Multi-Stakeholder Brand Narratives:

An Analysis of the Construction of Artistic Brands

Abstract

In the case of visual artists, the product they create is inextricably linked to their identities, personalities and career histories in terms of how the art is produced, presented, consumed and positioned and valued in the market. Although artists' branding initiatives are considered relevant to branding and marketing theory, identifying how these are constructed and managed, and identity negotiated through this process is an area that needs further development. This research therefore uses a multi-stakeholder approach to branding theory to examine contemporary artists' careers in order to understand how value is added to their 'product.' Qualitative analysis of artists' biographies and career histories in the London art market illustrates how value is co-constructed through relationships in a temporal manner that must be strategically managed.

Summary Statement of Contribution

The findings highlight the need to consider the macro-level context in the creation of value. Value is found to be collectively negotiated by a variety of stakeholders with different priorities and dependent on a multi-stakeholder brand narrative. The need for marketing not just of the product but also of the artist themself becomes apparent and the tension person-branding creates is explored. This is of wider interest to those researching other figurehead brands where organisational leaders are associated with the overall organisational brand and product range, in addition to contexts where brands do not rest within one organisation but their value is created through the interaction of a range of key stakeholders who collectively develop and manage the brand.

Keywords

Artists, art market, branding, stakeholder, brand narrative, biographical methods

'Artists don't make objects. Artists make mythologies.' - Anish Kapoor

Introduction

Brown and Patterson (2000) convincingly make the case that marketers must learn from artists or aesthetic methods in understanding and communicating marketing. In classifying marketing scholarship which has engaged with art into: 'the art school', 'the aesthetics school' and 'the Avant-Garde school,' they identify the breadth of research into, about and through art that has been slowly gaining purchase within the marketing community. The case that marketers should learn from examining the arts has also been made by Schroeder (2000) who considers how commercial companies such as Benetton have drawn on sensation to engage the audience, in the same way as artists such as Manet used shock tactics to develop their artistic brands. However, much of this literature focuses on the role of the artist as an individual creative genius, yet in the wider literature, meaning-making has been shown to be a collective process happening through co-production (Brown et al., 2003; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This paper seeks to unpack the value of what contemporary artist Anish Kapoor (2008) calls artists' 'mythologies' in order to understand how a work of art is legitimised and valued through the action of multiple stakeholders.

It has become an established reality that consumers construct and perform their identities within and in collaboration with brand culture and this is where many of these meaning-making processes occur (Schroeder, 2005). Brands surround us and individuals are increasingly encouraged to view themselves as brands (see Schawbel, 2009). The artworld is not immune to this trend, despite artists often being characterised as 'creatives' rather than 'entrepreneurs.' Authors such as Fillis (2000) have considered the artist as entrepreneur, both debunking the myth of the creative producer isolated from market considerations whilst also highlighting the relevance of considering the arts to provide valuable insight into marketing practice more broadly. Fillis focuses on the centrality of rule bending and risk taking that

both artists and entrepreneurs need to draw on in negotiating marketing practice. The relevance of looking at the artist as brand manager has also been recognised by recent studies (e.g. Muñiz et al., 2014; Kerrigan et al., 2011; Schroeder, 2005). This paper continues this stream of research, examining the construction, management and consumption of artistic brands. In doing so, the importance of temporality is highlighted, in that brands are not static, but socially constructed sets of meanings. These meanings arise from collaboration with other art professionals and are negotiated through a variety of competing narratives, not least the creativity vs. commerce divide, demonstrating the complexity of the value process in the visual arts market.

Branding theory allows us to unpack relationships between artists and the products they create to understand the complex way through which value emerges in the art market. Key to this is that the value and integrity of the product is inextricably linked to the value and integrity of the artist themself and marketed as such. Focusing on visual art, we find that the product is marketed as the embodiment of the artist. However, we argue that this focus does not represent the reality of the composition of the artistic brand, which is in fact created and developed through the collective action of a number of key artworld figures in collaboration with the artists. Following the call from Mele et al. (2014) to 'analyse what actions are carried out (…) before, after and sometimes instead of the monetary exchange' in order to understand value, we therefore move away from individual level analysis of branded artists, to focus instead on how artists operate as a collective to build social and cultural capital. We argue that this study has wider implications as many industries, including other creative and high-tech industries, rely on figurehead branded leaders whose personal brand is inextricably linked to the products that they produce and whose products rely on collective action to become legitimised.

Brands of branding theory

Branding theory is dominated by two key schools of thought: strategic brand management (SBM) approaches which emphasise the locus of control as the organisation, and socio-cultural approaches which consider brands as socially constructed and reliant on a range of actors collectively developing brand identity. This study is set within the context of socio-cultural considerations of branding, moving us away from the brand orientation approach where the brand owner controls brand identity. However, in doing so, we draw on some relevant constructs from the strategic approach, namely, the stakeholder model of brand equity which provides a more nuanced understanding of brand value, particularly when dealing with corporate brands that do not focus solely on customers (Keller, 2003; Jones, 2005; Roger & Davies, 2007). We take Freeman's (1984) definition of a stakeholder as 'any individual or group who can affect or is affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices, or goals of the organisation' (p.25) to focus on the collective nature of branding. Thus, we combine what have previously been viewed as oppositional approaches to understanding brand creation and value. In fact, considering the artist as a brand (see Kreutz, 2003; Schroeder, 2005) provides an opportunity to consider the collective act of brand making where producers, consumers and other stakeholders collectively develop, maintain and change brand identity over time. This study is therefore of wider significance for branding researchers concerned with communal meaning making.

The multi-stakeholder approach theorised by Freeman (1984) therefore allows us to consider the collective nature of brands. This is particularly relevant due to the current changes in the art market and more generally in the wider business environment. The art 'industry' with its proliferation of biennales, art fairs and media hype, not to mention critics, gallerists, curators, curator-dealers, curator-writers, and celebrity collectors, influences how art is viewed and can now almost be compared to the music industry or the film industry. In

the past couple of decades, the art market has gone through a period of unprecedented expansion (Robertson & Chong, 2008). Just as in the 1980s, Freeman argued for the need to have new frameworks to understand more turbulent, less structured organisational realities, we argue that there is a pressing need to consider stakeholders more generally in the art market as art is being dominated by money and big corporate interests (see for example Chong, 2013). Indeed, as there is no stable industrial context, a lack of clear hierarchies and informally structured business relationships, the rapidly changing environment in which art is produced and sold means that there is little understanding of where brand identity and ownership exists and how it is managed. This reflects broader structural changes in the contemporary marketplace such as contingent business practices, zero hours and flexible contracts as well as the rise of social media communication that have led to new types of client relationships which are central to brand development and require us to think about brands in new ways. Contrary to SBM, we can no longer clearly identify who owns a brand; we are in an era where brand identity and ownership rests in the hand of agencies, consumers, the brand itself and the media. Therefore, a consideration of key stakeholders is a useful exercise, and we claim that the art market provides a worthy exemplar due to its particularly fluid endorsement process (as noted by Velthius, 2005).

