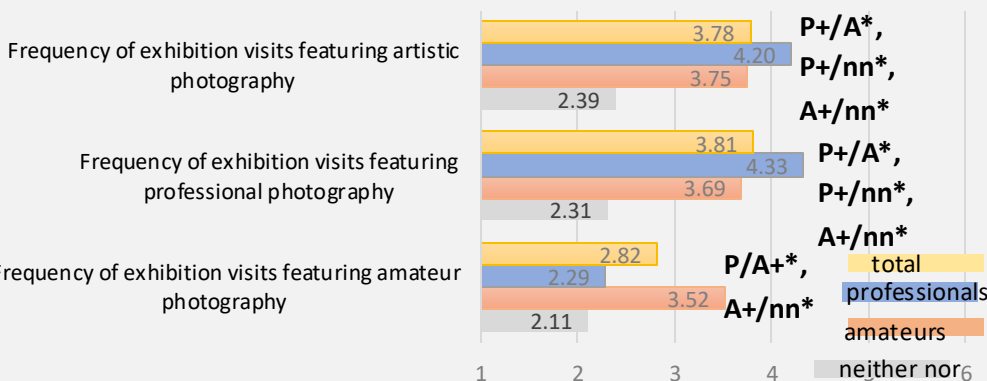
In the total sample, interest in artistic photography is significantly higher than interest in artworks in the fields of painting/sculpture. The higher the interest in artworks in painting/sculpture, the higher the interest in artistic photography ($r = 0.51^*$, large effect).

Interest in artistic photography



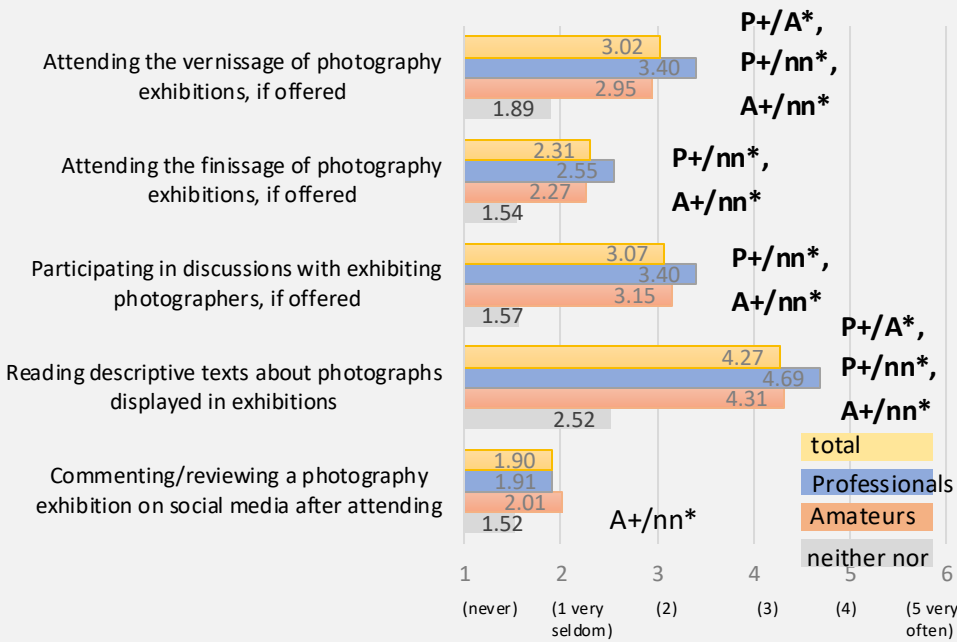
Professionals and amateurs show significantly greater interest in artistic photography than individuals in the "neither nor" group. Amateurs aged 60 to 69 are significantly more interested in artistic photography than amateurs under 49 years old.

Exhibition visits featuring artistic photography



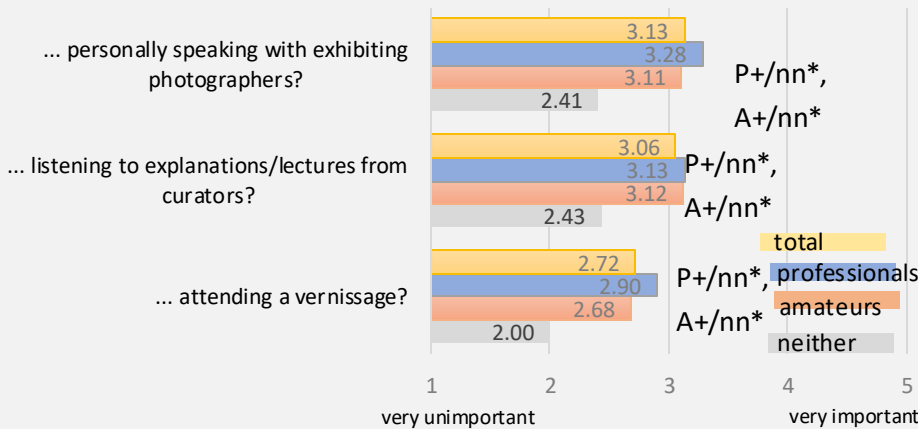
Professionals most frequently visit exhibitions featuring artistic photography/professional photography, while individuals in the "neither nor" group visit them the least. Amateurs are interested in exhibitions featuring amateur photography (particularly older males and members of photography clubs), whereas individuals in the other groups are not.

Activities during visits to exhibitions featuring artistic photography



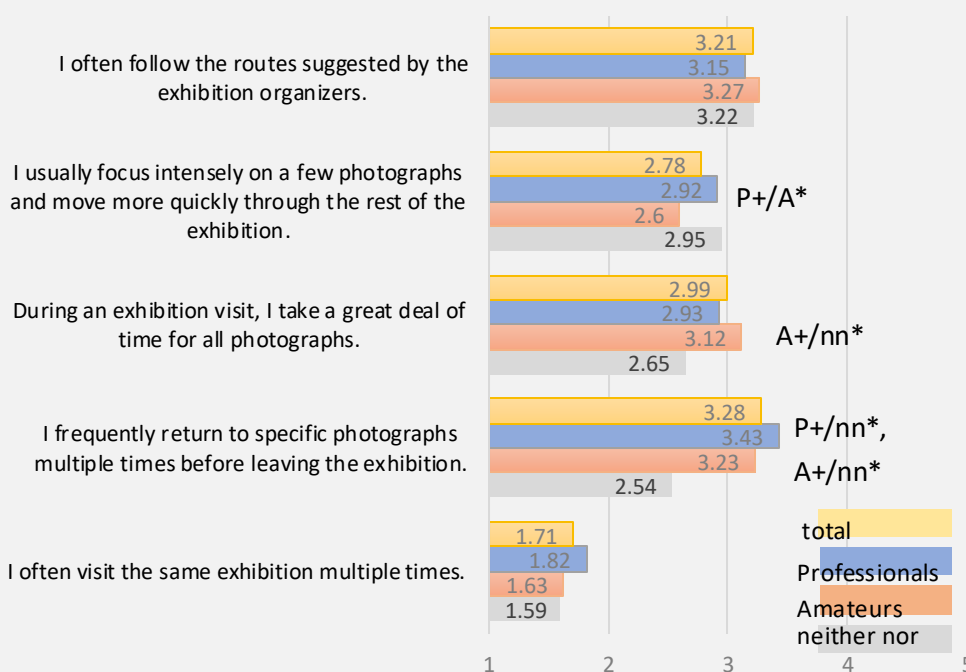
In the total sample, 18.4% never attend an opening reception. Among professionals, this figure is 5.9%, among amateurs 22.0%, and among the "neither nor" group 51.9%. Professionals and amateurs are more likely to frequently read descriptive texts at exhibitions. Overall, half of the respondents (50.1%) never comment on a photography exhibition on social media. Among professionals, this applies to 48.0%, among amateurs to 47.8%, and among the "neither nor" group to 66.7%. There are some differences within the groups (gender, photography club membership), which are documented in the main report.

Importance of activities during photography exhibitions



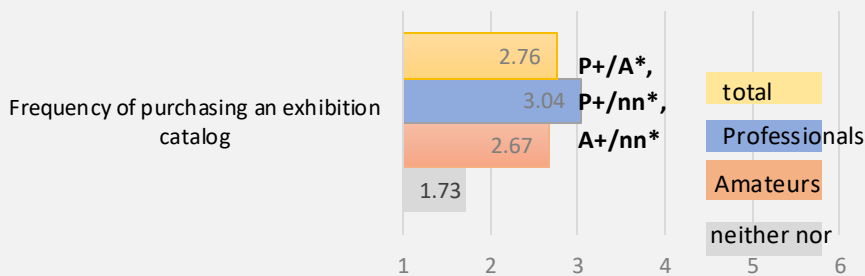
For both amateurs and professionals, it is, on average, only moderately important to personally speak with exhibiting photographers and to hear explanations from curators. Participation in an opening event (vernissage) is considered slightly less important. There are some differences within the groups (gender, photography club membership), which are documented in the main report.

Behavior during exhibition visits

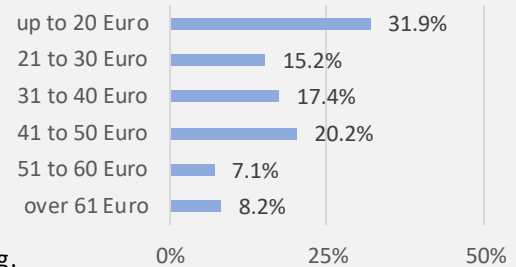


A total of 28.7% clearly or tententially focus intensively on a few photographs and move more quickly through the rest of the exhibition, while for 41.5%, the opposite is true. Additionally, 33.4% tend to or clearly take a lot of time for all photographs, whereas for 36.4%, the opposite is the case. Approval of these two items shows a clear negative correlation of $r = -0.45^*$ (medium effect). There are some differences within the groups (age, gender, photography club membership), which are documented in the main report.

Purchase of a catalog at photography exhibitions

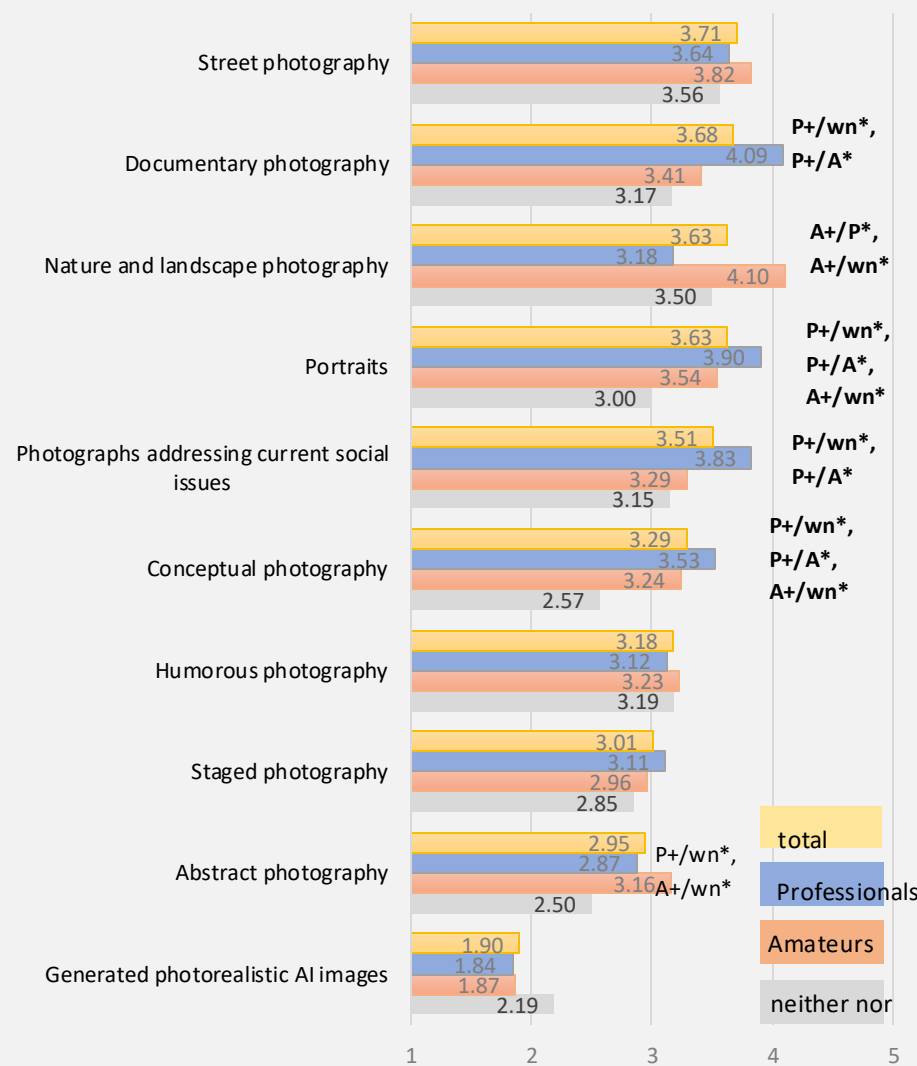


Willingness to pay for exhibition catalogs



On average, respondents are willing to spend 39 euros on an exhibition catalog.

