Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna

DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN

PHD IN MANAGEMENT

Ciclo XXXII

Settore Concorsuale: 13/B2
Settore Scientifico Disciplinare: SECS-P/08

ESSAYS ON ATYPICALITY: A NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE TO ILLUMINATE HOW ATYPICAL ACTORS CAN COUNTER THE DISCIPLINING EFFECT OF CATEGORIES

Presentato da: Donato Cutolo

Coordinatore Dottorato:

Prof. Riccardo Fini

Relatore:

Prof. Simone Ferriani

Co-relatori:

Prof.ssa Rosa Grimaldi
Prof.ssa Maria Rita Tagliaventi

Esame Finale anno 2021

A mio Papà, Michele.
Grazie di avermi insegnato il valore dell'umanità e della conoscenza.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

È difficile esprimere adeguatamente la sincera gratitudine, stima e affetto che provo nei confronti del mio mentore, Simone. Sant'Ignazio di Antiochia scriveva che «*si educa bene con quel che si dice, si educa meglio con quel che si fa, si educa ancor meglio con quel che si è*». Ti ringrazio per essere un modello di riferimento di raro valore e umanità. Grazie, inoltre, per aver creduto in me, per tutte le volte che hai trovato il modo di farmi guardare i problemi dalla giusta prospettiva, e soprattutto grazie per avermi sempre offerto il tuo aiuto con sincero disinteresse. You made all the difference in my PhD!

I miei ringraziamenti inoltre vanno:

All'Università di Bologna e al Dipartimento di Scienze Aziendali, grazie per aver reso possibile questo lungo e affascinante viaggio.

A Rosa, che per prima ha stimolato il mio interesse verso la ricerca e le scienze sociali.

A Maria Rita e Giacomo, che mi hanno pazientemente guidato nei primi anni del dottorato.

Ai miei colleghi e amici Carlotta, Caterina, Rita, Simone, Casey e soprattutto Leo.

Ad Emilio, Ezra e Susan. Thank you for welcoming me to the Sloan Community and inspiring me with your spirit, ideas, and scholarships.

Ad Ari, Ethan, and Karen. You made me feel at home, far away from home. My visit wouldn't have been the same without you.

A Martin, serendipitous co-author. Thank you for being such an inspirational thinker and good friend.

A Matteo Prato e Richard Haans. Thank you for the encouraging and constructive feedback during the review process.

A mia moglie Lucia, ai miei genitori, Michele e Nunzia, e a mio fratello, Costantino. Mi avete ascoltato ogni volta che ne ho avuto bisogno, anche quando non potevate capirmi. Ma soprattutto, la consapevolezza di avervi accanto mi ha confortato nei momenti più difficili.

Infine, a mio figlio Leonardo. Hai stravolto la mia vita e mi hai reso una persona migliore.

TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

..if you are not like everybody else, then you are abnormal, if you are abnormal , then you are sick. These three categories, not being like everybody else, not being normal and being sick are in fact very different but have been reduced to the same thing.
― Michel Foucault

Normality is a paved road. It's comfortable to walk, but no flowers grow.
― Vincent Van Gogh

The words of Michel Foucault eloquently capture the nature and the function of what he defines as the *normalization* process of modern societies. In his conceptualization, *normality* simultaneously indicates what is typical within a society, its unenthusiastic objective average, and also what are the expected norms of conduct, the optimal outcome towards which all individuals must move (Foucault, 1978, 2003a; Taylor, 2009). As noted by the French philosopher: "the norm is an interplay of differential normalities . . . the normal comes first, and the norm is deduced from it (Foucault, 1978, p. 63). Normality then becomes the yardstick used to evaluate actions, differentiate between actors and regulate social interactions, creating a circular dynamic that brings anyone who falls outside the spectrum of statistical normality into disrepute (Foucault, 1978, 2003b). Due to the disciplinary impulse of normalization, social actors are ranked and evaluated so that those who are atypical with respect to traits, characteristics or behaviors unavoidably incur severe penalties.

Normalization is thus an essential process to create and maintain social order, yet it is also a constraining force that discourage the emergence of novel modes of thought and existence (Foucault, 1977). Indeed, a voluminous literature demonstrates that deviating from normality holds the potential for novelty and change (Uzzi et al., 2013; Zuckerman, 2017; Berger & Packard, 2018). The metaphor used by Vincent Van Gogh pointedly alludes to the

fact that marvelous rewards can only be reaped by taking unusual and atypical paths. For an artist to be groundbreaking, for instance, she almost always needs to be atypical. If she is too normal, if she follows the existing aesthetics and stylistics norms, her work will reflect something that has already been seen before, and it probably will not be a gamechanger. Emblematic in this respect is Jackson Pollock, who took an atypical approach to painting. With his attitude, Pollock prompted a radical transformation of the concept of normal and gave rise to the new genre of Abstract Expressionism. Indeed, atypicality provides the raw materials for others to later build on in their personal pursuit of returns, and this process is critical to understanding how many social and cultural changes happen.

The co-existence of these two perspectives puts in evidence the double-edged nature of atypicality: it exposes social actors to the substantial risk of not meeting the minimal criteria of social acceptability, yet socio-cultural innovation is most likely to occur when individuals deviate from typical and expected patterns. This tension has long fascinated management, organizational and economic sociology scholars (Zuckerman, 1999; Hsu, 2006; Uzzi et al., 2013; Goldberg et al., 2016), fueling a lively debate among researchers interested in understanding how and why variations in behavior emerge, become manifest and gain momentum. In particular, sparked to a considerable extent by Zuckerman's (1999) influential piece, organizational theorists have explored this issue from the perspective of categories. Categories are agreed-upon systems of classification that organize social domains by partitioning various entities, ranging from people to objects to situations, into cohesive and coherent groups that share similar attributes, meanings and identities (Hannan et al., 2007; for reviews, see Durand & Paolella, 2013 and Vergne & Wry, 2014). For instance, songs can be categorized into musical genres (Askin & Mauskapf, 2017), restaurants into traditional or nouvelle cuisine (Rao et al., 2005), organizations into industries (Zuckerman, 1999), customers into typologies (Davis, 1959), and so on.

More specifically, categories represent a kind of "collective typification" where shared attributes are abstracted from the uniqueness of individual entities to form generic types of entities (Negro et al., 2010; Cattani et al., 2017). For instance, the genre of epic poetry is defined by the distinctive characteristics (plot centered around a hero of unbelievable values, involving supernatural and/or divine forces, presenting a moral code, etc.) of those literary compositions that appear to form a common set (The Iliad and The Odyssey, Beowulf, The Poem of the Cid, etc.). With a dynamic that reproduces Foucault's normalization process, categories thus both impose coherence on the world and exert a strong disciplining function on it (Cattani et al., 2017; Hannan et al., 2019). The very existence of categories sets expectations for what features their members should (and should not) have, thereby establishing what is deemed acceptable and legitimate. In this respect, the literature has extensively shown that when actors are atypical within a given category – due to an identity that deviates from the central tendency or because they combine features from other categories – they are systematically devaluated if not ignored (Zuckerman, 1999; Hsu, 2006; Hsu et al., 2009; Kovács & Hannan, 2010; Pontikes, 2012). This pressure to adopt the typical and expected features associated with existing categories was elegantly presented by Zuckerman (1999) as the "categorical imperative".

Nevertheless, atypical positioning within categorical systems not only persists but sometimes leads to extraordinary returns given its fundamental role in promoting exploration, innovation, and creativity (Schilling & Green, 2011; Durand & Paolella, 2013; Uzzi et al., 2013; Ferguson & Carnabuci, 2017; Askin & Mauskapf, 2017; Berger & Packard, 2018; Wagner et al., 2019). Indeed, as noted by Zuckerman (2017), "we do see innovative acts of unconventionality that expand our capacity for delivering valued goods and services." To reconcile the tension, management and organizational scholars have made significant strides in exposing the conditions under which otherwise punishable categorical nonconformity may

be tolerated and even rewarded by relevant audiences (Ruef & Patterson, 2009; Kovács & Hannan, 2010; Kim & Jensen, 2011; Smith, 2011; Pontikes, 2012; Cattani et al., 2014; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014; Leung, 2014; Goldberg et al., 2016; Zuckerman, 2017). In this process, a great deal of attention has been placed on systemic factors that alleviate the pressure for typicality, and the role of agency in influencing this process is nearly always considered marginal. While literature recognizes that actors can modify the structure of the categories in which they are embedded (Rao et al., 2005; Vergne & Wry, 2014), in the absence of favorable structural conditions - such as a benevolent audience or a significant amount of status - an ineluctable Foucauldian fate seems to prevail for those who do not comply, by choice or by force, to established categorical standards.

Can atypical actors strategically counter the normalizing effect of the categorical imperative? A few studies suggest that they may succeed in this challenge through deliberate rhetorical maneuvering within the cultural system they are embedded in (Kim & Jensen, 2011; Zhao et al., 2013; Smith & Chae, 2016). Zhao, Ishihara, & Lounsboury (2013), for instance, look at how the symbolic value of product names – capable of invoking familiarity and infusing positive reputation – can mitigate the evaluative discount associated with atypicality. Similarly, Smith and Chae (2016) show how atypical organizations resort to verbal accounts, in particular, deliberate names that signal membership in established market categories, to overcome the liabilities of atypicality and survive longer. However, while these results indicate some space for agents to deploy linguistic and communication strategies to interfere with evaluation processes based on social categorization, the literature has glossed over the potentialities this linguistic turn has to offer. There is ample evidence that language plays a critical role in constructing or changing social evaluations (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Giorgi et al., 2015; Lockwood et al., 2019). This dissertation will thus demonstrate that a narrative perspective proves useful for understanding how atypical actors

can leverage linguistic, stylistic and cultural dimensions of stories to mitigate against the penalties of their categorical noncompliance.

Drawing upon the literatures on categories, narratives, cognition, linguistics and communication, this doctoral thesis unfolds as a collection of three distinct articles that seek to shed light on this issue by addressing the following research questions

a) *What does it mean to be atypical?*
b) *How can atypical actors leverage narratives to get a more lenient evaluation?*

Before I go into the details of how each essay contributes to answering the two research questions, I will justify at a theoretical level why and how narratives can be useful for supporting atypical actors in their attempt to influence the outcomes of social evaluations.

Why narratives?

In forms that range from articulated accounts of individual experiences across the entire lifespan (Conway, 1990; McAdams, 1993; Pasupathi, 2001), to more fragmented, extemporaneous and situated stories (Hjorth & Steyaert, 2004; Boje, 2008), narratives offer a unique and rich perspective to understand human lives and actions (Bruner, 1987, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988; McAdams, 1993; Somers, 1994; Hyvärinen, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Stories in fact represent a portal to human psychology first and foremost because narratives and self are intimately tied (McAdams, 2001; McAdams et al., 2006; Singer, 2004). By interpreting and recounting personal experiences and future ambitions through a story, individuals construct and internalize a meaningful conception of their self (Thorne, 2000), and because narratives represent "an essential logic used by human beings for self-presentation" (O'Connor, 2004, p. 109), those stories are a fundamental, and particularly effective means to communicate both "sense-making," and "sense-giving" (Weick, 1995; Sonenshein, 2010;

Balogun et al., 2015). Narratives, in other words, help individuals understand and describe "who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233), not only shaping how they view themselves, but also how others view them.

Narratives thus are constitutive of identity development, and also a precious source of value and awareness (Bartel & Garud, 2009), since, as human beings, we are drawn to and connect with stories. Stories have always a purpose (Vaara et al., 2016) and since they are necessarily crafted "within a specific situation [...] for particular audiences, and to fulfill particular goals" (McLean et al., 2007, p. 262), they play a functional role that is central in purposeful social acting (O'Connor, 2002; Vaara & Tienari, 2011). In that respect, storytelling can be seen as an important cultural tool that individuals use to guide others in making sense of their efforts and intentions (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001) and influence their decisions (Martens et al., 2007). Put in other terms, narratives serves "to simultaneously appeal to and transform people's identities in a way that motivates action" (Polletta & Gardner, 2015, p. 5). Several studies in the cultural entrepreneurship and organizational literature highlight the important role played by narratives in leveraging audience's attention, building legitimacy and marshalling resources (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; O'Connor, 2002; Martens et al., 2007; Zott & Huy, 2007; Navis & Glynn, 2011; Manning & Bejarano, 2017; Blevins et al., 2018; Murray et al., 2020).

In sum, since narratives are vectors for identity that can convey value, engage attention, shape expectations, grant legitimacy and motivate action, I will explore their role as navigational devices in the evaluation of atypicality.

Answering the research question in three steps

The first step in answering the research question involves clarifying the construct of atypicality. Atypicality is a quality that is more easily recognized than defined, and there is a substantial lack of clarity about what atypicality is. Indeed, atypicality remains a relatively understudied and elusive concept, perhaps due to the theoretical fragmentation and the strong emphasis on the "golden cage" of pure categorical membership within which objects are held (Suchman, 1995; Zuckerman, 1999; Durand & Kremp, 2016). The first essay in this dissertation directly aims at answering the first research question ***What does it mean to be atypical?*** To that end, the first essay offers a theoretical contribution that sets the stage for the development of the dissertation. I offer a critical analysis of the construct of atypicality, bridging together fragmented theoretical and empirical findings from different fields with the intent to systematize and broaden our understanding of this construct. In this regard, I draw out important conceptual distinctions, decomposing two forms of atypicality previously conflated – incongruity and blending, and I build a model that synthesizes and clarifies the antecedents, as well as the processes and the conditions under which atypicality leads to specific outcomes. In addition, this essay offers a number of suggestions for topics of further study, with the intent to elucidate novel opportunities for unleashing the generative potential of this important construct.

The second step consists of addressing a critical methodological challenge question. ***How to measure variation in structural, linguistic, and stylistic components of narratives in a meaningful yet accurate way?*** Answering this question relies on the intuition that narrative structure can be treated as an "object of quantitative, scientific investigation with the intent to understand the elements that it is made of" (Min & Park, 2019). In this respect, advances in computational methods hold great promise for scholars interested in studying the complexity of language and its meaning (Lockwood et al., 2019), and in particular, topic modeling has

emerged as a valid support to generating novel theory by providing an operational means to identify cultural concepts embedded in words (DiMaggio et al., 2013; Croidieu & Kim, 2018; Min & Park, 2019). In the second essay, I propose a topic modeling approach to measuring the level of stylistic conventionality in the stories of around 80,000 artisans selling their handmade products on Etsy, the largest online marketplace for craft and handmade items. I focus on narrative conventionality because several lines of inquiry have highlighted it is an important feature in making it easier for audiences to relate to actors and objects they may otherwise dismiss (Garud et al., 2014; Manning & Bejarano, 2017; Lockwood et al., 2019; Vossen & Ihl, 2020), resolving ambiguity and easing interpretation (Martens et al., 2007; Navis & Glynn, 2011). This study offers empirical evidence narratives are essential cultural and cognitive resources that actors can leverage to influence audience evaluative process, and I show that anchoring narratives to conventional features has an inverted u-shape relationship with the performance of crafters. Furthermore, this study provides an important building block for answering my second research question, as it presents a set of useful ideas for uncovering the complexity of narratives employing Natura Language Processing (NLP) resources.

Finally, building on the previous essays, the last essay is comprised of a direct investigation of the second research question ***How can atypical actors leverage narratives to get a more lenient evaluation?*** Both essay 2 and 3 use the same empirical setting, i.e. the largest digital marketplace for craft and handmade items, as it is particularly suitable for examining how social categorization and narratives interact in shaping audience response to atypicality. Indeed, in this craftsmanship space, stories are a significant source of value and awareness that serve to build customers' appreciation of the work of a crafter (Mishler, 1992, 1995), and the importance of a pure and typical positioning within the system of product categories in online marketplaces has already been demonstrated (Hsu et al., 2009). In this piece, I empirically demonstrate that two key narrative features, conventionality and

abstraction, are central to orienting an audience toward a more favorable evaluation of producers with unconventional and atypical product offerings. The combined findings from essays 2 and 3 confirm that narratives are precious resources that can be strategically articulated to shape audience reactions and market appeal and illustrate that social evaluation of atypical and unconventional entities is a complex process that unfolds across multiple interacting axes. Specifically, while my results confirm that the categorical imperative is a constitutive element of social evaluation, I demonstrate that actors can elude this normalizing force through strategically crafted narratives.

References

Askin, N., & Mauskapf, M. (2017). What Makes Popular Culture Popular? Product Features and Optimal Differentiation in Music. *American Sociological Review*, *82*(5), 910–944. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417728662

Balogun, J., Bartunek, J. M., & Do, B. (2015). Senior Managers' Sensemaking and Responses to Strategic Change. *Organization Science*, *26*(4), 960–979. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2015.0985

Bartel, C. A., & Garud, R. (2009). The Role of Narratives in Sustaining Organizational Innovation. *Organization Science*, *20*(1), 107–117. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1080.0372

Berger, J., & Packard, G. (2018). Are Atypical Things More Popular? *Psychological Science*, *29*(7), 1178–1184. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797618759465

Blevins, D. P., Ingram, A., Tsang, E. W., & Peng, M. W. (2018). How do foreign initial public offerings attract investor attention? A study of the impact of language. *Strategic Organization*, 147612701877286. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127018772861

Boje, D. M. (2008). *Storytelling organizations*. SAGE.

Bruner, J. (1987). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, 11–32.

Bruner, J. (1991). The Narrative Construction of Reality. *Critical Inquiry*, *18*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1086/448619

Cattani, G., Ferriani, S., & Allison, P. D. (2014). Insiders, Outsiders, and the Struggle for Consecration in Cultural Fields: A Core-Periphery Perspective. *American Sociological Review*, *79*(2), 258–281. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414520960

Cattani, G., Porac, J. F., & Thomas, H. (2017). Categories and competition: Categories and Competition. *Strategic Management Journal*, *38*(1), 64–92. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2591

Conway, M. A. (1990). Associations between autobiographical memories and concepts. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, *16*(5), 799–812. https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-7393.16.5.799

Croidieu, G., & Kim, P. H. (2018). Labor of Love: Amateurs and Lay-expertise Legitimation in the Early U.S. Radio Field. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *63*(1), 1–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839216686531

Davis, F. (1959). The Cabdriver and His Fare: Facets of a Fleeting Relationship. *American Journal of Sociology*, *65*(2), 158–165. https://doi.org/10.1086/222656

DiMaggio, P., Nag, M., & Blei, D. (2013). Exploiting affinities between topic modeling and the sociological perspective on culture: Application to newspaper coverage of U.S. government arts funding. *Poetics*, *41*(6), 570–606. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2013.08.004

Durand, R., & Kremp, P.-A. (2016). Classical Deviation: Organizational and Individual Status as Antecedents of Conformity. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*(1), 65–89. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0767

Durand, R., & Paolella, L. (2013). Category Stretching: Reorienting Research on Categories in Strategy, Entrepreneurship, and Organization Theory: Reorienting Research on Categories. *Journal of Management Studies*, *50*(6), 1100–1123. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2011.01039.x

Ferguson, J.-P., & Carnabuci, G. (2017). Risky Recombinations: Institutional Gatekeeping in the Innovation Process. *Organization Science*, *28*(1), 133–151. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2016.1106

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (1st American ed). Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1978). *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault, M. (2003a). *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (1. Picador USA ed). Picador.

Foucault, M. (2003b). *Society must be defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (1st Picador pbk. ed). Picador.

Garud, R., Schildt, H. A., & Lant, T. K. (2014). Entrepreneurial Storytelling, Future Expectations, and the Paradox of Legitimacy. *Organization Science*, *25*(5), 1479–1492. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0915

Giorgi, S., Lockwood, C., & Glynn, M. A. (2015). The Many Faces of Culture: Making Sense of 30 Years of Research on Culture in Organization Studies. *The Academy of Management Annals*, *9*(1), 1–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2015.1007645

Goldberg, A., Hannan, M. T., & Kovács, B. (2016). What Does It Mean to Span Cultural Boundaries? Variety and Atypicality in Cultural Consumption. *American Sociological Review*, *81*(2), 215–241. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416632787

Hannan, M. T., Le Mens, G., Hsu, G., Kovács, B., Negro, G., Pólos, L., Pontikes, E. G., & Sharkey, A. J. (2019). *Concepts and Categories: Foundations for Sociological and Cultural Analysis*. Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/hann19272

Hannan, M. T., Pólos, L., & Carroll, G. (2007). *Logics of organization theory: Audiences, codes, and ecologies*. Princeton University Press.

Hjorth, D., & Steyaert, C. (Eds.). (2004). *Narrative and Discursive Approaches in Entrepreneurship: A Second Movements in Entrepreneurship*. E. Elgar Pub.

Hsu, G. (2006). Jacks of All Trades and Masters of None: Audiences' Reactions to Spanning Genres in Feature Film Production. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *51*(3), 420–450. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.51.3.420

Hsu, G., Hannan, M. T., & Koçak, Ö. (2009). Multiple Category Memberships in Markets: An Integrative Theory and Two Empirical Tests. *American Sociological Review*, *74*(1), 150–169. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400108

Hyvärinen, M. (2008). Analyzing Narratives and Story-Telling. In P. Alasuutari, L. Bickman, & J. Brannen, *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods* (pp. 447–460). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446212165.n26

Ibarra, H., & Barbulescu, R. (2010). Identity As Narrative: Prevalence, Effectiveness, and Consequences of Narrative Identity Work in Macro Work Role Transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, *35*(1), 135–154. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.35.1.zok135

Kim, B. K., & Jensen, M. (2011). How Product Order Affects Market Identity: Repertoire Ordering in the U.S. Opera Market. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *56*(2), 238–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839211427535

Kovács, B., & Hannan, M. T. (2010). The consequences of category spanning depend on contrast. In G. Hsu, G. Negro, & Ö. Koçak (Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (Vol. 31, pp. 175–201). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X(2010)0000031008

Leung, M. D. (2014). Dilettante or Renaissance Person? How the Order of Job Experiences Affects Hiring in an External Labor Market <sup/>. *American Sociological Review*, *79*(1), 136–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122413518638

Lockwood, C., Giorgi, S., & Glynn, M. A. (2019). "How to Do Things With Words": Mechanisms Bridging Language and Action in Management Research. *Journal of Management*, *45*(1), 7–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318777599

Lounsbury, M., & Glynn, M. A. (2001). Cultural entrepreneurship: Stories, legitimacy, and the acquisition of resources. *Strategic Management Journal*, *22*(6–7), 545–564. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.188

Manning, S., & Bejarano, T. A. (2017). Convincing the crowd: Entrepreneurial storytelling in crowdfunding campaigns. *Strategic Organization*, *15*(2), 194–219. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127016648500

Martens, M. L., Jennings, J. E., & Jennings, P. D. (2007). Do the Stories They tell get them the Money They Need? The Role of Entrepreneurial Narratives in Resource Acquisition. *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*(5), 1107–1132. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.27169488

McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self* (1st ed). W. Morrow.

McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology*, *5*(2), 100–122.

McAdams, D. P., Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (Eds.). (2006). *Identity and story: Creating self in narrative.* American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/11414-000

McAdams, D. P., & McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative Identity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *22*(3), 233–238. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413475622

McLean, K. C., Pasupathi, M., & Pals, J. L. (2007). Selves Creating Stories Creating Selves: A Process Model of Self-Development. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *11*(3), 262–278. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868307301034

Min, S., & Park, J. (2019). Modeling narrative structure and dynamics with networks, sentiment analysis, and topic modeling. *PloS One*, *14*(12).

Mishler, E. G. (1992). Work, identity, and narrative: An artist-craftsman's story. In G. C. Rosenwald & R. L. Ochberg, *Storied lives. The cultural politics of self-understanding* (pp. 21–40). Yale University Press.

Mishler, E. G. (1995). Models of Narrative Analysis: A Typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History, 5*(2), 87–123. https://doi.org/10.1075/jnlh.5.2.01mod

Murray, A., Kotha, S., & Fisher, G. (2020). Community-Based Resource Mobilization: How Entrepreneurs Acquire Resources from Distributed Non-Professionals via Crowdfunding. *Organization Science*. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2019.1339

Navis, C., & Glynn, M. A. (2011). Legitimate Distinctiveness and The Entrepreneurial Identity: Influence on Investor Judgments of New Venture Plausibility. *Academy of Management Review, 36*(3), 479–499. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2008.0361

Negro, G., Koçak, Ö., & Hsu, G. (2010). Research on categories in the sociology of organizations. In G. Hsu, G. Negro, & Ö. Koçak (Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (Vol. 31, pp. 3–35). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X(2010)0000031003

O'Connor, E. (2002). Storied Business: Typology, Intertextuality, and Traffic in Entrepreneurial Narrative. *Journal of Business Communication, 39*(1), 36–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/002194360203900103

O'Connor, E. (2004). Storytelling to Be Real: Narrative, Legitimacy Building and Venturing. In *Narrative and Discursive Approaches in Entrepreneurship: A Second Movements in Entrepreneurship* (pp. 105–124). E. Elgar Pub.

Pasupathi, M. (2001). The social construction of the personal past and its implications for adult development. *Psychological Bulletin, 127*(5), 651–672. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.127.5.651

Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. State University of New York Press.

