THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN ARTISTIC BRAND: EMBODYING THE ARTIST IN THE PRODUCT

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ABSTRACT
In the case of 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 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 branding theory to examine 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. Findings highlight the negotiated and socially constructed nature of authenticity in the arts market, demonstrating a need to consider the macro-level context in the creation of value. The need for marketing not just of the product but also of the artist themselves becomes apparent.
Artist brands, authenticity, entrepreneurship, biographical methods, narrative analysis

INTRODUCTION
In an increasingly branded world, it has become an established reality that consumers construct and perform their identities within and in collaboration with brand culture (Shroeder, 2005). The art world is not immune from this, although artists are generally characterised as 'creatives' rather than 'entrepreneurs.' This paper examines how an artistic brand is constructed, managed and consumed through time (not necessarily a conscious decision on the part of the artist), demonstrating that it can only be done in collaboration with other art professionals and needs to negotiate between a variety of competing narratives, demonstrating the complexity of the value process in the visual arts market. Using branding theory allows us to unpack the relationship between the artist and the product 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 is marketed as such. While this has been noted in passing by Butler (2000), there has been little attention to the effects and implications of this on the production and consumption of artistic products. Focusing on the visual arts, we find that the product is marketed as the embodiment of the artist and as such the brand is both a product of and an influence on artistic identity.

This research follows on from an increasing focus on art enterprises as business organisations which firmly locates discussions of the artist and the art market within the business and marketing literature (see: Fraser, 2000; Butler, 2000; Rentschler, 2002; Bradshaw & Holbrook, 2008). Brown (2011) acknowledges the importance of marketing strategies in the cultural industries in general, focusing on the book business and the role marketing plays in the 'manufacturing' of bestsellers. Similarly, this paper argues that visual artists must clearly position themselves and their work within the arts market in order to have their work valued, effectively running their own business. Fillis (2004) examines the artist as an entrepreneurial marketer, suggesting that traditional marketing frameworks fail to recognise the non-linear, flexible and chaotic nature of the marketing environment for small businesses. He suggests that the marketing approach needed in the arts environment is more flexible, closer to customers and more open to creative change. This is in line with calls to look beyond production issues in brand management for a wider view of their interaction with the wider culture through time (Bergvall, 2006).

This paper argues that those artists who are successful on the market have a strong brand identity and image that is temporal in that it responds to the market as well as allowing the artist to develop creatively and yet is 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 been using various marketing strategies for years, including the creation of distinctive products, brand extensions into other genres and media, the nurturing of exclusivity, etc. Although Schroeder has demonstrated that artists are brands and that they successfully manage these brand images, there is still little understanding of how these images are constructed and managed and identity negotiated through them. 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.

CONTEXT: THE BRANDED ARTIST

Reitlinger's (1961) analysis of auction records from the 18th century demonstrates that to some extent, artists have always been branded as their reputation and status in society determined the prices they achieved. Certain artists achieve a celebrated status and thereby gain the influence to define a whole realm of art and dominate the market. These artists are selected by dealers, curators and collectors who then collectively position them as leaders of the market, thereby redefining what is and is not considered 'good' art in accordance with their objectives and using the artist as a short-hand mechanism to represent the quality of that movement or style, thereby branding them. The selected artist therefore becomes the representative of that movement which is why certain artists command several times as much as any other. Other artists who are bound up in the movement then receive brand recognition by being co-branded in their associations. 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. Recognition is a key feature in branding although it is no guarantee of taste which is why Reitlinger can state that 'the history of taste (...) is so often bad taste' (241). In fact, the very notion of taste (on which art works are valued) is based on subjective cultural, social and historical contexts as set out by O'Reilly (2005a). As he argues, marketing is not neutral and 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 temporal changes into account.

Although artists being branded is nothing new, the extent to which these brands are part of the commercial marketplace is. As the art market has grown rapidly in the past couple of decades, its influence on artists has heightened. While art has always been a commodity, the way art is commodified and the speed of commodification has changed. In a media-driven society, artists require a clear brand position and unique profile to differentiate themselves from the competition. This is part of the wider mediatisation of society and culture that has been observed in various social fields. In mediatised social fields, individuals have a potential advantage when they are media-savvy and able to become a media personality or celebrity (Driessens, 2011). Celebrities have been largely ignored in consumer culture theory, as noted by Hewer and Brownlie (2009) but as Pringle (2004) argues, one of the most powerful tools in brand building is celebrity because 'celebrity sells' (20). Kerrigan et al.'s (2011) study of Warhol as a celebrity demonstrates how Warhol purposively built his art and celebrity persona into a brand that could be commodified and distributed. Indeed, Warhol's brand is the most successful example of an artist as a brand in the art market, and is still strong twenty-five years after the artist's death. According to this model of the artist as brand, reputation, image and credibility are intangible assets that can mobilise forms of social attraction from followers to develop a sustained visibility that results in brand equity. The artist brand is therefore socially constructed and negotiated as the result of social interaction and can then be produced and consumed.