Interest in genres in photography exhibitions



Professionals are primarily interested in documentary photography at photography exhibitions, followed by portraits and photographs addressing social issues. Amateurs show the greatest interest in nature and landscape photography, street photography, and portraits.

In the "neither nor" group, interest in the various themes is generally much lower, with the highest interest in street photography, followed by nature and landscape photography. There is largely no interest in exhibitions featuring generated photorealistic AI images. There are some differences within the groups (age, gender, photography club membership), which are documented in the main report.

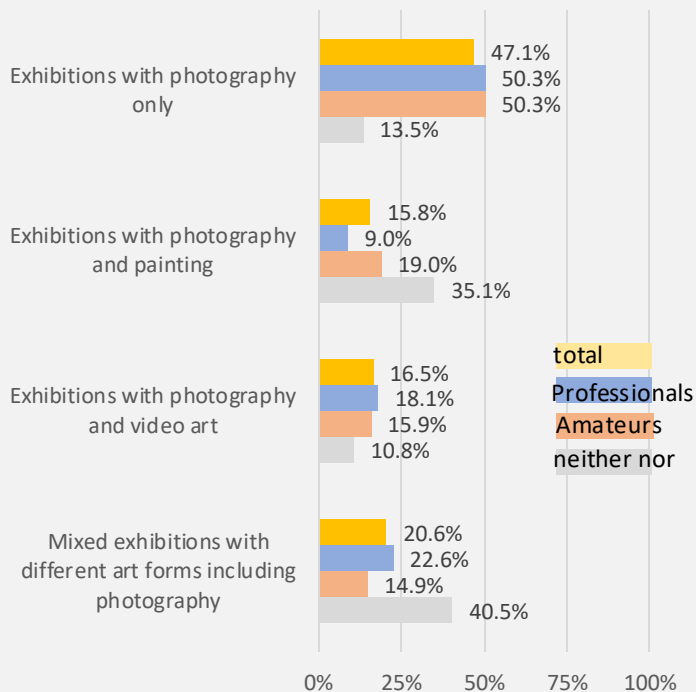
For a majority of 69.2% (professionals 59.9%, amateurs 71.2%, neither nor 96.3%), the listed photography genres correspond to those they are interested in within the context of photography exhibitions. Meanwhile, 30.8% (professionals 40.1%, amateurs 28.8%, neither nor 3.7%) are also interested in other genres.

- Among professionals who are interested in additional genres, the most frequently mentioned ones are architectural photography, experimental photography, photojournalism/reportage, and nude photography.
- Among amateurs who are interested in additional genres, the most frequently mentioned ones are architectural photography, macro photography, nude photography, sports photography, and a animal photography.

Among individuals who at least occasionally visit exhibitions featuring photographs by amateurs (N = 376), the majority (overall 84.8%, professionals 87.3%, amateurs 81.8%, neither nor 90.6%) are not interested in genres beyond those listed for photography exhibitions with amateur photography. A total of 15.2% are interested in other genres (professionals 12.7%, amateurs 18.2%, neither nor 9.4%), particularly everyday life and documentary photography, architectural photography, macro photography, travel photography, and animal photography.

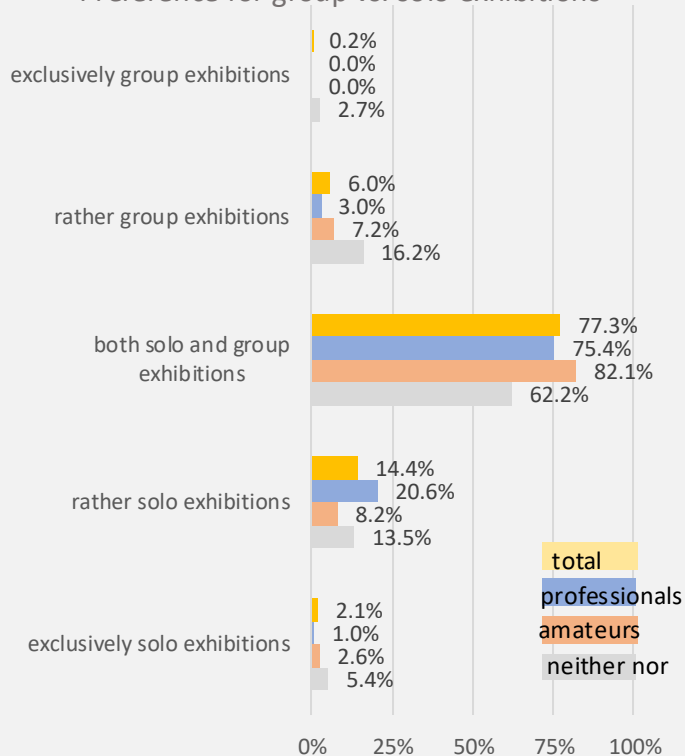
Exhibition formats of artistic photography

Pure photography exhibitions vs. combination with other art forms



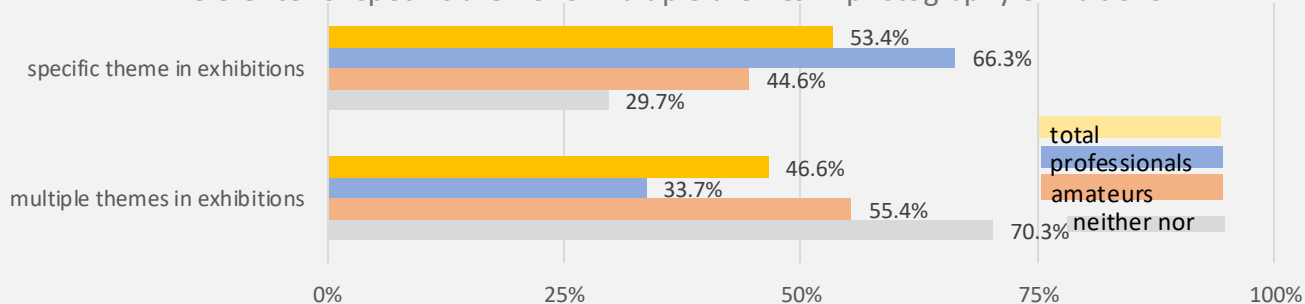
Professionals and amateurs predominantly prefer pure photography exhibitions. In the "neither nor" group, mixed exhibitions featuring various art forms, including photography, are preferred.

Preference for group vs. solo exhibitions



Particularly professionals (75.4%) and amateurs (82.1%) clearly prefer both solo and group exhibitions.

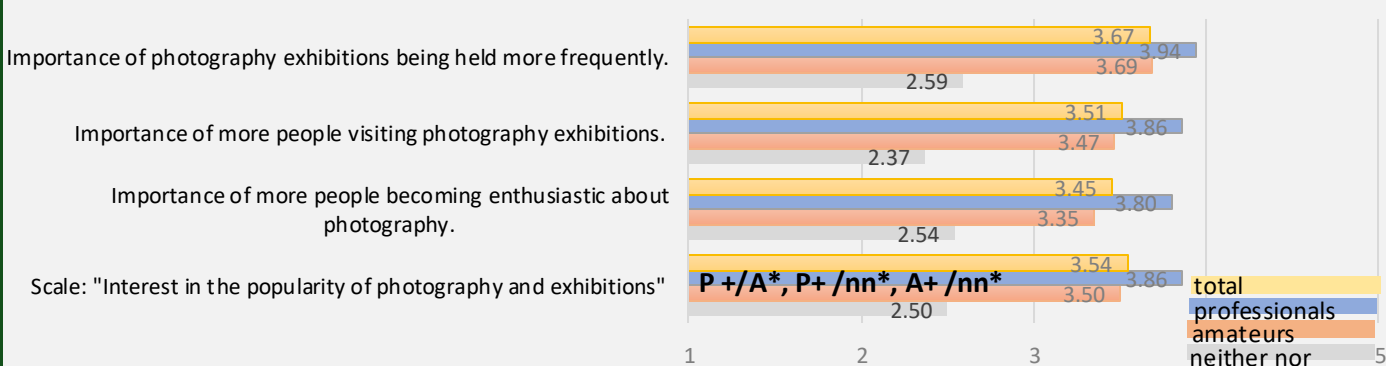
Preference for specific theme vs. multiple themes in photography exhibitions



Professionals predominantly prefer a specific theme. In the "neither nor" group, the opposite is true, with a clear majority preferring multiple themes in photography exhibitions. Among amateurs, the preference is more balanced.

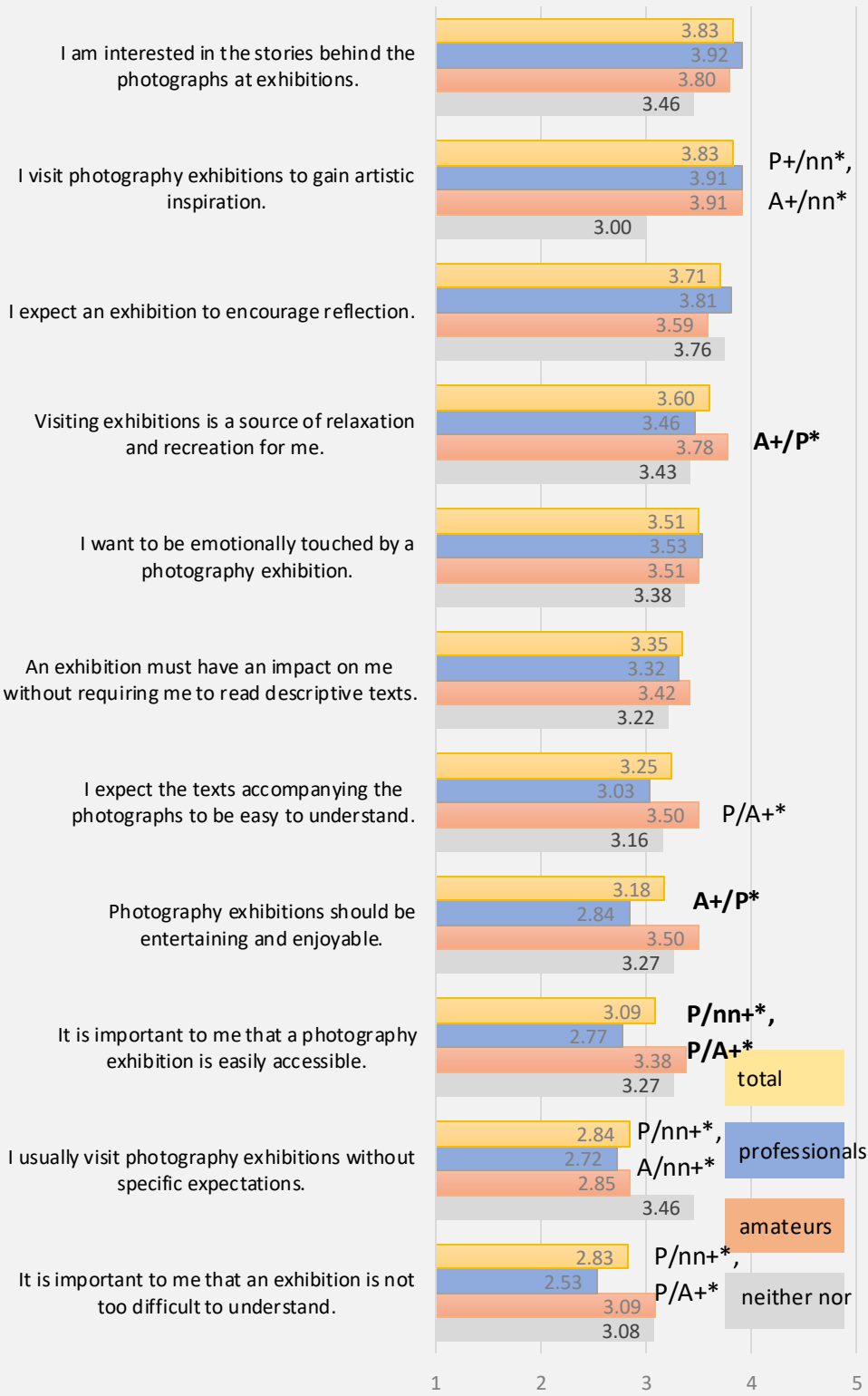
Expectations for photography exhibitions