Polletta, F., & Gardner, B. G. (2015). Narrative and Social Movements. In D. Della Porta & M. Diani (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199678402.013.32

Pontikes, E. G. (2012). Two Sides of the Same Coin: How Ambiguous Classification Affects Multiple Audiences' Evaluations. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 57*(1), 81–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839212446689

Rao, H., Monin, P., & Durand, R. (2005). Border Crossing: Bricolage and the Erosion of Categorical Boundaries in French Gastronomy. *American Sociological Review*, *70*(6), 968–991. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000605

Ruef, M., & Patterson, K. (2009). Credit and Classification: The Impact of Industry Boundaries in Nineteenth-Century America. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *54*(3), 486–520. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2009.54.3.486

Schilling, M. A., & Green, E. (2011). Recombinant search and breakthrough idea generation: An analysis of high impact papers in the social sciences. *Research Policy*, *40*(10), 1321–1331. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2011.06.009

Sgourev, S. V., & Althuizen, N. (2014). "Notable" or "Not Able": When Are Acts of Inconsistency Rewarded? *American Sociological Review*, *79*(2), 282–302. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414524575

Singer, J. A. (2004). Narrative Identity and Meaning Making Across the Adult Lifespan: An Introduction. *Journal of Personality*, *72*(3), 437–460. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00268.x

Smith, E. (2011). Identities as Lenses: How Organizational Identity Affects Audiences' Evaluation of Organizational Performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *56*(1), 61–94. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2011.56.1.061

Smith, E., & Chae, H. (2016). "We do what we must, and call it by the best names": Can deliberate names offset the consequences of organizational atypicality?: Deliberate Naming. *Strategic Management Journal*, *37*(6), 1021–1033. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2386

Somers, M. R. (1994). The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach. *Theory and Society*, *23*(5), 605–649. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00992905

Sonenshein, S. (2010). We're Changing—Or Are We? Untangling the Role of Progressive, Regressive, and Stability Narratives During Strategic Change Implementation. *Academy of Management Journal*, *53*(3), 477–512. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.51467638

Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 571–610. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331

Suddaby, R., & Greenwood, R. (2005). Rhetorical Strategies of Legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *50*(1), 35–67. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2005.50.1.35

Taylor, D. (2009). Normativity and Normalization. *Foucault Studies*, *7*, 45. https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i7.2636

Thorne, A. (2000). Personal Memory Telling and Personality Development. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *4*(1), 45–56. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0401_5

Uzzi, B., Mukherjee, S., Stringer, M., & Jones, B. (2013). Atypical Combinations and Scientific Impact. *Science*, *342*(6157), 468–472. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1240474

Vaara, E., Sonenshein, S., & Boje, D. (2016). Narratives as Sources of Stability and Change in Organizations: Approaches and Directions for Future Research. *Academy of Management Annals*, *10*(1), 495–560. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2016.1120963

Vaara, E., & Tienari, J. (2011). On the Narrative Construction of Multinational Corporations: An Antenarrative Analysis of Legitimation and Resistance in a Cross-Border Merger. *Organization Science*, *22*(2), 370–390. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0593

Vergne, J. P., & Wry, T. (2014). Categorizing Categorization Research: Review, Integration, and Future Directions: Categorizing Categorization Research. *Journal of Management Studies*, *51*(1), 56–94. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12044

Vossen, A., & Ihl, C. (2020). More than words! How narrative anchoring and enrichment help to balance differentiation and conformity of entrepreneurial products. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *35*(6), 106050. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2020.106050

Wagner, C. S., Whetsell, T. A., & Mukherjee, S. (2019). International research collaboration: Novelty, conventionality, and atypicality in knowledge recombination. *Research Policy*, *48*(5), 1260–1270. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2019.01.002

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Sage Publications.

Zhao, E. Y., Ishihara, M., & Lounsbury, M. (2013). Overcoming the Illegitimacy Discount: Cultural Entrepreneurship in the US Feature Film Industry. *Organization Studies*, *34*(12), 1747–1776. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613485844

Zott, C., & Huy, Q. N. (2007). How Entrepreneurs Use Symbolic Management to Acquire Resources. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *52*(1), 70–105. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.52.1.70

Zuckerman, E. W. (1999). The Categorical Imperative: Securities Analysts and the Illegitimacy Discount. *American Journal of Sociology*, *104*(5), 1398–1438. https://doi.org/10.1086/210178

Zuckerman, E. W. (2017). The Categorical Imperative Revisited: Implications of Categorization as a Theoretical Tool. In R. Durand, N. Granqvist, & A. Tyllström (Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (Vol. 51, pp. 31–68). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20170000051001

ESSAY 1 –THE PLATYPUS PUZZLE: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK ON ATYPICALITY

Introduction

Noncompliance with established contextual orders has long fascinated management, organizational and economic sociology scholars (Zuckerman, 1999; Hsu, 2006; Uzzi et al., 2013; Goldberg et al., 2016), fueling a lively debate among researchers interested in understanding how and why variations in behavior emerge, become manifest and gain momentum. On the one hand, extensive scholarship has shown that products, individuals, and organizations that are atypical within a given context - with respect to traits, features, characteristics and behaviors - often elicit negative responses from organizational audiences, who misunderstand or mistrust them (Zuckerman, 1999; Goldberg et al., 2016). On the other hand, deviation from standard positioning within established socio-cultural domains may open up pathways to innovation if not exceptional impact (de Vaan et al., 2015; Askin & Mauskapf, 2017; Zuckerman, 2017a; Berger & Packard, 2018; Litov et al., 2012). Emblematic in this respect is the emergence of Rock & Roll in the late 1940s. This atypical blend of African American and White musical traditions successfully challenged established cultural and social paradigms, paving the road for a groundbreaking transformation in the musical and cultural landscape, and increasingly promoting self-expression and freedom (Friedlander, 2006). To reconcile this paradoxical tension, management and organizational scholars have made significant strides in exposing the conditions under which otherwise punishable categorical nonconformity may be tolerated and even rewarded by relevant audiences (Ruef & Patterson, 2009; Kovács & Hannan, 2010; Kim & Jensen, 2011; Smith, 2011; Pontikes, 2012; Cattani et al., 2014; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014; Leung, 2014; Goldberg et al., 2016; Zuckerman, 2017a). Yet, despite the central role atypicality plays in organizational, social and managerial settings,

it remains a relatively understudied and elusive concept, and our understanding remains selective.

A primary reason for this lack of a systematic treatment lies in the consolidated tendency to define what stands out from the commonplace in opposition to what is typical and largely diffused within a social context (Merton, 1938, 1973; Durkheim, 1997). Legacy of the structuralist tradition, this approach nurtures the idea that knowledge is built around regularities and establishes typicality as the center of interest, thereby relegating atypicality to a space of peripheral interest. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, this approach has a strong normative connotation: what is considered typical often becomes the norm, the only acceptable standard so that atypicality is considered a breakdown in normally-functioning organizational, cultural or social system, and, as such, it is seen as a dysfunctional anomaly (Foucault, 2003). For instance, the frameworks developed by institutional theorists and organizational ecologists focus mainly on how, to appear legitimate, organizations have to adopt characteristics, practices, and repertoires typical within their organizational or institutional field (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Mizruchi & Fein, 1999; Durand & Thornton, 2018).

The other reason that hindered the emergence of a cohesive research stream on atypicality is undoubtedly the conceptual and theoretical dispersion and confusion that inhibited scholars from building on each other's work and progressing on this topic. Indeed, scholars have (directly or indirectly) studied atypicality through different disciplinary and conceptual lenses. For example, organizational scholarship on atypicality often refers to atypicality as a form of strategic positioning that deviates from the central tendency in a given industry (e.g., Smith & Chae, 2016). Other lines of scholarship, however, have used similar conceptualization to cover a range of related but different concepts. These include, for instance, several strands of work on distinctiveness, i.e., deviation from an industry average (Vergne & Wry, 2014; Haans, 2019); organizational non-conformity, i.e., a firm's deviation from industry

norm (Miller & Chen, 1996), strategy uniqueness, i.e. (dis)similarity of a firm's strategy relative to other firms in its primary industry (Litov et al., 2012; Oehmichen et al., 2021), or organizational deviance, i.e., deviance from laws, informal norms, and cultural standards (Jonsson et al., 2009; Ody-Brasier & Vermeulen, 2014).

Existing approaches in organization and management studies thus offer a confusing view of atypicality. First, we observe considerable ambiguity regarding the theoretical nature of atypicality and profound inconsistencies in the construct's meaning. While atypicality has generally been understood as a dynamic process of departure from a central tendency (Smith & Chae, 2016; Berger & Packard, 2018; Askin & Mauskapf, 2017), which can unfold in different ways (Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014), little attention has been paid to differentiating theoretically how the consequences of atypicality substantially depend on the process through which atypicality may emerge (Johnson & Kovács, 2014; Leung, 2014). To illustrate, an object may be atypical because it does not display conventional features shared by the other category members (Durand & Kremp, 2016) or because it presents unusual elements borrowed from other categorical domains (Rao et al., 2005). In both cases, the objects would depart from the central tendency, yet each dynamic has very different implications for the understanding of atypicality and can only be appreciated when differences in the nature of atypicality are considered.

Our concern in this paper is to address these neglects and put forward a common language that integrates across fields toward a shared understanding of what atypicality is, how it operates within social systems and how it can be most effectively theorized and empirically studied going forward. We address four research questions: (a) What is atypicality? (b) Why and under what conditions does atypicality come into existence? (c) What are the consequences of atypicality and what are the mechanism and the conditions under which atypicality leads to specific outcomes? (d) What are the next steps in studying atypicality?

To that end, in Section 1 we highlight and clarify conceptual and definitional issues associated with atypicality: in the spirit of Durand and Kremp (2016), we distinguish between two previously conflated forms of atypicality – incongruity and blending. The first form, *incongruity*, refers to the departure from the focal category's salient characteristic attributes. The second form, *blending*, refers to the borrowing of features from other categorical domains. Building on this renewed conceptualization, in Section 2 we describe the systematic review process of research published on the topic, and we classify the core publications along several dimensions of interest, such as form of atypicality, research methods, antecedents and enabling factors of atypicality, outcomes, type of mechanism and moderators used to explain the phenomena of interest. This helps us to summarize existing work and propose an integrative framework for thinking about atypicality. Specifically, in Section 3 we synthetize the antecedents and the enabling conditions to the emergence of atypicality, and then we focus on the consequences, the mechanisms and moderating conditions to the outcomes discussed (Section 4). This framework enables us to lay out an agenda for future research that uncovers critical knowledge gaps and provides clear and specific directions for future research-presented in Section 5.

Section 1- Unpacking Atypicality: Incongruity and Blending

The Oxford English Dictionary defines atypical as something "not typical; not conformable to the ordinary type". Atypicality is traditionally seen as what you get when you take away typicality. This oppositional approach, built through negative statements, is ill-suited to produce a workable definition. However, it contains the critical gist that atypicality is a construct that relates to some understanding of 1) what constitutes a typical expression in a given socio-cultural landscape. The notion of typicality sets its roots in cognitive psychology, particularly in prototype theory pioneered by Eleanor Rosch and her colleagues (Rosch, 1978;

Rosch & Mervis, 1975), and it conveys the grade of resemblance of an entity to the prototypical member of the category. Briefly, categories are cognitive infrastructures that organize the social world by grouping together entities with respect to the features and the attributes they hold in common (Durand & Khaire, 2017). Any category - movie genres, artistic movements or product categories - is thus an "agreed-upon system of classification" (Goldberg et al., 2016, p. 4) that define the boundaries of a features space (Askin & Mauskapf, 2017) structured around a prototypical exemplar, the central and most representative member of the category[1] (Mervis & Rosch, 1981). Typicality thus defines the extent to which an object well represents a conceptual, cultural or institutional space (Rosch, 1973, 1978; Popielarz & McPherson, 1995; Hannan et al., 2007, 2019), while atypicality accounts for the ***departure from the subset of centrl features that define the prototype of this domain*** (Mervis & Rosch, 1981; Smith, 2011; Smith & Chae, 2017). In other words, atypical instantiations of a given entity are recognized and accepted members of a categorical domain[2] (Popielarz & McPherson, 1995; Hannan et al., 2019), albeit peripheral to it (Kennedy, 2008; Pentland et al., 2011; Popielarz & McPherson,

[1] Although we acknowledge the existence of contrasting views on how individuals form prototypes - see, for example, Solso and McCarthy (1981) on the difference between central tendency and attribute-frequency – and alternative and more dynamic perspectives on categories and categorization - e.g. the exemplar view, where a category is represented by previously encountered instances of that category, the schema view, where a set of attributes describes the central tendency of a category, the goal-based, where categories are created ad hoc to support the aim of achieving a specific goal, or the ideal view, where a category is represented by the combination of ideal features (Medin & Schaffer, 1978; Barsalou, 1985; Murphy, 2002; Voorspoels et al., 2011; Kennedy & Fiss, 2013; Paolella & Durand, 2016; Hannan et al., 2007), for the scope of this review we rely on the classical prototypical perspective as a fundamental basis for the conceptual understanding of atypicality. Indeed, the arguments we develop about atypicality can deal just as well with other approach to categories.

[2] A critical consideration concerns the relationship between atypicality and membership within a category. Rosch's findings convinced a substantial numbers of scholars that not only typical members of a category are considered more representative than others, but also that typicality defines the degrees to which an object belongs to a category (Zadeh, 1965). The novel idea that atypicality entails partiality in category membership gained considerable traction and was adopted in many studies at the basis of our understanding of atypicality in social settings (Hannan et al., 2007; Hsu et al., 2009; Hannan, 2010). However, over the years scholars also noticed that this perspective perpetuated a potentially confusing representation of the relationship between typicality and membership (Kamp & Partee, 1995; Hampton, 2007; Hannan et al., 2019). Indeed, these are not orthogonal dimensions: despite the fact that atypical entities are not representative members of a category they do remain members, i.e., they are not outsiders. Indeed, a relatively atypical bird as the pelican, is yet an unequivocal member of the set of birds. That's because categories have defining features, and this is what determines categorical membership (Hannan et al., 2019).

1995; Rosch, 1973). In Murphy's (2002) words, "[atypical objects] are known to be members but that are un-usual in some way" (p. 22).

In their seminal works on the psychology of concepts, Rosch and colleagues (Mervis & Rosch, 1981; 1973, 1978; Rosch & Mervis, 1975) clarify the two related principles that define prototypicality, namely 1) sharing salient features with members of the *focal* category and 2) not sharing features and properties with members of *contrast* categories. For example, penguins are seen as very atypical birds because they do not share many of the distinctive features of birds (such as the plumage and the flight) and share the feature "swim" with fish and with some mammalian species. The mutual coexistence of these two constitutive principles suggests that also atypicality manifests in two distinct way.

First, objects can be atypical because they are *incongruent* with the other members of the category. This form of atypicality involves deemphasizing central features of the category, presenting features that are uncommon and rare among other members, or proposing never-seen combinations of characteristic features so that object become not comparable to other members (Miller & Chen, 1996; Kim & Jensen, 2011; Pentland et al., 2011; Bowers, 2015; Smith & Chae, 2017; Beck et al., 2019). For instance, organizations may be atypical because they give prominence to market-oriented ploys rarely used by competitors or avoid actions frequently used by rivals in the same field or industry (Miller & Chen, 1996). This form of atypicality involves all the dimensions that make up a prototype (Beck et al., 2019; Miller & Chen, 1996). For instance, in their study of Franconian Breweries, Beck and colleagues (2019) show that when a brewery's offerings rigidly adhere to the prototypical features of the industry, such as a limited number of beer types or in-house production, it can still be perceived atypical because of the distribution channels chosen. *Incongruity* has been unraveled in career trajectories (Kleinbaum, 2012), music production (Askin & Mauskapi, 2017), organizational strategies (Miller & Chen, 1996; Pentland et al., 2011; Rindova et al., 2011), scientific

production (Uzzi et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2019) as well as in research on organizational identity (Smith, 2011; Smith & Chae, 2016). While incongruity can be conceived as a form of extreme differentiation (Durand & Kremp, 2016) or distinctiveness (de Vaan et al., 2015; Haans, 2019), it is important to observe that a differentiation strategy does not necessarily imply *incongruity*. Indeed, differentiation occurs also among the typical members of the category (Hannan et al., 2007; Pontikes & Hannan, 2014; Kovács & Hannan, 2015). As noted by Zuckerman (2017a), typical members of a category "must at least be nominally differentiated, in the sense that each offering must have characteristics by which it is distinguished from other members of the category" (p. 34). In other words, the process through which actors seek to be distinct from other members of the category can take place also without a departure from central features of the categorical domain. At the same time, incongruity reflects a lack of conformance to conventions and standard references in a given social context (Durand & Kremp, 2016; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014; Smith & Chae, 2016), yet it doesn't describe a form of deviance. Indeed, while deviance is considered a "publicly labeled wrongdoing" and deviant actors are often regarded as outsiders (Becker, 1963), this form of atypicality does not have an antinormative and stigmatizing connotation that leads to the exclusion from the social space.

Blending is the second form of atypicality we introduce, and it can be interpreted as a combination fueled by the copying or borrowing of the elements from other contrasting categories (Rao et al., 2005, p. 838; Ruef & Patterson, 2009). The resulting combination of features that would not normally be expected to go together make objects not typical members of any of the categories blended (Kovács & Hannan, 2010; Pontikes & Hannan, 2014). A platypus is an exemplar representation of this form of atypicality. Its puzzling array of features – an iconic duck bill, it lays eggs like a reptile, and it nurses its young on milk like a mammal- makes it a very atypical member of its animal class. In fact, it is so atypical that when the first

specimens arrived in England from Australia, the scientists examining them suspected a hoax (Hall, 1999). Examples of *blending* include organizations claiming multiple identities in press releases (Pontikes, 2012), products assigned by market intermediaries to multiple genres and segments, e.g. movies (Hsu, 2006; Goldberg et al., 2016), restaurants serving a concoction of cuisines (Johnson & Kovács, 2014; Kovács & Hannan, 2010), or wineries spanning different styles (Negro et al., 2010; Negro & Leung, 2013). *Blending* is fundamentally associated with research investigating hybridity and category spanning, which illustrates that this form of atypicality increases proportionally to the number of categories spanned as well as to the conceptual distance existing between them (Goldberg et al., 2016; Johnson & Kovács, 2014). Yet it's important to observe that category spanning entail *blending* only under certain condition (McDonald & Allen, 2021). Consider the case of a hybrid object that spans two categories. When the conceptual distance between the categories is low, their prototypes tend to be closer and display more similar features (Gärdenfors, 2000; Pontikes & Hannan, 2014).[3] Consequently, there is a high degree of overlap between the categories- using Pontikes's (2012) terms - they are lenient. In this case, category spanning may actually lead to a rather typical positioning within both categorical spaces, as many prototypical features are actually shared between the two categories.

Incongruity and *blending* are analytically distinct because they draw on substantially different reference points to grasp the emergence of atypicality. Whereas incongruity emphasizes an object's lack of resemblance to prototypes considering the *feature space of the focal category*, blending instead gives prominence to its degree of overlap with other categories from the perspective of *the label space describing all categories*. Feature and label spaces are the two planes that define how categorization operates: feature space locates objects in the

[3] This may due, for instance, to an increase in the frequency of boundary spanning behaviors –e.g., in presence of emulation dynamics (Rao et al., 2005), or industry logics (McDonald & Allen, 2021; Vergne, 2012).

conceptual space by their feature values, while label space contains the symbolic labels attached to categories (Pontikes & Hannan, 2014). Extant research on atypicality makes the implicit assumption that the two planes perfectly overlap. However, the specific features associated with labels can (and do) change over time, and the two planes may or may not align with one other (Pontikes & Hannan,2014). Moreover, audiences, in certain contexts, are likely to use an "amalgamation of features rather than (or in addition to) labels to position, select, and evaluate products" (Askin & Mauskapf, 2017, p. 6). Suppose we ignore to account for both of these dimensions. In that case, we may commit the fallacy of trying to explain different dynamics in the same way, ignoring the possibility that they may require other explanations and that diverging recommendations for action may be provided.

A remarkable example is Askin & Mauskapt's (2017) 's investigation of what makes cultural products popular hits. The authors treat a song's positioning within its focal genre's feature space and the comprehensive label system of genres as distinct entities. Although the authors don't formally distinguish between the two forms of atypicality, they argue that songs that do not display conventional musical features within a genre, e.g., key, tempo, acousticness, become even more atypical if they blend multiple genres (rather than being associated with a single genre). Based on this consideration, the authors construct a measure that simultaneously accounts for incongruity (distance from prototypical musical features of a genre) and blending (songs labeled as multi-genre)[4]. Their study unravels an inverted U-shaped relationship between a song's combined atypicality and its performance on the Billboard Hot 100 charts. However, when blending is considered separately (pieces that combine multiple genres), it results in a positive relationship with the likelihood that a song rises to the charts' top. As their

[4] In a similar way, Johnson and Kovács (2014) consider both the feature space (items on the menu) and the label space (cuisine categories) in measuring the atypicality of a restaurant. Not even they distinguish the two forms of atypicality, nonetheless.

results suggest, our distinction is crucial to unpack the complexity of the social mechanisms underlying atypicality and its contradictory findings in organization studies.

Section 2 - **Review Approach**

We chose the systematic review (Elsbach & Knippenberg, 2020) as the methodology for our study, and for selecting literature to be included in the review we follow a multi-step approach. First, we started with publication outlets listed in the Financial Times FT50 journal list as a broad inclusion criterion of high-quality (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Durand & Thornton, 2018; Lockwood et al., 2019). From this set of journals, we conducted a search using the terms atypical*; typical*; conventional*; unconventional*. We took an inclusive approach concerning the set of publications under consideration: we reviewed all the articles for their relevance, and, after a careful examination, we eliminated those that did not conceptualize or explore some aspects of atypicality. To ensure completeness, we also included studies identified by cross-checking reference sections of identified studies. Furthermore, we relied on knowledge of the relevant literature to retrieve relevant articles published separately on other impactful journals, edited volumes, and books. Our final sample included 68 journal articles and book chapters.

In the second step, we systematically classified each source according to a range of themes, such as the forms of atypicality, research methods, antecedents and enabling factors, outcomes, mechanisms and moderators of atypicality–outcomes relationships. Antecedents in our model are the factors that predict atypical outcomes and behaviors, while the facilitating factors describe the condition under which atypicality is more likely to emerge. Outcomes are the consequences of atypicality. Mechanisms are those variables that explain the underlying processes of why atypicality is related to an outcome, and moderators describe the conditions

under which atypicality influences (or not) the outcomes. The Appendix at the end of the paper details the codes that we assigned to each paper.

The overriding finding of our review is that the research on atypicality is fragmented. Figure 1 shows that early contributions came from psychology: Rosch and colleagues' articles form the basis for the bulk of the research conducted on atypicality. Research in management and organization studies, sociology, and marketing gained steam only several years later[5], when scholars began exploring the implications of atypicality on factors other than categorization processes – such as market and social evaluation.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

In line with the conceptual distinction proposed between incongruity and blending, our review shows evidence of a divide between studies that focus on incongruity versus those that discuss blending. Only a few studies consider both the forms of atypicality, although not formally distinguishing between the two concepts(e.g., Askin & Mauskapf, 2017; Johnson & Kovács, 2014). As shown in Figure 2, our review found that the origins of atypicality are a relatively neglected research area. Only a handful of studies directly investigate the antecedents and the conditions that trigger, shape, and facilitate the emergence of atypicality (18 % of all the papers considered in our sample). In comparison, the outcomes of atypicality (55 studies), the mechanisms (35), and the moderators of the atypicality-outcomes relation (25) have been the focus of the majority of empirical work.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

---

[5] To determine the field, we collected information on the field of the journal in which an article was published. We broadly distinguish between management and organization studies, sociology, psychology, and marketing.

Looking at these studies in more detail, it is noteworthy the degree to which scholars across fields agree on the deemed important questions. The interest in atypicality's negative consequences dominate extant research on this concept, with 42 articles investigating the atypicality's evaluative discount. However, it is also interesting to observe that 15 studies discuss the benefit deriving from atypicality – namely sparking innovation, arousing interest and promoting structural (and cultural) transformation. Atypicality thus results in contradictory outcomes, and to reconcile this inconsistency several studies have examined the boundary conditions that lead atypical objects to be punished, tolerated, or even rewarded (25).

Our review identifies five main mechanisms that intervene in the relationship between atypicality and its consequences, i.e., generating ambiguity and confusion, delegitimizing, signaling underlying qualities, changing the evaluation process, and recombining and bridging elements. What stands out is that there has been little attempt to systematically test the mechanisms theorized: less than half of the studies (42%) puts forward an empirical analysis in which the mechanisms proposed are directly tested.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Though a wide range of methods is represented in our article set, the dominant method is empirical estimation (59 articles). Regression analysis is the most popular methodology in management and organization studies, with 29 studies claiming contributions via hypotheses testing and sociology (15 articles). Experimental studies are an often-deployed method in psychology (6 articles) and marketing (5 articles). Table 1 shows that purely theoretical models are the preferred method in psychology (4 articles), and to a lesser extent, sociology

(2 articles). Qualitative analysis through in-depth interviews is used primarily in management and organization studies (6 articles) and in sociology (2 articles).

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Figure 4 summarizes our conceptual model. We will generally discuss the model as it typically applies to social objects, whether they products or actors (individuals or organization). However, we will also note conditions when applying it to products (e.g., in the case of antecedents and facilitators) causes it to be applied to actors.

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

Section 3 - Sources of Atypicality

Antecedents: Why

Strategic consideration

Nearly always, atypicality is portrayed as a deliberate decision informed by strategic considerations (Durand & Thornton, 2018; Zhao et al., 2018). The impetus for atypicality stems from an explicit or implicit assessment of the opportunities to maximize returns by engaging with unconventional behaviors or atypical positionings in the category (Miller & Chen, 1996; Pentland et al., 2011; Smith, 2011; Rindova et al., 2011; Pontikes, 2012). From this perspective, atypicality is pursued to with the intent to innovate or to establish a unique niche to develop a competitive edge (Porter, 1980).

Resistance

However, a narrow focus on outcomes and performance is detrimental to a complete understanding of why atypicality emerges. In fact, atypicality is often a form of self-expression not bound by any calculative consideration about consequences. Dean Alfange's *An American Creed* perfectly exemplifies this perspective: "I do not choose to be a common man. It is my right to be uncommon. I seek opportunity to develop whatever talents God gave me—not security." (Congress, 1968). In this regard, the emergence of atypical career paths (Kleinbaum, 2012), or the pursuit of a "Renaissance man" identity (Zuckerman et al., 2003; Leung, 2014), often embodies a form of resistance to the dominant logic that reflects individuals' attempts to pursue multiple passions (Huyghe et al., 2016), give voice to one's inner self (Campion et al., 2020), or offer a new logic and role identity emphasizing expanded autonomy (Rao et al., 2003), rather than a strategic choice. Besides self-expression, this more interior view on atypicality emphasizes authenticity (Caza et al., 2018), the emergence of oppositional identities (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000), variety seeking (Scarpi et al., 2019), and even personality elements (e.g., need for uniqueness, Snyder & Fromkin, 1977) as a dispositional motivation for atypical behaviors.

Unawareness

Finally, in other cases atypicality may not express a voluntary choice at all, but it would result from coincidence, indifference, or chance. Several works, for instance, indicates inexperience tend to produce more atypical patterns of action (Miller & Chen, 1996; Pentland et al., 2011). That's because, experience plays a socializing role allowing to recognize and perceive how the vast majority of people in the surroundings behave. Indeed, in several cases, lacking experience in a specific domain prevents the understanding of what is considered

typical and expected, and there may emerge structured areas of ignorance of particular rules and norms (Becker, 1963). Similarly, atypicality may simply stem from sociodemographic or economic characteristics that are underrepresented within a group. For example, Popielarz and McPherson (1995) describe this form of passive atypicality in terms of gender and education among members of voluntary associations. To put it more generally, atypicality may be generated unwittingly, reflecting unawareness of the dominant practices and features rather than an intention to reap higher returns, subvert existing order or creating space for self-expression (Becker, 1963).