As noted by Shepherd (2005), self-marketing and person branding have become popular in the personal development industry. However, they do not figure very largely in the academic marketing literature and there has been a call for more research in the area to determine the differences between them and traditional product brands (Bendisch et al., 2013). Bensisch et al.'s (2013) analysis of CEOs as brands is a notable exception, it argues that personal brands are different from other brands because personality is at the core of a people brand. In the art market, brand identity evolves from the artistic identity which is personal and individually-driven and the brand identity takes into account value added from various stakeholders which in turn influence the artistic identity in a cyclical process. Bendisch et al. (2013) argue that this can lead to 'role stress' if the expectations of the brand identity conflict with personal values. The potential conflict of personal (artistic in the case of artists) identity and brand identity is unique to people and is of particular importance for artists due to the well established tension between art and commerce in the art world (Velthius, 2005). Person brands are therefore complex, especially as

they are inextricably linked to the brands of their various stakeholders.
Branding theory is found useful here not so much as a guide as to how to create a successful artist brand but as a lens through which we can understand how artists operate in the art market. Mainstream branding theory is used for the analysis in terms of focusing on the 'added values' that make an art work or artist valuable as well as generic notions of brand identity and brand positioning that differentiate the brand from its competitors, all applicable to the art market. However, this theory is found to be too limited in scope, treating brands as removed from culture and consumers. Cultural branding theory, as developed by Douglas Holt (2004), is therefore also used as it allows for a more multifaceted understanding of branding. Moreover, as art is a cultural product, it is essential to emphasise how meaning is produced and circulated on a macro-level, and, as we have seen this is affected temporally. Inspired by cultural studies (see Lury's (2004) analysis of brands operating as a force in the organisation of production since the mid-19th century, for example), this perspective broadens the focus of analysis from an individual consumer level, or the simple transaction between a marketer and a consumer to a macro-level. Cultural branding theory allows us to consider how value is co-created and co-consumed and how this is related to identity issues, although we are extending this to not only include consumers but also the producers due to the link between the artist and the work they create.

METHOD

The paper follows previous studies of the art market including Plattner's (1998) study which argues for an ethnographic study of a sample of artists' careers to examine causes of artistic as well as commercial success. Fillis (2011) specifically recommends the use of biographical and narrative methods to examine entrepreneurial marketing, while Kerrigan et al.'s (2011) study of Warhol provides an understanding of the wider social and cultural context in which the brand is constructed. Menger (1999) notes that the one of the most striking features of artists' careers is their temporal aspect and this research sought to drew this out further by taking a cross-sectional approach, selecting artists at different states in their career trajectories. In line with this, characterising the artistic career as a series of statuses or phases which provides artists with their identities allowed us to understand how they build their 'brand' and how this is communicated and consumed and changes through time. The data came from a larger research study focusing on artistic identity. Seventeen face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with contemporary visual artists in London, a key art-market hub (all interviewees listed in table 1.1).
The interviewees were firstly filtered through lists of artists selected for certain prizes or collections that are considered key in the endorsement process thus demonstrating the status of the artists on the market (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 used following an initial series of informal discussions with key art market figures as well as a review of the visual art press. Interviewees were then further filtered down by career age in order to draw out the cross-sectional aspect of careers, three groups of five artists at different career stages were decided on: emerging artists who graduated from art school in the past five years; artists who have been working professionally for 6-14 years and; established artists who have been working for at least 15 years. The time periods used here were decided on in conjunction with key art market professionals and artists and serve as a baseline for the study. A final step was to gather exhibition reviews and catalogues about the artists interviewed in order to compare artists' own perspectives on their work and identity with how they are contextualized by other art market actors, specifically critics, curators and dealers as well as auction houses for the most established artists. The data highlighted three key areas of focus in the construction and management of an artistic brand which we shall now turn to: the need for a coherent and recognisable brand identity; the need for social capital and the need for a flexible narrative in responding to market conditions.