Interest in the popularity of photography and exhibitions



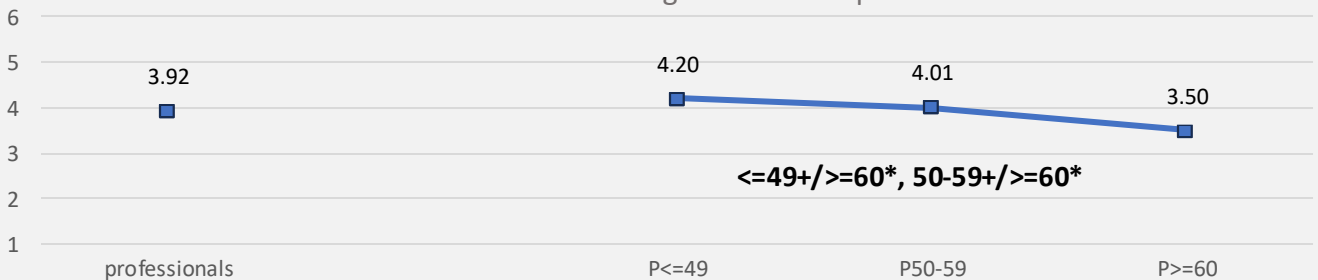
Professionals have the highest interest in the popularity of photography and exhibitions, followed by amateurs. The scale **"reflection, social aspiration, and clear messages"** significantly correlates with the importance of more people visiting photography exhibitions: $r = 0.27^*$ (small effect). The correlation with the overall scale is $r = 0.30^*$ (medium effect).

Expectations for photography exhibitons



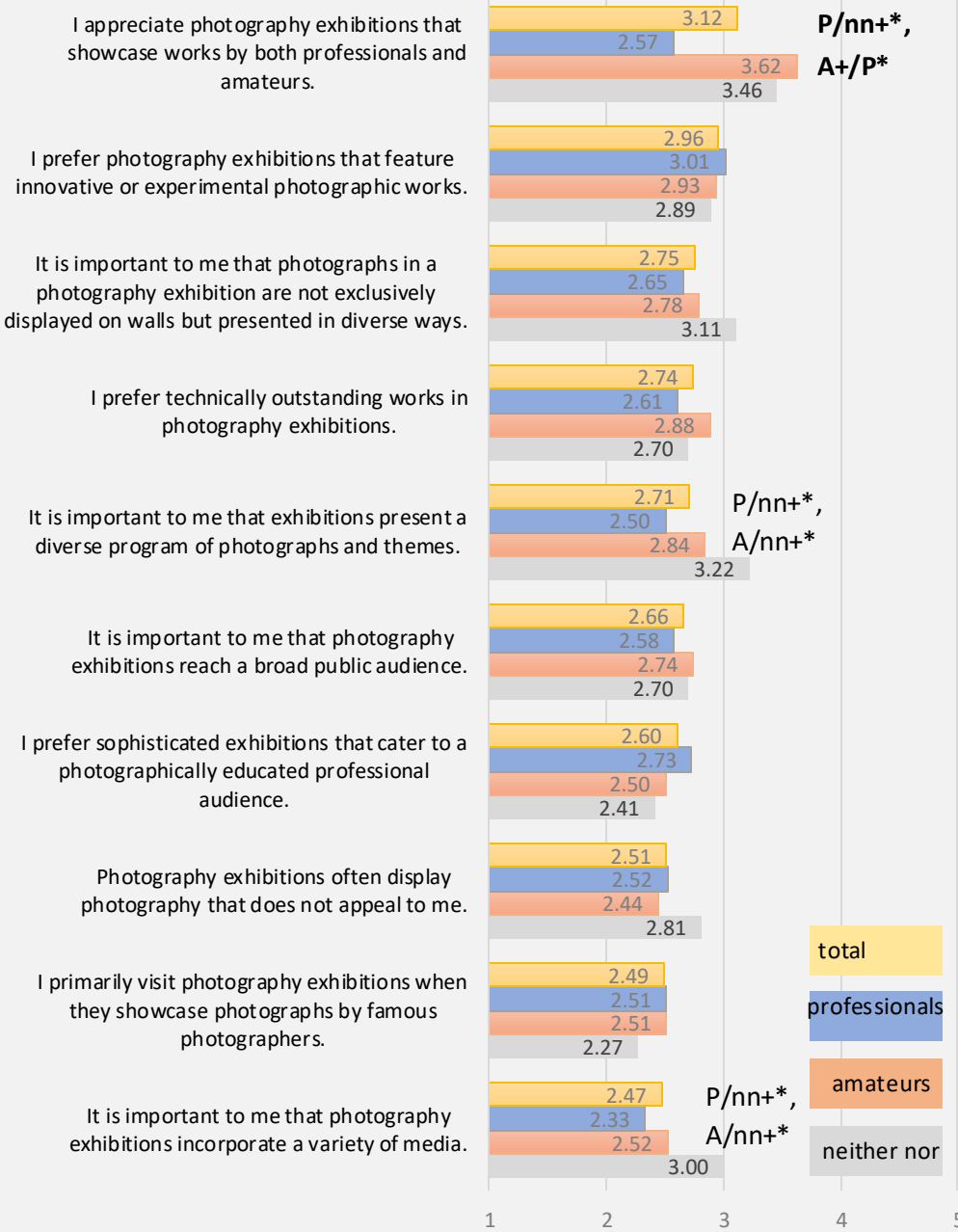
Professionals show the strongest interest in the stories behind the photographs. It is also very important to them to gain artistic inspiration from photography exhibitions and for an exhibition to encourage reflection. The accessibility of exhibitions is generally of little importance to professionals, although this is less true for those under 49 years old. For amateurs, gaining artistic inspiration from photography exhibitions is very important, and they also have a strong interest in the stories behind the photographs. Additionally, finding relaxation and recreation during exhibition visits is highly significant to them. There are some differences within the groups (age, gender, photography club membership), which are documented in the main report.

Professionals: Exhibition visits to gain artistic inspiration



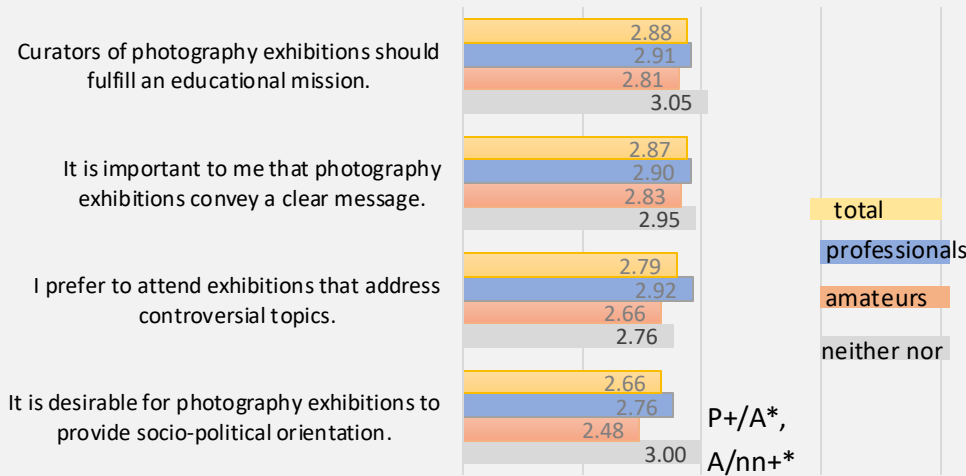
Professionals under 50 and those between 50 and 59 are significantly more likely to visit exhibitions for artistic inspiration than professionals over 60.

Program and type of photography exhibitions



Professionals show the strongest preference, though only to a moderate extent (M = 3.01), for photography exhibitions to feature innovative or experimental works. They also find it the least important that exhibitions incorporate diverse media (M = 2.33). Amateurs (M = 3.62) and individuals in the "neither nor" group (M = 3.46) would appreciate exhibitions showcasing works by both professionals and amateurs. Professionals (M = 2.57) do not share this view. There are some differences within the groups (age, gender, photography club membership), which are documented in the main report.

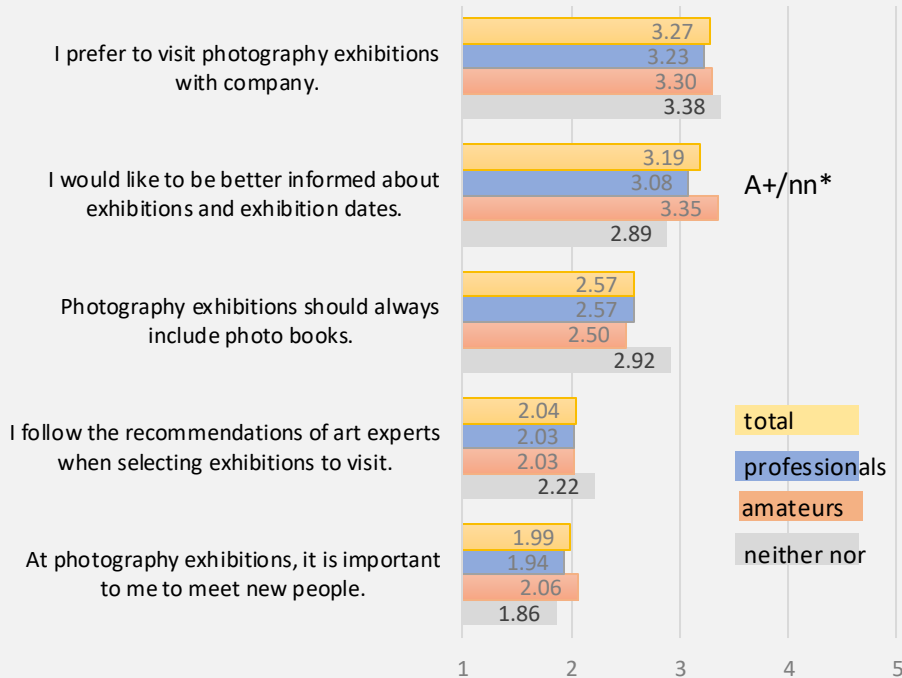
Content-related expectations for photography exhibitions



Overall, in all groups, it is only of moderate importance that photography exhibitions convey clear messages, address controversial topics, and provide socio-political orientation. Accordingly, curators are only partially seen as having an educational mandate. However, there is significant variation within the groups regarding these topics. For instance, 31.1% rather or clearly perceive an educational mandate for curators, while 36.5% rather or clearly do not.