Conventional applications of the stakeholder approach, however, assume 'an organisation' with clear internal and external stakeholders. This is not the case here, the situation is more complex as it is difficult to tell who is 'internal' or 'external' to art brands and moreover not all the stakeholders agree, there are inherent conflicts between them that must be taken into account. We follow Weiss' (2009) claim that 'the stakes of stakeholders are not always obvious' and that they 'can also be present, past or future oriented' (p.44), thus the need to consider temporality. Ultimately, we are not so much applying stakeholder theory as using it as a lens to understand the collective nature of brands. We contend that the

stakeholder approach allows us to consider issues of power and urgency and where this power rests (following Mitchell et al., 1997).

This paper therefore argues that to be successful on the market, artists must have strong brand narratives. These narratives are temporal in that they must respond to the market while allowing the artist to develop creatively and yet be recognisable and stable enough to maintain social capital (in the form of endorsement from art 'experts' such as dealers, curators, critics and collectors), ensuring sales. This follows on from Schroeder's (2005) research which notes that artists have used various marketing strategies for years, including the creation of distinctive products, brand extensions into other media and the nurturing of exclusivity. Although Schroeder demonstrated that artists are successful brand managers in terms of their construction of 'a recognisable look, name and style' (p.1291), there is still little understanding of how these images are constructed and managed. Therefore, the research questions guiding our study are: how can branding theory be applied to an artist and their work; what role do other players in the visual arts market hold in the brand construction and management process and what are the implications of becoming a branded artist? Furthermore, the approach taken here will focus on the 'corporate' brand or 'house of brands' of the artist within which exist several product lines and individual product brands. Consequently, we both move considerations of the artist as brand forward, while illustrating the wider relevance for considering fine artist brands in the advancement of branding theory and practice.

Context: The Branded Artist

The branding of artists and artworks resonates with Cashmore and Parker's (2003) description of celebrity formation: '...commodification of the human form (...) the process by which people are turned into "things," things to be adored, respected, worshipped, idolised,

but perhaps more importantly, things which are themselves produced and consumed' (p.215). The use of celebrity endorsement has been widely acknowledged (see Erdogan, 1999), and artists have often been used for this purpose (for example, Murakami's collaboration with Louis Vuitton). McCracken (1989), examines how celebrities work through 'meaning transfer' whereby product properties become associated with desirable qualities of the commodified celebrity in a three-stage process where culture and consumption interact. This process is useful because unlike the SBM approach, it considers changes over time. In the contemporary art market, this meaning transfer between the artist and their product, i.e. the work that they produce, is an essential element in the valuation of the work. While various studies have noted that the separation between entrepreneurs marketing their business and marketing themselves is unclear (Shepherd, 2005; Gurrieri, 2012), it is particularly noteworthy in the art market where the product is an expression of personal creativity (see Fillis, 2000; 2004a).

Reitlinger's (1961) analysis of 18th century auction records demonstrates that artists have always been branded as their reputation and status in society determined the prices achieved and therefore could be considered a measure of brand equity. Certain artists achieve celebrated status, gaining influence to define a whole realm of art and dominate the market, commanding several times as much as their peers. These artists are selected by dealers, curators and collectors who collectively position them as market leaders, thereby redefining what is considered 'good' art and using the artist as a short-hand mechanism representing the quality of that movement or style, thereby branding them. Wijnberg and Gemser (2000) illustrated how the Impressionists, in conjunction with their dealers and critics, created their own brand name. Artists labelled as Impressionists, personify the values attached to the movement, giving the movement its brand equity. Other artists associated with the movement receive brand recognition through co-branding, for example Turner's followers achieved old-

master status in the 1850s due to the value attached to Turner's work in a brand-leveraging process (Reitlinger, 1961). From a stakeholder perspective (whether at the level of dealer, curator or collector), the brand position of the artist is important in reducing risk when buying art. Of course, this does not guarantee long-term value, which is why Reitlinger reminds us that 'the history of taste (…) is so often bad taste' (241). In fact, the very notion of taste (on which artworks are valued) is based on subjective cultural, social and historical contexts whereby certain values or myths are endorsed over others, thus the importance of cultural branding (more of which further on) as more mainstream mind-share notions of branding do not take these changes into account.

Kerrigan et al.'s (2011) study of Warhol demonstrates this branding process by showing how Warhol purposively built his art and celebrity persona into a brand that could be commodified and distributed. A recognised artist brand, Warhol articulated his celebrity branding intentions deploying reputation, image and credibility as intangible assets, mobilising forms of social attraction from followers and developing a sustained visibility contributing to brand equity. The artist brand is therefore socially constructed and negotiated as the result of social interaction and can then be produced and consumed. Warhol profitably used the media in creating his brand, his eccentric personality creating a mysterious aura; a key element of his brand identity. As Kerrigan et al. (2011) note, Warhol focused on amassing social and cultural capital in developing his art-world brand identity. Therefore 'Warhol's life has become his defining work of art,' the boundaries between his brand and life are indivisible and indeed it is not just the product he created that is consumed but the artist and his celebrity (p.25). Moreover, Warhol as brand manager acted as a house of brands building up a portfolio of brand extensions, willing to endorse a variety of products by no means limited to the art market in order to further increase his brand awareness. To understand an artistic brand, we argue that it is necessary to consider both the artist

themselves, their entire oeuvre and the individual products as inextricable parts of the 'value added' of these brands. The artist's 'corporate' brand infuses the art with added values, while each artwork is its own 'product brand' and therefore holds value as a stand-alone, independent work.

The challenge of person branding

That the artist can be a commodifiable, dehumanised product is extremely questionable as McDonald and Vieceli (2004) point out. However, historical consideration of branding demonstrates the ubiquity of branding and that branding has not developed solely as an instrument of commerce but has served a variety of social purposes. Eckhardt and Bengtsson (2009) examined the history of branding in China, finding that brands were important agents of consumer culture as early as the 10th century. Indeed, brands were used as powerful differentiating symbols, fulfilling an innate human desire for status and stratification. We therefore use branding as lens to consider the underlying macro-forces at work, going beyond simple economic value to consider social and cultural values as well. This allows us to consider how these values are constructed and managed through the actions of a number of stakeholders.