BRAND IDENTITY

Russell Belk's seminal paper on the extended self argues that 'we are what we have;' (1988:139) in the case of artists however, this paper argues 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 (2005b) 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 in terms of a mismatch between what professionals do and who they are. Just as Belk found there to be a diminished sense of self when possessions are lost or stolen, artists also seem to 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.
Loss of power or control over the art is potentially traumatic due to the fact that it is very much 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 so many successful artists often buy work back). Through the process of creating their art, artists manage their identities and the process works two-ways because the way the art is received in the market also becomes internalised and part of their identity in a continuous loop moving back and forth from production and consumption throughout the career. So getting a good critical reception will allow for a greater sense of self-worth and status while failing to do so will lead to diminished self-worth and status, both in artists' own eyes and the eyes of others who judge an artist based on their work. The art work essentially acts as an advertisement for the self, both to others and through the circular process through which artistic identity is created and managed, to the artist themself. Art works therefore function as anchors for artists' identities in a similar way to how material possessions do so for consumers, the uniqueness and authenticity of the work being at the root of the identity concept (Belk, 1988). When the artists interviewed discussed their careers they frequently discussed the product as an extension of themselves, for example one artist discusses working with a dealer 'who decided he was interested in selling *me*' [Erin.50]. The artist needs to be as marketable as their products.
In the case of the artist then, identity is actively constructed out of the works of art produced and is also consumed as such:

But it's what people read into what an artist represents in terms of value, 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.46]
The brand functions as a symbolic device through which consumers can buy into this identity and as such comprises both the art work itself (which in effect is the face of the brand) but also the whole past history of the artist and their career history which have formed the artistic identity. 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. The works and the cultivated persona of the artist become interchangeable and part of a singular trademark.

BRAND OWNERSHIP

In the art market, due to the fact that anyone can call themselves an 'artist,' the endorsement of experts is essential to filter the bad from the good (Robertson & Chong, 2008). The endorsement process consists of a network of experts who negotiate the value of a work of art. Over time, ideas about the product from this network of relationships accumulate and fill the brand markers with meaning from which value is achieved. A brand emerges when these collective understandings become firmly established. Art brands are created primarily through artistic values and identity but it is the quality of how these are communicated that decides whether a brand will live or die.. The value in these relationships for the artist is that they are able to propagate the artistic identity to the mass audience, providing access to the market and giving the work value. Moreover, if these relationships are with already branded institutions themselves (major galleries, collectors, museums, prizes etc.) they can draw the artist's brand into an existing narrative or reinvent the brand narrative by repackaging them. Brand management is not only about building brands but also brand leveraging in borrowing brand value through associations with other brands (Uggla, 2006). In fact, the whole endorsement process through which art works are valued can be considered one massive co-branding initiative through which social capital is built up and transferred. Brands in this sense provide consumers with the added value of increased confidence and these relationships can be indicative of a low risk product.

How the artistic identity and strategic vision of the artist is embodied and expressed by these art professionals is therefore key to the success or failure of a brand. If the people the artist works with do not mirror their brand values it will cause underlying identity issues for the artist which will be damaging in the long-term. Their behaviour can support or damage the brand. Strategic brand management (Elliott & Percy, 2007) examines identity issues involved in brand ownership but in this case, brand ownership is more nebulous than the mainstream literature accounts for. While theoretically the artist owns the brand, other actors such as dealers make that difficult. The difficulty for the artist is that at this point the brand is a bit of a Frankenstein, no longer controlled by its creator. Ultimately, the brand has a life and meaning of its own, distinct from the artist's identity who gave it existence. This is especially visible when looking at how the value of an artist's work changes after their death.

Much of the value of the brand is therefore imparted by other constituents, not just the one-to-one relationship with the brand. Managing the brand therefore requires managing relationships across the network. Traditional brand management pays insufficient attention to brand builders, which is why this study is therefore more in line with Vargo and Lusch's (2004) new dominant logic for marketing which focuses on the co-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 as we have seen. Value here is participatory and dynamic, defined by and co-created with these other parties through time which is why we need to explore how these are constructed in more detail.

BRAND NARRATIVE

Holt's (2004) notion of iconic brands argues that the most successful brands use identity myths to achieve iconic status, thereby allowing their consumers to address identity desires and anxieties. These brands have identity value as they are valued for what they symbolise. 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, the dealer, the critics, the curators and the collectors who come into contact with the work. The narrative, as we have examined, is therefore only partly controlled by the artists themselves. It seems certain narratives are more likely to be successful than others and therefore picked up and perpetuated by the other actors in the endorsement chain. These include narratives about innovation which is, since the 20th century, the primary criteria for quality in the art market, and more general narratives about populist worlds where commercial values do not exist. This fits in well with the myths or stereotypes generally associated with artists who are considered to be living on the periphery of the modern world, passionate eccentrics who communicate underlying needs that are not acknowledged in modern life. In this sense, artists are seen as acting out lifestyles that we consider to be in a 'full, totally free manner' as fitting for stars in Debord's analysis of celebrity (1994:29). Artistic identities must therefore be constructed and manipulated to fit in with the dominant values of the art world.