There are some differences within the groups (age, gender, photography club membership), which are documented in the main report.

Social and organizational expectations for photography exhibitions



Tententially, all groups prefer to visit photography exhibitions with company. However, meeting new people at photography exhibitions is considered unimportant. Amateurs, in particular, express a desire for more information about exhibitions and dates. There are some differences within the groups (gender, photography club membership), which are documented in the main report.

Factors influencing expectations for photography exhibitions

To identify underlying dimensions in the statements, a principal component analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted.

Factor 1 (33.86% of variance): **Reflection, societal aspirations, and clear messages.** Cronbach's Alpha = 0.76
This factor encompasses expectations focused on thematic depth, societal relevance, and clear communication of messages. Visitors expect exhibitions to encourage reflection, address socially relevant topics, and communicate clearly.

- I expect an exhibition to encourage reflection.
- Curators of photography exhibitions should fulfill an educational mission.
- It is desirable for photography exhibitions to provide socio-political orientation.
- I prefer to attend exhibitions that address controversial topics.
- It is important to me that photography exhibitions convey a clear message.

Factor 2 (15.61% of variance): **Accessibility and comprehensibility.** Cronbach's Alpha = 0.73
This factor includes expectations regarding the easy accessibility and comprehensibility of exhibitions.

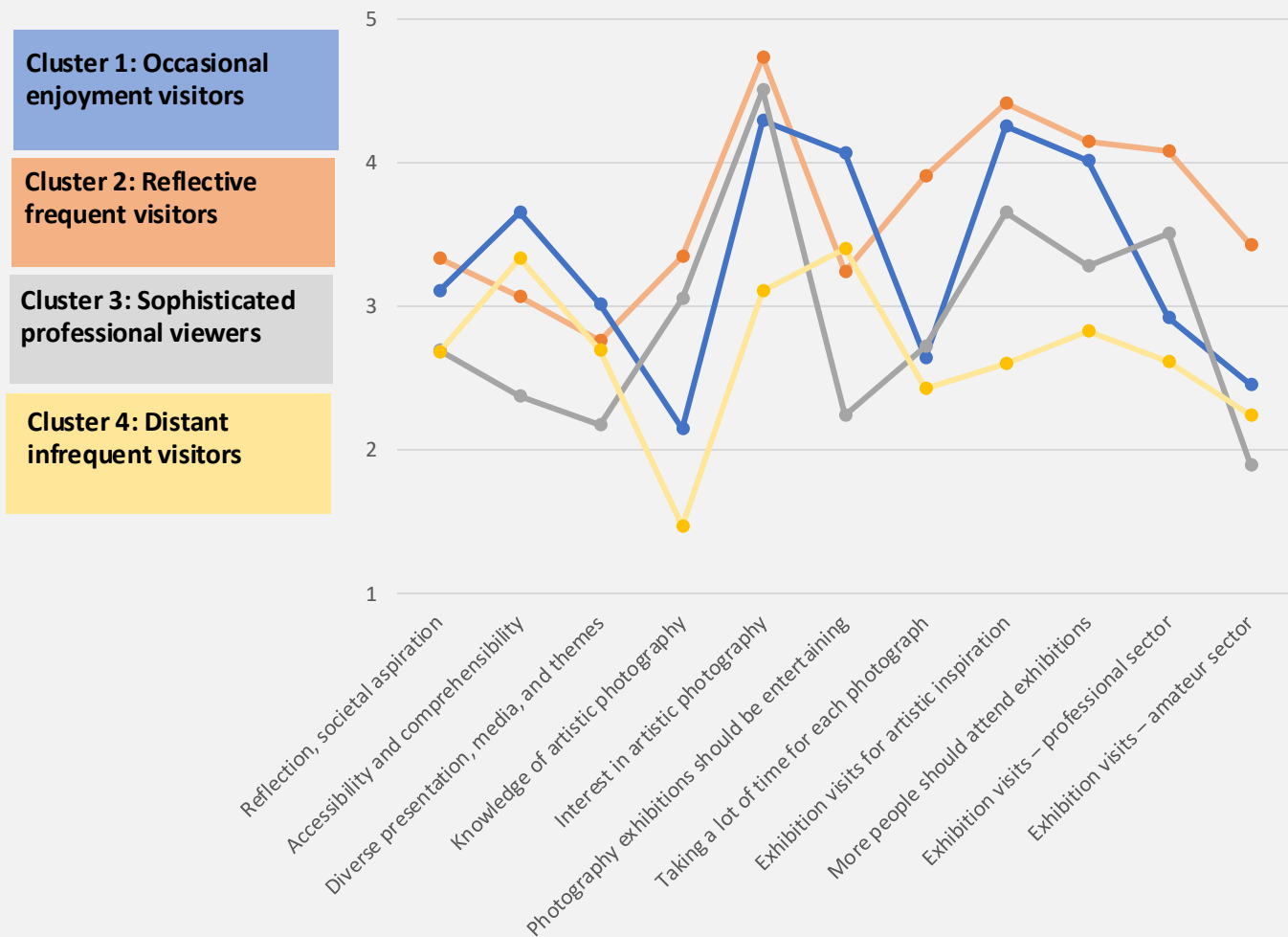
- It is important to me that an exhibition is not too difficult to understand.
- I expect the texts accompanying the photographs to be easy to understand.
- It is important to me that a photography exhibition is easily accessible.

Factor 3 (10.80% of variance): **Diverse presentation, media, and themes.** Cronbach's Alpha = 0.75
This factor describes expectations regarding a varied and creative presentation of photographs.

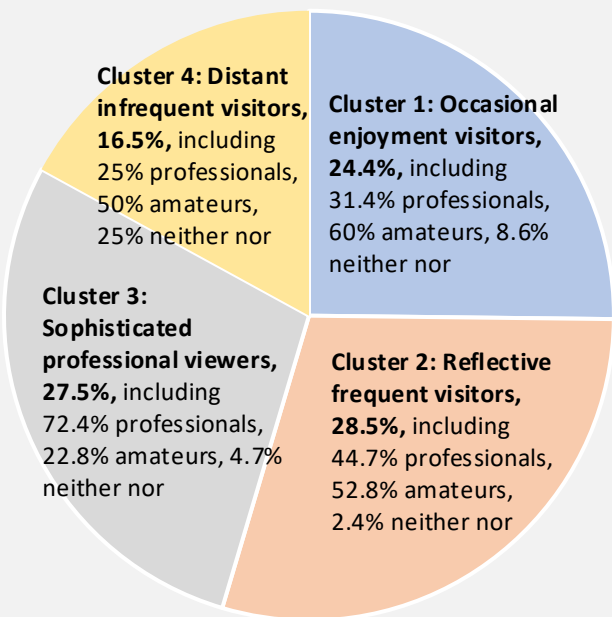
- It is important to me that photographs in a photography exhibition are not exclusively displayed on walls but presented in diverse ways.
- It is important to me that photography exhibitions incorporate a variety of media.
- It is important to me that exhibitions present a diverse program of photographs and themes.

Participant types in photography exhibitions

Cluster analysis: Participant types in photography exhibitions



Participant types in photography exhibitions



Cluster 1: Occasional enjoyment visitors

Members show a strong interest in artistic photography but have limited knowledge in this area. They particularly appreciate entertaining and accessible exhibitions and visit them occasionally, both in the professional and a amateur sectors. Artistic inspiration is their main focus.

Cluster 2: Reflective frequent visitors

Members demonstrate very high knowledge of artistic photography and a strong interest in it. They frequently visit both professional and amateur exhibitions and take a lot of time to examine the works in depth. They value exhibitions as a source of inspiration and critically reflect on their content.

Cluster 3: Sophisticated professional viewers

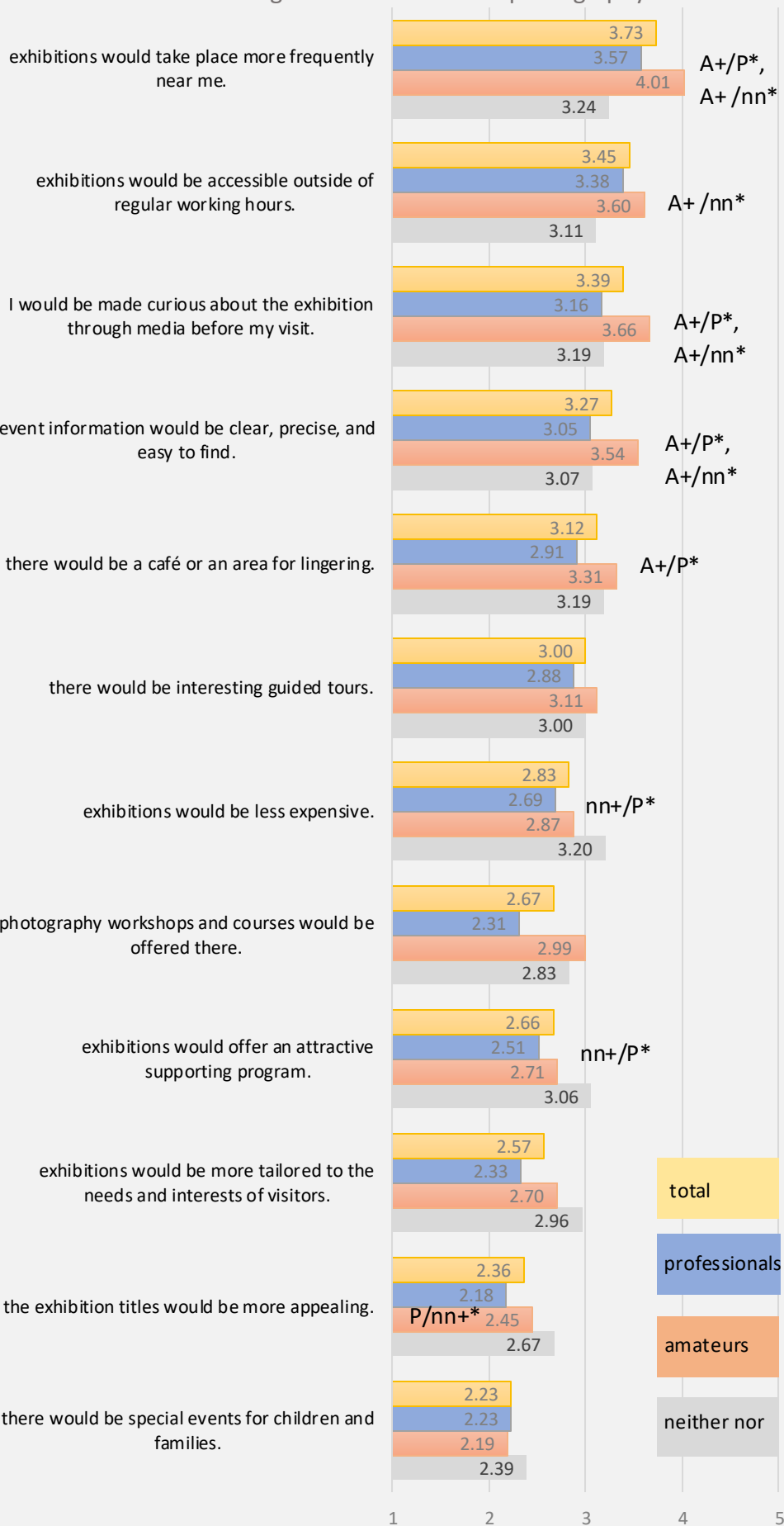
Members possess extensive knowledge of artistic photography and specifically seek out professional exhibitions. They show little interest in entertainment and amateur exhibitions.