Facilitators: Under what conditions

Several studies suggest that different exogenous and endogenous factors may facilitate the emergence of atypicality (Pentland et al., 2011). In this section we differentiate between contextual and individual factors, although we recognize that often these facilitators concur to make atypicality emerge more easily (Koppman & Leahey, 2019)

Contextual factors

There is ample evidence that actors' social context and their interactions with and relationship to that context can influence the emergence of atypicality (Beck et al., 2019; Miller & Chen, 1996). For instance, Miller and Chen (1996) apply a sociological lens to empirically show that the extensiveness and the continuity of a firm's interactions with its market contribute significantly to its level of atypicality in competitive strategies. Beck et al. (2019) instead show that physical proximity plays a key role in reducing their propensity to deviate from prototypical characteristics within industry clusters. Furthermore, the presence of intrinsic tensions between two divergent logics - e.g. artistic vs commercial orientation in the production of art - can magnify the emergence of atypical behaviors (Kim & Jensen, 2011).

Individual/Organizational factors

At the actor level, the leading explanation for the variation in the tendency to embark in atypical behaviors is based on status, as low- and high-status actors have less to lose from lack of conformity than middle-status ones (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001; Durand & Kremp, 2016). Also, membership in high-status social groups and highly ranked organizations can intervene to influence the likelihood to engage with atypicality. For instance, Koppman and Leahey (2019) show that scholars who are male and affiliated with top-tier universities have a greater hazard of using methods that diverge epistemologically from conventional methodology in sociology. At the organizational level, the size and resources of a company may give it more leeway to experiment with atypical identities and strategies (Miller & Chen, 1996). Finally, if individuals operate in teams (Uzzi et al., 2013) and the characteristics of these teams (Wagner et al., 2019) may impact the likelihood to generate atypical outcomes. For example, de Vaan and colleagues (2015) suggests that network proprieties of groups (e.g., whether they are structurally folded) can create more favorable conditions for atypicality proliferation.

Section 4 – Outcomes of Atypicality

Consequences: liability or asset?

Evaluative discount

A burgeoning literature on social and market evaluation is devoted to show that atypical positioning within existing product or industry categories leads to detrimental consequences (Goldberg et al., 2016; Hannan et al., 2007, 2019; Hsu et al., 2009; Zuckerman, 1999). Indeed, atypicality negatively affects evaluative outcomes in social and organization life, as audiences tend to ignore or sanction objects with atypical positioning within a categorical space

(Zuckerman, 1999; Hsu, 2006; Hannan et al., 2007; Bowers, 2015; Smith & Chae, 2017). The evaluative liabilities of atypicality are perhaps best summarized in research on the "*categorical imperative"(*Zuckerman, 1999), which has demonstrated that objects violating categorical properties tend to be ignored or sharply penalized compared to typical – or categorically pure- objects. This penalization takes multiple forms, such as poorer economic performance, worse ratings, limited coverage and reduced market appeal (Hsu, 2006; Negro & Leung, 2013; Hannan et al., 2019; Kim & Jensen, 2011). When atypicality becomes pervasive, this evaluative discount may even jeopardize the meaning of the category itself, reducing the appeal of category and even its survival (Hannan et al., 2007; Negro et al., 2010).

A body of research from cognitive psychology has documented that a more general preference in individuals for prototypical codes and features is intrinsic in perception itself (Rosch, 1973; Rosch & Mervis, 1975; Mervis & Rosch, 1981; Palmer et al., 2013; Reber et al., 2004), and this predilection has been demonstrated for a diverse set of entities, including actors (Zuckerman et al., 2003), organizations (Pontikes, 2012), films (Hsu, 2006), aesthetic and beauty (Palmer et al., 2013), paintings (Hekkert & Wieringen, 1990), books (Kovács & Hannan, 2015; Piters & Stokmans, 1997) and wines (Negro et al., 2011).

Great Impact - Innovation

Despite the concrete risk of reducing market and evaluative appeal, greatest returns are unlikely to flow to those who do not follow unconventional path (Litov et al., 2012; Zuckerman, 1999). Atypicality in fact is one of the driving forces of innovation (Torrance, 1974; Schilling & Green, 2011; Uzzi et al., 2013; Ferguson & Carnabuci, 2017; Wagner et al., 2019). Innovative breakthroughs emerges when existing components are recombined in ways that defy traditional configurations (Goldberg et al., 2016; Buhr et al., 2021), and these atypical combinations afford startling possibilities for novelty and creativity (Fleming, 2001; Schilling & Green, 2011;

Kleinbaum, 2012). Take for instance the ascent of Bjarke Ingels, the Danish architect named as one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people of 2016. Ingels's signature move is forcing together seemingly mutually exclusive concepts so that unconventional and innovative configurations emerge. Emblematic in this respect is Copenhill, an industrial power plant topped by an artificial ski slope terrace in Copenhagen. Atypical perspectives dare to break the mold of the existing mindset and release the flow of innovation, and this potential may open up pathways to exceptional impact. To illustrate, the highest-impact science builds on a large body of conventional knowledge, yet it is embedded in and supported by the presence of atypical combinations of that knowledge that instill innovation (Uzzi et al., 2013). Interdisciplinary publications, as a form of atypical, domain spanning publications, likely experience these same benefits (Leahey et al., 2017).

It is worth mentioning that although novelty, i.e., the recombination of pre-existing components in an unprecedented fashion (Nelson & Winter, 1982; Simonton, 2004) and atypicality are related – to the point that are often conceptualized and operationalized as an indistinct construct, e.g. Uzzi et al. (2013) - they are nevertheless distinct concepts (Wang et al., 2017). In fat, objects can be atypical despite their lack of newness (Koppman & Leahey, 2019). The main conceptual difference lies in the time frame considered to define something atypical or novel. While atypicality describes a departure from the characteristic features of a categorical space at a given point in time, the appreciation of novelty instead requires extending the window of observation to the entire history of that category space. The fashion industry is particularly good example to illustrate this point. Fashion indeed, is intrinsically cyclical, and different trends, i.e., the typical stylistic elements translated into the designs for every collection (Godart & Galunic, 2019), are reintroduced at pointed moments in history. For this reason, a piece of a collection considered atypical in a specific season may not be novel at all simply because it has already appeared in the past.

Socio-cultural transformation

Among other things, atypicality provides also great opportunities for challenging present views and changing the status quo (McDonald & Allen, 2021). Indeed, when some actors decide to undertake atypical choices, their behaviors are susceptible of having broader effects on their field or industry to the extent that these atypical actions can diffuse and become accepted by other actors in the field (Rao et al., 2005; Negro et al., 2011; Rao et al., 2003). Whether one relies on art, science, business, or sport, there is plenty of anecdotal and scientific evidences that atypicality , even when it is initially devaluated, can with time trace new paths for others to follow, and such dynamic is useful to understand social and cultural change (Hargadon, 2003; Lo & Kennedy, 2014).

An exemplar illustration of this point is Igor Stravinsky's ballet, *The Rite of Spring*. When it premiered in Paris in 1913, its puzzling blending of traditional folklore and modernism, its choreography that defied every traditional canon of gracefulness, and the strong rejection of the ordered harmonies and comfort of contemporary compositions, shocked the audience causing mayhem, chaos and disapproval. However, the turbulent debut of the *Rite* is considered one the most explosive moments of cultural shift in the history of the performing arts. Today, the *Rite* is widely regarded as a seminal work of modernism, one of the most influential musical composition of the 20th century, with repercussions that continue to reverberate in jazz, minimalism, and other contemporary movements. In the words of the music historian Donald Jay Grout "the *Rite*… had the effect of an explosion that so scattered the elements of musical language that they could never again be put together as before"(Grout et al., 2014, p. 713)

Great Impact - Interest

Finally, pursuing atypical and unconventional path may still be a risk worth taking because it can arouse significant interest and attention (Ruef & Patterson, 2009). For instance, when producers target and combine multiple genres, they increase the total size of the market that they have the potential to appeal to and glean resources from (Hsu et al., 2009). Findings from social psychology suggest that atypicality has the potential to increase curiosity, memorability, and romance. Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil and colleagues (2012) shows that quotes from movies are more memorable when they use more atypical word choices. In this regard, Mandler 's schema incongruity theory (1982) confirms that atypicality may lead to more favorable results once the initial violation of expectations is resolved. Thus atypicality can be an important asset to stand out, develop unique appeals and attract attention –particularly when there is a fierce competition for attention (Taeuscher et al., 2020). For instance, research has shown that songs whose lyrics (Berger & Packard, 2018) and musical features (Askin & Mauskapf, 2017) tend to diverge from the central tendency of their genre, have greater chances to achieve widespread success and become popular hits. There is a lot of evidence in marketing and advertising literature that evoking atypicality can generate considerable interest. For instance, Goodstein (1993) has shown that atypical ads induce more consumer interest, compared to typical ones, in terms of longer viewing time. Another example is offered by *Guerrilla marketing* strategies, which are comprised of atypical and unconventional marketing tactics that serve to achieve the greatest possible impact (Levinson, 2007).

Moderators: Contextualizing the divergent effects of atypicality

This plurality of outcomes has not gone unnoticed and several attempts at reconciling this paradoxical divergence have highlighted that the consequences of atypicality strongly depend on contextual factors:

a) *Audience's features*: Frist of all, the role of the audience is central. Different audiences may interpret the same social object as more or less atypical on the basis of their particular orientation, as a result audiences' social structure may render fields more or less aversive to atypicality. Heterogeneity in theories of values (Cattani et al., 2014), expected goals (Kim & Jensen, 2011; Pontikes, 2012), broad preferences (Goldberg et al., 2016), level of exposure (Landwehr et al., 2013), level of commitment (Smith & Chae, 2017), experience and familiarity with the context (Bellezza et al., 2014; Lord et al., 1991) are some of the most relevant attributes that have been shown to shape audiences' reactions to atypical propositions. Other research suggests tastes for atypicality vary across product categories: results from consumer research show that when audience primes prestige, exclusiveness, or novelty, they are less likely to appreciate typicality and even to prefer atypicality (Ward & Loken, 1988).

b) *Domain's features*: The specific domain where atypical propositions emerge is too an important factor: when categorical boundaries are more porous, less evident, the conceptual space is in flux, or new logics come into existence, the tolerance for atypicality increases (Ruef & Patterson, 2009; Kovács & Hannan, 2010; Leung, 2014; Lo & Kennedy, 2014). Additionally, in settings that involve more complex outcome requirements audiences are more likely to appreciate atypicality (Paolella & Durand, 2016). Finally, when a domain allows for knowledge transfer between independent evaluators, because for instance exchanges tend to take place in public, atypical propositions are more likely to be deemed as acceptable (Zuckerman, 2017a).

c) *Object's features*: Individual or organizational-level characteristics such as status (Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014), intrinsic quality (Johnson & Kovács, 2014), physical distance from the other category members (Beck et al., 2019), public signals of quality, e.g., demonstration of positive performance and commitment (Smith, 2011;

Zuckerman, 2017a), or more generally, how characteristic features are combined – e.g., their order (Kim & Jensen, 2011; Leung, 2014; Wry et al., 2014), and their mutual fit (Paolella & Durand, 2016; Ruef & Patterson, 2009; Younkin & Kashkooli, 2020), and how they are presented to the audience (Johnson & Kovács, 2014; Leung & Sharkey, 2014), may also increase the likelihood that atypicality is interpreted positively, gets rewarded and sparks profound changes.

d) *Actor's effort:* Finally, another stream of research has highlighted the role of strategic manipulation in offsetting the negative consequences of atypicality. In particular, increasing work in this vein suggests that the interpretation and the evaluation of atypical entities can be strategically and actively influenced using language and other forms of symbolic management (Kim & Jensen, 2011; Pontikes, 2012; Vossen & Ihl, 2020; Zhao et al., 2013a). For instance, Caza et al., (2018) describe how individuals who pursue atypical careers engage in impression-management practices to gain social validation, Smith and Chae (2016) show that atypical organizations choose evocative names to signal membership in a legitimate category and this practice reduces the ambiguity in the eyes of evaluators. Finally, Koppman and Leahey (2019) describe how sociologists adopting atypical methodological approaches successfully reduce career penalties by demonstrating competence in conventional methods and distancing themselves from the method chosen.

Mechanisms: Explaining the outcomes

Generating Ambiguity and Confusion

A first mechanism invoked to explain why atypicality leads to devaluation is that atypicality infuses actors and products with ambiguous and confusing identity, thereby hindering the audience from identifying the object's ordering (Zuckerman, 1999; Leung & Sharkey, 2014;

Hsu et al., 2009). Atypical objects spark confusion because they do not fit into the prevailing cognitive frameworks, thereby promoting weaker inferences about their broader category (Rosch & Mervis, 1975), and inhibiting audience to successfully place in a classification system (Ruef & Patterson, 2009). Due to this lack of clear references, atypical objects match poorly to the evaluation standards and result difficult to evaluate, as it is harder to educate audience members about something they are not already familiar with (Hsu, 2006; Rosch & Mervis, 1975; Smith, 2011). As a consequence, audience's preference are oriented toward more clearly relevant objects (Zuckerman, 1999). Research in strategy has likewise shown that because organizations pursuing atypical strategies "impose a larger information burden on the market" (Litov et al., 2012), these organizations tend to receive poorer evaluations from relevant social audiences, such as analyst, critics, consumers. Studies in cognition and psychology support this perspective demonstrating that, due to the incongruence with customers' expectations, atypicality is processed with less speed and fluency (Reber et al., 2004; Winkielman et al., 2006). Due to processing complexity, atypicality results more difficult to remember, learn, and understand thereby eliciting more negative reactions compared to typicality. Research shows that this perceptual mechanism leads atypical objects - be they organizations, individuals or products – to be penalized regardless of their underlying quality, skills, or actual performance (Leung & Sharkey, 2014).

Delegitimizing

A second, related, mechanism that explains the evaluative discount is that atypicality invites illegitimacy. Departure from the central features of a category violates codified and institutionalized expectations about desirable and appropriate qualities (Zuckerman et al., 2003; Hannan et al., 2019; Zuckerman, 1999; Phillips et al., 2013), and thus atypical objects are often seen by audience as illegitimate and therefore penalized. Typicality is crucial to the

conferral of legitimacy (Stinchcombe, 1965; Suchman, 1995; Ruef & Scott, 1998; Kacperczyk & Younkin, 2017; Hsu et al., 2009; Suddaby et al., 2017), as "audiences organize their expectations and evaluations of how well candidates perform along the dimensions and the features that define a category" (Durand & Thornton, 2018, p. 638). Since atypical objects tend to reflect poor categorical fitness, audiences question their legitimacy as category members, developing concerns about their quality, commitments as well as their capabilities (Zuckerman et al., 2003; Ruef & Patterson, 2009; Phillips et al., 2013).

Changing the Evaluation Process

Several studies suggest that atypical objects can lead to enhancing performance by altering the parameters of evaluation, the process by which evaluation unfolds and thus changing audiences' behavioral patterns (Smith, 2011; van Ooijen et al., 2016; Smith & Chae, 2017; Younkin & Kashkooli, 2020). Indeed, atypicality might actually prove beneficial by affecting:

a) Information processing. Atypicality serves as a cue that increases the motivation to scrutinize deeply all the information available, leading to increased processing elaboration. To illustrate, consumers tend to process product claims more extensively when they evaluate an atypical as opposed to a typical product (Goodstein, 1993; van Ooijen et al., 2016) and when this piece of information is positive, atypicality is disproportionately rewarded (Smith, 2011).
b) Selection of the reference category. Atypical objects are often subject to cognitive incommensurability with other category members, thereby leading audiences to select alternative reference groups in order to make the evaluation possible. By virtue of this process, atypicality may produce a more positive response. For instance, Smith and Chae (2017) show that atypicality, by virtue of its inherent ambiguity, provides evaluators with more leeway to select nonconforming reference groups in plausible and

defensible ways. Younkin and Kashkooli (2020) instead show that to evaluate atypical songs that blend extremely distant genres, e.g., folk and rap, audience tends to rely on a more inclusive and abstract categorization that mitigates against confusion and illegitimacy. In a similar vein, Bowers (2015) demonstrates that atypical funds are less subject to negative relative comparisons with other category members.

Signaling Underlying Qualities

Atypicality can lead to greater rewards because, under certain conditions, it is interpreted as important signal of underlying qualities. For instance, Pontikes (2012) shows how atypical organizations are more appealing to market makers, i.e., venture capitalists, that see their ambiguity as a potential for innovation and source of flexibility for future development. Similarly, Sgourev and Althuizen (2014) demonstrate that atypical sets of artworks are evaluated higher that typical ones because interpreted as an act of creativity, as long as the actor in question enjoy status privileges; Bellezza and colleagues (2014) illustrate how behaviors that voluntarily defy conventions and common expectations lead to inferences of greater competence and status by providing visible signal that individuals can afford to follow their own volition; Paolella and Durand (2016) suggest that, when audience deal with complex cases, atypicality signal capacity to handle complex situations. Finally, McDonald and Allen (2021) argue that the emergence of atypicality within a market space may signal an altered future state in the logic of that market, indicating the potential propagation of a new categorical order.

Recombining and Bridging elements

Finally, atypicality may give rise to exceptional outcomes due to its intrinsic re-combinatorial potential. Ample evidence exists that incongruity and blending fosters a recombination of

existing materials that bridges formerly disconnected elements and creates novel links and relationships between them (Schilling & Green, 2011; Uzzi et al., 2013). For instance, several studies suggest that the combination of cognitive elements in atypical ways stimulates knowledge creation. Unfamiliar links between familiar ideas cause a radical change in the perceived distance between them, thus "enabling relatively small investments in well-targeted exploration to have disproportionate payoffs (Schilling & Green, 2011, p. 30; see also Ferguson & Carnabuci, 2017; Schilling, 2005; Wagner et al., 2019). Similarly, individuals' with atypical career trajectories in organizations are more likely to become intra organizational brokers because such people tend to recombine the network structure and create bridging ties that connect parts of the organization that are rarely linked (Kleinbaum, 2012). This mechanism is central in explaining our atypical combination of cultural elements set the path to creativity and may even stimulate the evolution and transformation of social contexts. By fostering the recombination of material within and between categories, atypicality bridges formerly disconnected elements, stimulating the crossover of cultural material and the consequent evolution of a field (Rao et al., 2005; Lo & Kennedy, 2014). This process, repeated over time, can undermine consensus because it introduces disagreement about which features are considered typical of the category, ultimately resulting in reconfigurations of audience taste and redefinitions of genre boundaries (Negro et al., 2011).

Section 5- Future Research Opportunities

Our framework indicates that the investigation of atypicality has observed an overabundance of research in certain areas (e.g., a great deal of attention has been placed on devaluation as consequence and its associated moderators) while other aspects have been under investigated (e.g., antecedents, facilitators). In addition, our review indicates a need to open the "black box" of the consequences of atypicality in order to properly test the mechanisms that cause them. In

the attempt to foster the development of this intriguing, yet evasive, in the following section, we envisage three promising avenues of future research.

Understanding atypicality: expanding the nomological network

Understanding that there may be different forms of atypicality requires future research to investigate more directly why and how *incongruity* and *blending* relates to each other. In this respect, we suggest that incongruity may be independent of blending – as objects operating withing a single categorical domain can still present an atypical configuration of features. On the other hand, we see blending as necessarily conducive to incongruity. The more pronounce is the borrowing process from other categories, the more the combination of features is likely to become incongruent in the focal category (Johnson & Kovács, 2014). Drawing on our framework, we encourage scholars to further explore different motivations, drivers and processes shaping the pursuit of atypicality in organizational and market settings. In this regard, we urge the adoption of more qualitative approaches, which so far have been used primarily to complement quantitative findings. A more nuanced understanding of why actors' departure from conventions could help expose new mechanisms by which atypicality gets discounted, rewarded or prompts innovation. For instance, in contexts where atypicality is perceived as a relevant identity marker, we suggest that the concept of authenticity could offer valuable insights in explaining why certain atypical offerings succeed while others do not. Indeed, recent evidence indicates that authenticity can mediate the negative consequences associated with violation of categorical norms and institutional codes (Hahl & Ha, 2020).

In addition, advances regarding our knowledge of atypicality can take place by exploring the existing links between the antecedents, enabling factors and processes of emergence – and how they related to outcomes and mechanisms. To illustrate, when atypical behaviors are perceived as unintentional, atypicality is more likely to trigger delegitimization and lead to devaluation

(Bellezza et al., 2014). We encourage future research to further explore the complex interactions between the concepts introduced to study the observable manifestations of atypicality in social and cultural domains.

A closer look at the interaction between, antecedents and consequences of atypicality in in organizational and market settings would also offer a different angle to observe how cultural domain evolves. As an example, previous research on tempered radicals (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Quinn & Meyerson, 2008) shows that when atypical orientations within an organization are associated with a strong desire to buck the system, atypicality can gradually erode the conventional system and lead to its transformation. Indeed, as unconventional yet recognized members of a given socio-cultural domain, atypical actors may have more latitude to instigate change in existing frames and logics than institutionalized insiders or disembedded outsiders (Cattani et al., 2014, 2017).

Coping with atypicality: Producer side

With relatively few exceptions (Smith, 2011; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014; Smith & Chae, 2016), previous research has places little attention on the agentic efforts through which producers may seek to mitigate atypicality penalties. We know very little about the processes underlying atypical actors' efforts at navigating the evaluative challenge they face. For instance, sometimes atypicality entails the socio-psychological burden of isolation. To illustrate, Popielarz and McPherson (1995) demonstrate that atypical group members are often marginalized because of homophilous pressures toward group homogeneity. Similarly, Caza et al. (2018) show how atypical workers tend to distance themselves from others due to the misconceptions surrounding their professional choices. Shedding light on how atypical actors overcome these difficulties and enhance reception, for instance by fostering communities to feel more secure in pursuing their atypical paths, or strategically mobilizing narrative devices,

will provide a deeper understanding of the conditions that support the successful development of atypicality. This line of inquiry could have valuable implications for research on organizational categorization and entrepreneurship (e.g., Boone et al., 2013; J. P. Vergne & Wry, 2014; Tang & Wezel, 2015). New and innovative ventures are often atypical by nature as they frequently involve undertaking unique strategies relative to incumbent competitors. A deeper understanding of producer-level coping strategies would help explain how such new ventures can endure in the face of macrolevel pressures to conform to the norms of a given market category (Younkin & Kashkooli, 2020).

Coping with atypicality: Audience side

The role that audience heterogeneity plays in explaining diverging reactions to atypicality is now generally acknowledged, with previous research emphasizing the importance of diversity in preferences, tastes and roles (Kim & Jensen, 2011; Pontikes, 2012; Cattani et al., 2014; Goldberg et al., 2016). But what if the evaluative principles that inform audiences' judgments are themselves atypical? Consider the case of NBA player Dennis Rodman as depicted in the recent ESPN documentary "The Last Dance", which chronicles the 1997-98 Chicago Bulls season. With his larger-than-life personality and bizarre off-court antics, Rodman is considered one of the most unorthodox NBA players that ever joined the league. While many NBA teams passed on him because of his erratic behavior, Chicago Bulls' head coach Phil Jackson was able to understand his persona and to grow him into the elite player he became. Phil Jackson's own atypicality, as confirmed by the coach himself, was crucial in helping him lay the ground for handling Rodman. Indeed, during his basketball career Jackson was considered to be very different from the typical NBA player, often described as a freethinking hippie if not an outsider to the league. Are thus atypical audiences more likely to understand, appreciate and cultivate atypicality by virtue of cognitive, e.g. easier understanding of how atypical ideas are

formulated (Schilling & Green, 2011), psychological, e.g. similarity bias (Franke et al., 2006), or sociological, e.g. homology (Bourdieu, 1979) mechanisms?

Our framework also lays the groundwork to explore other features of the audience that may influence how atypicality is perceived and interpreted. For instance, atypical objects introduce disagreement about what is considered typical within a certain category (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Negro et al., 2011; Kovács & Hannan, 2010), and this disagreement may be exacerbated by the level of audience's expertise. Indeed, individual differences in categorical knowledge, experience and interest can affect not only the extent to which a certain positioning within the category is perceived as atypical (Cudennec, 2018), but also how it is evaluated. In this regard, studies in social psychology suggest that category expert are less likely to devaluate atypicality and treat all members of a category alike regardless of their typicality (Lord et al., 1991).

Conclusions

Recombining existing knowledge, ideas and practices in atypical ways is at the heart of creativity and socio-cultural change, yet atypicality generates mistrust and encourages rejection. While research aimed at reconciling this inconsistency has accumulated rapidly, this literature has remained unstructured and scattered across several disciplines. In this article, we aim to extend and formalize an integrative conceptual model that helps to crystallize an organizational perspective on atypicality. We first decompose two forms of atypicality previously conflated – incongruity and blending, and we propose a framework that sets the stage for further theoretical and empirical development on this topic.

We are witnessing a global transformation of social and economic dynamics that have created more space than ever for experimentation with atypical identities and practices. For instance, the changing nature of work and the increasing propensity toward eclectic career

trajectories (Barley et al., 2017; Kuhn & Maleki, 2017), the rise of platforms enabling people to juggle and combine multiple, seemingly unrelated, jobs and roles (Campion et al., 2020), the emergence of digital markets where users may expect atypical and unconventional strategies from producers (Taeuscher et al., 2020), or the urgent need for unconventional responses and tools to cope with the new normal imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Foss, 2021), it all emphasizes how crucial is for organizational and management scholars to deepen their focus on this construct. We hope that this conceptual review on atypicality will encourage and inform future scholarship in this fascinating domain and will elucidate novel opportunities for unleashing the generative potential of this important construct.

References

Aguinis, H., & Glavas, A. (2012). What We Know and Don't Know About Corporate Social Responsibility: A Review and Research Agenda. *Journal of Management*, *38*(4), 932–968. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311436079

Aldrich, H. E., & Fiol, C. M. (1994). Fools Rush in? The Institutional Context of Industry Creation. *Academy of Management Review*, *19*(4), 645–670. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1994.9412190214

Askin, N., & Mauskapf, M. (2017). What Makes Popular Culture Popular? Product Features and Optimal Differentiation in Music. *American Sociological Review*, *82*(5), 910–944. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417728662

Barley, S. R., Bechky, B. A., & Milliken, F. J. (2017). The Changing Nature of Work: Careers, Identities, and Work Lives in the 21st Century. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, *3*(2), 111–115. https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2017.0034

Barsalou, L. W. (1985). Ideals, central tendency, and frequency of instantiation as determinants of graded structure in categories. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, *11*(4), 629.

Beck, N., Swaminathan, A., Wade, J. B., & Wezel, F. C. (2019). Industry Clusters and Organizational Prototypes: Evidence From the Franconian Brewing Industry. *Journal of Management*, *45*(7), 2978–3008. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318773411

Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. Free Press.