If the artist can position themselves within these myths, using them for their role identity, they stand to win in the marketplace, Turner Prize winning artist Grayson Perry recognises that:
These roles are clicking around your head as an artist as we're all making up our identity from a kind of mishmash of things and the most important role for me is that of the 'outsider artist' untainted by the art world, the pure spirit of being creative. I have to remember to be like that as I get more popular. (Perry, 2010)
Although these myths about artists have always existed (though they have changed through time), as artists are becoming increasingly celebritised and commodified, the media is becoming the primary vehicle through which these myths are played out. We have already mentioned that Kerrigan et al. (2011) argue that artists such as Warhol are framed and narrativised through the lens of celebrity iconography and their brand is constructed through media attention. This is a circular process whereby as they generate more media attention they achieve increasing brand awareness. Artists are aware of this process, Grayson Perry, for example, discusses how it has worked to his advantage to have 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 the most successful artists will play on these myths in order to be framed by both the art world and the media in order to achieve brand awareness. Artists who are successful on the market are successfully positioned within these narratives which gives them control over the market, this however does not mean they are the most interesting or talented artists which is why many of the most financially successful artists of the past are long forgotten. Moreover these narratives are temporal and may not continue to be attractive.

IMPLICATIONS

This paper has focused on the notion of the artist as brand, in line with current research looking at the person as brand which is usually 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. However, it is interesting to look at branding from a historical perspective which demonstrates that branding has been commonplace in the absence of capitalist economies and has not developed solely as an instrument of commerce but rather has served a variety of social purposes. Eckhardt and Bengtsson (2009)'s paper on the history of branding in China finds that brands were important agents of consumer culture as early as the 10th century. Indeed, brands were used as symbols to differentiate products and demonstrate their quality and authenticity, holding powerful cultural symbolism, fulfilling an innate human desire for status and stratification. This wider view of branding is useful in relation to notions of 'person as brand' as it takes into account the cultural and social aspects of branding, not simply the economic. When looking at people brands, it is therefore much more complex than just imitating the corporate branding process. Ultimately however, it has to be remembered that the artist brand is not in fact 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.
To understand an artistic brand, it is necessary to consider both the artist themselves, their entire oeuvre and the individual products, they are all inextricable parts of the 'value added' of these brands. Within the 'corporate' brand of the artist which infuses the art with added values therefore, each piece of art is its own 'product brand' and as such holds value as a stand-alone, independent, authentic work. This is why the underlying identity needs to be rooted in the authenticity myths of the art market explored above, the very integrity of the art work is dependent on this. The 'artist' brand infuses the 'product' brand with personality, reputation and value. Although notions of identity are central elements in marketing theory in that that there has always been a 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 due to the fact that the central part of their identity formation comes from the product they create. 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.

CONCLUSION

Research has shown that established brands have distinct benefits in terms of increased profile, differentiation, customer attractiveness, visual recognition and investor confidence (Balmer, 2006). This is found to be true of art brands which essentially serve to personify the work. However, in order to be successful, these brands need to be flexible as their identity is a work in progress, playing different roles at different times for different stakeholders and drawing upon the social and cultural context. As such they are reflexive and dynamic rather than fixed and essential. Conventional marketing fails to take into account how brand meaning is negotiated by both producers and consumers through contextual effects such as time, space, personal history and cultural process. 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 both the status of the artist's career and the life-cycle of the product. Moreover, this study demonstrates that conventional notions of branding fail to acknowledge the complexity of branding narratives, ignoring the value of authenticity in branding, and overlooking the macro-level context through which what is considered valuable changes over time. Indeed, this paper seeks to highlight how the macro-level context defines value and that a more comprehensive understanding of marketing results from a consideration of this context; those that control the market control the perceived meanings of the work, the narratives that get picked up as 'authentic' and therefore the value of the work. While authenticity has become a central concept in the contemporary marketing literature (Hartmann & Ostberg, 2012; Arnould & Price, 2000; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Rose & Wood, 2005) in terms of consumers desiring authentic product offerings and experiences, how a brand can be positioned and perceived as authentic and how to maintain that authenticity is a topic that needs exploring further. This examination of artistic brands makes the first steps towards demonstrating concrete ways in which this can be done 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. We find that branding theory is a useful tool to look at the way value is attached to art works in the art market, taking into account the full range of meanings they communicate, both tangible and intangible. By focusing on the interplay between the product and the producer (the artist) and the way this comes together to create a mythical narrative of which the artist is the protagonist and is at the heart of the brand, we can start to untangle the process through which value is created, co-created, experienced and consumed.

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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 1.1: ARTISTS INTERVIEWED