Cluster 4: Distant infrequent visitors

Members have little knowledge of artistic photography and show low interest in exhibitions. They rarely visit exhibitions and have little need for artistic inspiration.

Factors for higher attractiveness of photography exhibitions

Factors for higher attractiveness of photography exhibitions



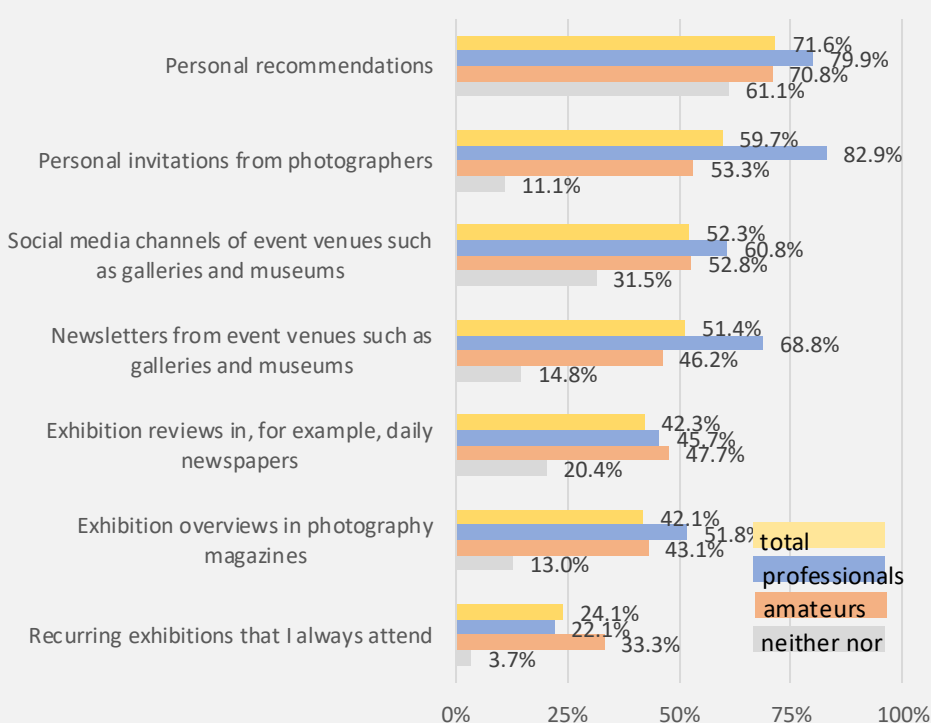
For professionals, the attractiveness of visiting an exhibition would increase if exhibitions were held more frequently nearby, if they were accessible outside of regular working hours, if they were promoted in a way that sparks curiosity through social media, and if event information were clear, precise, and easy to find. Among amateurs, the greatest potential to enhance the attractiveness of photography exhibitions lies in increasing their frequency in nearby locations, generating curiosity through social media, making them accessible outside of regular working hours, and ensuring that event information is clear, precise, and easy to find. For individuals in the "neither nor" group, attractiveness could be increased if exhibitions were held more frequently nearby and were less expensive, if they were promoted in a way that sparks curiosity through social media, and if there were a café or a place to linger. There are many differences within the groups (age, gender, photography club membership), which are documented in the main report.

Potential for increasing the attractiveness of photography exhibitions

Photography exhibition visits would be more attractive for me if ...	Agree somewhat + fully agree	Applies particularly to:
exhibitions took place more frequently near me.	66,4%	Amateurs
exhibitions were accessible outside of regular working hours.	54,6%	Amateurs; amateurs aged 50-59
I was made curious about the exhibition through media before my visit.	51,0%	Amateurs; female amateurs; amateurs who are not members of a photography club
there was a café or an area for lingering.	43,0%	Amateurs; female amateurs
there were interesting guided tours.	38,8%	Female professionals
event information was clear, precise, and easy to find.	37,5%	Amateurs
photography workshops and courses were offered there.	30,8%	Amateurs; female amateurs; amateurs under 49; female professionals
exhibitions were less expensive.	29,4%	Individuals in the "neither nor" group; female amateurs; amateurs who are not members of a photography club; amateurs under 49; female professionals
exhibitions offered an attractive supporting program.	27,9%	Individuals in the "neither nor" group; female amateurs; amateurs who are not members of a photography club; amateurs under 49; female professionals
exhibitions were more tailored to the needs and interests of visitors.	21,7%	Individuals in the "neither nor" group; female amateurs; amateurs who are not members of a photography club; amateurs under 49; female professionals; professionals under 49
there were special events for children and families.	17,6%	Individuals in the "neither nor" group; amateurs under 49
exhibitions took place more frequently near me.	17,0%	Amateurs under 49

There is potential to enhance the attractiveness of photography exhibitions, particularly among individuals who rather or fully agree with the respective statements. The following table presents the corresponding percentage values and highlights the groups for whom the potential for increasing attractiveness is even greater.

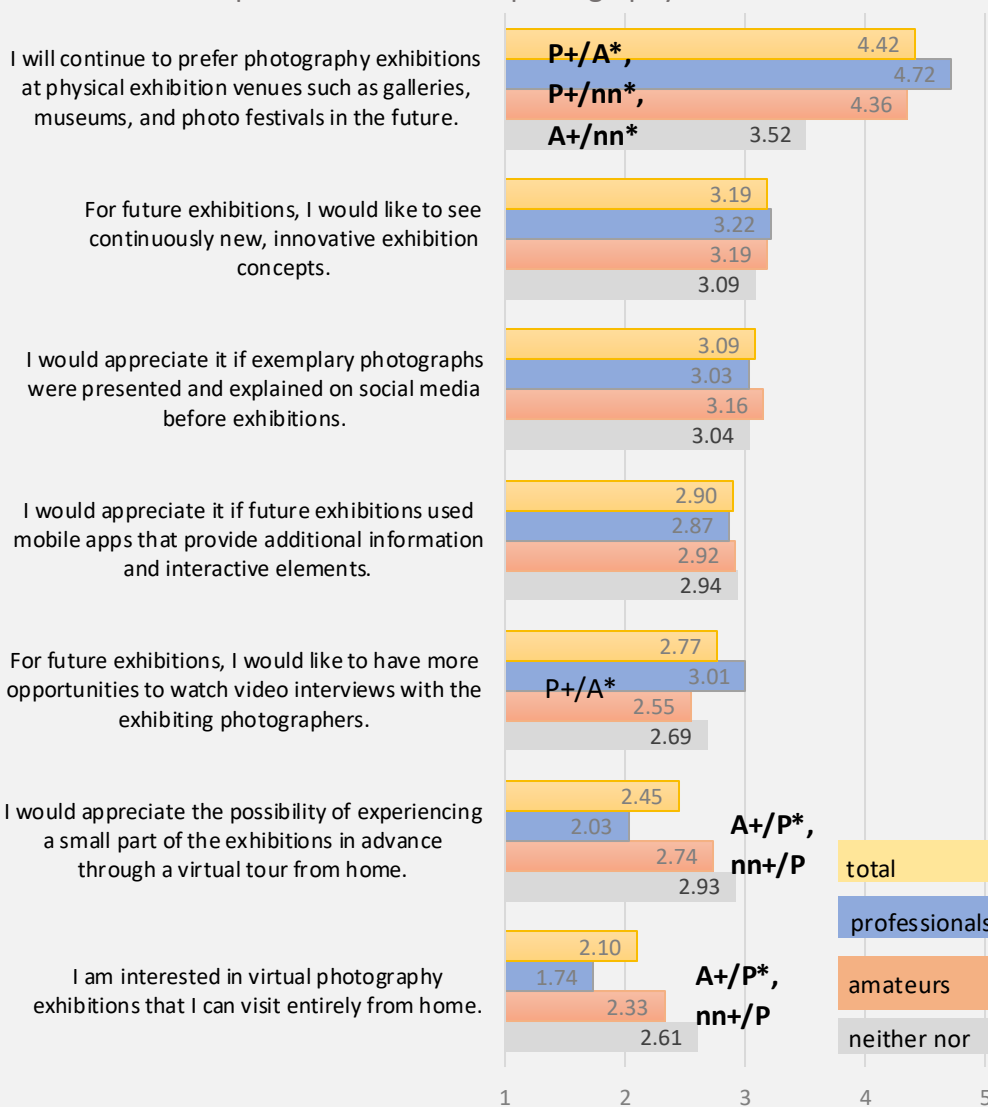
Information occasions for photography exhibitions



Professionals most frequently visit photography exhibitions due to personal invitations from photographers, personal recommendations, and newsletters from galleries and museums. Amateurs most often attend photography exhibitions based on personal recommendations, followed by personal invitations from photographers and social media channels of galleries and museums. For individuals in the "neither nor" group, personal recommendations are the primary motivation for visiting photography exhibitions.

Expectations for future photography exhibitions

Expectations for future photography exhibitions



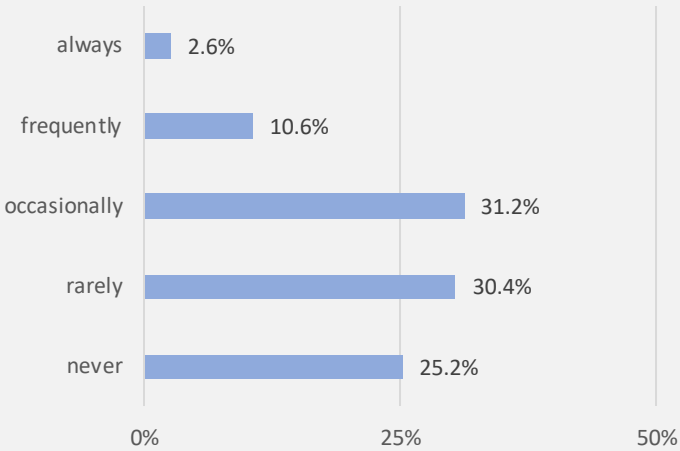
Professionals and amateurs clearly prefer photography exhibitions at physical exhibition venues for the future. All groups show a slight preference for continuously new and innovative exhibition concepts. For a portion of the respondents, it is also appealing to have exemplary photography introduced and explained on social media before attending exhibitions.

	Agree somewhat + fully agree	Applies particularly to:
I would appreciate it if exemplary photographs were presented and explained on social media before exhibitions.	40,6%	Amateurs under 49
I would appreciate it if future exhibitions used mobile apps that provide additional information and interactive elements.	32,6%	
For future exhibitions, I would like to have more opportunities to watch video interviews with the exhibiting photographers.	29,1%	Professionals
I would appreciate the possibility of experiencing a small part of the exhibitions in advance through a virtual tour from home.	23,6%	Amateurs; individuals in the "neither nor" group

There is potential for measures related to photography exhibitions, particularly among individuals who rather or fully agree with the respective statements. The following table presents the percentage values for selected measures accordingly.