Bellezza, S., Gino, F., & Keinan, A. (2014). The Red Sneakers Effect: Inferring Status and Competence from Signals of Nonconformity. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *41*(1), 35–54. https://doi.org/10.1086/674870

Berger, J., & Packard, G. (2018). Are Atypical Things More Popular? *Psychological Science*, *29*(7), 1178–1184. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797618759465

Boone, C., Wezel, F. C., & van Witteloostuijn, A. (2013). Joining the pack or going solo? A dynamic theory of new firm positioning. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *28*(4), 511–527. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2012.07.006

Bourdieu, P. (1979). Symbolic Power. *Critique of Anthropology*, *4*(13–14), 77–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X7900401307

Bowers, A. (2015). Relative Comparison and Category Membership: The Case of Equity Analysts. *Organization Science*, *26*(2), 571–583. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0908

Buhr, H., Funk, R. J., & Owen-Smith, J. (2021). The authenticity premium: Balancing conformity and innovation in high technology industries. *Research Policy*, *50*(1), 104085. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2020.104085

Campion, E. D., Caza, B. B., & Moss, S. E. (2020). Multiple Jobholding: An Integrative Systematic Review and Future Research Agenda. *Journal of Management*, *46*(1), 165–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206319882756

Carroll, G. R., & Swaminathan, A. (2000). Why the Microbrewery Movement? Organizational Dynamics of Resource Partitioning in the U.S. Brewing Industry. *American Journal of Sociology*, *106*(3), 715–762. https://doi.org/10.1086/318962

Cattani, G., Ferriani, S., & Allison, P. D. (2014). Insiders, Outsiders, and the Struggle for Consecration in Cultural Fields: A Core-Periphery Perspective. *American Sociological Review*, *79*(2), 258–281. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414520960

Cattani, G., Ferriani, S., & Lanza, A. (2017). Deconstructing the Outsider Puzzle: The Legitimation Journey of Novelty. *Organization Science*, *28*(6), 965–992. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2017.1161

Caza, B. B., Moss, S., & Vough, H. (2018). From Synchronizing to Harmonizing: The Process of Authenticating Multiple Work Identities. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *63*(4), 703–745. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839217733972

Congress, U. S. (1968). *Congressional record: Proceedings and debates of the 90th congress* (114(8)).

Cudennec, A. (2018). Under the Magnifying Glass: Expertise and Categorization on the Perception of Atypicality. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, *2018*(1), 17044. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2018.98

Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, C., Cheng, J., Kleinberg, J., & Lee, L. (2012). *You had me at hello: How phrasing affects memorability*. Proceedings of the ACL.

de Vaan, M., Vedres, B., & Stark, D. (2015). Game Changer: The Topology of Creativity. *American Journal of Sociology*, *120*(4), 1144–1194. https://doi.org/10.1086/681213

Durand, R., & Khaire, M. (2017). Where Do Market Categories Come From and How? Distinguishing Category Creation From Category Emergence. *Journal of Management*, *43*(1), 87–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316669812

Durand, R., & Kremp, P.-A. (2016). Classical Deviation: Organizational and Individual Status as Antecedents of Conformity. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*(1), 65–89. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0767

Durand, R., & Thornton, P. H. (2018). Categorizing Institutional Logics, Institutionalizing Categories: A Review of Two Literatures. *Academy of Management Annals*, *12*(2), 631–658. https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2016.0089

Durkheim, É. (1997). *The division of labor in society* (1st paperback ed). Free Press.

Elsbach, K. D., & Knippenberg, D. (2020). Creating High-Impact Literature Reviews: An Argument for 'Integrative Reviews.' *Journal of Management Studies*, *57*(6), 1277–1289. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12581

Ferguson, J.-P., & Carnabuci, G. (2017). Risky Recombinations: Institutional Gatekeeping in the Innovation Process. *Organization Science*, *28*(1), 133–151. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2016.1106

Fleming, L. (2001). Recombinant Uncertainty in Technological Search. *Management Science*, *47*(1), 117–132. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.47.1.117.10671

Foss, N. J. (2021). The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Firms' Organizational Designs. *Journal of Management Studies*, *58*(1), 270–274. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12643

Foucault, M. (2003). *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (1. Picador USA ed). Picador.

Franke, N., Gruber, M., Harhoff, D., & Henkel, J. (2006). What you are is what you like—Similarity biases in venture capitalists' evaluations of start-up teams. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *21*(6), 802–826. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2005.07.001

Friedlander, P. (2006). *Rock & roll: A social history* (2nd ed). Westview Press.

Gärdenfors, P. (2000). *Conceptual spaces: The geometry of thought*. MIT Press.

Godart, F. C., & Galunic, C. (2019). Explaining the Popularity of Cultural Elements: Networks, Culture, and the Structural Embeddedness of High Fashion Trends. *Organization Science*, *30*(1), 151–168. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2018.1234

Goldberg, A., Hannan, M. T., & Kovács, B. (2016). What Does It Mean to Span Cultural Boundaries? Variety and Atypicality in Cultural Consumption. *American Sociological Review*, *81*(2), 215–241. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416632787

Goodstein, R. C. (1993). Category-Based Applications and Extensions in Advertising: Motivating More Extensive Ad Processing. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *20*(1), 87. https://doi.org/10.1086/209335

Grout, D. J., Burkholder, J. P., & Palisca, C. V. (2014). *A history of western music* (Ninth edition). W. W. Norton & Company.

Haans, R. F. J. (2019). What's the value of being different when everyone is? The effects of distinctiveness on performance in homogeneous versus heterogeneous categories. *Strategic Management Journal*, *40*(1), 3–27. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2978

Hahl, O., & Ha, J. (2020). Committed Diversification: Why Authenticity Insulates Against Penalties for Diversification. *Organization Science*, *31*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2019.1317

Hall, B. K. (1999). The paradoxical platypus. *BioScience*, *49*(3), 211–218. https://doi.org/10.2307/1313511

Hampton, J. A. (2007). Typicality, Graded Membership, and Vagueness. *Cognitive Science*, *31*(3), 355–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/15326900701326402

Hannan, M. T. (2010). Partiality of Memberships in Categories and Audiences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *36*(1), 159–181. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-021610-092336

Hannan, M. T., & Freeman, J. (1977). The Population Ecology of Organizations. *American Journal of Sociology*, *82*(5), 929–964. JSTOR.

Hannan, M. T., Le Mens, G., Hsu, G., Kovács, B., Negro, G., Pólos, L., Pontikes, E. G., & Sharkey, A. J. (2019). *Concepts and Categories: Foundations for Sociological and Cultural Analysis*. Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/hann19272

Hannan, M. T., Pólos, L., & Carroll, G. (2007). *Logics of organization theory: Audiences, codes, and ecologies*. Princeton University Press.

Hargadon, A. (2003). *How breakthroughs happen: The surprising truth about how companies innovate*. Harvard Business School Press.

Hekkert, P., & Wieringen, P. C. W. (1990). Complexity and prototypicality as determinants of the appraisal of cubist paintings. *British Journal of Psychology*, *81*(4), 483–495. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.1990.tb02374.x

Hsu, G. (2006). Jacks of All Trades and Masters of None: Audiences' Reactions to Spanning Genres in Feature Film Production. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *51*(3), 420–450. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.51.3.420

Hsu, G., Hannan, M. T., & Koçak, Ö. (2009). Multiple Category Memberships in Markets: An Integrative Theory and Two Empirical Tests. *American Sociological Review*, *74*(1), 150–169. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400108

Huyghe, A., Knockaert, M., & Obschonka, M. (2016). Unraveling the "passion orchestra" in academia. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *31*(3), 344–364. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2016.03.002

Johnson, R., & Kovács, B. (2014). Contrasting alternative explanations for the consequences of category spanning: A study of restaurant reviews and menus in San Francisco. *Strategic Organization*, *12*(1), 7–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127013502465

Jonsson, S., Greve, H. R., & Fujiwara-Greve, T. (2009). Undeserved Loss: The Spread of Legitimacy Loss to Innocent Organizations in Response to Reported Corporate Deviance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *54*(2), 195–228. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2009.54.2.195

Kacperczyk, A., & Younkin, P. (2017). The Paradox of Breadth: The Tension between Experience and Legitimacy in the Transition to Entrepreneurship. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *62*(4), 731–764. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839217700352

Kamp, H., & Partee, B. (1995). Prototype theory and compositionality. *Cognition*, *57*(2), 129–191.

Kennedy, M. T. (2008). Getting Counted: Markets, Media, and Reality. *American Sociological Review*, *73*(2), 270–295. JSTOR.

Kennedy, M. T., & Fiss, P. C. (2013). An Ontological Turn in Categories Research: From Standards of Legitimacy to Evidence of Actuality: An Ontological Turn in Categories Research. *Journal of Management Studies*, *50*(6), 1138–1154. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12031

Kim, B. K., & Jensen, M. (2011). How Product Order Affects Market Identity: Repertoire Ordering in the U.S. Opera Market. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *56*(2), 238–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839211427535

Kleinbaum, A. M. (2012). Organizational Misfits and the Origins of Brokerage in Intrafirm Networks. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *57*(3), 407–452. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839212461141

Koppman, S., & Leahey, E. (2019). Who moves to the methodological edge? Factors that encourage scientists to use unconventional methods. *Research Policy*, *48*(9), 103807. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2019.103807

Kovács, B., & Hannan, M. T. (2010). The consequences of category spanning depend on contrast. In G. Hsu, G. Negro, & Ö. Koçak (Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (Vol. 31, pp. 175–201). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X(2010)0000031008

Kovács, B., & Hannan, M. T. (2015). Conceptual Spaces and the Consequences of Category Spanning. *Sociological Science*, *2*, 252–286. https://doi.org/10.15195/v2.a13

Kuhn, K. M., & Maleki, A. (2017). Micro-entrepreneurs, Dependent Contractors, and Instaserfs: Understanding Online Labor Platform Workforces. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *31*(3), 183–200. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2015.0111

Lamont, M., & Molnár, V. (2002). The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *28*(1), 167–195. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141107

Landwehr, J. R., Wentzel, D., & Herrmann, A. (2013). Product Design for the Long Run: Consumer Responses to Typical and Atypical Designs at Different Stages of Exposure. *Journal of Marketing*, *77*(5), 92–107. https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.11.0286

Leahey, E., Beckman, C. M., & Stanko, T. L. (2017). Prominent but Less Productive: The Impact of Interdisciplinarity on Scientists' Research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *62*(1), 105–139. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839216665364

Leung, M. D. (2014). Dilettante or Renaissance Person? How the Order of Job Experiences Affects Hiring in an External Labor Market. *American Sociological Review*, *79*(1), 136–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122413518638

Leung, M. D., & Sharkey, A. J. (2014). Out of Sight, Out of Mind? Evidence of Perceptual Factors in the Multiple-Category Discount. *Organization Science*, *25*(1), 171–184. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2013.0828

Levinson, J. C. (2007). *Guerrilla Marketing: Easy and Inexpensive Strategies for Making Big Profits from Your SmallBusiness*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Litov, L. P., Moreton, P., & Zenger, T. R. (2012). Corporate Strategy, Analyst Coverage, and the Uniqueness Paradox. *Management Science*, *58*(10), 1797–1815. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.1120.1530

Lo, J. Y.-C., & Kennedy, M. T. (2014). Approval in Nanotechnology Patents: Micro and Macro Factors That Affect Reactions to Category Blending. *Organization Science*, 141223041331004. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0933

Lockwood, C., Giorgi, S., & Glynn, M. A. (2019). "How to Do Things With Words": Mechanisms Bridging Language and Action in Management Research. *Journal of Management*, *45*(1), 7–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318777599

Lord, C. G., Desforges, D. M., Ramsey, S. L., Trezza, G. R., & Lepper, M. R. (1991). Typicality effects in attitude-behavior consistency: Effects of category discrimination and category knowledge. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *27*(6), 550–575. https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(91)90025-2

Mandler, G. (1982). The Structure of Value: Accounting for Taste. In M. S. Clark & S. T. Fiske (Eds.), *Affect and Cognition* (pp. 1–41).

McDonald, R. M., & Allen, R. T. (2021). A Spanner in the Works: Category-Spanning Entrants and Audience Valuation of Incumbents. *Strategy Science*, *Forthcoming*.

Medin, D. L., & Schaffer, M. M. (1978). Context theory of classification learning. *Psychological Review*, *85*(3), 207.

Merton, R. K. (1938). Science and the Social Order. *Philosophy of Science*, *5*(3), 321–337. https://doi.org/10.1086/286513

Merton, R. K. (1973). *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*. University of Chicago Press.

Mervis, C., & Rosch, E. (1981). Categorization of Natural Objects. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *32*(1), 89–115. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.32.020181.000513

Meyerson, D. E., & Scully, M. A. (1995). Tempered Radicalism and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change. *Organization Science*, *6*(5), 585–600. JSTOR.

Miller, D., & Chen, M.-J. (1996). Nonconformity in Competitive Repertoires: A Sociological View of Markets. *Social Forces*, *74*(4), 1209. https://doi.org/10.2307/2580349

Mizruchi, M. S., & Fein, L. C. (1999). The Social Construction of Organizational Knowledge: A Study of the Uses of Coercive, Mimetic, and Normative Isomorphism. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *44*(4), 653. https://doi.org/10.2307/2667051

Murphy, G. L. (2002). *The big book of concepts* (1. MIT Press paperback ed). MIT Press.

Negro, G., Hannan, M. T., & Rao, H. (2010). Categorical contrast and audience appeal: Niche width and critical success in winemaking. *Industrial and Corporate Change*, *19*(5), 1397–1425. https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/dtq003

Negro, G., Hannan, M. T., & Rao, H. (2011). Category Reinterpretation and Defection: Modernism and Tradition in Italian Winemaking. *Organization Science*, *22*(6), 1449–1463. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0619

Negro, G., & Leung, M. D. (2013). "Actual" and Perceptual Effects of Category Spanning. *Organization Science*, *24*(3), 684–696. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1120.0764

Nelson, R. R., & Winter, S. G. (1982). *An evolutionary theory of economic change* (digitally reprinted). The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press.

Ody-Brasier, A., & Vermeulen, F. (2014). The Price You Pay: Price-setting as a Response to Norm Violations in the Market for Champagne Grapes. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *59*(1), 109–144. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839214523002

Oehmichen, J., Firk, S., Wolff, M., & Maybuechen, F. (2021). Standing out from the crowd: Dedicated institutional investors and strategy uniqueness. *Strategic Management Journal*, smj.3269. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3269

Palmer, S. E., Schloss, K. B., & Sammartino, J. (2013). Visual Aesthetics and Human Preference. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *64*(1), 77–107. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100504

Paolella, L., & Durand, R. (2016). Category Spanning, Evaluation, and Performance: Revised Theory and Test on the Corporate Law Market. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*(1), 330–351. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0651

Pentland, B. T., Hærem, T., & Hillison, D. (2011). The (N)Ever-Changing World: Stability and Change in Organizational Routines. *Organization Science*, *22*(6), 1369–1383. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1110.0624

Phillips, D. J., Turco, C. J., & Zuckerman, E. W. (2013). Betrayal as Market Barrier: Identity-Based Limits to Diversification among High-Status Corporate Law Firms. *American Journal of Sociology*, *118*(4), 1023–1054. https://doi.org/10.1086/668412

Phillips, D. J., & Zuckerman, E. W. (2001). Middle-Status Conformity: Theoretical Restatement and Empirical Demonstration in Two Markets. *American Journal of Sociology*, *107*(2), 379–429. https://doi.org/10.1086/324072

Piters, R., & Stokmans, M. J. W. (1997). The influence of typicality of book covers on preferences. In G. Guzman, A. Jose, & S. Sanz (Eds.), *The XXII International Colloquium of Economic Psychology* (Vol. 1, p. 41). Unknown Publisher.

Pocheptsova, A., Labroo, A. A., & Dhar, R. (2010). Making Products Feel Special: When Metacognitive Difficulty Enhances Evaluation. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *47*(6), 1059–1069. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.47.6.1059

Pontikes, E. G. (2012). Two Sides of the Same Coin: How Ambiguous Classification Affects Multiple Audiences' Evaluations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *57*(1), 81–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839212446689

Pontikes, E. G., & Hannan, M. (2014). An Ecology of Social Categories. *Sociological Science*, *1*, 311–343. https://doi.org/10.15195/v1.a20

Popielarz, P. A., & McPherson, J. M. (1995). On the Edge or In Between: Niche Position, Niche Overlap, and the Duration of Voluntary Association Memberships. *American Journal of Sociology*, *101*(3), 698–720. https://doi.org/10.1086/230757

Porter, M. E. (1980). *Competitive strategy*. Free Press.

Quinn, R., & Meyerson, D. (2008). The Positive Pontential of Tempered Radicals. In C. C. Manz, K. S. Cameron, K. P. Manz, & R. D. Marx, *The Virtuous Organization* (pp. 247–258). WORLD SCIENTIFIC. https://doi.org/10.1142/9789812818607_0013

Rao, H., Monin, P., & Durand, R. (2003). Institutional Change in Toque Ville: Nouvelle Cuisine as an Identity Movement in French Gastronomy. *American Journal of Sociology*, *108*(4), 795–843. https://doi.org/10.1086/367917

Rao, H., Monin, P., & Durand, R. (2005). Border Crossing: Bricolage and the Erosion of Categorical Boundaries in French Gastronomy. *American Sociological Review*, *70*(6), 968–991. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000605

Reber, R., Schwarz, N., & Winkielman, P. (2004). Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure: Is Beauty in the Perceiver's Processing Experience? *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *8*(4), 364–382. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0804_3

Rindova, V., Dalpiaz, E., & Ravasi, D. (2011). A Cultural Quest: A Study of Organizational Use of New Cultural Resources in Strategy Formation. *Organization Science*, *22*(2), 413–431. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0537

Rosch, E. (1973). Natural Categories. *Cognitive Psychology*, *4*(3), 328–350. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(73)90017-0

Rosch, E. (1978). Principles of categorization. In E. Rosch & B. Lloyd (Eds.), *Cognition and categorization* (pp. 28–49). Erlbaum.

Rosch, E., & Mervis, C. (1975). Family resemblances: Studies in the internal structure of categories. *Cognitive Psychology*, *7*(4), 573–605. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(75)90024-9

Ruef, M., & Patterson, K. (2009). Credit and Classification: The Impact of Industry Boundaries in Nineteenth-Century America. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *54*(3), 486–520. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2009.54.3.486

Ruef, M., & Scott, W. R. (1998). A Multidimensional Model of Organizational Legitimacy: Hospital Survival in Changing Institutional Environments. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *43*(4), 877. https://doi.org/10.2307/2393619

Scarpi, D., Pizzi, G., & Raggiotto, F. (2019). The extraordinary attraction of being ordinary: A moderated mediation model of purchase for prototypical products. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *49*, 267–278. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.03.006

Schilling, M. A. (2005). A "Small-World" Network Model of Cognitive Insight. *Creativity Research Journal*, *17*(2–3), 131–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2005.9651475

Schilling, M. A., & Green, E. (2011). Recombinant search and breakthrough idea generation: An analysis of high impact papers in the social sciences. *Research Policy*, *40*(10), 1321–1331. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2011.06.009

Sgourev, S. V., & Althuizen, N. (2014). "Notable" or "Not Able": When Are Acts of Inconsistency Rewarded? *American Sociological Review*, *79*(2), 282–302. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414524575

Simonton, D. K. (2004). *Creativity in science: Chance, logic, genius, and Zeitgeist*. Cambridge University Press.

Smith, E. (2011). Identities as Lenses: How Organizational Identity Affects Audiences' Evaluation of Organizational Performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *56*(1), 61–94. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2011.56.1.061

Smith, E., & Chae, H. (2016). "We do what we must, and call it by the best names": Can deliberate names offset the consequences of organizational atypicality?: Deliberate Naming. *Strategic Management Journal*, *37*(6), 1021–1033. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2386

Smith, E., & Chae, H. (2017). The Effect of Organizational Atypicality on Reference Group Selection and Performance Evaluation. *Organization Science*, *28*(6), 1134–1149. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2017.1154

Snyder, C. R., & Fromkin, H. L. (1977). Abnormality as a positive characteristic: The development and validation of a scale measuring need for uniqueness. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *86*(5), 518–527. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.86.5.518

Solso, R. L., & McCarthy, J. E. (1981). Prototype formation: Central tendency model vs. attribute-frequency model. *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society*, *17*(1), 10–11. https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03333651

Stinchcombe, A. L. (1965). Organizations and social structure. In J. March (Ed.), *Handbook of organizations* (Vol. 44, pp. 142–193). Rand McNally.

Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 571–610. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331

Suddaby, R., Bitektine, A., & Haack, P. (2017). Legitimacy. *Academy of Management Annals*, *11*(1), 451–478. https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2015.0101

Taeuscher, K., Bouncken, R. B., & Pesch, R. (2020). Gaining Legitimacy by Being Different: Optimal Distinctiveness in Crowdfunding Platforms. *Academy of Management Journal*. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2018.0620

Tang, Y., & Wezel, F. C. (2015). Up to standard? *Journal of Business Venturing*, *30*(3), 452–466. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2014.07.010

Torrance, E. P. (1974). *Torrance tests of creative thinking: Verbal tests, forms A and B ; figural tests, forms A and B ; norms-technical manual*. Personal Press.

Uzzi, B., Mukherjee, S., Stringer, M., & Jones, B. (2013). Atypical Combinations and Scientific Impact. *Science*, *342*(6157), 468–472. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1240474

van Ooijen, I., Fransen, M. L., Verlegh, P. W. J., & Smit, E. G. (2016). Atypical food packaging affects the persuasive impact of product claims. *Food Quality and Preference*, *48*, 33–40. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2015.08.002

Vergne, J. P. (2012). Stigmatized Categories and Public Disapproval of Organizations: A Mixed-Methods Study of the Global Arms Industry, 1996–2007. *Academy of Management Journal*, *55*(5), 1027–1052. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0599

Vergne, J. P., & Wry, T. (2014). Categorizing Categorization Research: Review, Integration, and Future Directions: Categorizing Categorization Research. *Journal of Management Studies*, *51*(1), 56–94. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12044

Voorspoels, W., Vanpaemel, W., & Storms, G. (2011). A formal ideal-based account of typicality. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, *18*(5), 1006–1014. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-011-0122-9

Vossen, A., & Ihl, C. (2020). More than words! How narrative anchoring and enrichment help to balance differentiation and conformity of entrepreneurial products. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *35*(6), 106050. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2020.106050

Wagner, C. S., Whetsell, T. A., & Mukherjee, S. (2019). International research collaboration: Novelty, conventionality, and atypicality in knowledge recombination. *Research Policy*, *48*(5), 1260–1270. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2019.01.002

Wang, J., Veugelers, R., & Stephan, P. (2017). Bias against novelty in science: A cautionary tale for users of bibliometric indicators. *Research Policy*, *46*(8), 1416–1436. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.06.006

Ward, J., & Loken, B. (1988). The generality of typicality effects on preference and comparison: An exploratory test. *ACR North American Advances*.

Winkielman, P., Halberstadt, J., Fazendeiro, T., & Catty, S. (2006). Prototypes Are Attractive Because They Are Easy on the Mind. *Psychological Science*, *17*(9), 799–806. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01785.x

Wry, T., Lounsbury, M., & Jennings, P. D. (2014). Hybrid Vigor: Securing Venture Capital by Spanning Categories in Nanotechnology. *Academy of Management Journal*, *57*(5), 1309–1333. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.0588

Younkin, P., & Kashkooli, K. (2020). Stay True to Your Roots? Category Distance, Hierarchy, and the Performance of New Entrants in the Music Industry. *Organization Science*, *31*(3), 604–627. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2019.1323

Zadeh, L. A. (1965). Fuzzy sets. *Information and Control*, *8*(3), 338–353. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-9958(65)90241-X

Zhao, E. Y., Ishihara, M., Jennings, P. D., & Lounsbury, M. (2018). Optimal Distinctiveness in the Console Video Game Industry: An Exemplar-Based Model of Proto-Category Evolution. *Organization Science*, *29*(4), 588–611. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2017.1194

Zhao, E. Y., Ishihara, M., & Lounsbury, M. (2013a). Overcoming the Illegitimacy Discount: Cultural Entrepreneurship in the US Feature Film Industry. *Organization Studies*, *34*(12), 1747–1776. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613485844

Zhao, E. Y., Ishihara, M., & Lounsbury, M. (2013b). Overcoming the Illegitimacy Discount: Cultural Entrepreneurship in the US Feature Film Industry. *Organization Studies*, *34*(12), 1747–1776. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613485844

Zuckerman, E. W. (1999). The Categorical Imperative: Securities Analysts and the Illegitimacy Discount. *American Journal of Sociology*, *104*(5), 1398–1438. https://doi.org/10.1086/210178

Zuckerman, E. W. (2017a). The Categorical Imperative Revisited: Implications of Categorization as a Theoretical Tool. In R. Durand, N. Granqvist, & A. Tyllström (Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (Vol. 51, pp. 31–68). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20170000051001

Zuckerman, E. W. (2017b). The Categorical Imperative Revisited: Implications of Categorization as a Theoretical Tool. In R. Durand, N. Granqvist, & A. Tyllström

(Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (Vol. 51, pp. 31–68). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20170000051001

Zuckerman, E. W., Kim, T., Ukanwa, K., & von Rittmann, J. (2003). Robust Identities or Nonentities? Typecasting in the Feature-Film Labor Market. *American Journal of Sociology*, *108*(5), 1018–1073. https://doi.org/10.1086/377518

Tables and figures

Table 1. Distribution of Methods Within Field (in percentages)
***Notes*: Papers using multiple methods are counted multiple times**

	Quantitative Regression	Quantitative Experiment	Quantitative Other	Qualitative	Theoretical
Management and Organization Studies	42.65%	2.94%	1.47%	8.82%	0.00%
Sociology	22.06%	1.47%	0.00%	2.94%	2.94%
Psychology	1.47%	8.82%	0.00%	0.00%	5.88%
Marketing	0.00%	7.35%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Total	66.18%	20.59%	1.47%	11.76%	8.82%

Figure 1. Number of Published Articles on Atypicality, by Year and Field

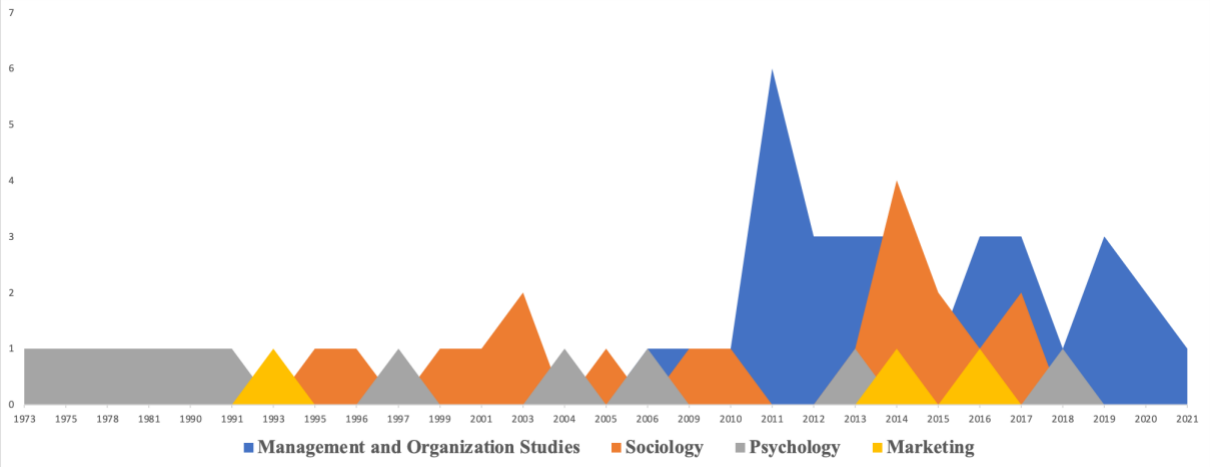


Figure 2. Forms of atypicality, by number of papers, and themes, by number of papers and forms of atypicality.
***Notes*: Papers addressing multiple themes are counted multiple times**