Shepherd (2005) notes the popularity of self-marketing and person branding in the personal development industry. However, there has been a call for more academic research in the area (Bendisch et al., 2013). Bendisch et al.'s analysis of CEO brands argues that personality is vital for people brands. However, we illustrate the collective multi-stakeholder perspective of such personal branding whereby brand identity must consider value added from various stakeholders influencing the artistic identity. External influences such as dealers indirectly influence the work produced by framing the narrative in a certain way to market the work, therefore influencing artistic direction and market success. However, the influence

of key artworld stakeholders is not wholly external, for example, a good review can boost the artistic sense of self, while a negative one can have the opposite effect. Bendisch et al., 2013; Shepherd, 2005 and Gurrieri, 2012 argue that this can lead to 'role stress' if brand identity conflicts with personal values. The potential conflict of personal (artistic in our case) identity and brand identity is unique to people brands and of particular importance for artists due to the well established tension between art and commerce (Velthius, 2005). Person brands are therefore complex, as they are inextricably linked to the brands of the various endorsing stakeholders.

Cultural branding theory and the branding of culture

Inspired by cultural studies, cultural branding theory (Holt, 2004) broadens the focus of analysis from the simple transaction between a marketer and a consumer. In this sense, the brand is a 'cultural artefact moving through history' (Holt, 2004, p.215). Holt's notion of iconic brands and cultural branding theory enables us to access theoretical insights into the identity projects of consumers where brands create myths to connect with them. Within the art market, we can see the centrality of such myths, however, myths operate at the industry level before trickling down to the ultimate consumer. So, we turn to socio-cultural approaches to branding in considering brands within brandscapes (e.g. Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002; Thompson & Arsel, 2004; Salzer-Mörling & Strannegard, 2004; O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2013). This notion of brands being consumed in relation to other brands is applicable to the art market due to the symbolic values associated with artworks, artists and art movements. Cultural branding allows us to consider the co-creation and co-consumption of value and how this relates to identity issues, as we extend beyond consumers to producers due to the link between the artist and the work they create. By introducing the multi-stakeholder approach to the cultural branding literature, we can examine how value is co-

created through multiple stakeholder interaction and how the brand can have a life and meaning beyond that intended by its original creator.

Method

The paper follows previous studies of the art market including Plattner's (1998) call for an ethnographic study of artists' careers. Fillis (2011) specifically recommends the use of biographical and narrative methods to examine entrepreneurial marketing and he has applied this approach to the study of artists (Fillis, 2004b). Since the interpretive research process offers an open, flexible and experiential approach, the examination of the dynamic nature of the careers and relationships through which the artistic brand is constructed can be effectively achieved with this approach. Menger (1999) notes that one of the most striking features of artists' careers is their temporal aspect, therefore we took a cross-sectional approach, selecting artists at different career stages; emerging artists (graduated from art school in the past five years); mid-career artists (working professionally for 6-14 years) and; established artists (working for at least 15 years). The terms emerging, mid-career and established are widely used in the art market but without set definitional boundaries. Key art market professionals were consulted in developing the classifications. Interviews, allowed us to tease out the longitudinal aspect by asking the respondents about their career histories. Goulding et al. (2004) take this longitudinal life-passage approach to examine the career of 'collectors of tattoos,' identifying the process of getting a tattoo as a social act. Characterising the artistic career as a series of statuses, providing artists with their identities, allowed us to understand their brand building and how this is communicated and consumed and changes through time. This follows the Chicago School notion of career (see Goffman, 1959) which has foregrounded the importance of image as a conveyor of an identity. Data triangulation was ensured through collecting and analysing publicly available documentation regarding respondents' artistic careers.

Seventeen face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with contemporary visual artists in London, a key international art-market hub (see table 1 for more details). Interviewees were filtered through lists of artists selected for prizes or collections considered key in the art market's valuation process thus demonstrating the status of the artists (Turner Prize, Venice Biennale, Tate and British Council collections for established artists and New Contemporaries, Zabludowicz and Saatchi collections for mid-career and emerging artists). These filters were developed from a series of informal discussions with key art market figures and a review of the art press. As purposeful quota sampling was applied, snowballing technique (Malhotra et al. 1996) was employed to recruit interviewees and key informants. This approach is recommended to gain access to research participants who are otherwise difficult to approach.

Additionally, data were gathered through observation and recorded in field diaries to triangulate this data with interview data. Observational methods help to distinguish whether what participants say in interviews reflects what they do (Silverman, 1997). This was particularly useful for this study, as artists tend to underplay their marketing due to negative connotations in the artworld, moreover artists are not always self-aware of this behaviour and may not characterise it as such.

Interviewee (pseudonym)	Career Stage	Sex
Amanda	Emerging	F
Lily	Emerging	F
Alexander	Emerging	M
Theo	Emerging	M
Mike	Emerging	M
Elizabeth	Emerging	F
Chris	Mid-career	M
Sarah	Mid-career	F
Faye	Mid-career	F
Diana	Mid-career	F
Henry	Established	M
William	Established	M
Jasper	Established	M
Martin	Established	M
Elliot	Established	M
Jude	Established	M
Erin	Established	F

Table 1: Artists Interviewed

Twenty further interviews were undertaken with wider stakeholders in the artworld: dealers - the key group associated with marketing an artist's work (12 interviews), curators (4), collectors (2) and a critic, selected due to their prominence in the London art market as evidenced either by dealers' participation in the major international art fairs (Frieze and Basel), or the success of the artists they represent/buy/cover in terms of the national prizes and collections referenced above (Turner Prize, Venice Biennale, Tate and British Council Collections). All participants were anonymised. Finally, exhibition reviews, catalogues and auction records were reviewed in order to compare artists' own perspectives on their work

and identity with how they are contextualised by other art market actors, specifically critics, curators and dealers as well as auction houses for the most established artists.

Unpacking the artistic brand

Our data revealed the artistic brand is formulated, established, validated and sometimes rejected through the interaction of multiple stakeholders. We found tensions between these stakeholders and offer a tentative model regarding the roles played and observations regarding the importance of adopting a temporal approach to understanding contemporary artistic brands. The presence of such tensions, lead us to consider stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) and the multi-stakeholder approach (Keller, 2003; Roger & Davies, 2007) in nuancing cultural branding approaches to collective meaning making around brands. The following sections present our findings, focusing on the importance of an artist's work in developing a coherent and recognisable brand identity and narrative, the importance of developing, maintaining and mobilising social capital in establishing artistic brands and the importance of flexibility in responding to market conditions. In each of these categories, we acknowledge the centrality of a range of stakeholders in directing and influencing these processes.