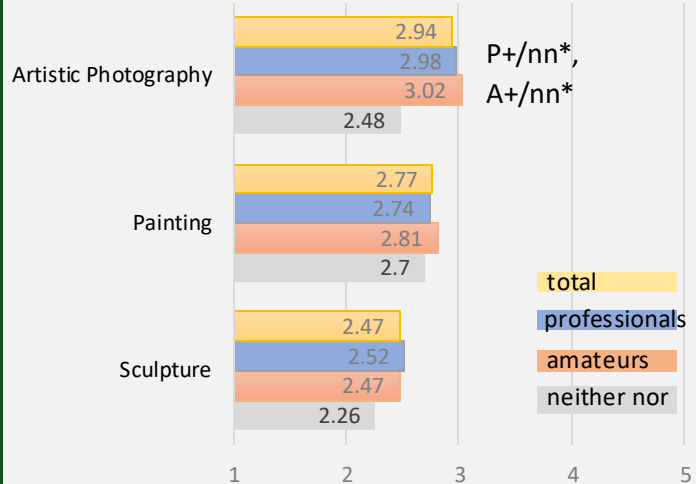
Participation in and significance of guided tours

Participation in guided tours at exhibitions featuring artistic photography



At least a quarter of the respondents never participate in guided tours at exhibitions featuring artistic photography. A total of 10.6% frequently attend, while 31.2% occasionally take part when such tours are offered.

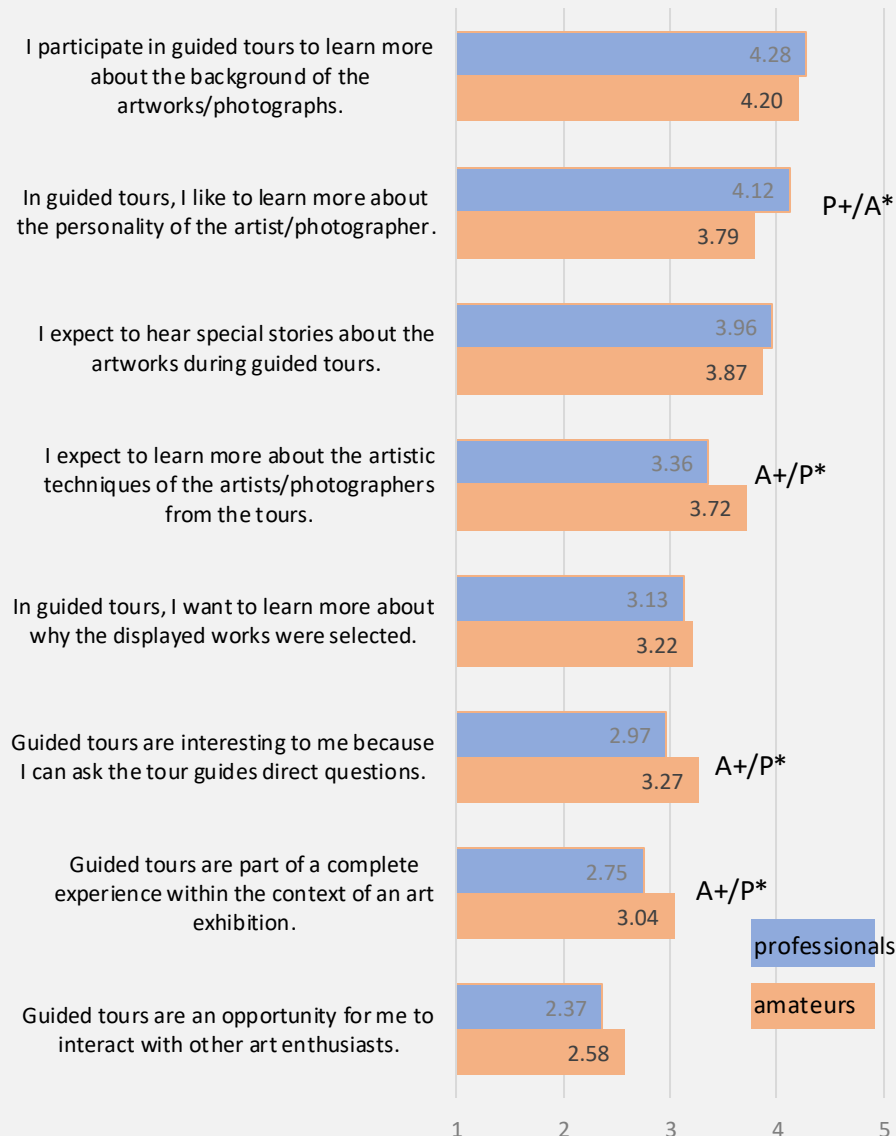
Importance of guided tours



Among individuals who at least occasionally participate in guided tours featuring artistic photography, 80.3% have expectations that align with those for guided tours in the fields of painting/sculpture.

Requirements for guided tours

Requirements for and reasons for guided tours

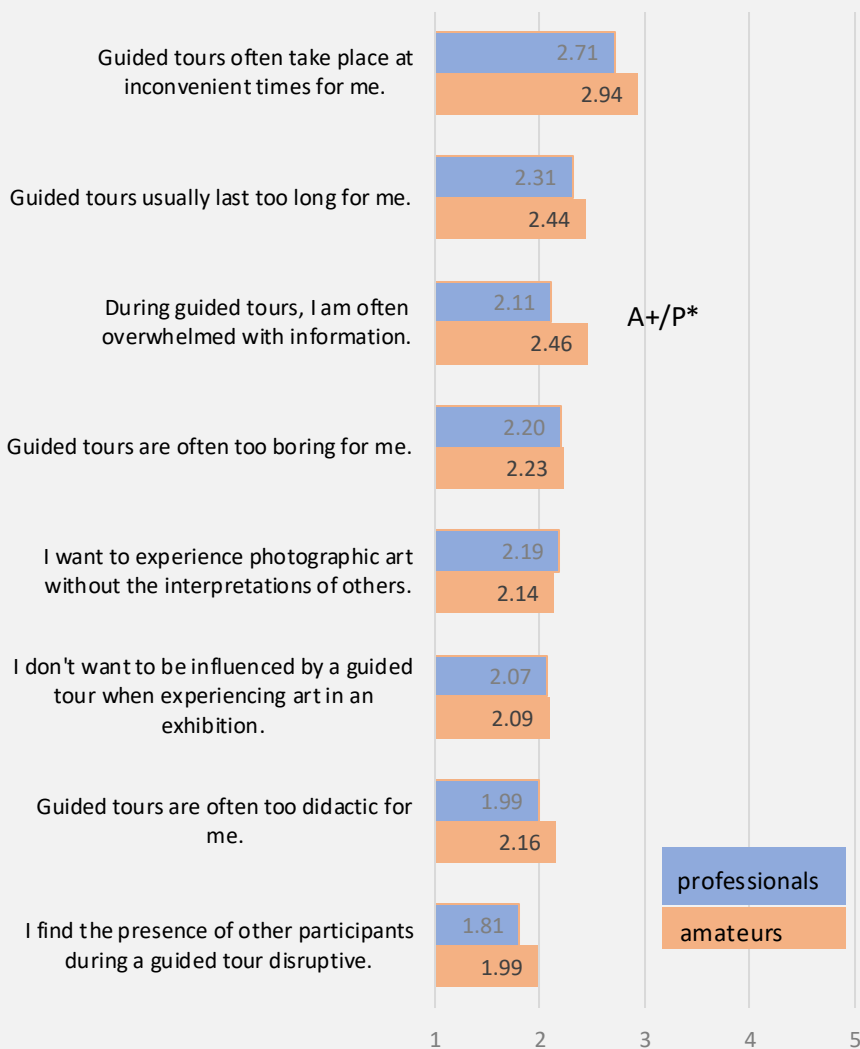


In the analysis of guided tours, only individuals who at least occasionally participate in guided tours at exhibitions featuring artistic photography were considered. As a result, the "neither nor" group included only 20 cases, and therefore, this group was completely excluded from further analyses.

The primary reason for participating in guided tours is to learn more about the background of the artworks/photographs. Another significant reason, particularly for female professionals, is to gain insight into the personality of the artist/photographer. Additionally, hearing special stories about the artworks is predominantly important to the majority. However, making contact with other participants during guided tours is generally considered unimportant.

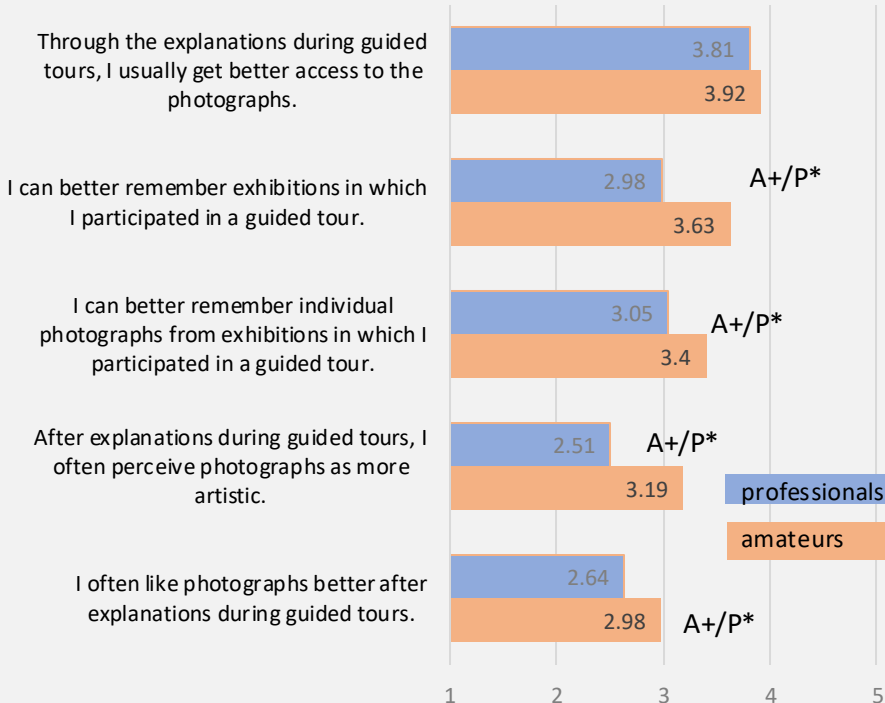
Negative aspects and effects of guided tours

Negative aspects of guided tours



Only a very small number of respondents experience negative effects in connection with guided tours. The most common issue is that tours are scheduled at inconvenient times, but even this applies only to 24.3% rather and 6.4% very much. The least disturbing aspect is the presence of other participants during a guided tour.