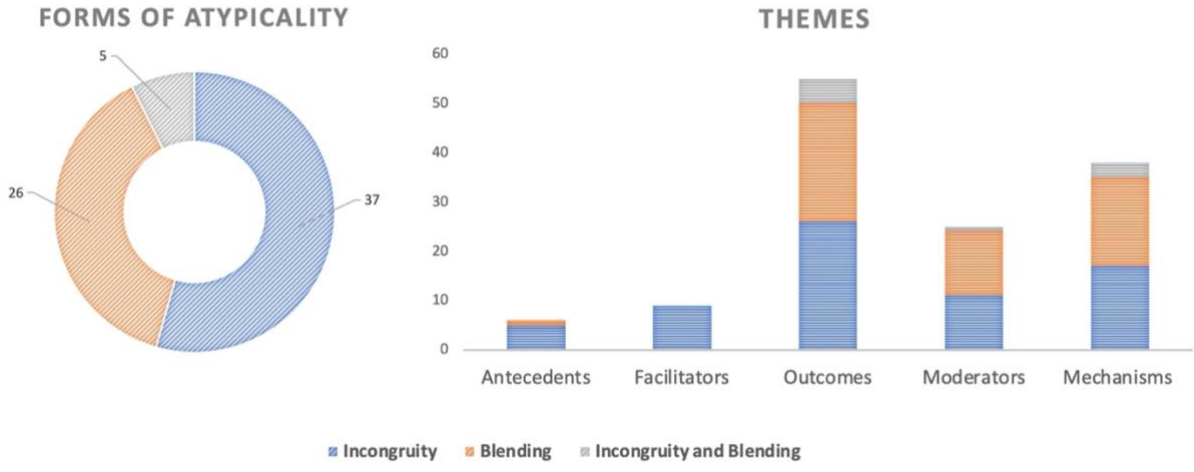


Figure 3. Summary of each theme represented in number of papers concerned as proportions (calculated from the papers considering the theme)

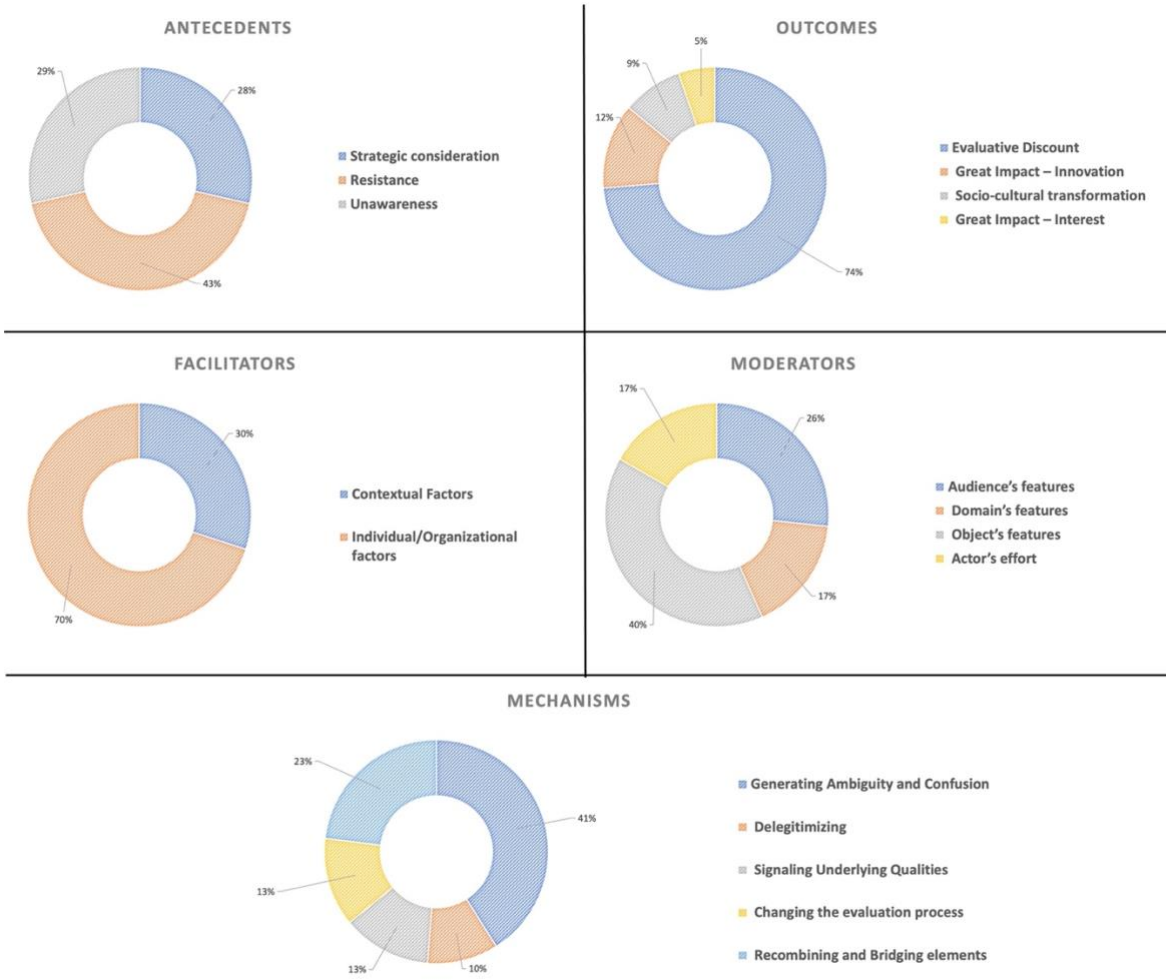
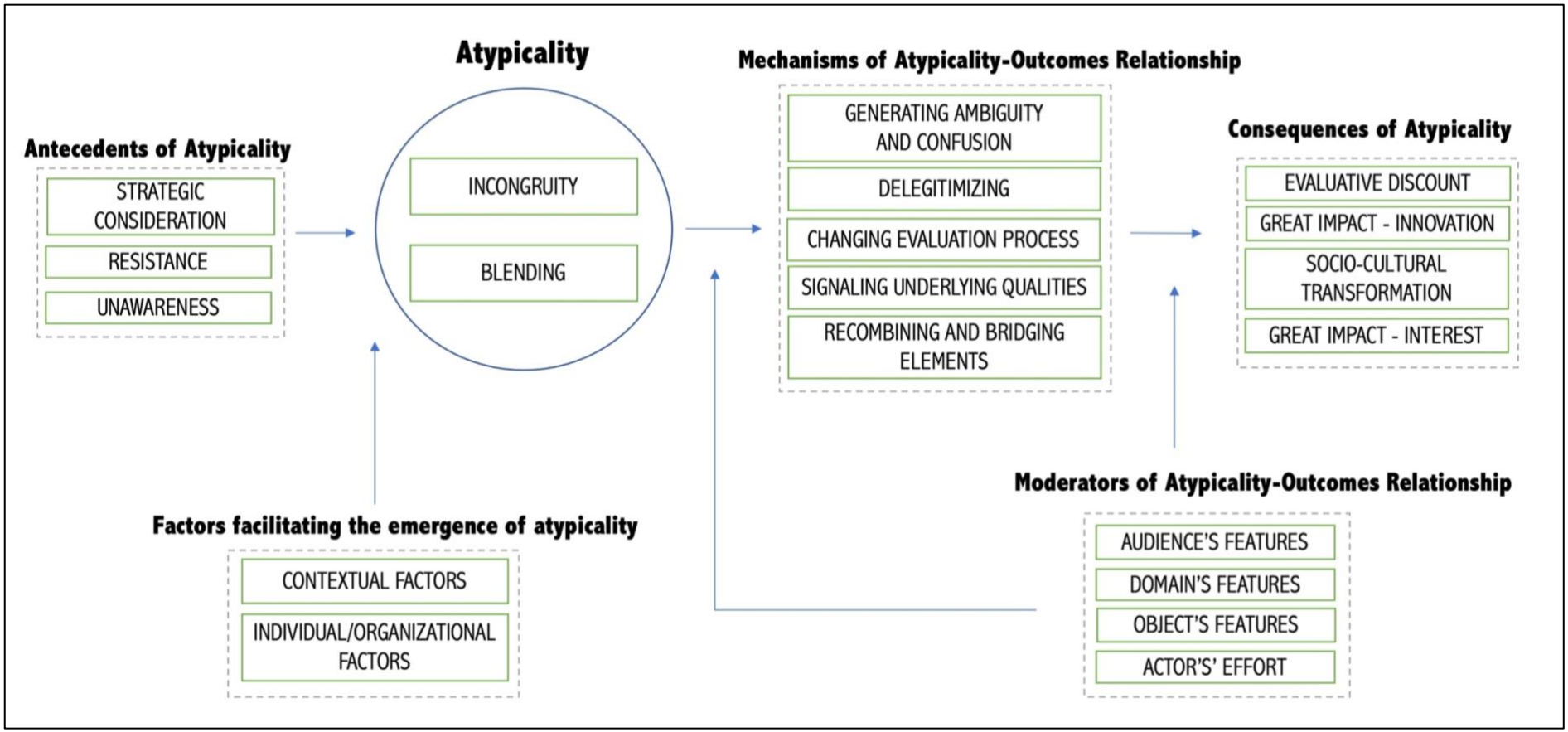


Figure 4. An integrative model of Atypicality



Appendix

Full list of papers review and codes assigned

Author (Year) - Papers with three or more authors are identified with 'et al.'. The full references can be found in the paper's reference list.

Form of Atypicality - Incongruity (I); Blending (B)

Antecedents - Strategic consideration (STR); Resistance (RES); Unawareness (UNW)

Facilitators - Contextual factors (CONT); Individual/Organizational factors (I/O)

Mechanisms - Generating Ambiguity and Confusion (CONF); Delegitimizing (DLEG); Signaling Underlying Qualities (QUAL); Changing the evaluation process (CHA); Recombining and Bridging elements (REC)

Moderators - Audience's features (AUD); Domain's features (DOM); Object's features (OBJ); Actor's effort (ACT)

Outcomes - Evaluative Discount (DISC); Great Impact – Innovation (INN); Socio-cultural transformation (TRANSF); Great Impact – Interest (INT)

Method - Qualitative (QUAL); Quantitative (QUANT); Theoretical (THEO)

Focus - Object of study

Authors (year)	Form of atypicality	Antecedents	Facilitators	Mechanisms	Moderators	Outcomes	Method	Focus
Askin & Mauskapf (2017)	I, B					INT	QUANT-Regression	Songs
Beck et al. (2019)	I		CONT - Physical Proximity		OBJ - Geographical Location	DISC	QUANT-Regression; QUAL	Organizational form
Bellezza et al. (2014)	I			QUAL - Competence and Status	AUD- Familiarity with the context; OBJ - Intentionality	DISC	QUANT-Experiment	Unconventional Behaviors
Berger & Packard (2018)	I					INT	QUANT-Regression	Songs
Bowers (2015)	B			CHA - Selection of the Reference Category		DISC	QUANT-Regression	U.S. Publicly Traded Firms
Cattani et al. (2014)	-				AUD – Theory of value	DISC	QUANT - Regression	Cast members in Hollywood feature-film industry
Caza et al. (2018)	B	RES			ACT – Impression Management		QUAL	Careers - Multiple Job Holders
de Vaan et al. (2015)	I		I/O – Team composition			INN	QUANT - Regression	Videogames
Durand & Kremp (2016)	I		I/O - Status				QUANT-Regression	Repertoire in opera companies
Ferguson & Carnabuci (2017)	tiB			REC*		INN	QUANT-Regression	Patent Applications
Fleming (2001)	I			REC*		INN	QUANT-Regression	Patent
Goldberg et al. (2016)	B				AUD - Preferences	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Films,Restaurants
Goodstein (1993)	I			CHA - Information processing		INT	QUANT-Experiment	Advertisement

Authors (year)	Form of atypicality	Antecedents	Facilitators	Mechanisms	Moderators	Outcomes	Method	Focus
Hekkert & Wieringen (1990)	I					DISC	QUANT - Experiment	Abstract paintings
Hsu (2006)	B			CONF		DISC	QUANT-Regression	Movies
Hsu et al. (2009)	B			CONF*		DISC	QUANT-Regression	eBay auctions; Movies
Johnson & Kovács (2014)	B				OBJ - Intrinsic Quality, Nature of Atypicality	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Restaurants
Kacperczyk & Younkin (2017)	B			DLEG*			QUANT-Regression	Artists' functional and market experience
Kim & Jensen (2011)	I		CONT - Divergent logics		AUD - Expected goals; OBJ – Features' combination	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Repertoire in opera companies
Kleinbaum (2012)	I			REC*		INN	QUANT-Regression	Career paths
Koppman & Leahey (2019)	I		I/O - Gender & Affiliation		ACT - Distancing		QUANT-Regression, QUAL	Research methodologies
Kovács & Hannan (2010)	I, B				DOM - Fuzzy categorical boundaries	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Restaurants
Kovács & Hannan (2015)	B					DISC	QUANT-Regression	Books; Restaurants
Landwehr et al. (2013)	I				AUD – Level of exposure	DISC	QUANT - Experiment	Car design
Leung (2014)	B				OBJ - Features combination	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Career paths
Leung & Sharkey (2014)	B			CONF	OBJ - Features presentation	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Peer to peer lending

Authors (year)	Form of atypicality	Antecedents	Facilitators	Mechanisms	Moderators	Outcomes	Method	Focus
Litov et al. (2012)	I			CONF*		DISC; INN	QUANT-Regression	Firm strategy
Lo & Kennedy (2014)	B			REC*	DOM – New Institutional Logics	DISC; TRANSF	QUANT-Regression	Patents
Lord et al. (1991)	I				AUD - Category knowledge	DISC	QUANT - Experiment	Group members defining features
Mervis & Rosch (1981)	I, B			CONF		DISC	THEO	
McDonald & Allen (2021)	B			QUAL* - Reconfiguration of market structures		TRANSF	QUANT - Event study	Startups
Miller & Chen (1996)	I		CONT - Market interaction; I/O - Firm Size and Resources				QUANT-Regression	Organizational competitive repertoire
Negro et al. (2010)	B			CONF		DISC	QUANT - Regression	Wine Labels
Negro et al. (2011)	I			REC*		TRANSF	QUAL; QUANT – Event study	Wine Labels
Negro & Leung (2013)	B			CONF		DISC	QUANT - Regression	Wine Labels
Palmer et al. (2013)	I			CONF*		DISC	THEO	Aesthetic and beauty
Paolella & Durand (2016)	B			QUAL* – Handling with complex cases	DOM – Complex outcomes requirements; OBJ- Features' combination	DISC	QUAL; QUANT-Regression	Law firms
Pentland et al. (2011)	I	STR; UNW					QUANT-Multidimensional Scaling	Organizational Routines

Authors (year)	Form of atypicality	Antecedents	Facilitators	Mechanisms	Moderators	Outcomes	Method	Focus
Phillips et al. (2013)	B			DLEG		DISC	QUAL	Law Firms
Phillips & Zuckerman (2001)	I		I/O - Status				QUANT-Regression	Law Firms and Securities Analysts
Piters & Stokmans (1997)	I			CONF		DISC	QUANT-Experiment	Books
Pontikes (2012)	B			QUAL – Innovation and flexibilty	AUD - Expected goals	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Market label claimed by organizations
Pontikes & Hannan (2014).	I, B						THEO	
Popielarz & McPherson (1995)	I	UNW					QUANT- Event history	Group Membership
Rao et al. (2003)	I	RES		REC		TRANSF	QUAL, QUANT-Regression	Chefs and Cuisines
Rao et al. (2005)	B			REC		TRANSF	QUANT-Regression	Chefs and Cuisines
Reber et al. (2004)	I			CONF* /DLEG*		DISC	THEO	
Rindova et al. (2011)	I	STR					QUAL	Organizational strategy
Rosch (1973)	I			CONF		DISC	QUANT-Experiment	Colors and Form
Rosch (1978)	I, B			CONF		DISC	THEO	
Rosch & Mervis (1975)	I, B			CONF		DISC	QUANT-Experiment	Natural categories of concrete objects

Authors (year)	Form of atypicality	Antecedents	Facilitators	Mechanisms	Moderators	Outcomes	Method	Focus
Ruef & Patterson (2009)	B			CONF* /DLEG*	DOM - Categorical system in flux; OBJ – Features' combination	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Enteprises classification
Scarpi et al. (2019)	I	RES					QUANT-Experiment	Fruit juices and confectionery
Schilling & Green (2011)	I			REC*		INN	QUANT-Regression	Reference combinations appearing in Scientific articles
Sgourev & Althuizen (2014)	I			QUAL - Creativity	OBJ - Status	DISC	QUANT - Experiment	Artworks
Smith (2011)	I				OBJ - Public demonstration of positive performance and commitment	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Hedge Funds
Smith & Chae (2016)	I				ACT - Naming	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Hedge Funds
Smith & Chae (2017)	I			CHA - Selection of the Reference Category	AUD - Level of committment	DISC	QUANT - Experiment	Hedge Funds
Uzzi et al. (2013)	I		I/O - Teams	REC*		INN	QUANT-Regression	Reference combinations appearing in Scientific articles
van Ooijen et al. (2016)	I			CHA - Information processing			QUANT - Experiment	Product packaging
Vossen & Ihl (2020)	B				ACT - Narrative strategies	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Videogames
Wagner et al. (2019)	I		I/O - Team's composition				QUANT-Regression	Reference combinations n Scientific articles
Winkielman et al. (2006)	I			CONF		DISC	QUANT - Experiment	Abstract and geometric patterns

Authors (year)	Form of atypicality	Antecedents	Facilitators	Mechanisms	Moderators	Outcomes	Method	Focus
Younkin & Kashkooli (2020)	B			CHA - Selection of the Reference Category	OBJ - degree of atypicality	DISC	QUANT – Regression + Experiment	Songs
Zhao et al. (2013)	B				ACT - Naming strategies	DISC	QUANT-Regression	Movies
Zuckerman (1999)	B			CONF*, DLEG*		DISC	QUANT-Regression	Corporations listed on American stock exchanges
Zuckerman (2017)	B, I				DOM - Knowledge Exchange; OBJ - Public demonstration of positive performance and commitment	DISC	THEO	
Zuckerman et al. (2003)	B			DLEG*		DISC	QUANT-Regression	Feature-film actors

Note= *Mechanism theorized but not directly tested

ESSAY 2 – TELL ME YOUR STORY AND I WILL TELL YOUR SALES: A TOPIC MODEL ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE STYLE AND FIRM PERFORMANCE ON ETSY

Introduction

That individuals differ in their style of speaking and writing is hardly a novel observation. In particular, style is a building block of narrative as a genre, as elements of style inform how stories are constructed and interpreted (Wales, 1989). The concept of narrative style is not undisputed and it has evolved over time (Bradford, 1997), encompassing a large variety of symbolic and aesthetic choices that identify the distinctive and recurrent characteristics of authors and their works (Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014; Godart, 2018). For example, a writer may choose to describe a given event using colourful words and unusual syntax, or in more formal language. Thus, the same exact story can be told with different stylistic nuances, each emphasizing different perspectives and features. Emblematic in this respect is "Exercises in Style," Raymond Queneau's 1947 postmodern masterpiece. This book contains a collection of 99 retellings of the same unexceptional story – the author observes a man complaining in a bus and later, in another part of town, he sees the same man being advised by a friend to get an additional button for his coat. Each version has its own characterization expressed through linguistic variations, e.g., anagrams and metaphors, but also variations of perspective, like looking at the story backwards or in a dream-like fashion. The aggregate effect of these configurations of choices (some large, most small) on the creation constitutes its style. When such a pattern of choices expresses a consistent and recognizable manner of creation the style may be thought of as a distinctive identity footprint (but even less-consciously produced artefacts/behaviours may have definable styles, to the extent that they express a consistent and

recognizable manner of creation). Indeed, forms of textual fingerprinting have long been employed to uniquely trace the origin of narrative materials to their authors. Analyses of word structure, for example, have been used to distinguish letters written by soldiers in 1800 (Broehl & McGee, 1981), to establish the identity of the authors of biblical works, and to discriminate the speaking approaches of different political leaders (Foster, 1996).

Thus, the way people write and talk have been recognized as markers of individual identity and, as a consequence, as powerful judgment device (Pennebaker & King, 1999). After all, we size people up at a glance based on their style; we know which styles we like and which we do not; we can almost instantaneously say when the styles of two books or songs are similar or different, and this aesthetic perception affects how we respond to it long before any conscious reasoning. This simple intuition, not only that individuals convey unique identities through their narrative styles, but they also elicit unique meaning and responses among target audiences informs the research questions that animate this methodological essay. How to detect patterns of words usage over different topics in a way that is both empirically tractable and theoretically meaningful? Can we trace such patterns to individual performance differences?

To answer these questions, finding patterns that describe observable textual differences is not enough. Rather, we must pay equal attention to the role of the reader (i.e., the audience) and try to appreciate the meaning that constitutes the reading experience or, in other words, what the audience gets from it. We achieve this goal by employing a topic-modelling approach (a methodology to discover the latent structure of large collections of texts) to the detection of stylistic features in a sample of over 75,000 biographical narratives in the digital market place of Etsy and examining how such style relates to market performance. After fleshing out the topic structure of this population -consisting of the topics, the distribution of topics per document, and the distribution of words over topics- we develop an original measure of stylistic conventionality informed by work on institutional conformity and explore the performance

effect of narrative conventionality. We set this analytical effort within the growing literature attesting to the importance of storytelling in organizational life (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000).

Our evidence suggests that a moderate level of conventionality is associated to higher performance, suggesting that a narrative balancing typical and atypical element signals a more appealing identity to the relevant audiences. In contrast, when the presence of conventional features increases significantly, stories lose their ability to pique interest and curiosity, and those conventional elements in the narratives prevent sellers from effectively contrasting the anonymity of the digital marketplace. Overall, these findings resonate with the notion of "legitimate distinctiveness" (Navis & Glynn, 2011), suggesting that the broader narrative context provides frames of reference that entrepreneurs appropriate in their identity claims and narrative styles are a way for communicating adherence to or departure from such normative guideposts.

The essay is organized as follows. First, we briefly introduce storytelling in managerial and organizational studies, focusing particularly on the role of narrative style. Second, we delineate our topic modelling approach to the construction of conventionality-based measure of narrative style. Next, we discuss the findings from applying our analytical strategy to a large sample of 78,758 creative entrepreneurs selling their craft items in the Etsy digital marketplace. We conclude by advancing some theoretical as well as and methodological considerations for researchers interested in the in the interface between, style, language and management.

Narratives and Style

Our interest in detecting narrative styles and studying their effect on relevant organizational outcomes is part and parcel of a growing trend among scholars in the social sciences to rethink and reclaim their subjects from textual and linguistic points of view. In particular, although it "took some time before the linguistic turn in the social sciences found its way into organization studies" (van Werven et al., 2015, p. 629), growing research in strategy and entrepreneurship

now takes a narrative approach to the study of performance and innovation. A key emphasis in these studies is that business leaders, as skilled rhetoricians, are able – through their storytelling tactics – to shape the sense making process of key stakeholders. For instance, stories are extremely important for entrepreneurial ventures to overcome the liability of newness and garner legitimacy (Navis & Glynn, 2011). By conveying a comprehensible identity, entrepreneurial narratives shape the expectation of critical resource providers such as investors and customers, and reduce the uncertainty that typically surround new business initiatives (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Martens et al., 2007; Garud et al., 2014; van Werven et al., 2015; Manning & Bejarano, 2017).

Narrative style may play a critical role in this expectations-shaping process by interfering with the cognitive processing of the message itself. The theoretical basis for this suggestion lies in language expectancy theory, which holds that individuals develop normative expectations concerning appropriate communication styles in given situations (Burgoon, 1995; Burgoon et al., 2002; Burgoon & Miller, 1985), and such expectations affect individuals' attitude toward message persuasion. When those expectations are exceeded the persuasiveness of the message increases. Conversely, when they are violated, individuals can become distracted redirecting their attentional related resources to non-task related efforts. Indeed, attentional resources have limited capacity, such that when a cognitive task consumes the attentional resources of working memory impairment in performance on such task is bound to happen.

Expected patterns of language use have been shown by cognitive studies to exist (Ashcraft, 1989) and operate along multiple language features including language intensity, complexity, and emotional tone (Burgoon & Miller, 1985; Craig & Blankenship, 2011; Averbeck & Miller, 2014). Along these lines, past research has linked the frequency with which we use certain style words categories with how we are perceived by others, thereby resulting

in tangible performance outcomes such us job performance or recruitment (Berry et al., 1997). More recently, entrepreneurship scholarship has shown crowdfunding audiences to be sensitive to the linguistic styles adopted by entrepreneurs to describe their ideas on crowdfunding platforms (Parhankangas & Renko, 2017; but see also Manning & Bejarano, 2017). In the present paper, we follow the lead of these studies to investigate the performance implications of adopting narrative styles that vary in their levels of conventionality. We surmise that conventional narratives are less likely to interfere with the audience ability to process the information conveyed in the narrative. In contrast, the unexpected nature of unconventional narratives will likely interfere with the cognitive processing of the content of the narrative. This weakened level of message processing should reduce audiences' persuasion by the narrative or, as in our setting, lower the audiences' willingness to make the purchase advocated in the message, resulting in reduced performance.

A Topic Modeling approach to investigate narrative style

The interest in measuring narrative stylistic features set its roots back in the early attempts of computer scientists to develop stylistic profiles of authors analyzing the frequencies of different word-type used in their works (Burrows, 1987; Holmes, 1994). These approaches were aimed at statistically quantifying stylistic features to derive a sort of fingerprint of each author. Progress in computer and data science, in particular in the field of computational linguistic, have made available more advanced and sophisticated tools to analyze the style of narration. In this section, we propose a topic modeling approach to derive the stylistic conventionality of entrepreneurial narratives and then investigate its impact on firms' performance.