Brand Identity Development

Selling 'Me'

While Schroeder (2005), Kerrigan et al. (2011) and Muñiz et al. (2014) have all considered the external nature of the artist as a brand, we still know little about the internal struggles of the artist in developing their own brand. Indeed naming this process as branding is controversial. In doing so, we turn to Belk's seminal paper where he argues that 'we are what we have' (1988, p.139). In the case of artists we argue that it is more of a case of 'we

are what we make.' Artists invest considerable self-worth in their work, which is why O'Reilly (2005) argues that the creative process is self-orientated as much as it is product-oriented. Indeed, the literature on professional identity necessarily discusses personal identity, so for example, Pratt et al. (2006) find that identity construction is triggered by the need to reduce gaps between what professionals do and who they are. Just as Belk found a diminished sense of self when possessions are lost or stolen, our data showed that artists also experience a diminished sense of self when failing to create work (whether due to lack of time, money or inspiration) and in failing to achieve recognition for their work. For example, one of the artists interviewed defined success as 'getting good feedback and people responding to [the work] positively' [Alexander]. Chris went even further, describing selling work as 'kind of like selling my soul (…), it was kind of an embodiment of my soul, all these objects that make me who I am.' Important works function as reminders and confirmers of artists' identities, serving as markers in their life histories, as highlighted by Jude, another artist: 'making art is a pivotal moment, making certain artworks takes you up another level (...) so they would be major moments I would say.'

Loss of power or control over the art is potentially traumatic as it is seen as a part of the self (for example when artists first get representation or when their work is sold at auction, which is why many successful artists buy work back[1]). Through creating their art, artists manage their identities. This works both ways as how the art is received in the market becomes internalised in a continuous loop moving back and forth from production and consumption throughout the career. Good critical reception allows for a greater sense of self-worth and status while diminished self-worth and status can come from lack of recognition, both in artists' perception and that of others who place value on their work: 'no one came [to her solo show] and it was all a bit soul-destroying' [Sarah]. The artwork acts as a presentation

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[1] Damien Hirst, for example spent £500,000 buying back a medicine cabinet he had sold to Saatchi for £500 (Robecchi, 2010).

of the self, externally to the wider artworld and internally to the artist themselves and therefore how this art is framed, used and distributed by stakeholders powerfully impacts on artists' identities.

Artworks function as anchors for artists' identities similarly to material possessions for consumers (Belk, 1988). Artists frequently discussed the product as an extension of themselves; Erin discusses working with a dealer 'who decided he was interested in selling *me.*' The artist needs to be as marketable as their products, so William suggested he was in a difficult position as a: 'middle-aged, white, middle-class male, it's not exactly got easy marketing or sexy written all over it.' This statement shows that contemporary artists understand that the artistic brand is as dependent on the stories told about its producer, as it is on the product produced. Bradshaw et al. (2010) note that consumption of the contemporary art-object requires a combination of the idea behind the work, the experience of viewing the work and the object itself. The artist's story is used to anchor the artwork's positioning on the market, hence William's fear that his 'story' was not in keeping with the idealised notion of the outsider artist (to which we shall return later).

There is a need for coherence between the brand identity of the product and that of the artist: 'you talk about "a Damien Hirst" rather than "a work by Damien Hirst," people want to buy into him, it's kind of creepy really' [Faye]. As with CEO brands (Bendisch, et al., 2013), the personality of the artistic brand is largely based on the personality, or at least perceived personality of the artist. Dion and Arnould (2011) found that a charismatic creative director is essential for luxury brands, this is also true for the artist. Henry recognised this when discussing his career:

There is a way in which the role made by society, part of the stereotype which is very much relevant is a sort of 'monk', and there's a way in which the person in everyday

life, who comes to the artist, wants them to be living in the way that they would like to be, as a surrogate, so I think every artist experiences that, you are a reflection of the other possibilities.

This links to Benjamin's notion of 'aura' or cult value (1968), illustrated by the forgery or reproduction which is of no value because it lacks the hand of the creator present in the original. Part of the appeal of an original artwork is in the fantasy that one may own and capture the aura of the work which allows the buyer to share in the power of the object - and artist's authority. Any gap between brand identity and artist's reputation and image therefore undermines the brand's credibility and reputation which is why artists must keep behaving in a way fitting their brand identity as they are interdependent, staging charismatic authority. However, as we shall see this is complicated by the fact that the 'story' of the artists is not always in the artist's hands and must be negotiated and managed across multiple relationships.

Selling 'my story': becoming an artist

Artists must therefore learn to act as 'artists,' Henry remembers that when he was first in art school he 'didn't know what sort of voice to speak in, what kind of hair to wear, what kind of dress, and [he] was, very, very inauthentic.' Artists are expected to perform certain mythic roles and although they may seem natural, they are very much learnt. Our respondents understood the need for a strong narrative in positioning themselves, for many, art school was the starting point of this narrative. Our data show the importance of art school in 'socialising' artists, teaching them the values and vocabulary of the artworld as well as providing access to the artworld networks enabling the shift from 'outsiders' to 'insiders.' Sarah echoes the feelings of many informants by saying that: 'I applied for the Slade [art school] and got in. And then I became an artist (…). And left an artist, signed on

[to unemployment benefits], but left an artist.' Becoming an artist therefore entails knowledge of the context of the artworld so as to be able to frame the work within it in line with stakeholders expectations.

Like any narrative form, artistic life stories therefore require editing and framing, work outside the narrative is expunged from CVs, for example Alexander was commissioned to produce a sculpture 'but it never went into the portfolio because it didn't really make sense with the rest of the work.' A number of artists felt they had been pushed into enacting certain artistic stereotypes. For example, Theo felt that the art market trades off the idea of the 'tortured artist' and as a recovering alcoholic and drug addict he was struggling to reposition his work, which was no longer perceived as having the same gravitas. The works and the cultivated persona of the artist become interchangeable and part of a singular trademark.

Artistic identity is therefore the central ideology or platform from which all the work evolves and, success relies on clear communication. This identity articulates who the artist is, what they stand for and conceptually anchors differentiation in the market. All of the artists interviewed, including those who did not consider themselves 'commercial,' had a central concept unifying their body of work which they used to label and position themselves: whether thematic such as examining 'the mundane' (Elizabeth), use of colour (Martin) or medium used (performance on video, Chris). William discussed what he saw as 'a tendency towards product conservatism in as much that people and museums want something that's part of a narrative that's been branded,' using Damien Hirst and Mark Wallinger as examples; roughly the same age, both winners of the Turner Prize and both owing much of their success to the patronage of Charles Saatchi but with very different auction records:

An artist who does something relatively recognisable and remains within a formal area tends to do better than an artist like Mark, financially. It's very difficult with Mark to know what he will do next, is it going to be a painting of a horse, is it going to be a video, is it going to be a hosepipe sticking out of the window? Mark doesn't have a single product line and there are other reasons for their respective wealth but I think that's a contributory factor. So if you're say a collector in Norway you can buy a Hirst and everyone recognises it as a Hirst but if you're a collector in Norway and buy a Wallinger people will come wondering in and ask 'who is that by?'