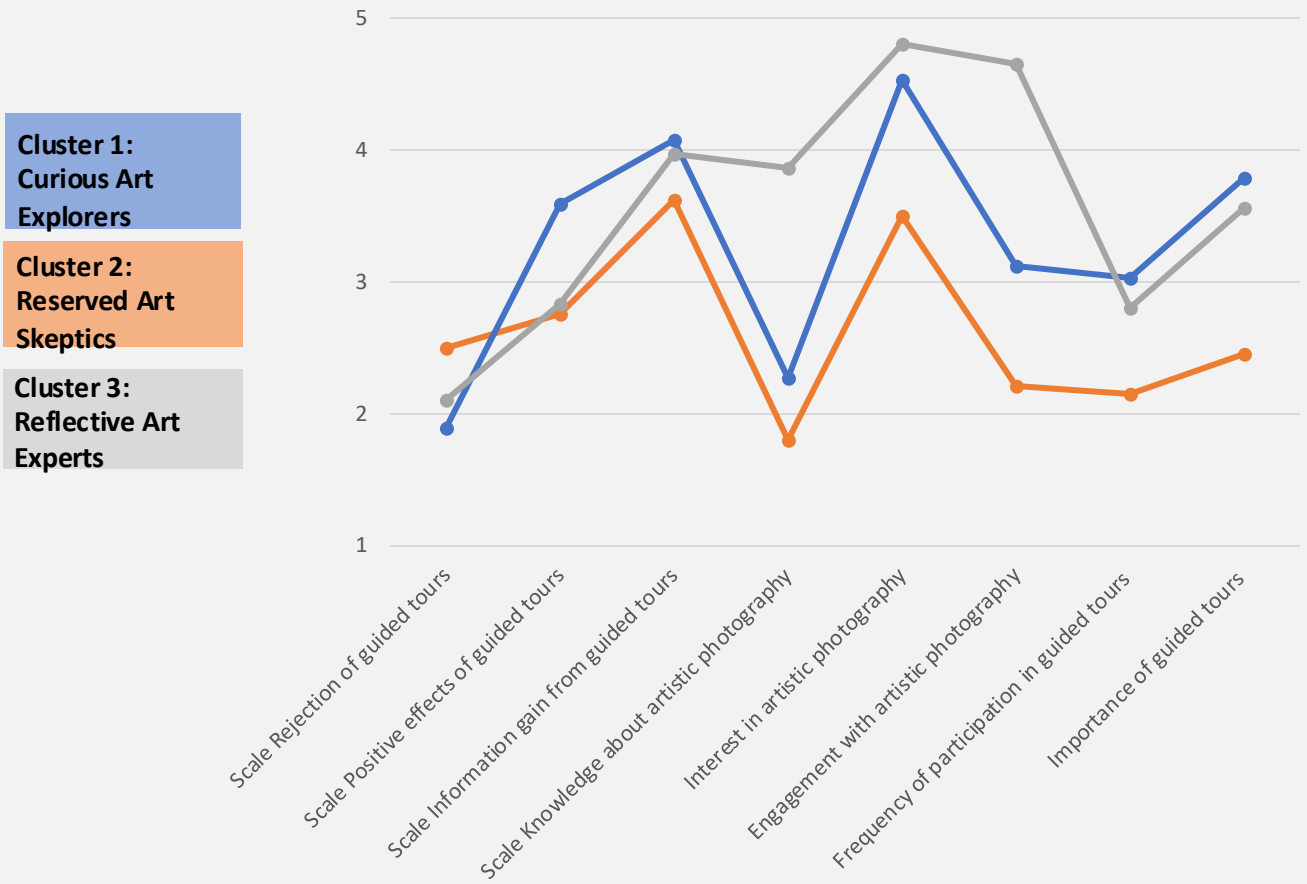
Effects of guided tours



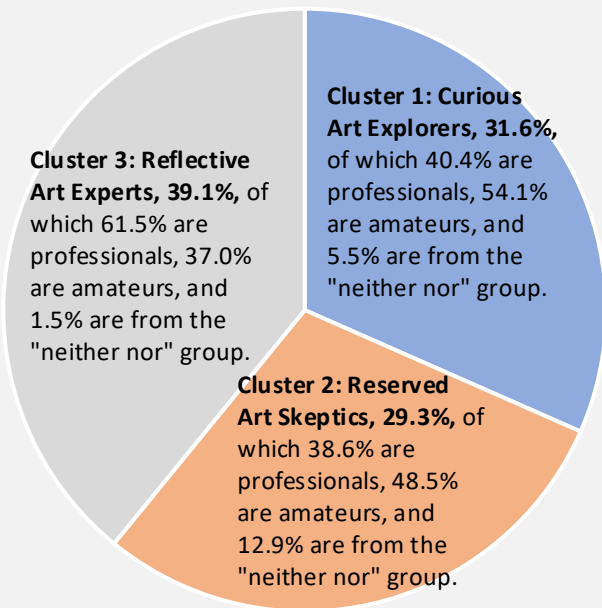
Both professionals and amateurs predominantly experience guided tour explanations as helping them gain a better understanding of the photographs. Amateurs, in particular, tend to remember both the exhibition as a whole and individual photographs better after attending a guided tour. Overall, amateurs benefit more from guided tours than professionals.

Types of participant in photography exhibitions

Cluster analysis participant types for guided tours



Participant types for guided tours



Cluster 1: Curious Art Explorers

This cluster is characterized by a high interest in artistic photography and guided tours. Members of this group view guided tours as a valuable opportunity to deepen their knowledge and enhance their art experience. They regularly participate in guided tours and find them enriching.

Cluster 2: Reserved Art Skeptics

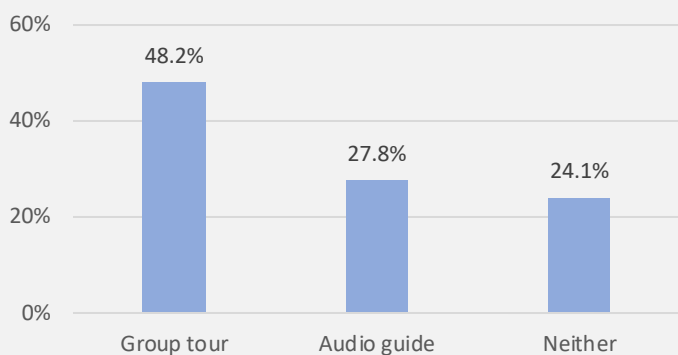
Members show little interest in artistic photography and in guided tours. They rarely participate in guided tours and perceive them as only somewhat informative or enriching.

Cluster 3: Reflective Art Experts

Members of this group have a very high interest in artistic photography and use guided tours strategically to deepen their knowledge and gain inspiration. Despite a moderate rejection of certain aspects, they value guided tours as a valuable source of information and reflection.

Informations at exhibitions

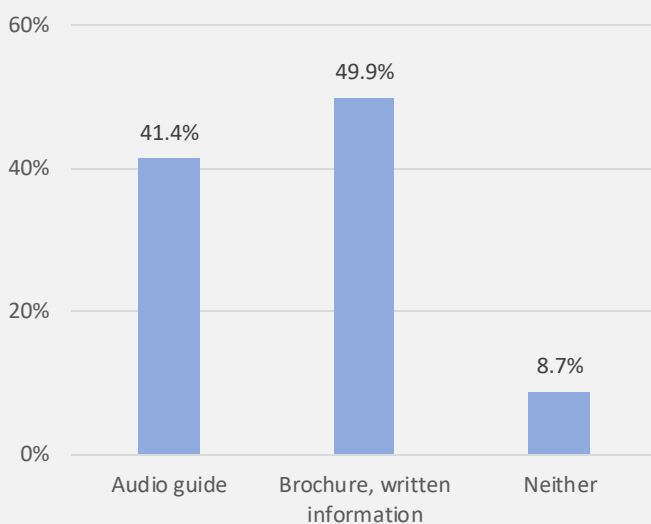
Preference for group tour vs. audio guide



On average, a free audio guide is used rather infrequently ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.21$). 7.2% use it always, and 22.1% never use it. A paid audio guide is used significantly less frequently ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.03$): $t(460) = 16.24^*$, Cohen's $d = 0.76$ (medium effect). 43.2% never use it, and only 8.2% use it frequently or always.

Group tours (48.2%) are clearly preferred over an audio guide (27.8%). 24.1% would use neither.

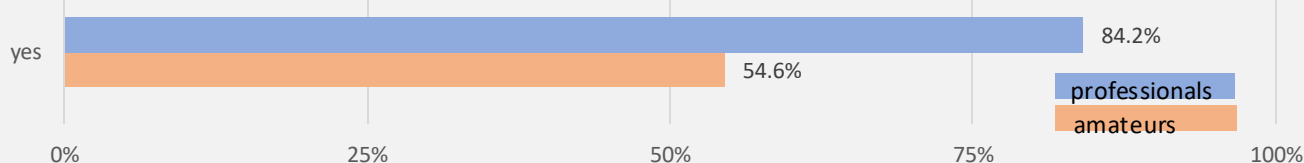
Preference if no group tour is offered



If there were no group tours, 41.4% would use an audio guide, compared to 49.9% who would prefer a brochure or written information. 8.7% would use neither.

Own photography exhibitions

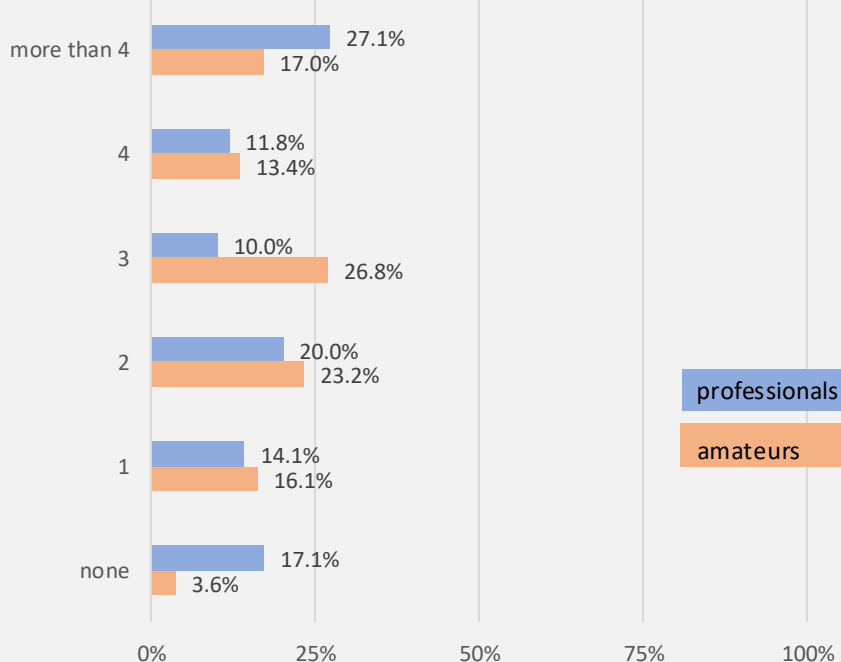
Own photography exhibitions



Among professionals, 84.2% also display their own photographs at exhibitions, while among amateurs, it is only 54.6%.

Among the amateurs who display their own photographs at exhibitions, 3.6% are in the under-50 age group, 17.9% are in the 50-59 age group, 48.2% are in the 60-69 age group, and 30.4% are in the over-70 age group. 87.5% of exhibiting amateurs are members of a photography club, while 12.5% are not members.

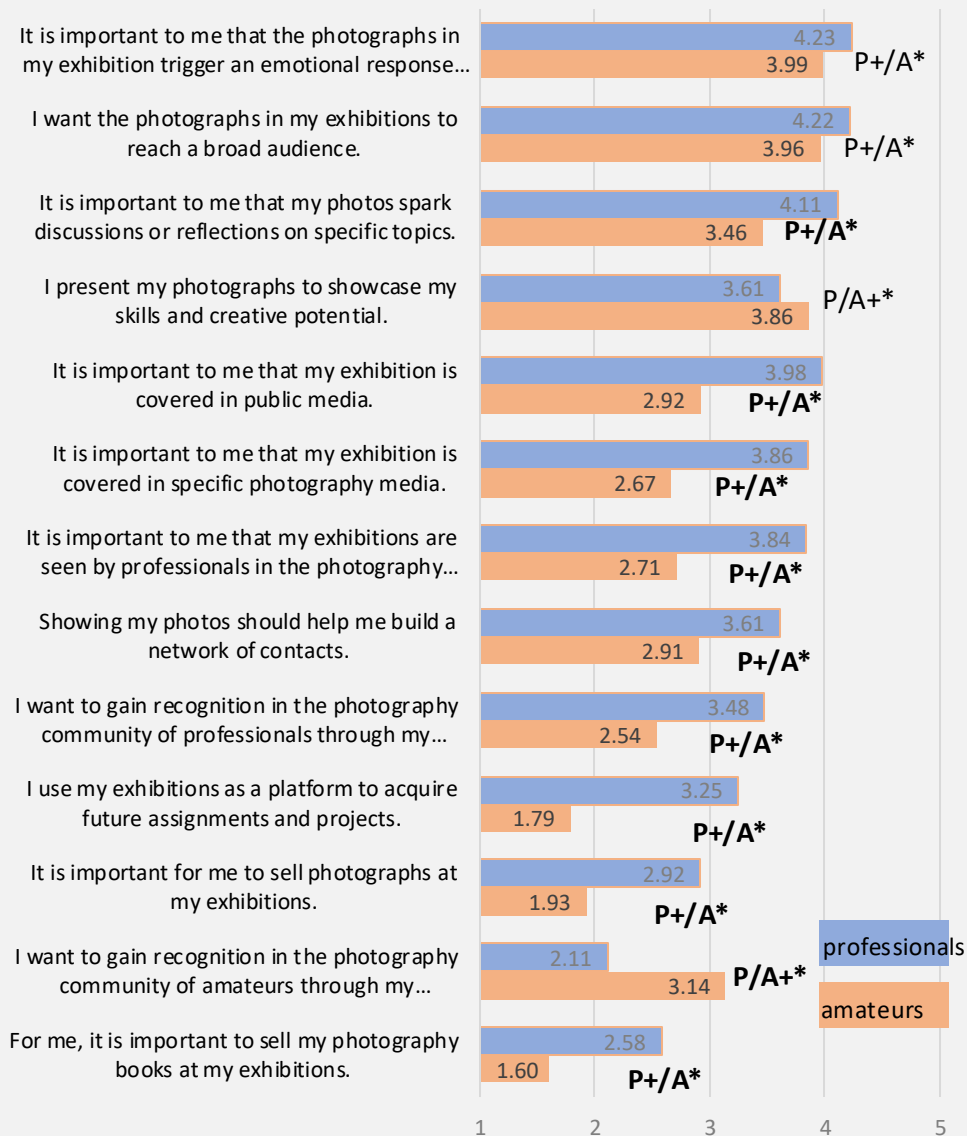
Number of phot. exhibitions since January 1, 2022



27.1% of professionals had more than four exhibitions since January 1, 2022, over a period of about three years, compared to 17% of amateurs. Amateurs most commonly had 3 exhibitions in this period.