Increasingly, management and organizational scholars are borrowing from computer science new methods to analyze language in large data collections. New computer-based language processing techniques reduce the high complexity of examining large text corpora, and offer novel approaches to study linguistic and stylistic features that afford a better

understanding of the role of language in organizational dynamics. Among those tools, topic modeling has provided an interesting twist to the linguistic turn in management (DiMaggio et al., 2013; Hannigan et al., 2019). Topic models are defined "generative models for documents*"* (Steyvers & Griffiths, 2007, p. 424), as they make the latent thematic structure of textual data emerge. The basic assumption behind this methodology is that any documents is a combination of different topics where each topic represents a probability distribution over words (Mohr & Bogdanov, 2013). Specifically, analyzing co-location and co-occurrence of words within documents, the models infer the underlying topics and their relative weight in the corpus of data.

This work applies Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic models (Blei et al., 2003) to study the style of the narratives. Specifically, this essay provides an empirical application of how to use a topic model approach to compute a measure of conventionality and test how conventional styles in entrepreneurial narratives influence performance.

Empirical application

Example data

For the application of our approach to dissect narrative stylistic features, we focus on entrepreneurial narratives shared by craftsmen selling their products in the digital marketplace of Etsy. Founded in in 2005, Etsy is a digital platform for creative small businesses, where people can set up their virtual shop and sell their handmade items, craft supplies, and vintage goods. The company aims at providing "creative entrepreneurs" (i.e., the sellers as defined in the company website) with opportunities to pursue their business ideas. This empirical setting is well-suited for the purpose of this study, as stories are particularity relevant in the world of crafting as they infuse the items with both symbolic and material value (Mishler, 1992).

Also, the digital marketplace under study provides access to a rich set of information: along with performance data, Etsy strongly encourages sellers to write a biography to introduce themselves, and share the story of their business, since each virtual shop has a dedicated web page that offers an overview of the business. Web-scraping methods were used to collect the narratives of these entrepreneurs every two months. After a year, we decided to build a cross-sectional dataset with the last scraping because less than 1% of the sellers in the sample actually modified the narrative during the entire time span. The final sample consisted of 78,758 sellers with processed and validated narratives.

Topic model results

Although several approaches have been proposed, there is no consensus on the best way to determine the optimal number of topics in the model. For the purposes of this essay, we followed the conventional practice to constrain this number to 100 (Blei & Lafferty, 2007; Kaplan & Vakili, 2015; Haans, 2019). A representation of all the topics is provided in Table 1, where for each topic we report its relative weight and the five most representative words.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The emerging pattern of topics well captures relevant features of the context under investigation, thus confirming the contextual embeddedness of these entrepreneurial narratives (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Gartner, 2007). Unsurprisingly, we observe that a number of topics emphasizes the presence in the narratives of typical business elements such as the description of the products sold (e.g., Topic 77: “jewelry”, “bead”, “piece”, “bracelet”, “necklace” and Topic 4: “furniture”, “build”, “home”, “design”, “table”) or cues that convey the ability to create value, such as focus on quality and customers assistance (e.g., Topic 93: “quality”,

"product", "item", "handmade", "unique", and Topic 55: "custom", "order", "question", "contact", "message"). At the same time, it is quite interesting to point out the appearance of typical features of narrative accounts, such as topics that resonate loudly with personal characteristics, roles and the journey of each entrepreneurs (Topic 68: "home", "family", "mom", "daughter", "husband" or Topic 27: "start", "years", "ago", "open", "store").

Additionally, the weights of topics within the different product categories exposes narrative elements that persist significantly across them (e.g., Topic 88: "make", "love", "thing", "idea", "enjoy" or Topic 67: "create", "passion", "creative", "share", "dream"), suggesting a general effort at building resonance with the expectations of the intended audience of customers (Martens et al., 2007). In fact, these topics perfectly match the general characteristics of the marketplace, since Etsy places great emphasis on such features as creativity, uniqueness and craftsmanship, consistently with Etsy's mission statement:

Etsy is the global marketplace for unique and creative goods. It's home to a universe of special, extraordinary items, from unique handcrafted pieces to vintage treasures. (Etsy website)

Other topics, on the contrary, are very specific of a single product category - e.g., Topic 46 : "food", "cake", "make", "cookie", "bake" is presents mainly in the category which groups people who sell Food & Drink items, or Topic 62: "doll", "toy", "child", "play", "kid", that substantially appears only in the Toys category. Data produced with topic modelling also include the distribution of topics over each document, which offers a fine-grained description of narratives' stylistic composition. To illustrate, Table 2 reports the topic composition of two narratives by two sellers both listing their items in the Home Improvement product category.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Independently of the number of topics present in each narrative (which is influenced also by the length of the narrative), topic distribution reveals two different narrative styles. The first story revolves around the way this seller became a wine aficionado after meeting his current wife and how this transformation sparked his entrepreneurial journey. The author places great emphasis on Topic 70: “drink”, “wine”, “beer”, “glass”, “tea” – which accounts for 25% of the entire story – and Topic 49: “wife”, “business”, “family”, “husband”, “team” – which covers another 16% of the narrative. The second narrative is less concentrated in terms of topic distribution, incorporating more elements and touching on a multiplicity of aspects. The author narrates how he turned his model train hobby into a business, but here the process is centered upon the active role of customers’ need in shaping the business (Topic 27: “start”, “year”, “ago”, “decide”, “sell”, Topic 23: “furniture”, “build”, “home”, “decide”, “custom”, and Topic 35: “order”, “item”, “ship”, “contact”, “purchase”). The story also reports the company’s attempt to build a solid brand renowned for high quality products through appearances on magazines and television show, which is well captured by a significant presence of Topic 89 (“product”, “design”, “company”, “line” , “brand”) and Topic 93 (“make”, “quality”, “product”, “high” , “design”).

Narrative conventionality

The topic model data produce several interesting insights. Although this approach does not allow to fully appreciate all the stylistic features of a text, the distribution of topics within narratives sheds light on similarities and differences between stories. For instance, some entrepreneurs in this digital context are more prone to introducing personal elements in their narratives as potential differentiating elements at the expenses of a purer and more prototypical storyline. Additionally, the diffusion of the topics within and across product categories is a clear indication of elements, practices and thus meanings, that define the context: the higher the weight of a topic in a product category, the stronger its relevance in that context.

Starting from these considerations, we combined the narrative-topic with the topic-product category distribution to build our measure of narrative conventionality. Elaborating on the intuition of Durand and Kremp (2016), we used the distribution of topics over narratives to conceptualize narrative stylistic conventionality as a systematic tendency to include topics that are widely diffused and shared also by other sellers in the same product category. We adapted the measure developed by Durand and Kremp to our data, regressing the topic' shares of narrative for each seller on the topic shares of all the other seller within the same product category. More formally:

$Tin = \hat{\alpha} \cdot \bar{Ti} + b\hat{\imath} + uic$ with E (uic)=0

Where Tin represent the weight of topic I for narrative n and $\bar{Ti}$ is the average weight of topic I for all the other narrative in the category. We took the slope of the regression line as our measure of content conventionality, with all the values above 1 indicating a conventional narrative.

Narrative Conventionality = $\hat{\alpha} = Cov(Tn,\bar{T})VAR(\bar{T})$

In other words, a narrative is conventional if the author overemphasizes topics, and thus features, that are also central in other sellers' narratives. Figure 1 offers an illustration of the structure of a conventional narratives vis a vis a non-conventional one.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

In this example, the red bars represent the topics distribution across all the members of the Video Games product category, while the blue and the green bars report the narrative-topics distribution of two sellers operating in that category. Looking at Figure 1, we observe that

highly influent topics in narrative # 2 – such as Topic 7, Topic 22, Topic 56 and Topic 94 – are also widely shared and diffused among the other sellers within the same category. On the contrary, narrative # 1 is not centered around these elements as it emphasizes other topics – like Topic, 25, Topic 32, Topic 35, and Topic 74 – that are less relevant in other sellers' narratives. Based on our measure, narrative # 1 is considered unconventional, while narrative # 2 has a more conventional style.

Variables

Dependent Variable

Craft Items Sold. Because the focus of this paper is on the impact that conventional narratives have on performance, we measure performance in terms of craft items sold. Thus, the dependent variable in this study is a count of the items sold by each seller since s/he joined the platform.

Independent Variables

Narrative Conventionality. The main variable of this study is the stylistic conventionality of the narrative measured as described in the previous section. We also include its squared term to test for nonlinear relationship. To address multi-collinearity issues arising from the interaction terms, this variable was mean-centered prior to being interacted (Aiken et al., 1991).

Control Variables

We included several control variables in the analysis to account for other factors that may influence sellers' performance in this context. Two key control variables were taken into consideration: *seller rating*, measured as the average review score received by a seller, and *platform experience*, measured as the numbers of years selling on the platform. We also

controlled for the length of the narrative, measured in terms of number of words, and the average level of competition in the product category. Finally, we introduced a set of dummy variables to control for gender and country of origin of the sellers, and the product categories they selected to sell their items.

Model Specification

We adopted a negative binomial regression rather than a Poisson model because the dependent variable of this study, number of craft items sold, is a nonnegative count variable with over dispersion (Hausman et al., 1984). Further, robust estimators were used to control for mild violation of underlying assumptions (Cameron & Trivedi, 1998). The baseline model includes only the control variables, in Model 1 we introduce narrative conventionality and its squared term.

Results

Descriptive statistics and pairwise correlations for all variables are provided in Table 3. The means and SDs were calculated using untransformed measures for ease of interpretation.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

All the correlations in the data are reasonably low, and we controlled for multicollinearity using Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs). Results show a mean VIF of 3.49, with the highest VIF of 9.01 (Product Category *Shoes*), which is still below the recommended threshold of 10 (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, multicollinearity is unlikely to influence the results in our analyses. Results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

In the Baseline Model, we find that entrepreneurs with better ratings ($\beta = 0.604$, $p < 0.001$) and with more years of experience on the platform ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.001$) are more likely to sell a higher number of items. Moreover, we find that the level of competition in product categories negatively influences the number of products sold ($\beta = -0.589$, $p < 0.001$), and that male sellers slightly outperform their female counterparts ($\beta = -0.032$, $p < 0.05$). Finally, the strategic relevance of narratives is highlighted by the positive and significant narrative length coefficient ($\beta = 0.032$, $p < 0.05$): articulated and rich narratives increase the likelihood of attracting audience attention.

Turning to the variable of theoretical interest, Model 1 introduces narrative conventionality and its squared. When controlling for other relevant factors, our analysis reveals a positive and significant effect of narrative conventionality ($\beta = 0.133$, $p < 0.001$), as well as a negative and significant effect of its squared term on seller performance ($\beta = -0.056$, $p < 0.001$). Following Lind and Mehlum (2010), we validate the presence of an inverted U shape by testing the slopes at both the ends of the data range. The slope at the lower bound (-1.85) is positive and significant (0.341, $p < 0.001$) and at the upper bound (4.46) is negative and significant (-0.364, $p < 0.001$), resulting in a significant overall test for the presence of an inverted U shape (t-value = 4.76; $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the estimated turning point is located within data range (1.19, 95% Fieller interval [0.92; 1.66]). To facilitate the interpretation of the results, in Figure 2 we plot the predicted number of sales across the range of observed values for narrative conventionality.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

While holding all the other variables in the model constant, the presence of contextually familiar elements in the narrative is associated with a 14.2% increase (= exp(0.133) − 1) in the number of items sold for moderate levels of narrative conventionality. For higher levels of conventionality, on the contrary, the same increase leads to a 5.4% decrease (= exp(-0.055) − 1) in the sales. In other words, for an average seller on the platform, the benefits of the optimal level of narrative conventionality translates into 3297 more craft items sold compared to those who do not display enough conventional features in their stories (at the minimum value of narrative conventionality, and in 3547 more items compared to those sellers who are extremely conventional in presenting their stories (at the maximum value of conventionality).

Discussion and Conclusion

Over the past few years, a large and growing body of research has studied the role of storytelling (stories or narratives) in innovation and entrepreneurship (e.g., Bartel & Garud, 2009; Martens et al., 2007; Garud & Gehman, 2012; Garud & Giuliani, 2013; Navis & Glynn, 2011). Indeed, one of the key challenges innovators (e.g., entrepreneurs) face is to persuade relevant audiences (e.g., crowdfunders, venture capitalists, angel investors, funding organizations, R&D managers, users, and so on) to support their novel ideas. The skillful use of linguistic devices has been recognized as critical to deal with this challenge (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997; Gabriel, 2004; Larrimore et al., 2011; Martin, 2016; van Werven et al., 2015). To this date, however, we lack an understanding of how narratives are actually constructed to appeal to various audiences. Manning and Bejarano (2017), for instance, found that entrepreneurs may apply different more or less project-specific narrative styles to mobilize resources.[6] Their findings are particularly relevant for our study because they

[6] Analyzing 54 crowdfunding campaigns on the platform Kickstarter, Manning and Bejarano found that campaigns tend to use and/or combine two dominant narrative styles that they call the "ongoing journey" and the "results-in-progress" style. As they put it: "The former style narrates projects as longer-term endeavors

reveal how narratives may be related to the ability or inability of crowdfunding campaigns to align presentations with narrative styles that are expected of projects sharing certain features.

Building on this narrative perspective, the main goal of this paper was to offer a concise methodological contribution by introducing a topic model approach for the study of narrative stylistic features. Recent advances in quantitative methodologies for analyzing large-scale heterogeneous data have enabled novel understanding of increasingly complex narrative structures. For instance, Min and Park (2019) have shown how a narrative lends itself naturally to network-based modeling and analysis that can be further enriched by incorporating various text analysis methods from computational linguistics.[7] We believe that topic modeling and, more generally, natural language processing hold great promise for the study of narratives and have the potential to advance our understanding of how different stylist choices influence important organizational and economic outcomes. The progress of computer science, therefore, offers researchers more opportunities to explore the characteristics that make a story more or less effective in persuading the internal and external public.

While previous studies have looked at the temporal construction of narratives and how narratives reflect key project features, our focus is on the stylistic conventionality of entrepreneurial narratives – that is, the systematic tendency to include topics that are widely diffused and shared also by other entrepreneurs in the same product category. Specifically, we analyze the stories of craftsmen selling their handmade products on Esty, the largest digital marketplace for handmade and craft items, and we test how the conventionality of narratives

---

powered by creative initial ideas and a bold vision, inviting audiences to "join the journey"; the latter narrates projects more narrowly as a progression of accomplishments, engaging the audience instrumentally to support next steps" (Manning and Bejarano, 2017: 194).

[7] They apply the methods to Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. As they put it: "We model the temporally unfolding nature of narrative as a dynamical growing network of nodes and edges representing characters and interactions, which allows us to characterize the story progression using the network growth pattern" (Min and Park, 2019: 1).

can affect their performance. The adoption of a topic-model approach reveals that, in this context, stories embody personal elements of the seller's life, but also that entrepreneurs seek to conform to established contextual standards by incorporating topics the are widely shared and diffused among other sellers.

The growing interest in narratives, as well as the type of narrative style that is more or less effective in eliciting the support from relevant audiences, rests on the recognition that narratives are critical strategic assets that entrepreneurs can leverage to generate identities and differentiate themselves from their competitors. Narratives are indeed essential for building identities (White, 1981), and by controlling them, entrepreneurs can leverage them (Aspers, 2010) to gain visibility and be perceived as distinctive. It is through the stories they tell about themselves – who they are, what they do, and why they do it – that entrepreneurs try to project an identity that is similar enough to that of other entrepreneurs, but not too similar to go unnoticed. In his study of outsider artists, for instance, Alan Fine (2004) found that many art collectors share artists' biographical stories with visitors when they display their art.[8] By the same token, narratives that incorporate biographical accounts might add to the perceived uniqueness of an entrepreneur's product offering.

Since the style of a narrative is critical for mobilizing symbolic and/or material support, the performance implications of adopting certain narratives in entrepreneurial processes deserve greater attention (Martens et al., 2007; Manning and Bejarano, 2017). Our study's main findings suggest how the right level of conventionality of a narrative can be leveraged strategically to enhance distinctiveness while displaying a degree of conformity to topics that are diffused and shared by others in the same product category and that audience members

[8] As one collector explained: "In many cases with this work, the story is more important than the art is, and people are buying the story as opposed to the piece of art for art's sake … There are artists I've supported financially just because I like them, and I like their story, but not because I believe the pieces are outstanding" (in Fine, 2004: 68).

expect to hear. Specifically, narratives that differ in their level of conventionality have a differential impact on firm performance (i.e., product sales). Our paper represents a first step towards a more systematic analysis of the performance implications of adopting certain narratives in entrepreneurial processes.

The use of topic modeling holds the promise to shed important light on how narratives can be built to attract audiences. Other methodological approaches, however, also appear to be suitable for examining the style of a narrative in analytic terms. A very promising methodology for studying and measuring style and stylistic changes is social sequence analysis (SSA). A recently developed methodological tool, the analysis of social sequences affords the study of patterns of social processes over time in an eventful way similar to historiography, while retaining social scientific abstraction (Abbott, 1990; Stark & Vedres, 2006). One of the distinctive features of SSA is to account for uniqueness and similarity at the same time. Formilan, Ferriani, and Cattani (2020) have exposed the contribution of SSA methodological framework to the study of temporal patterns of creativity in the underground electronic music field by examining artists' stylistic variation sequences. Examining the stylistic trajectories of electronic music artists, they have shown how sequence methods can be leveraged to represent and analyze temporal dynamics of style in a way that other traditional analytical approaches (e.g., event history or panel design methods) cannot. The use of SSA could be further extended to trace temporal patterns of stylistic changes in a company's narratives to establish how those changes make these narratives more or less effective in persuading internal and external audiences over time.

Given the vast diffusion of narratives and storytelling in organization life, and the increased availability of data, the approach proposed here could be fruitfully applied to other empirical settings. For instance, stories are particularly relevant in the cultural and creative industries (Haans, 2019), where the proliferation of digital and social media has strengthened

the ongoing interaction between producers and consumers by affording novel spaces and opportunities to build a relationship through stories. For instance, the key of the success of The Blonde Salad blog was the selectivity of its founder – Chiara Ferragni – in choosing the brands to work with because "the stories Ferragni would tell about these brands had to reflect her own lifestyle" (Keinan et al., 2015, p. 5, emphasis not in the original). Given the proliferation of blogs, the style of the bloggers' narrative is becoming increasingly a critical differentiating factor. Tracing narratives over time, including the way they are communicated, would reveal which stylistic features contribute to determining their appeal in the eyes of blog followers.

Entrepreneurial pitches represent another very interesting area of application. Indeed, most of what we know about entrepreneurship comes from stories of and about entrepreneurs. A growing body of research in entrepreneurship now adopts a framing approach to study creativity and innovation, where framing refers to "the use of rhetorical devices in communication to mobilize support and minimize resistance to a change" (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014, p. 185). Despite the frequency with which audiences across innovation domains are expected to evaluate novel ideas, however, little research still exists that attends to the structural properties of such narratives and their effect on the recipients' evaluative responses. Recently, scholars have explored the impact of abstract or concrete linguistic framings on how relevant audiences evaluate entrepreneurial pitches (e.g., Falchetti et al., 2018). The study of the frames innovators employ in their pitches could be further expanded by using topic modelling to analyze more systematically how innovators can use rhetorical devices – particularly the topics that form a narrative and the style by which this narrative is communicated to the target audiences – to mobilize the resources they need.

With online digital platforms becoming increasingly viable contexts for entrepreneurial activities, future research may find these settings particularly attractive for studying the implications of different narrative styles. Indeed, these platforms provide unique access to an

impressive amount of textual and performance data that could be used to gauge the effectiveness of different narrative stylistic features. In this paper, we have attempted to make a first step in this direction, with the hope to stimulate further research in using our approach to study how different stylistic choices affect effective communication.

References

Abbott, A. (1990). A primer on sequence methods. *Organization Science*, *1*(4), 375–392.

Aiken, L. S., West, S. G., & Reno, R. R. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Sage Publications.

Aldrich, H. E., & Fiol, C. M. (1994). Fools Rush in? The Institutional Context of Industry Creation. *Academy of Management Review*, *19*(4), 645–670. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1994.9412190214

Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Taking the Linguistic Turn in Organizational Research: Challenges, Responses, Consequences. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *36*(2), 136–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886300362002

Ashcraft, M. H. (1989). *Human memory and cognition.* Scott, Foresman & Co.

Aspers, P. (2010). *Orderly fashion: A sociology of markets*. Princeton University Press.

Averbeck, J. M., & Miller, C. (2014). Expanding Language Expectancy Theory: The Suasory Effects of Lexical Complexity and Syntactic Complexity on Effective Message Design. *Communication Studies*, *65*(1), 72–95. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2013.775955

Bartel, C. A., & Garud, R. (2009). The Role of Narratives in Sustaining Organizational Innovation. *Organization Science*, *20*(1), 107–117. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1080.0372

Berry, D. S., Pennebaker, J. W., Mueller, J. S., & Hiller, W. S. (1997). Linguistic bases of social perception. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *23*(5), 526–537.

Blei, D. M., & Lafferty, J. D. (2007). Correction: A correlated topic model of Science. *The Annals of Applied Statistics*, *1*(2), 634–634. https://doi.org/10.1214/07-AOAS136

Blei, D. M., Ng, A. Y., & Jordan, M. I. (2003). Latent dirichlet allocation. *Journal of Machine Learning Research*, *3*(Jan), 993–1022.

Bradford, R. (1997). *Stylistics*. Routledge.

Broehl, W. G., & McGee, V. E. (1981). Content analysis in psychohistory: A study of three lieutenants in the Indian Mutiny, 1857-58. *The Journal of Psychohistory*, *8*(3), 281.

Burgoon, M. (1995). Language expectancy theory: Elaboration, explication, and extension. *Communication and Social Influence Processes*, 29–52.

Burgoon, M., Denning, V., & Roberts, L. (2002). Language expectancy theorY. In *The Persuasion Handbook: Developments in Theory and Practice* (pp. 117–136). Sage Publications.

Burgoon, M., & Miller, G. R. (1985). An expectancy interpretation of language and persuasion. In H. Giles & R. St. Clair (Eds.), *Recent advances in language, communication, and social psychology* (pp. 199–229). Routledge.

Burrows, J. F. (1987). Word-Patterns and Story-Shapes: The Statistical Analysis of Narrative Style. *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, *2*(2), 61–70. https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/2.2.61

Cameron, A. C., & Trivedi, P. K. (1998). *Regression analysis of count data*. Cambridge University Press.

Cornelissen, J. P., & Werner, M. D. (2014). Putting Framing in Perspective: A Review of Framing and Frame Analysis across the Management and Organizational Literature. *Academy of Management Annals*, *8*(1), 181–235. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2014.875669

Craig, T. Y., & Blankenship, K. L. (2011). Language and persuasion: Linguistic extremity influences message processing and behavioral intentions. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *30*(3), 290–310.

Czarniawska-Joerges, B. (1997). *Narrating the organization: Dramas of institutional identity*. University of Chicago Press.

DiMaggio, P., Nag, M., & Blei, D. (2013). Exploiting affinities between topic modeling and the sociological perspective on culture: Application to newspaper coverage of U.S. government arts funding. *Poetics*, *41*(6), 570–606. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2013.08.004

Durand, R., & Kremp, P.-A. (2016). Classical Deviation: Organizational and Individual Status as Antecedents of Conformity. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*(1), 65–89. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0767

Falchetti, D., Cattani, G., & Ferriani, S. (2018). Overcoming the Liability of Novelty: The Power of Framing. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, *2018*(1), 11077. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2018.11077abstract

Fine, G. A. (2004). *Everyday genius: Self-taught art and the culture of authenticity*. University of Chicago Press ; University Presses Marketing [distributor. https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=911F9497-CE05-489B-919F-3E91F622DFA6

Formilan, G., Ferriani, S., & Cattani, G. (2020). A methodological essay on the application of social sequence analysis to the study of creative trajectories. In V. Dörfler & M. Stierand (Eds.), *Handbook of Research Methods on Creativity*. Edward Elgar. https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/20164/

Foster, D. (1996). Primary culprit: Who is anonymous. *New York Magazine*, *29*, 50–57.

Gabriel, Y. (2004). Narratives, stories and texts. In D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Oswick, & L. Putnam (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational discourse* (Vol. 61, p. 77). Sage.

Gartner, W. B. (2007). Entrepreneurial narrative and a science of the imagination. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *22*(5), 613–627. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2006.10.003

Garud, R., & Gehman, J. (2012). Metatheoretical perspectives on sustainability journeys: Evolutionary, relational and durational. *Research Policy*, *41*(6), 980–995. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2011.07.009

Garud, R., & Giuliani, A. P. (2013). A Narrative Perspective on Entrepreneurial Opportunities. *Academy of Management Review*, *38*(1), 157–160. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2012.0055

Garud, R., Schildt, H. A., & Lant, T. K. (2014). Entrepreneurial Storytelling, Future Expectations, and the Paradox of Legitimacy. *Organization Science*, *25*(5), 1479–1492. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0915

Godart, F. C. (2018). Why is Style Not in Fashion? Using the Concept of "Style" to Understand the Creative Industries. In C. Jones & M. Maoret (Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (Vol. 55, pp. 103–128). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20180000055005

Haans, R. F. J. (2019). What's the value of being different when everyone is? The effects of distinctiveness on performance in homogeneous versus heterogeneous categories. *Strategic Management Journal*, *40*(1), 3–27. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2978

Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2010). *Multivariate data analysis* (7th ed). Prentice Hall.

Hannigan, T., Haans, R. F. J., Vakili, K., Tchalian, H., Glaser, V., Wang, M., Kaplan, S., & Jennings, P. D. (2019). Topic modeling in management research: Rendering new theory from textual data. *Academy of Management Annals*. https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2017.0099

Hausman, J., Hall, B., & Griliches, Z. (1984). *Econometric Models for Count Data with an Application to the Patents-R&D Relationship* (No. t0017). National Bureau of Economic Research. https://doi.org/10.3386/t0017

Holmes, D. I. (1994). Authorship attribution. *Computers and the Humanities*, *28*(2), 87–106.

Kaplan, S., & Vakili, K. (2015). The double-edged sword of recombination in breakthrough innovation: The Double-Edged Sword of Recombination. *Strategic Management Journal*, *36*(10), 1435–1457. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2294

Keinan, A., Maslauskaite, K., Crener, S., & Dessain, V. (2015). The blonde salad. *Harvard Business School Case*, *515–074*.

Larrimore, L., Jiang, L., Larrimore, J., Markowitz, D., & Gorski, S. (2011). Peer to peer lending: The relationship between language features, trustworthiness, and persuasion success. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *39*(1), 19–37.