Wallinger's work is difficult to categorise and each new piece is usually in a new format and hard to recognise as being by one particular hand, therefore it is challenging to brand.

However considering the artist and their work is not enough to understand the artistic brand. We must look at the internal, brand building process through which stakeholders contribute to the brand identity and image as a starting point (see figure 1 for an illustration of the stakeholders involved in the artistic brand). Jude discusses how over a career: 'you have to sustain the level of your prices, you need that backing, you need to be in group shows and be written about, you can't just be talked about by collectors, it doesn't mean anything.' William sees success as several interrelated 'levels' including critical recognition: 'you can achieve that without the other level [financial collector-base] but it's increasingly hard.' These spheres are intimately connected, Theo describes his career as a 'Venn-diagram' of overlapping groups where, as Chris puts it, everything depends on building up the 'pyramid of approval.' Relationships are key to artists' success, as it is through these relationships that the brand attains added value and it is these relationships to which we turn now.

Figure 1: Daisywheel model of artistic brand stakeholders

Creating and deploying the brand

Legitimising 'me': the need for social capital

While individual perception of brand identity is important, as noted above, such an identity is constructed within the wider artworld and our study illustrates the importance of collective brand ownership (see figure 2 for an illustration of the various dimensions involved in this). Anyone can call themselves an 'artist;' therefore, experts are essential to filter the bad from the good (Robertson & Chong, 2008). The endorsement process consists of a network of experts negotiating the value of a work of art. Over time, this network of relationships accumulates ideas of the product and fills the brand markers with meaning from which value is achieved. A brand emerges when these collective understandings become

firmly established. Value is extracted from these relationships; Theo explains the artistic career as: 'building up a momentum of people (…) you start to build up a little following, (…) it's a culmination of lots of different things.' Artistic brands are created primarily through artistic values and identity but the quality of how these are communicated determines brand longevity. Gatekeepers' messages can propagate the artistic identity to the mass audience, legitimising them and providing market access and giving the work value. Moreover, if they are already branded institutions (major galleries, collectors, museums, prizes, etc.) they can draw the artist's brand into an existing narrative or reinvent the brand narrative by repackaging. Henry describes how a friend of his:

> Suddenly got taken up by a very happening gallery of the day called [A] and for a few years he had this extraordinary period, and he said to me 'what you need is a [A] to legitimise you' and that's terribly true. Even an unfashionable artist, if they're showing in just the right place at just the right time, they'll be legitimised.

Brand management is not only about building brands but also brand leveraging in borrowing brand value through associations with other brands (Uggla, 2006). The whole endorsement process through which artworks are valued can be considered as a complex co-branding initiative through which social capital is built up and transferred in a brand-leveraging process where brand equity is distributed amongst others.
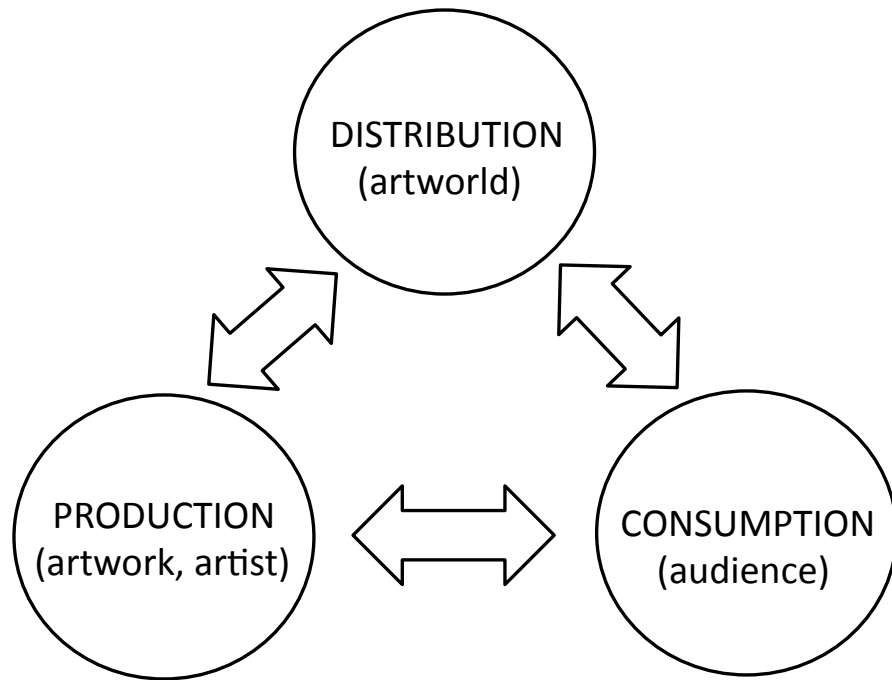
Figure 2: A multi-stakeholder perspective of the artistic brand

Brands provide the added value of increased confidence and these relationships can be indicative of a low-risk product. Indeed, risk reduction is a key function of branding (Roselius, 1971). Collectors generally seek to make decisions based on selective information (Velthius, 2005) and are likely to rely on market results and expert advice in shaping purchasing behaviour. Therefore the artist relies on others in becoming branded and fighting through the considerable 'noise' in the market:

All this contemporary art, people want to buy into it but they don't know much about it, so they rely upon sort of the credit rating agencies which are the curators and the museums to see whether it's ok or not. [William]

De Chernatony (2001) found that of all the marketing variables, brand name receives most consumer attention and is a key influencer on perceptions of quality. This is certainly true in the art market where collectors spend millions on top branded artists at top branded galleries, art fairs or auctions. Our informants, dealers in particular were well aware that established brands are used as 'mental shorthand' just as in other areas of consumption to insure against financial risk.