Expectations for one's own photography exhibitions

Expectations for one's own photography exhibitions



For both professionals and amateurs, the most significant aspect of an exhibition is triggering an emotional response in the visitors and reaching a broad audience with the photographs. Overall, expectations for exhibitions are generally higher among professionals than amateurs. Only in two cases is it the other way around. For amateurs, it is somewhat more important to showcase their creative potential through exhibitions and to gain recognition in the amateur photography community.

For many professionals, exhibitions also have a functional aspect: attracting attention, networking, acquiring assignments, and selling photographs. However, there are significant differences among professionals. For 45.9% of professionals, acquiring assignments is somewhat or very important, while for 29.5%, it is somewhat or very unimportant. For 33% of professionals, selling photographs at exhibitions is somewhat or very important, while for 39.5%, it is somewhat or very unimportant.

Factors for evaluating one's own photography exhibitions

Factor 1 (35.81% of variance): **Commercial and media objectives**. Cronbach's alpha = 0.85
This factor includes items related to the sale and media visibility of exhibitions.

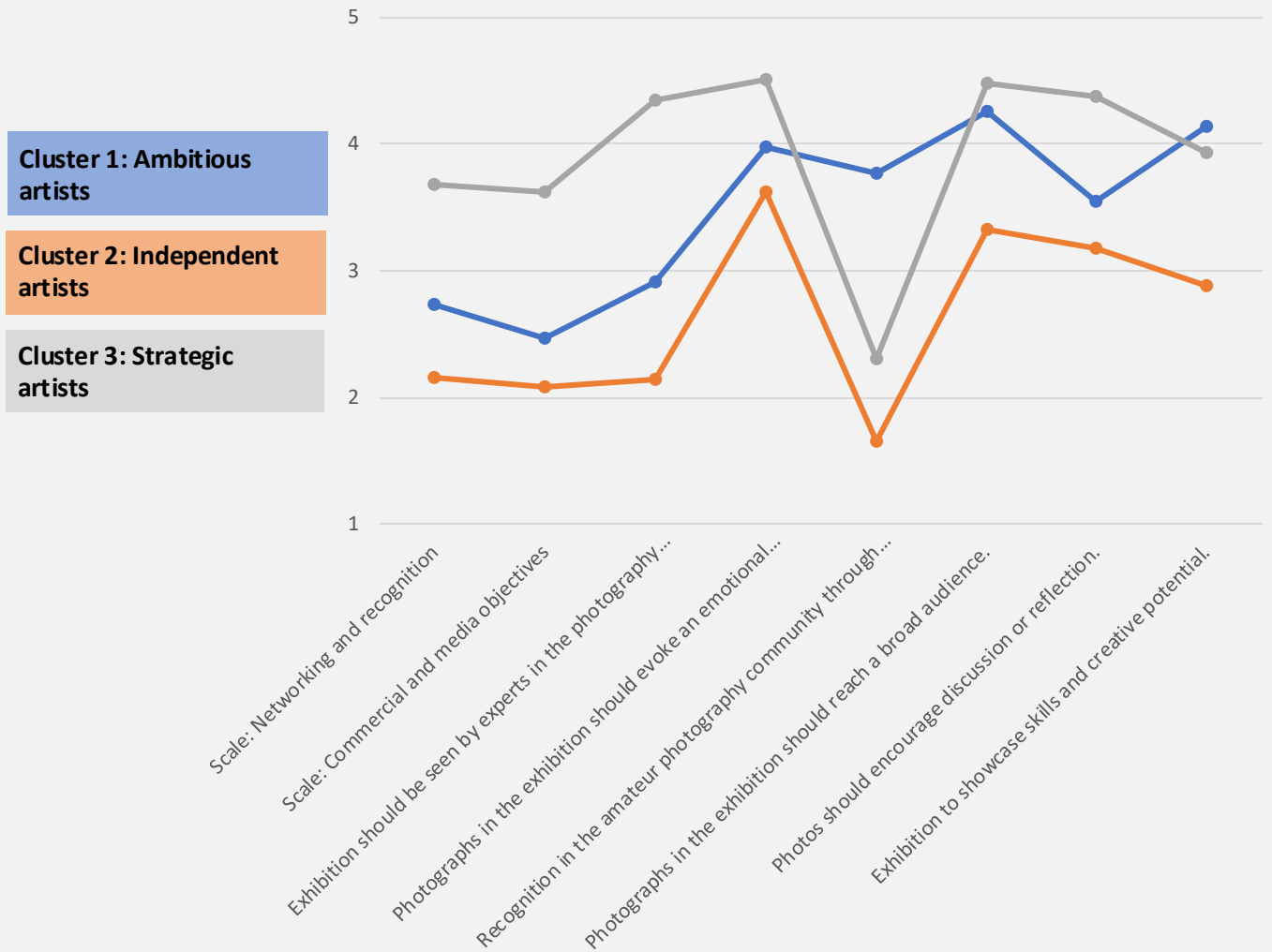
- "It is important to me to sell my photobooks at my exhibitions."
- "It is important to me to sell photographs at my exhibitions."
- "It is important to me that specialized photography media report on my exhibition."
- "It is important to me that public media report on my exhibition."

Factor 2 (33.75% of variance): **Networking and recognition**. Cronbach's alpha = 0.75
This factor captures the social and career-related motives for participating in photography exhibitions.

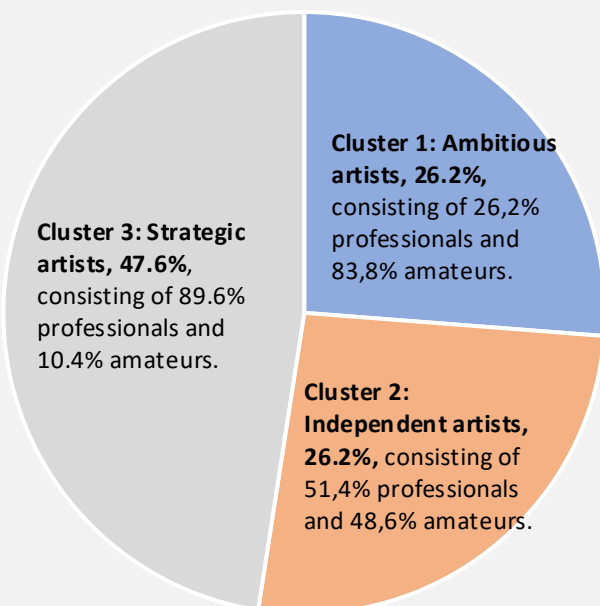
- "Showing my photos should help me build a network of contacts."
- "I use my exhibitions as a platform to acquire future commissions and projects."
- "I want to gain recognition in the professional photography community through my exhibitions."

Types of participants in one's own photography exhibitions

Cluster analysis: Types in own photography exhibitions



Types in own photography exhibitions



Cluster 1: Ambitious artists

This cluster is characterized by a moderate interest in networking as well as commercial and media-related goals. The members want to present their works to a broad audience, gain recognition in the amateur community, and showcase their own skills.

Cluster 2: Independent artists

This cluster includes both professionals and amateurs, who overall show little interest in recognition, networking, as well as commercial and media objectives. Members of this group are rather reserved in self-promotion and present their work primarily out of personal motivation.

Cluster 3: Strategic artists

This cluster consists almost exclusively of professional photographers who actively work to make their photographs known through media presence, networking, and emotionally impactful content. Members combine artistic ambition with strategic self-marketing to achieve both recognition and financial success.

Summary

The present study examines the behavior, preferences, and expectations of visitors to photography exhibitions. Based on an online survey, professionals, amateurs, and a "neither" group were analyzed regarding their frequency of visits, interests, and motivations.

Professionals visit photography exhibitions most frequently and prefer professional formats. Amateurs also show interest in amateur exhibitions that align with their own photographic interests. Within this group, photography club members are particularly active visitors. In contrast, the "neither" group shows little interest in photography exhibitions.

The results emphasize the diversity of expectations and behaviors in photography exhibitions. Professionals and amateurs value photography exhibitions as a source of artistic inspiration and are particularly interested in the stories behind the images, suggesting a deeper engagement with the content. Additionally, amateurs perceive exhibitions more as an opportunity for relaxation and entertainment, indicating leisure-related expectations. Women among professionals, as well as amateurs in general, are more likely to seek emotional engagement through exhibitions. Professionals, on the other hand, place greater importance on reflection and a clear message, underscoring their content-oriented approach.

Based on the data, four visitor types were identified:

- **Occasional Enjoyers:** Visit exhibitions occasionally and prefer entertaining formats. Show high interest in artistic photography and artistic inspiration.
- **Reflective Frequent Visitors:** Frequent visitors with extensive knowledge of artistic photography. Interested in critical reflection on photographic themes and artistic inspiration.
- **Discerning Professional Viewers:** Professionals focusing on thematically relevant, professional formats. Low interest in entertainment-oriented and amateur exhibitions.
- **Distant Infrequent Visitors:** Individuals with little interest in artistic photography and exhibitions.

Guided tours are used by professionals and amateurs to gain deeper insights. They are particularly interested in the artistic background, the photographers, and the stories behind the images. Amateurs benefit the most, as they tend to recall specific photographs and the overall exhibition better afterward. For both groups, guided tours enhance accessibility to the works.

Additionally, three participant types in guided tours were identified: curious art explorers, who actively engage with and find value in guided tours; reserved art skeptics, who perceive guided tours as largely irrelevant; and reflective art experts, who use guided tours strategically to expand their knowledge.

The findings on photography exhibitions featuring personal works reveal clear differences between professionals and amateurs. Both groups seek to evoke emotional reactions from the audience and gain visibility, with these aspects being more important for professionals. Additionally, professionals use exhibitions strategically for networking, commissions, and sales, depending on their specialization. In contrast, amateurs focus on gaining recognition within their community and showcasing their creative potential, reflecting personal development and social appreciation.

Three types of exhibitors were identified: **Ambitious Artists:** Primarily amateurs who present their work but do not pursue commercial goals. **Independent Artists:** Artists with strong self-motivation and personal artistic expression. **Strategic Artists:** Mainly professionals who use exhibitions purposefully for their careers and networking.