Lounsbury, M., & Glynn, M. A. (2001). Cultural entrepreneurship: Stories, legitimacy, and the acquisition of resources. *Strategic Management Journal*, *22*(6–7), 545–564. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.188

Manning, S., & Bejarano, T. A. (2017). Convincing the crowd: Entrepreneurial storytelling in crowdfunding campaigns. *Strategic Organization*, *15*(2), 194–219. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127016648500

Martens, M. L., Jennings, J. E., & Jennings, P. D. (2007). Do the Stories They tell get them the Money They Need? The Role of Entrepreneurial Narratives in Resource Acquisition. *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*(5), 1107–1132. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.27169488

Martin, S. R. (2016). Stories about Values and Valuable Stories: A Field Experiment of the Power of Narratives to Shape Newcomers' Actions. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*(5), 1707–1724. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2014.0061

Min, S., & Park, J. (2019). Modeling narrative structure and dynamics with networks, sentiment analysis, and topic modeling. *PloS One*, *14*(12).

Mishler, E. G. (1992). Work, identity, and narrative: An artist-craftsman's story. In G. C. Rosenwald & R. L. Ochberg, *Storied lives. The cultural politics of self-understanding* (pp. 21–40). Yale University Press.

Mohr, J. W., & Bogdanov, P. (2013). Introduction—Topic models: What they are and why they matter. *Poetics*, *41*(6), 545–569. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2013.10.001

Navis, C., & Glynn, M. A. (2011). Legitimate Distinctiveness and The Entrepreneurial Identity: Influence on Investor Judgments of New Venture Plausibility. *Academy of Management Review*, *36*(3), 479–499. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2008.0361

Parhankangas, A., & Renko, M. (2017). Linguistic style and crowdfunding success among social and commercial entrepreneurs. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *32*(2), 215–236. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2016.11.001

Pennebaker, J. W., & King, L. A. (1999). Linguistic styles: Language use as an individual difference. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *77*(6), 1296–1312. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.6.1296

Sgourev, S. V., & Althuizen, N. (2014). "Notable" or "Not Able": When Are Acts of Inconsistency Rewarded? *American Sociological Review*, *79*(2), 282–302. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414524575

Stark, D., & Vedres, B. (2006). Social Times of Network Spaces: Network Sequences and Foreign Investment in Hungary. *American Journal of Sociology*, *111*(5), 1367–1411.

Steyvers, M., & Griffiths, T. (2007). Probabilistic topic models. *Handbook of Latent Semantic Analysis*, *427*(7), 424–440.

van Werven, R., Bouwmeester, O., & Cornelissen, J. P. (2015). The power of arguments: How entrepreneurs convince stakeholders of the legitimate distinctiveness of their ventures. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *30*(4), 616–631.

Wales, K. (1989). *A dictionary of stylistics* (1st ed.). Routledge.

White, H. C. (1981). Where Do Markets Come From? *American Journal of Sociology*, *87*(3), 517–547. https://doi.org/10.1086/227495

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Complete list of Topics with respective weight in the corpus

Topic #	Topic Weight	Keywords
0	0.023	dress, make, clothing, clothe, wear, fabric
1	0.015	plant, grow, garden, herb, seed, organic
2	0.005	skin, pain, natural, benefit, body, shave
3	0.028	magazine, feature, art, work, show, award
4	0.038	home, decor, create, love, decorate, style
5	0.016	beach, sea, shell, live, glass, fish
6	0.011	case, design, cover, phone, model, clock
7	0.034	store, studio, locate, open, street, year
8	0.042	craft, make, love, item, thing, enjoy
9	0.014	box, wrap, label, paper, basket, gift
10	0.072	piece, create, unique, love, art, design
11	0.021	sign, design, cut, vinyl, decal, custom
12	0.016	shirt, design, print, apparel, tee, clothing
13	0.063	day, time, work, hour, room, home
14	0.019	fairy, magic, world, magical, fantasy, steampunk
15	0.015	wool, fiber, feel, yarn, natural, hand
16	0.026	support, donate, community, charity, woman, local
17	0.017	metal, make, work, copper, hand, piece
18	0.029	farm, live, family, husband, home, small
19	0.016	quilt, embroidery, machine, stitch, fabric, pattern
20	0.052	school, year, learn, class, college, work
21	0.120	love, make, people, thing, happy, work
22	0.032	product, soap, natural, skin, ingredient, make
23	0.024	furniture, build, home, design, light, lamp
24	0.041	sell, show, year, craft, local, start
25	0.019	cat, animal, pet, toy, horse, dog
26	0.068	make, buy, start, find, good, sell
27	0.101	start, year, sell, make, decide, time
28	0.017	hair, hat, bow, make, accessory, headband
29	0.022	planner, sign, sticker, link, find, newsletter
30	0.011	information, read, reading, card, personal, question
31	0.031	crochet, knit, yarn, pattern, make, knitting
32	0.066	customer, quality, product, good, provide, offer
33	0.020	leather, make, hand, product, good, work
34	0.023	life, year, health, diagnose, cancer, find
35	0.037	order, item, ship, day, shipping, time
36	0.025	traditional, culture, tradition, artisan, ancient, art
37	0.021	bag, make, fabric, purse, design, handbag
38	0.018	jewellery, make, piece, design, silver, bead
39	0.066	design, style, modern, create, collection, piece
40	0.036	material, make, product, recycle, environment, sustainable
41	0.029	draw, print, illustration, design, art, work
42	0.068	vintage, find, item, love, treasure, thing
43	0.008	shoe, pair, boot, sock, sandal, wear
44	0.015	book, journal, write, paper, read, story
45	0.024	jewelry, stone, gemstone, ring, piece, gold
46	0.015	food, cake, make, cookie, treat, bake
47	0.012	game, sport, bike, play, team, car
48	0.020	fabric, linen, textile, cotton, make, hand
49	0.025	wife, business, family, year, husband, military
50	0.021	energy, crystal, healing, spiritual, heal, life

Table 1. Complete list of Topics with respective weight in the corpus (continue)

Topic #	Topic Weight	Keywords
51	0.064	item, store, find, add, offer, handmade
52	0.078	love, life, bring, make, create, inspire
53	0.070	work, world, art, nature, form, beauty
54	0.016	make, miniature, sculpture, clay, work, polymer_clay
55	0.117	custom, order, question, make, contact, item
56	0.046	sew, make, sewing, fabric, machine, love
57	0.052	design, range, colour, make, love, personalise
58	0.011	flower, floral, wreath, bouquet, make, wedding
59	0.013	glass, stained_glass, piece, work, art, mosaic
60	0.020	paper, card, stamp, hand, print, design
61	0.046	size, make, hand, clean, time, dry
62	0.018	doll, toy, child, make, play, kid
63	0.084	time, work, job, year, full, start
64	0.011	ceramic, clay, pottery, piece, work, glaze
65	0.018	photography, photo, image, photograph, camera, photographer
66	0.057	quality, product, high, company, good, offer
67	0.102	create, passion, love, creative, life, share
68	0.118	love, home, family, mom, child, time
69	0.044	design, graphic, designer, work, create, creative
70	0.013	tea, coffee, cup, wine, drink, beer
71	0.026	baby, child, make, blanket, bear, fabric
72	0.038	travel, world, live, love, country, life
73	0.059	family, mother, year, grow, love, child
74	0.024	dog, pet, collar, love, make, rescue
75	0.009	candle, scent, oil, essential_oil, perfume, fragrance
76	0.049	art, work, design, study, university, year
77	0.055	jewelry, bead, make, piece, bracelet, necklace
78	0.067	business, small, family, work, customer, start
79	0.007	map, button, pin, magnet, board, badge
80	0.038	vintage, antique, item, piece, collection, find
81	0.065	work, create, material, make, idea, product
82	0.111	life, time, feel, day, find, thing
83	0.018	memory, special, love, life, moment, family
84	0.022	costume, make, mask, movie, character, disney
85	0.014	music, god, rosary, play, guitar, lord
86	0.020	print, art, design, frame, digital, wall
87	0.016	wedding, bridal, bride, accessory, dress, design
88	0.118	make, love, thing, create, enjoy, start
89	0.050	product, design, company, line, create, brand
90	0.071	thing, make, love, fun, good, day
91	0.034	wood, make, piece, furniture, work, build
92	0.019	color, blue, black, white, glitter, nail
93	0.094	make, quality, product, item, high, design
94	0.037	nature, tree, mountain, live, beautiful, bird
95	0.042	fashion, accessory, design, style, clothing, woman
96	0.052	art, paint, painting, artist, work, artwork
97	0.031	wedding, party, design, event, invitation, create
98	0.101	make, friend, start, family, love, decide
99	0.045	gift, special, personalize, create, unique, make

Table 2. Two examples of narrative-topics distribution

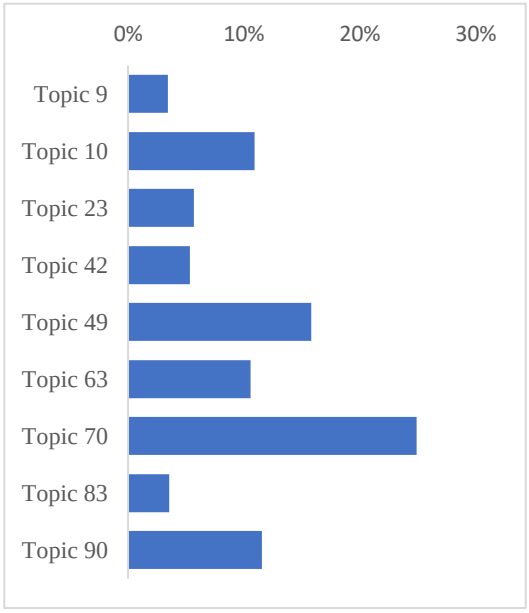
Note: Only topics that account for 1% or more of the narrative are reported

Narrative

Once upon a time there was a whiney guy from Michigan who in 2006 arrived in Southern California where he met a Winey Girl. The whiney guy enjoyed drinking Miller Lite whilst cheering on his beloved Detroit Lions on Sunday afternoons. The Winey Girl wasn't sure a relationship with a beer drinking Michigonian would ever last but bought a 12 pack of Miller Lite and gave it a try. Eventually the 12 pack was gone and the Whiney Guy was still there so they uncorked a bottle of wine to celebrate and soon he became a Winey Guy.

Winey Guy decided to quit the remodel construction work and start his own business creating furniture and unique home décor items out of repurposed wine barrels, appropriately named The Winey Guys and now three years and 1,200 barrels later the Winey Guy is still at it, creating beautiful pieces each and every day for all of you. Be sure to follow us on social media to keep up with all of our latest creations and find out the next chapter of our story!

Topics Distribution



In July 2019, we will celebrate our 19th year in business. I personally have been collecting model trains for over 50+ years, and wanted to take my hobby and turn it into a business. So...Several years ago, I decided to get my trains out of their boxes and up on display. I built a 12' x 20' room for all my model trains. I wanted my toy trains displayed without having support brackets, so I designed an aluminum display shelving system. It held my heaviest locomotives without any trouble. I soon realized other people may have a need for my model railroad display shelves, and that is when I began selling online.

Soon afterward, I started making hand crafted buildings, bridges and accessories for my train room from up-cycled materials (from local companies) and also listed them for sale. They were a success!

We continue to expand since a lot of our products are purchased for fairy gardens, weddings, and party favors. We welcome custom orders of our products and we accept challenges for new ones.

Our number one key to success is making sure our customers are always happy. We go out of our way to ensure low prices and prompt shipping at the best cost.

We have been featured on television, in magazines and news articles for all of our top-quality products.

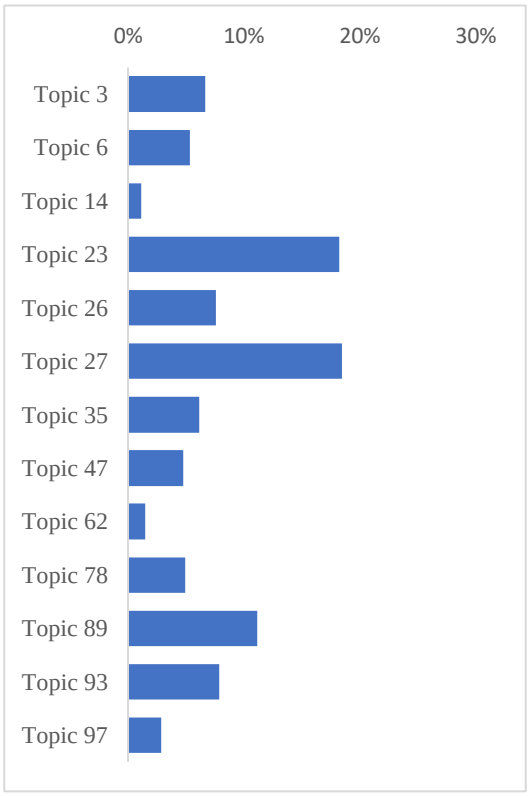


Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variables	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Craft Items Sold	3020.26	12431.07	0	1630579	1						
2. Seller Rating	4.57	1.27	0	5	0.065	1					
3. Platform Experience	5.07	2.8	0	14	0.1621	0.1376	1				
4. Category Competition	2838.33	648.49	924	4469	-0.084	-0.0043	0.0109	1			
5. Gender (Female)	0.65	0.48	0	1	-0.0098	0.0176	0.0153	0.0276	1		
6. Narrative Length	203.10	128.07	39	1640	0.0324	0.0316	0.108	0.0332	0.0054	1	
7. Narrative Conventionality	1.05	0.67	-0.80	5.52	0.0054	-0.0129	-0.0636	0.0129	0.0299	-0.0621	1

Table 4: Negative Binomial Regression Models

Dep. Variable*: Craft Items Sold*	Baseline Model		Model 1	
	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err
Seller Rating	0.604***	0.007	0.605***	0.007
Platform Experience	0.222***	0.003	0.223***	0.003
Category Competition (Log)	-0.589***	0.059	-0.578***	0.059
Gender	-0.032*	0.016	-0.037*	0.016
Narrative length (Log)	0.031*	0.014	0.037**	0.014
Narrative Conventionality			1.133***	0.013
Narrative Conventionality^2			-0.055***	0.009
Nationality		Yes		Yes
Product Category		Yes		Yes
Constant	2.566***	0.083	2.550***	0.083
lnalpha		0.465		0.462
Log pseudo Likelihood		-635142.54		-635002.79
Wald Chi-Square (d.f.)		39651.17 (129)		40071.17(131)
p-value		0.000		0.000

Note: ⁎p < 0.05; ⁎⁎p < 0.01; ⁎⁎⁎p < 0.001. N= 78,758

Figure 1: Topics distribution and Narrative Conventionality: an illustration of two cases

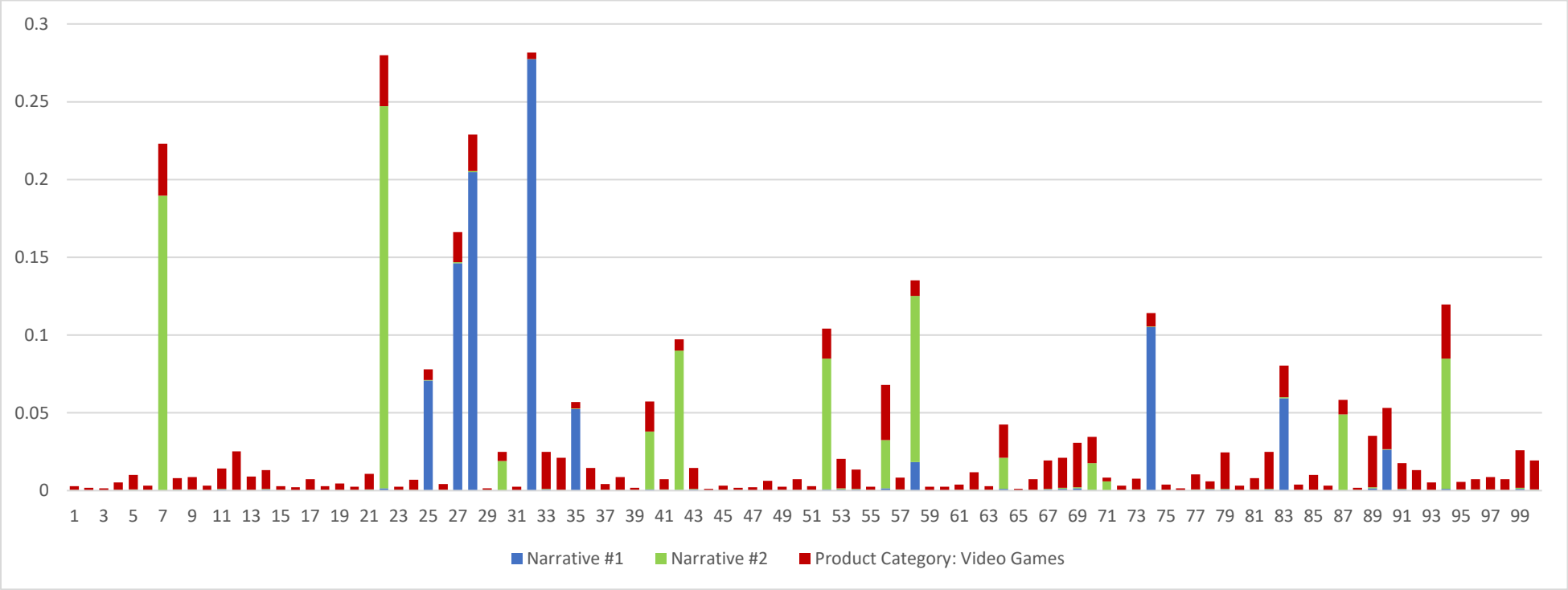
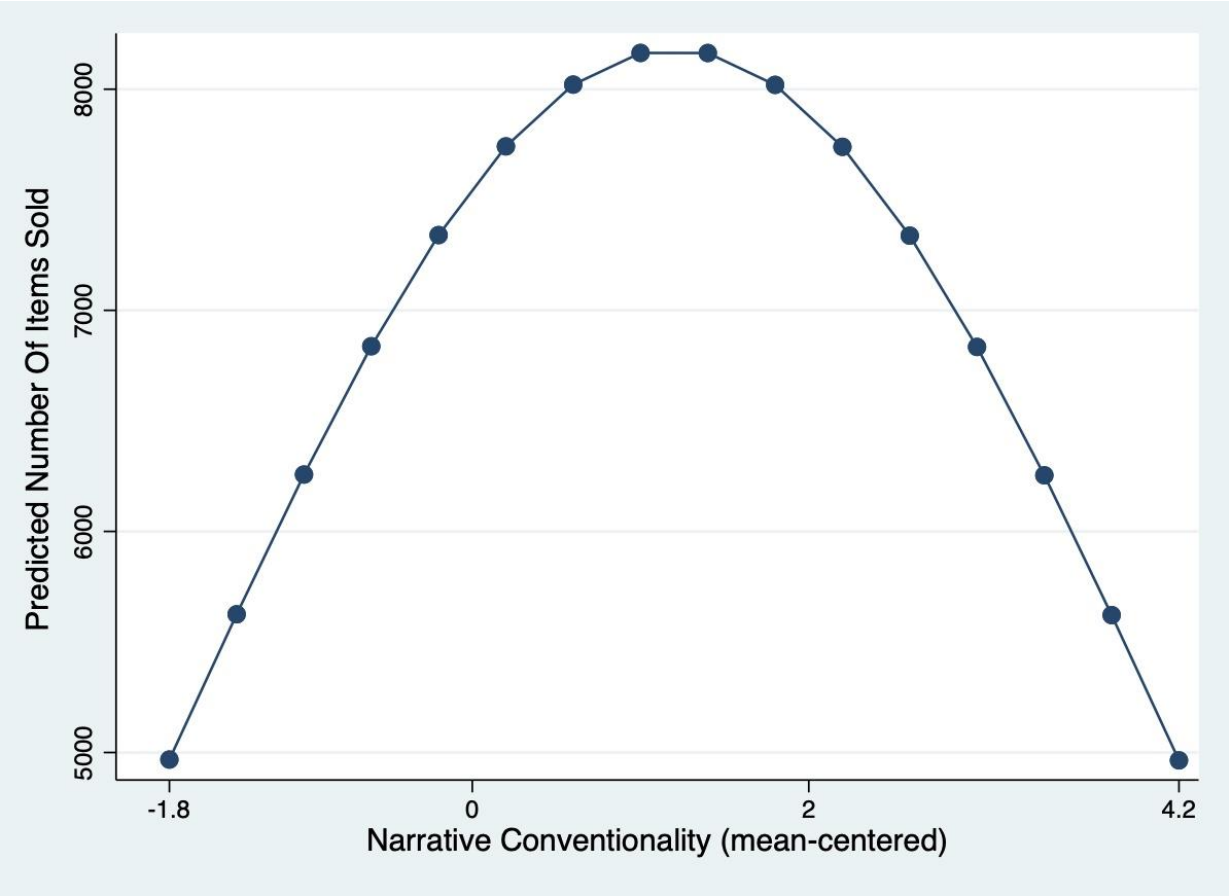


Figure 2: Narrative Conventionality - Craft Items Sold Relationship. Marginal effects estimated by keeping the other covariates constant



ESSAY 3 – CONVENTIONALLY CLIMBING THE LADDER OF ABSTRACTION: HOW ATYPICAL PRODUCERS CAN LEVERAGE NARRATIVE FEATURES TO INCREASE THE APPEAL OF THEIR OFFERING

Introduction

Paul Cézanne is considered one of the great fathers of modern art, but he was fiercely ostracized for defying established norms of beauty in his time. A forerunner of Cubism, he broke away from Impressionism and developed a highly atypical aesthetic style that resisted categorization in contemporary aesthetic theories (Shiff, 1986), resulting in systematic rejection of his work: the Salon, the official art exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, rejected Cézanne's submissions every single year from 1864 to 1869. This example is illustrative of a widely studied phenomenon in organizational and economic sociology: organizational audiences tend to misunderstand, avoid, or devaluate social actors with atypical traits, attributes, and behaviors in a given category who fail to conform to category-based expectations (Zuckerman, 1999, 2000; Hsu et al., 2009; Negro & Leung, 2013). Extensive empirical evidence shows that relevant audiences tend to give poorer evaluations to firms that pursue atypical strategies, markets tend to devalue organizations that fail to conform to category-based expectations, peers tend to penalize people who enact culturally deviant identities, and consumers tend to find hybrid products confusing (Zuckerman, 1999; Hsu, 2006; Kovács & Hannan, 2015; Kovács & Johnson, 2014; Leung & Sharkey, 2014). Preferences for typical stimuli over atypical ones have also been documented with regard to colors, aesthetic qualities, book covers, and semantic categories (Palmer et al., 2013; Piters & Stokmans, 1997; Reber et al., 2004; Rosch, Simpson, et al., 1976).

These recurring empirical associations across cultural, social, and organizational domains are partly the result of social audiences' cognitive constraints about what constitutes an acceptable social object. But they are also emblematic of what French theorist Michel Foucault (1979) called the "normalizing society," referring to the homogenizing pressures exerted by modern institutions which use the statistical abstraction of "normal" as their core organizing principle. Foucault emphasized that normalization serves a "double function" by creating a classification system that immediately rewards or penalizes those it classifies. In this classification system, "the penalty of the norm" functions, paradoxically, by defining a class of subjects as the same and then using normative criteria to establish individual differences. As a result, differences become "value-laden, a shortcoming rather than a viable alternative" (Espeland & Sauder, 2007, p. 73), and pressure builds to conform as closely as possible to the norm.

Luckily, despite abundant evidence regarding the penalties of atypicality, non-compliance can still be a risk worth taking, and conditions may even exist whereby the benefits of atypicality exceed those of conformity. In many contexts, atypicality persists not only because it serves as a salient identity marker (Smith, 2011; Pontikes, 2012; Trapido, 2015; Berger & Packard, 2018), but also because it sometimes results in disproportionate rewards. For example, Smith and Chae (2017) demonstrated that atypical organizations enjoy large rewards when they perform well. Atypical combinations of ideas lead to scientific breakthroughs (Schilling & Green, 2011; Uzzi et al., 2013; Ferguson & Carnabuci, 2017), while the activation of counter-stereotypical thinking propels the generation of creative ideas (e.g., songs are more likely to become commercial hits if they combine sonic elements in atypical ways) (Askin & Mauskapf, 2017; Berger & Packard, 2018; Wagner et al., 2019). These findings may seem unsurprising to scholars in entrepreneurship or strategy for whom nonconformity is often seen as a precursor to competitive advantage, innovation, or the

creation of new categories altogether. Our goal, however, is different. We are not interested in demonstrating the performance upsides of atypicality. Instead, in the spirit of Smith (2011, p. 63) we aim to expose conditions under which "otherwise punishable nonconformity may be tolerated and even rewarded" by relevant audiences.

Recently, researchers have made significant strides in exposing such conditions. Findings from an increasing number of studies indicate that different audiences value different things; therefore, the acceptance of an atypical social object (e.g., idea, individual, organizational form, product/service offering, etc.) likely depends upon the particular theory of value embraced by audience members (Pontikes, 2012; Cattani & Ferriani, 2014). Another line of inquiry points out that unfavorable responses to atypicality may be attenuated when the categorical system underpinning audience evaluation is emergent or in flux (Rosa et al., 1999; Rao et al., 2005; Ruef & Patterson, 2009; Wry & Lounsbury, 2013). Alternative accounts have focused on actors' visible signals of commitment or performance in shaping audiences' perceptions of atypicality, with penalties being replaced by enthusiasm when demonstrations of competence overcome audience skepticism (Smith, 2011; Zuckerman, 2017). Other studies have posited the role of identity features such as status (Phillips et al., 2013), reputation (Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014), and authenticity (Buhr et al., 2021; Hahl & Ha, 2020) in insulating against evaluative discounts faced by atypical actors. The finding that famous chefs have the freedom to erode established cuisine categories without losing audience favor (Rao et al., 2005) is illustrative of this line of scholarship.

These studies have identified several socio-cognitive factors shaping evaluative responses to atypicality, thereby unveiling the "social magic" that creates discontinuity out of continuity (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 117). Yet these explanations are limited in their ability to offer prescriptive advice to actors who do not enjoy reputational advantages or who must simply hope for demand

characterized by heterogeneous evaluative orientations, exogenous conditions of categorical flux, or more simply, benign audiences. We seek to address this limitation by drawing on the nascent stream of scholarship concerned with how actors can strategically mobilize cultural elements to shape audience members' responses to their offers (Kim & Jensen, 2011; Smith & Chae, 2016; Zhao et al., 2013; Cattani et al., 2017; Vossen & Ihl, 2020) and propose that one overlooked source of variation is the linguistic structure of actors' narratives.

Previous accounts have identified how rhetorical mechanisms such as naming practices can be strategically deployed to mitigate the potential for a lack of audience attention due to atypicality. For instance, Zhao, Ishihara, and Lounsbury (2013) showed that genre-spanning movies can use titles to strategically trigger audience attention. Similarly, Smith and Chae (2016) offered evidence that the names of atypical organizations can be used to signal conformity to extant market categories and offset the negative consequences of their atypical positioning. We extend this stream of research to show how atypical actors can effectively mobilize narratives to mitigate demand-side penalties related to atypicality. Narratives[1], defined as "rationalizing accounts of … identity" (Glynn & Navis, 2013, p. 1130) wherein intertwined sequences of events and characters are temporally ordered to make a point (Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Garud & Giuliani, 2013; Polletta & Gardner, 2015), play a crucial role in aligning actions to audience interests and normative beliefs (Lockwood et al., 2019; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Martens et al., 2007).