Packaging 'me': the importance of the dealer

Our data showed that the dealer, in particular, is a key figure in the branding process, packaging and placing the artist in the market, generating necessary awareness to start building the brand and attaching the notion of quality to it. Dealers are central to the artist's brand narratives. Artists interviewed agreed that dealer representation is one of the career markers that differentiates 'professional' from 'amateur' artists. Dealers also serve to 'label' the artist, positioning and differentiating them within certain movements or styles, giving the artist instant brand recognition. This positioning depends on the niche the dealer works within and all the artists highlighted the importance of not 'getting into bed with the first [dealer] who asks' [Elizabeth]. Indeed, the key decision-making criteria for this relationship is which other artists are in that gallery: 'the most important factor is how I would sit with the other artists, because that's who you are associating with' [Elizabeth]. Here we see how the brand narrative changes as it is repackaged through working with other stakeholders. In effect, dealers create the brand and introduce it to the market as their name substantially raises the value of the brand equity with a concomitant jump in price levels. This varies according to the dealer but merely having a dealer is considered to increase brand value as it represents belief in the artists, therefore there is more chance of long-term success and return on investment. One of the dealers interviewed commented on frequently selling artworks to collectors at significantly inflated prices several years after initially showing them the work:

Sometimes you think 'how silly' because it's very often that a person has bought something at two or three times the price, two or three years later. It's happened about four times now that someone's asked me the price and I say that the artist has recently graduated. Then there's been notable success within a career and then the prices go up. Then someone who's seen it in 2001, last year bought work that was £10,000 when I showed it originally for £1300, without even complaining.

Collectors want additional reassurance as they are aware that most artists who leave art school are no longer practicing a few years later. The work is not viewed solely as aesthetic, but positioned within a wider value ecosystem.

Dealers, as gatekeepers, therefore play a significant role in distributing artwork, which is why artists accept that they take up to a 50% cut; Martin, for example, comments that 'if you have a really good dealer, it really is worth up to 50% as you have access to different platforms and sales opportunities.' Another dealer interviewed commented that:

If you are a commercial dealer you're in a position to make a career happen, it's to do with promotion. There are galleries who have a more significant presence than any of the artists they represent. We're racing towards a situation where artists aren't all that important, 'important' galleries are, because viewers can't trust their eyes.

We return to the importance of dealers as trusted brands signifying long-term security in an uncertain market known for its lack of transparency. Thus, choice of dealer is central to establishing brand identity and artists need to align dealer brand identity with their own. This is similar to corporate branding where the values and beliefs held by employees (or in this case partners) of the company (in this case the artist) become key elements in terms of the credibility and relevance of the brand to external stakeholders (Schultz & Hatch, 2006). How the artists' identity and strategic vision is embodied and expressed by these art professionals

is key to brand success or failure. If collaborators do not mirror the artist's brand values, underlying identity issues will ensue for the artist, creating long-term damage. For example, emerging artist Alexander discovered that his work:

> was at art fairs without any permission asked, I didn't know. Now there's a picture, for instance, of a piece of work showing in Rotterdam last year, that work I don't like, it has nothing to do with what I do, I was so pissed off when I saw that picture because I thought 'God this is on now and I'm not responsible for it, I don't want to show it because I've moved on from that and I don't want people who I might work with in the future to see that and think that's what I do.'

The fear here is that a curator, dealer or collector the artist wants to work with in the future may misunderstand his work and write him off. So, while showing with the 'right' galleries can lead to successful sales and higher prices, there are also significant dangers to working with the 'wrong' dealers who do not have the same long-term interests. Artists can change galleries due to a fundamental disagreement in artistic direction, for example Jasper discusses doing a couple of shows 'that were great' with a dealer 'but then I became very interested in conceptual art and he wasn't so interested in it (...) and I moved to somebody else.' This shows the fluidity of the artistic brand.

While theoretically the artist owns the brand, other actors challenge this ownership. The difficulty for the artist is that after emerging onto the market, they may no longer control the brand. As dealers continue to position the artist in the market, trying to generate ever-higher prices, the artist may lose creative freedom. Theo, for example, was 'given a lot of money to create something really big' based on a piece he had mocked up earlier where he had 'really meant it' and the end result left him with a bad aftertaste 'one [piece] was very much an artist trying to get this voice, the other was very much part of the artworld where production had played a massive part, financial backing had, and I felt uncomfortable about

that.' Ultimately, the brand has a life and meaning of its own, distinct from the artist's identity who gave it existence.

Brand value thus emerges from various stakeholder interactions and managing the brand requires managing relationships across the network. SBM pays insufficient attention to brand builders, which is why this study is more aligned with cultural approaches focusing on the collaborative creation of value, relationships and networks. However this value is co-constructed not only with consumers in the art market but also with other businesses/professionals such as dealers; the brand is a multifarious construct; the sum of these various relationships. Value here is participatory and dynamic, defined by and co-created with these other parties through time which is why we need to explore the issue of temporality in more detail.

Temporal Brand Narrative

Mediatising 'me': the use of myths

In a successful artistic brand, the artist creates a 'world' or narrative that is coherent and consistent while allowing room for development. As Theo identified: 'I think there's a certain sort of, insular type of thing to an artist, you get into their world.' Holt's (2004) notion of iconic brands argues that the most successful brands have symbolically-driven identity value. A brand, Holt tells us, performs myths through its associated stories. In art, these stories are told by the work itself but also by the artist, dealers, critics, curators and collectors who come into contact with the work, with the narrative only partly controlled by the artists themselves. It seems certain narratives are more likely to be successful than others and therefore perpetuated by the other actors in the endorsement chain. These were found to centre around the notion of innovation which is, since the 20th century, the primary criteria for quality in the art market (as noted by Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000), as one dealer stated: 'so

the first thing is innovation, success really depends on it,' and more general narratives about populist worlds where commercial values do not exist (see Bradshaw & Holbrook, 2007 and Rentschler et al., 2012): 'what's most important is to make work that has integrity and is honest and if it's that, it's successful' [Chris]. Artists playing up certain mythic values in their artistic identities are more likely to be successful. How the artist is perceived is therefore key to the value of the work they create.

Gaertner's (1970) study of recurrent patterns in artists' biographies suggests certain myths get picked up; the most popular of these is the artist as 'bohemian,' living in opposition to society. He argues that this pattern has become so persuasive that artists have sometimes adopted it consciously. Gaertner finds little proof that this pattern exists objectively but because it is established, it influences actual models of being and behaviour and artists tend to live according to it. This is in line with Bradshaw and Holbrook's (2007) analysis of the Romantic myth of the artist as a self-destructive icon. They suggest that the artist inherits a role to perform, and our data confirms that artists understand that there is a role to play which is imposed or at least valorised by the marketplace. In fact, we find that this bohemian mythology is often worked into branding strategies, positioning the product as an authentic, populist product following Holt's cultural branding (2004), for example William describes a 'model of an active embrace of low-profile and non-success underpinning art as a priestly, semi-religious thing.'

Although artists themselves may be financially motivated when creating work, their artistic legitimisation largely depends upon being seen as non-commercial entities thus the need for artists to downplay the importance of their marketing activities when discussing their careers. Alexander says: 'marketing seems like a ridiculous word to use, but it's about how you represent yourself, it's important.' Consumers of the brand want to believe that artists live separately from the modern world of commerce and by consuming the work

themselves can bring some of these values into their own lives. This is where the continuing, underlying Romantic ideology of 'art for art's sake' resides, too much success or economic concern can be detrimental. Therefore controlling distribution and production is crucial to artistic brands: 'but then it got to a stage where I was showing the same thing lots of times in London, people were almost seeing my name around too much, it was like oh, you shouldn't' [Chris]. Artists have to be careful as they gather more success not to forego these values entirely to keep some level of artworld credibility as artists will not accept peers who have 'gone into production' [Martin].

Therefore, artists positioning themselves within these myths, using them for their role identity, can win in the marketplace, for example Turner Prize winning artist Grayson Perry recognises that:

These roles are clicking around your head as an artist (…) and the most important role for me is that of the 'outsider artist' untainted by the artworld, the pure spirit of being creative. I have to remember to be like that as I get more popular (2010).

Myths about artists have always existed, but artists are increasingly celebritised and commodified with media being the primary vehicle through which these myths are played out. Increased media attention results in increased brand awareness. Artists themselves are aware of this process, Perry, for example, discusses the benefit of having an easy title that can create headlines, in his case 'transvestite potter.' 'I am the tranny potter, it's something I live with, it's my brand name' (Perry, 2010). People like a narrative, (indeed, Brown and Patterson (2010) point out that to enchant consumers, marketers must build brand narratives) and therefore successful artists will play on these myths in order to be framed by both the artworld and the media to achieve brand awareness. Artists successful on the market are successfully positioned within these narratives.

Holt (2004) argues that consumers who make use of the brand's myth for their identities forge tight emotional brand connections resulting in brand value. This paper argues that as well as value for consumers, artists themselves resolve identity anxieties through their work. Once the brand reaches the market and is consumed, it feeds back to the artist contributing to further identity-building. Critical reviews are used by our respondents to 'label' themselves and steer new work in that direction. Our interviews demonstrated that an artist's life is very much invested in their artistic identity and by extension, in their brand identity. Their life becomes a part of the brand so any other aspects of themself is somehow attached to the brand, for example, Chris's job working in a shop becomes 'a big field project' leading to his artistic identity being based on the 'fetishisation of mass produced objects and how much we find ourselves in the things that we consume.' Boundaries between identity, brand, self and work are extremely blurred. In fact, as the artist starts to achieve success it can become difficult to separate the brand image from their own identity which is why they can get caught up in certain stereotypes such as the 'live fast, die young' ideology which Theo was trying to escape. Bradshaw and Holbrook (2007) showed the human cost of cultural myths, the negative psychological and social side effects of this is something that is missing from the person branding rhetoric.

Renewing and Reviving 'Me': staying current

Holt (2004) argues that the success of cultural brands comes from their ability to stay relevant, shifting according to the historical context. The artist must continually track 'consumers' views, as a high-representationality and low-functionality product, the brand must keep a continuous presence in consumers' minds by responding to the wider context in which it is situated (Heding et al., 2009). William describes success as 'that feeling of being part of some sort of conversation,' thus demonstrating the relevance of the work and continues by saying 'of course it sort of shifts in a way because the conversation is going to

move on. It's a bit of a moving target and it keeps on dragging itself away from you.' Artists therefore constantly edit their brand image to stay relevant and yet appear timeless. In the words of Howard Hodgkin 'because the further great problem of how to be an artist is how to go on being an artist' (1981). Particularly at mid-career stage, the pressure of achieving a certain position in the market is replaced by the pressure of maintaining this positioning. Sustaining success is difficult, Diana comments that the career 'goes in waves because the first moment you might get some success but there's queue of people behind you and also you have to go on developing. It's what you do with it.' Successful artists need to constantly negotiate their market position, thus the importance of branding which creates an identity that goes beyond just the product. This continuous pressure to adapt to shifting market developments and stakeholder preferences must be balanced against the need to preserve brand uniqueness over time. The link between the artist and the product indicates a psychological impact which more traditional product brands do not have. Brand building therefore requires strategic behaviour rarely acknowledged by the artworld, in terms of accumulating social capital to align oneself to the values of the artworld through networking and marketing (whether conscious or unconscious), to have the work accepted on the market and to continuously renew this acceptance, maintaining those connections.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our study set out to understand the following: how can branding theory be applied to an artist and their work; what role do other players in the visual arts market hold in the brand construction and management process and what are the implications of becoming a branded artist? This paper focused on unpacking the value of artists' 'mythologies' to understand how a work of art is legitimised and valued through the action of multiple stakeholders. In doing so, we consider the artist as a brand, following current research on the person as brand which is often concerned with celebrity brands (Brown, 2003; Kerrigan et al., 2011) but also for

example, with CEO brands (Bendisch et al., 2013). The assumption that a person can be branded is controversial as discussed by McDonald and Vieceli (2004). When looking at people brands, it is more complex than just imitating the corporate branding process and there is a need to take into account the cultural and social aspects of branding, not simply the economic. Ultimately however, the underlying tension in the branding conception, between person and object, remains, and it has to be remembered that the artist brand is not solely the embodiment of the artist in object-form but rather the result of various stakeholders' images collectively constructing a brand around an artist. Therefore, rather than focusing on how artists develop their brands (as this is not always consciously done), branding is used here as a heuristic device, as a lens through which to look at how art is marketed through social interaction and the fluidity of meanings that is produced, communicated and consumed through this process.

We find that the integrity of the artwork depends on the narrative created about the artist which, to be successful, must be rooted in myths about the artistic persona. The 'artist' brand infuses the 'product' brand with personality, reputation and value. Artistic brand equity comes from congruency between brand identity viewed from the creators' perspective and brand reputation as perceived by stakeholders. The brand is only of value, therefore, if it appeals to multiple stakeholder groups and achieves a long-term reputation, in fact the person brand is not the artist, it is the public perception of the artist and their abilities. This research is of value to the wider branding literature through demonstrating how artists successfully manage different stakeholders' priorities in a brand-leveraging process to negotiate an evolving brand image and narrative. Moreover, unpicking the process through which brand-leveraging occurs allows us to see how optimal positioning can be achieved in a networked market, thus capturing the complexity of brand knowledge and how it influences marketing activity. Additionally, developing an artistic identity depends on support and validation of

other actors within the artworld. Therefore, the identity narratives are a collective process rather than offering the sole perspective of the artist. Integrating the stakeholder model within the context of socio-cultural considerations of branding, we argue, allows us to consider these communal meaning making enterprises in more depth.

Figure 3 below illustrates the process through which value and meaning are collectively constructed in the artistic brand. At the heart of the brand is the artist and their works which collectively form the centre of the brand identity. However, only through stakeholder relationships can brand identity be diffused in order to access the market and create brand equity. Emerging artists are socialised into the artworld through local recognition from peers and art school relationships, which builds cultural capital. As they reach mid-career, artists start to get legitimised by gatekeepers: critics, curators and particularly dealers, amassing social capital. Finally, if they are successful and become established, artists reach a wider audience through selling at auction houses, showing in museums, belonging to collections and being mediatised, at which point the socio-cultural value can become economic value. However, the model as presented shows a simplistic rise through the endorsement processes but value does not simply go up, it can fluctuate depending on the entrance and exit of stakeholders in the career. Each artist can be expected to have a different path due to different stakeholders and relationships with these stakeholders. This career trajectory therefore creates a brand narrative which we can expect to be fluid and temporal (thus throughout a career prices may rise or drop) and unique to each individual as it is composed of these multitudinous connections.
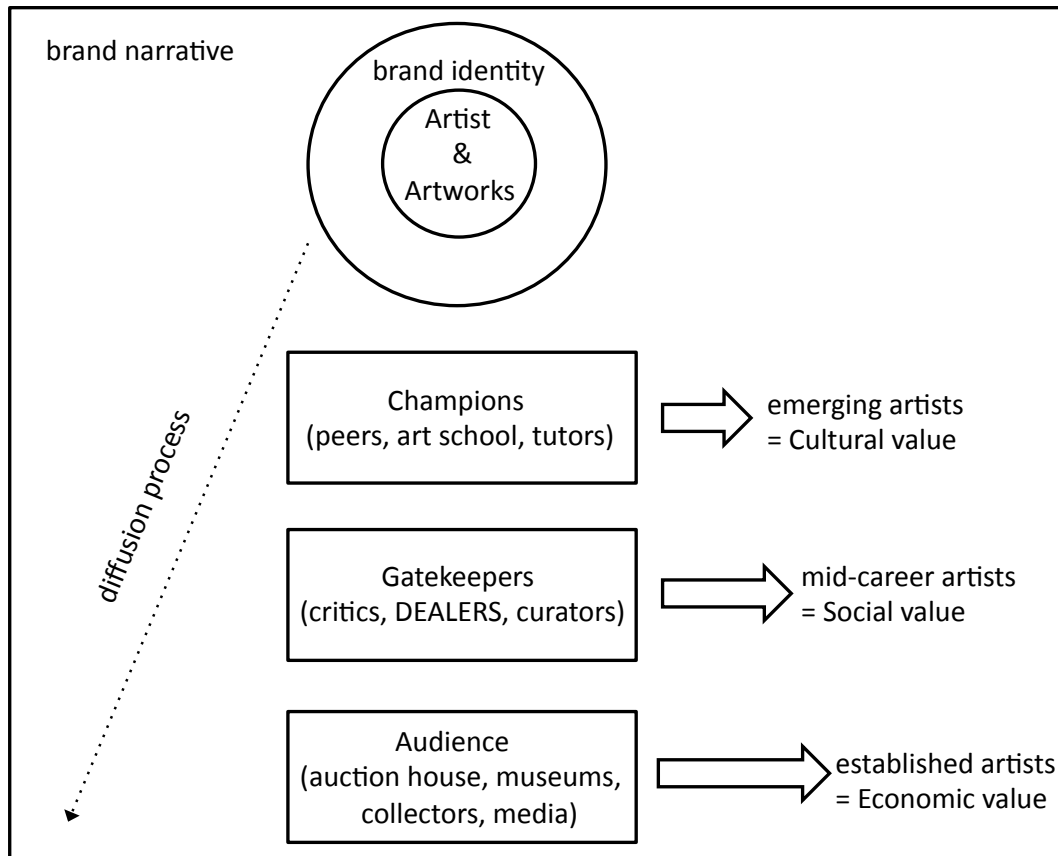
brand narrative

brand identity

Artist & Artworks

diffusion process

Champions
(peers, art school, tutors) → emerging artists
= Cultural value

Gatekeepers
(critics, DEALERS, curators) → mid-career artists
= Social value

Audience
(auction house, museums, collectors, media) → established artists
= Economic value

Figure 3: Construction of the Artistic Brand

In order to be successful, these brands must therefore be flexible as their identity is a work in progress, different roles are performed at different times for different stakeholders, drawing upon the social and cultural context rather than having a definite positioning. Conventional marketing fails to consider how brand meaning is negotiated by both producers and consumers through contextual effects such as time, space, personal history and cultural processes. Conventional notions of brand ownership are therefore found inadequate; not only is the brand and its values co-constructed by a variety of actors which goes beyond simple producer-consumer relationships but who is in control of the brand changes according to the status of the artist's career. Moreover, this study demonstrates that SBM approaches fail to acknowledge the complexity of branding narratives, ignoring the value of myth-making in

branding, and overlooking the macro-level context through which what is considered valuable changes over time.

While the model above demonstrates the various impacting factors on the artistic brand, our research shows that the identity and reputation of the person brand and the artist brand are interdependent. This means that when marketing, the value and integrity of the product is linked to the value and integrity of the self which can cause underlying identity issues and stress as artists must market their identities (or a version of it) as well as their products. Although notions of identity are central elements in marketing theory, in that there has always been recognition of patterns of social difference affecting consumption, segmentation and targeting as well as consumer behaviour, there has been little research focusing on how producers negotiate their identity through marketing behaviour. This is of particular importance for artists as the central part of their identity formation comes from the product they create.

This examination of artistic brands makes the first steps towards demonstrating concrete ways in which a brand can be positioned and perceived as legitimate and the difficulties in this process, particularly in highlighting that a person brand cannot be constructed by one person alone but must be socially co-constructed and negotiated by a variety of individuals including its consumers. By focusing on the interplay between the product, the producer (the artist) and the stakeholders, and the way these come together to create a mythical narrative of which the artist is the protagonist, we can start to untangle the process through which value is created, co-created, experienced and consumed. Artists may appear to make mythologies, as Anish Kapoor suggests, but their actions alone are not sufficient to mythologise the artwork, this process occurs through multiple interactions in culturally- and historically-situated contexts.

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