Accordingly, drawing from the social psychology literature, we focus on two features highlighted in narrative-oriented scholarship as playing a central role in shaping the audience sensemaking process: conventionality and abstraction. Because a narrative situates an audience in a broader system of meanings (Martens et al., 2007; Navis & Glynn, 2011), we contend that decisions about whether to incorporate conventional elements and to use more or less abstract

cognitive anchors directly affect how audience members form expectations and orient their actions (Hayakawa, 1949; Martin et al., 1979; M. Burgoon & Miller, 1985; M. Burgoon, 1995).

Empirically, we focus on the world of crafting, a context where stories constitute a precious source of value and awareness (Mishler, 1992, 2006). Our dataset includes a unique collection of 78,758 narratives from crafters offering their handmade products on Etsy, the world's largest digital marketplace for craft items. Using a combination of topic modeling, automated textual analysis, and econometrics, we show that producers with atypical offerings spanning multiple (cognitively distant) product categories who evoke conventional features in their narratives are more likely to overcome the discounts they would ordinarily experience. In addition, our findings support the contention that the use of abstract language increases audience members' interpretive flexibility, thereby mitigating potential penalties associated with atypicality. Our study provides large-scale evidence of the value of considering linguistic determinants of audience members' evaluative responses, thereby bolstering the key claim among language-oriented organizational scholars that narratives are a pivotal manifestation of cultural practices that actively operate to shape people's inferences about the social worlds they inhabit (Giorgi et al., 2015).

Collectively, our findings contribute to the recent line of scholarship on the conditions under which atypical actors can overcome penalties related to a lack of categorical compliance (Smith, 2011; Smith & Chae, 2017; Younkin & Kashkooli, 2020), and specifically, the mechanisms whereby strategically deployed narratives can alleviate demand-side penalties for atypicality (Zhao et al., 2013; Smith & Chae, 2016). Moreover, by illuminating the interplay between an actor's atypicality and specific narrative features, we contribute to research in cultural entrepreneurship (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Glynn & Navis, 2013; Garud et al., 2014) and respond to calls for more research on how a narrator's characteristics may influence the cultural

resonance of storytelling (Martens et al., 2007). Finally, leveraging computational advancements in textual analysis, we offer an original methodological approach to uncover micro-mechanisms whereby individual narratives elicit particular responses among audiences, thereby contributing to increasing calls to "enrich understanding of the links between words and action outcomes" (Lockwood et al., 2019, p. 21; see also Giorgi et al., 2015).

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we briefly review theoretical and empirical studies on atypicality and narratives which inform our hypotheses. After describing our research context and our data collection and analysis strategies, we present our empirical results. We conclude by discussing implications of our findings and highlighting promising areas for future research.

Theoretical background

The notion of (a)typicality occupies center stage in the rich scholarship concerned with how categorization processes influence social and economic outcomes informed largely by the prototype theory pioneered by Eleanor Rosch and her colleagues (Rosch, 1975; Rosch, Mervis, et al., 1976; Mervis et al., 1976; Rosch, 1978; Mervis & Rosch, 1981). According to this theory, there are two related determinants of what makes an object typicality. First, the extent to which an object shares property with other category members. For example, in the category of birds, a sparrow is small, has long wings and short legs, flies, lives in a nest, lays eggs, tweets, etc. On the other hand, an ostrich is huge, does not fly, has small wings and long legs, and runs. In other words, it lacks some of the most common features of birds, and thus is less typical (i.e., perceived to be less representative of the category) than a sparrow. Second, the extent to which an object tends to span categories (i.e., combine properties of other related categories) (Rosch & Mervis, 1975). For

example, a platypus, which is categorized as a mammal because it nurses its young, also has an iconic duckbill and lays eggs, which are features more commonly seen in categories other than mammals (i.e., birds and reptiles). Rosch and Mervis (1975) showed experimentally that both of these variables—sharing features with other category members and sharing features with contrast categories—influence learning speed, categorization, and categorical expectations. Following Rosch and Mervis's pioneering insights, vast scholarship in psychology and consumer research has demonstrated a positive relationship between typicality and preference, and the tendency to use more typical category members as referents in comparisons (Ward & Loken, 1988). Past research in this tradition has yielded evidence suggesting that relative to atypical instances, typical exemplars of a category are more likely to be named sooner in free recall of category members (Nedungadi & Hutchinson, 1985), learned more rapidly as category members (Meints et al., 1999), and classified more quickly and with fewer errors (Mervis & Rosch, 1981).

Organizational and social theorists interested in categories as "cognitive infrastructures" of markets have also found inspiration in Rosch and her collaborators' findings. In a burgeoning literature, scholars are theorizing the effects of categorical compliance (or degree of typicality as a member of a category) on evaluative outcomes such as preference, allocation of attention, or choice (Zuckerman, 1999; Zuckerman et al., 2003; Hannan, 2010). This literature emphasizes that market audiences follow a process whereby they encounter offerings,[2] identify their relevant traits, place them into categories, and then use these classifications to derive expectations and inform their assessments. Across a variety of settings, this work has demonstrated that audiences respond better to offerings that are more similar to a category prototype (Durand & Paolella, 2013), and penalize offerings that are less representative (i.e., atypical) of that category in terms of social evaluation and appeal (Hsu et al., 2009).

Two underlying logics have been advanced regarding demand-side penalties for atypical offerings. First, typicality invites legitimacy. Categories operate as cognitive shortcuts to facilitate a shared understanding among actors and simplify evaluative efforts by offering proxies for unobservable qualities, skills, and value (Zuckerman, 1999; Hannan et al., 2007). Because atypical offerings violate the assumptions of appropriateness associated with a simple prototype (by, for instance, combining characteristics and elements from disparate categories), they defy codified expectations about desirable and appropriate qualities (Zuckerman, 2000; Zuckerman et al., 2003; Hannan et al., 2019), and consequently, they tend to suffer an illegitimacy discount (Zuckerman, 1999; Negro & Leung, 2013).

The second mechanism evoked to explain such penalties is that atypical offerings generate conceptual confusion and uncertainty because they are challenging to categorize, and it is difficult to educate relevant audiences about things that are unfamiliar to them (Smith, 2011). Because atypical offerings are ambiguously positioned within the system of categories held by the market audience and are likely to be classified under many categories in the same conceptual space, audiences find it difficult to form expectations and make sense of them (Hsu et al., 2009; Hannan et al., 2019). Going back to our earlier example, when the first platypus specimens arrived from Australia, the scientists in England who were examining them suspected a hoax (Hall, 1999). Moreover, research on cognition suggests that atypicality decreases interpretability, as more neural resources are required to perceive and classify atypical patterns (Winkielman et al., 2006).

These dynamics are often intertwined and mutually influence each other (Kovács & Johnson, 2014), decreasing the appeal of atypical offerings to audience members. Overall, the conceptualized mechanisms in the existing literature suggest the following baseline hypothesis:

H1: Producers with atypical offerings have lower expected market appeal than producers with typical offerings.

Language and Categories: Narratives as Devices to Mitigate the Discount of Atypicality

Notwithstanding the many downsides, atypicality may yield substantial benefits, most notably by increasing organizational visibility: atypical offerings stand out more from the crowd and thus may garner attention more easily. Especially in contexts oriented towards novelty, this may be congruent with expectations that actors break from conventions. Although atypical combinations carry a high risk of rejection, such risk can be compensated by disproportionate rewards resulting from breakthrough products. For example, Hsu et al. (2012) suggested that feature films that combine genres in highly innovative ways have a higher likelihood of exceptional success compared with films that do not. In the realm of science, Foster et al. (2015) found that biomedical articles that explore unusual connections among chemicals have a much harder time getting published, but garner significantly more attention when they do. Atypical combinations can also help actors project distinctive identities (Navis & Glynn, 2011; Durand & Paolella, 2013), which may be valued by customers who can fulfill their desire to gain status by purchasing distinctive products (Lynn & Harris, 1997), even if those products are distinctive in name only (Miller & Kahn, 2005).

These examples help explain why scholarly attention is shifting from documenting and explaining the atypicality penalty to identifying factors that moderate its functioning. To this end, various lines of research have focused on audience-side enabling factors such as the existence of an audience predisposed to favor atypicality. Novelty-hungry venture capitalists may treat evidence of product atypicality as a proxy for innovation (Pontikes, 2012), just as "high-brow consumers may use their acceptance of atypical products to signal their education" (Kacperczyk

& Younkin, 2017, p. 740) or critics may actively target atypical offerings to affirm their connoisseurship (Chong, 2013). Related studies have shown that settings populated by multiple audiences may be less averse to atypicality (Cattani et al., 2014; Goldberg et al., 2016). Diverse audiences may mitigate the potential illegitimacy penalty by rendering an unfavorable evaluation less salient, as offerings can be evaluated differently by audiences holding different world theories (Durand & Paolella, 2013; Ertug et al., 2016). It has also been noted that audiences are more open to atypical product offerings introduced by high-status actors (Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014). High status in a particular market space insulates offerings from viability concerns because status can serve as a signal of quality (Podolny, 2005). Broadly, an actor's status can mitigate uncertainty associated with atypical offerings (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001). Evidence of success also may reduce evaluators' reliance on typicality and provide producers with greater leeway for experimentation (Smith, 2011).

Research in this area has begun to shed light on how the atypicality penalty can be avoided; however, because it focuses primarily on factors over which producers have no or very limited control (i.e., the audience's structure or orientation), we know much less about how producers can strategically position their offerings according to their interests and audience members' current or future preferences (Cattani et al., 2017). In particular, we suggest that the narrative elements producers can mobilize to frame their offerings constitute an overlooked, yet critical driver of evaluation. Accordingly, in the next section, we draw on language-oriented organizational scholarship and cognitive psychology to posit two different narrative features that producers can leverage to mitigate against audiences' potential adverse reactions to their atypical offerings—namely, narrative conventionality and narrative abstraction. Narrative conventionality is inherently tied to a story's content and plays a central role in shaping resonance, thereby facilitating

fit with audience members' extant cognitive orientations (Giorgi, 2017). Narrative abstraction focuses more on a story's linguistic attributes, affecting audience members' responses to a given concept via its comprehensibility (Rosch, Mervis, et al., 1976; Pan et al., 2018; Younkin & Kashkooli, 2020).

Conveying Atypicality Through Narratives: Conventionality and Abstraction

As both "the product and the context of discursive and material interactions that define the meaning, legitimacy, and moral order of our society" (Delmestri et al., 2020, p. 910), categories and the act of categorizing are deeply anchored in language. Categories are reservoirs of cultural codes that producers can mobilize to construct their narratives, which in turn shape audience attention and sensemaking efforts (Garud et al., 2014; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Martens et al., 2007; Navis & Glynn, 2011; Sinha et al., 2020). From a theoretical perspective, the insight that narratives can shape audience perceptions by influencing how the information under scrutiny is cognitively processed finds significant leverage in language expectancy theory. This theory holds that individuals develop normative expectations concerning appropriate communication styles in specific situations (M. Burgoon & Miller, 1985; M. Burgoon, 1995; M. Burgoon et al., 2002). Such expectations affect individuals' attitudes toward messages. Cognitive studies have revealed the existence of expected language use patterns (Ashcraft, 1989) which operate along multiple language features, including intensity, complexity, and emotional tone (M. Burgoon & Miller, 1985; Craig & Blankenship, 2011; Averbeck & Miller, 2014). Along these lines, researchers have linked the frequency of the use of specific style word categories with how individuals are perceived by others, thereby resulting in tangible performance outcomes such as job attainment (Berry et al., 1997). More recently, entrepreneurship scholars have shown that crowdfunding audiences are

sensitive to the linguistic styles used by entrepreneurs to describe their ideas (Parhankangas & Renko, 2017; see also Manning & Bejarano, 2017). Related streams of research have shed light on the role of narratives in helping audiences appreciate more clearly how and the extent to which a particular product is associated with claimed categories, emphasizing categories' underlying cultural codes and meanings (Martens et al., 2007; Vossen & Ihl, 2020).

This work suggests that the strategic mobilization of language helps audiences relate to offerings, thereby improving their evaluations.[3] It also suggests that "resonance," defined as "an audience's experienced personal connection" with words (Giorgi, 2017, p. 716), is a central mechanism in achieving desired outcomes through language. For example, in organizational settings, resonance has been invoked as a mechanism to account for differences in analysts' abilities to shape investors' evaluations of their work (Giorgi & Weber, 2015) and entrepreneurs' abilities to secure resources for new ventures (Martens et al., 2007; van Werven et al., 2015). In all of these examples, language effectively matched audiences' beliefs (Giorgi, 2017; Lockwood et al., 2019). To account for language effectiveness through resonance, scholars have emphasized the crucial role of words with cultural salience—that is, words aligned with the broader cultural canons in which the audience is embedded (Benford & Snow, 2000). An exemplary linguistic manifestation of this form of cultural embeddedness is the use of conventional narrative elements.[4]

When a narrative evokes conventional codes (e.g., signs, images, cues, etc.), it facilitates understanding, enhances familiarity, and consequently makes it easier for audiences to relate to a product they might otherwise dismiss (Garud et al., 2014; Manning & Bejarano, 2017; Lockwood et al., 2019). For instance, Elsbach and Kramer (2003) showed that Hollywood screenwriters are expected to be extremely creative, and that experts tend to dismiss those who do not highlight this conventional feature in their storyline pitches. Of course, this narrative evaluation process is deeply

embedded in the cultural context, as conventionality is determined by prevailing norms, beliefs, or assumptions (Bruner, 1991; Navis & Glynn, 2011). It follows from these arguments that when producers describe atypical offerings using conventional narratives, they can help audiences (re)contextualize the offerings using familiar references and logics, thereby alleviating the puzzlement atypicality is likely to beget. In other words, narratives with conventional elements can facilitate audiences' cognitive processing of atypicality by making "the unfamiliar familiar ... [with] terms that are understandable, distilling and ordering otherwise ambiguous cues in order to make them coherent" (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001, p. 549), and "reconnecting seemingly independent or unrelated categorical cultural codes" (Vossen & Ihl, 2020, p. 4), thereby fulfilling expectations of legitimacy usually defied by atypical offerings (Navis & Glynn, 2011; Durand & Kremp, 2016).

Consistent with this idea, recent studies have shown that managers of atypical organizations may prepare for legitimacy threats by using naming conventions that signal conformity to existing market categories (Smith & Chae, 2016). Similarly, Zhao et al. (2013) suggested that strategic names imbued with known reputations counter liabilities associated with category-spanning by channeling attention and credibility. These examples capture the gist of our moderating hypothesis, implying that imbuing an atypical offering's narrative with conventional elements can help audiences anchor their evaluations on prevailing references and norms in a given context, thereby mitigating the atypicality penalty. Accordingly, we expect:

H2: The atypicality penalty decreases as the contextual conventionality of a producer's narrative increases.

The impacts of narratives are likely to be determined not only by their content, but perhaps even more so by how that content is presented (Pennebaker et al., 2003). Findings from linguistics and cognition studies demonstrate that language abstraction is crucial in contextualizing the meaning carried by words and in subsequent information processing (Rosch, 1975; Rosch, Mervis, et al., 1976). The basic principle is that thoughts and communication fall on a concreteness-abstraction continuum that identifies different hierarchically-organized conceptual levels at which meanings are evoked by words (Hayakawa, 1949; Rosch, 1975; Mervis & Rosch, 1981). While concrete language refers to descriptive words that provide specific information and contextual nuance (Hansen & Wänke, 2010), abstract words refer to general, superordinate, high-order decontextualized concepts (Brysbaert et al., 2014).

As structural features of language, concreteness and abstraction provide specific cues for interpreting entities (or situations), and in turn help audiences construct conceptual representations of the real world and take action (Semin, 2000; Lupyan & Lewis, 2019). For instance, consider these two sentences describing the same situation but with variation in the semantic dimension of abstraction/concreteness (Rosch, 1975; Rosch, Mervis, et al., 1976):

The diver was surrounded by *fish.*

The diver was surrounded by *sharks*.

In this example, the use of the more specific and concrete word *sharks* significantly alters the inferences drawn about the same situation cued more abstractly with the word *fish*. Consistent with this idea, social and cognitive psychologists have systematically shown that a narrative's level of abstraction affects a variety of inferential judgments regarding aspects of narrative content, such as the likelihood of an event reoccurring, the stability of the relationships between characters depicted in the narrative, the duration of the events described, and characteristics of the narrator

(e.g., trustworthiness) (Hansen & Wänke, 2010; Pan et al., 2018; Semin & De Poot, 1997; Semin & Greenslade, 1985; Semin & Smith, 1999).

Given this crucial role in orienting attention and structuring cognition (Semin, 2000; Rubini et al., 2014), abstraction is also a key mechanism in resolving the tensions of unsuccessful categorization efforts. Several studies suggest that when objects or situations present multiple and contrasting cues, the inability to reconcile characteristic features with a known category can be resolved by adopting a more abstract level of categorization (Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015). Younkin and Kashkooli (2020) offered strong empirical evidence to corroborate this idea by demonstrating that when customers hear songs that combine extremely distant genres (e.g., folk and rap), they are more likely to resolve the ambiguity surrounding classification by using more abstract, superordinate categories such as *sound* or *music*. Findings in the marketing literature on lifestyle branding also show that abstraction facilitates complex categorization processes. Indeed, brands that are marketed based on more abstract "lifestyle" associations (e.g., Ralph Lauren) have historically succeeded in introducing confusing offerings that span many seemingly disparate categories (e.g., table linens, sunglasses, paint) (Batra et al., 2010). When companies shift the focus of their advertising from concrete product features to more abstract benefits, they divert customers' attention to more general attributes (Chernev et al., 2011) and enable people to "broaden their horizons" (E. M. Burgoon et al., 2013, p. 505), rendering distant combinations easier to grasp (Hayakawa, 1949; Martin et al., 1979). In a similar vein, Shih (2021) suggests that increasing the level of abstraction is a way to push forward the innovative frontier by making difficult-to-understand technologies more easily accessible to other innovators.

Combining these lines of reasoning, we argue that narrative abstraction can offer cues that promote a more inclusive classification process which in turn reduces the complexity of

categorizing atypical offers and leads to a more lenient evaluation. To further illustrate this point, consider a "typical" case of atypicality: an actor trying to broaden her identity by taking on multiple and diverse professional roles (Zuckerman et al., 2003; Leung, 2014). Now consider the following two sentences with different levels of abstraction:

Leah is an extraordinary *painter* and a talented *musician.*

Leah is an extraordinary *artist.*

The nouns *painter* and *musician* evoke a network of attributes and meanings associated with categories at the basic level of abstraction (Rosch, 1975, 1978), while *artist* reflects a superordinate-level (i.e., more abstract) category. As noted earlier, a lower level of language abstraction implies more contextualization and specificity in the cues. The nouns *painter* and *musician* indeed carry a set of distinctive features that situate the actor within specific groups of artists who express themselves through painting and music, implicitly forming detailed expectations regarding attributes such as artistic movement (Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism), musical style (classical, jazz, soul), techniques (oil, watercolor, acrylic), musical instruments (piano, guitar, drums) and tools (paintbrush, canvas, easel). To fully convey the value of an atypical identity, a narrative leveraging concrete language must therefore include multiple attributes, and an elaborate strategy is necessary to hold the different pieces together (Vaara et al., 2016; Caza et al., 2018). The result of this unfamiliar combination which is not easily categorized is increased cognitive load due to the difficulty of commingling multiple elements and locating them within a common overarching theme. Thus, when producers situate atypical offerings within concrete narratives, they are more likely to create confusion and thus negatively influence market appeal.

On the contrary, when moving up the abstraction ladder, the generalizability of the attributes evoked by language increases (Rosch, Mervis, et al., 1976), thereby minimizing

differences and emphasizing linkages between roles, in some cases making them more relevant (Wry & Lounsbury, 2013; Younkin & Kashkooli, 2020). Going back to our example, the word *artist* leaves out the specific features associated with the words *painter* and *musician*, and retains only those attributes shared across the multitude of creative people (painters and musicians, but also writers or sculptors). Hence, the more abstract word *artist* evokes general features and broader meanings such as creativity, self-expression, and perseverance that can help people draw on a more encompassing category in their evaluation of Leah's atypicality. Thus, the more abstract category of artists likely results in an attenuation of cognitive as well as legitimacy-based penalties. For this reason, we argue that abstract narratives, by evoking more general meanings, may prove useful in resolving audience confusion and invite an alternative lens for the classification of atypical offerings, thereby moderating the atypicality discount.

In sum, leveraging narrative abstraction is an effective strategy to emphasize more essential features and prompt a shift towards a superordinate level of processing of atypical offerings, thereby reconciling the conceptual ambiguity associated with classification (Younkin & Kashkooli, 2020). In other words, these arguments suggest that the aversion to atypicality driving audience members' negative responses may attenuate at a high level of narrative abstraction.

H3: The atypicality penalty decreases as the level of abstraction of a producer's narrative increases.

Empirical Setting: Etsy and the world of crafting

Our empirical setting is Etsy, a digital platform that enables creative small businesses to establish virtual shops to sell handmade items and craft supplies. With more than 47 million active buyers (Etsy & GfK, 2019), Etsy is the largest digital marketplace in the craft industry valued

around $43.9 billion in the United States in 2017 (Dobush, 2017). The rise of marketplaces for arts and crafts reflects broader societal trends towards self-expression and work fluidity (Barley et al., 2017; Petriglieri et al., 2018, 2019). An increasing number of people are deciding to pursue their passions professionally (Alboher, 2012; Thorgren et al., 2014; Solesvik, 2017; Caza et al., 2018), and the craft economy offers a viable way to do so. Indications of the current interest in crafts include the proliferation of amateur craft shows over the last 5 to 10 years. The Magazine Publishers of America lists around 300 magazines devoted to crafts and hobbies. Countless blogs and online video tutorials explaining crafting techniques and offering DIY tips have been produced, primarily by Millennials and members of Generation Z (Danziger, 2018). To some extent, this trend appears to mirror the original Arts and Crafts movement of the 19th century, with digital transformation being the key enabler. The advent of digital platforms and the corresponding rise of online communities have provided creative people with endless ways to share ideas, express themselves meaningfully and learn new skills (H. Kim, 2018). Digital platforms such as Etsy, Zibbet, and Artfire create new market opportunities for millions of crafters and artists, enabling them to showcase their work anywhere in the world and make a living from their products.

This setting affords several theoretical and empirical advantages. First, in this context, crafters have little latitude to tailor and frame their offerings to compensate for an atypical positioning within the offering space. Etsy, like most online markets, displays all products offered by crafters on their home pages, where offerings are grouped into categories to help audience members more easily navigate the different products. For this reason, atypical offerings that span multiple and unrelated categories become immediately evident. Second, and more importantly, in this craftsmanship space, stories are a significant source of value. Beyond helping individuals create their identities as crafters and artists (Mishler, 1992, 2006), stories play a crucial role in

building customers' appreciation of crafters' work, connecting products to artisans' biographies, and infusing objects with value, both symbolic and material. In addition, because digital platforms offer the unprecedented capability to aggregate and quickly render a massive number of offerings comparable, careful attention must be paid to storytelling to stand out in an environment characterized by intense competition for attention. Finally, crucial to this study's purpose, this platform-based marketplace was created to match people with similar interests and provide a space where crafters could build a community to collectively increase their customer appeal.

As a consequence, Etsy has enabled and encouraged communication among crafters and customers. The platform enables crafters not only to seek feedback and suggestions from their peers in a vibrant online community (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015), but also to share the stories behind their products and life choices, the creative process, and future expectations on their profile pages to foster connection and engagement with broader audiences. In Figure 1, we present two examples of crafters' stories, illustrating the main characteristics of narrative accounts (Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Garud & Giuliani, 2013).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Data and Empirical Strategy

We employed web scraping algorithms on Etsy's website to gather data about 192,305 crafters operating in the digital marketplace in March 2019. We visited their profile pages to collect each crafter's socio-demographic characteristics, cumulative performance statistics, personal story, and self-determined list of product categories. We eliminated crafters from the sample who did not have narratives on their profile pages or whose narratives were written in a language other

than English. In addition, because the performance of conventional topic models degrades significantly when applied to short texts due to infrequent word co-occurrence patterns in each document (Cheng et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2014), we excluded all documents with less than 30 words from the analysis.[5] All of the raw textual data were preprocessed following recommendations in the literature (Feldman & Sanger, 2007; Hickman et al., 2020). We used NLTK libraries in Python and Google Refine Expression Language (GREL) to eliminate punctuation, stopwords (pronouns, prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions), non-relevant elements (such as numbers, personal names or links to social network profiles), as well as non-English and extremely infrequent words that could bias the results (Bird, 2006). Our final sample comprises validated narratives from 78,758 crafters (one narrative per crafter) operating in 146 product categories on the platform.[6] The total size of the corpus is 6,072,413 words, and the average narrative length is 201 words.

Measures

Dependent variable. To test our hypotheses, we followed previous studies and relied on sales as an indicator of market appeal (e.g., Kim & Jensen, 2011; Zhao et al., 2013). In digital contexts, the number of items sold provides a direct indication of *market appeal*; thus, the dependent variable in this study is the number of products sold by crafters. In supplementary analyses used as robustness checks, we employed an alternative approach that measures market appeal as the number of reviews received by each crafter (controlling for their quality).

Independent variables. Prior research has shown that an offering's *atypicality* can be gleaned from the number of categories spanned and the level of similarity between the categories (Hsu et al., 2009; Goldberg et al., 2016). Our measurement of atypicality thus relies on the set of product categories available to crafters on the platform. The rationale behind this approach is that if a crafter spans multiple product categories, offerings are unlikely to conform to each category's

salient and typical attributes (Hsu et al., 2009), especially if those categories are conceptually different (Kovács & Hannan, 2015). Consider three artisans: one sells leather shoes, the second sells leather shoes and leather jewelry, and the third sells leather shoes and handmade soaps. Based on category membership, the first artisan can be considered to have the most typical offering among the three, because the other two artisans span multiple categories. However, the third artisan's offering is more atypical than the second artisan's because leather shoes and handmade soaps share very few attributes and target totally unrelated customers, unlike leather shoes and leather jewelry. We used a consolidated measure available in the literature to measure atypicality (Kovács & Hannan, 2015; Goldberg et al., 2016):

$$\text{Atypicality} = 1 - \left(\frac{1}{1 + \frac{D(t)}{(|l_t| - 1)}} \right), if\ |l_t| > 1$$

where $|l_c|$ denotes the number of the product categories an offering belongs to and *D(t)* represents the sum of the pairwise cognitive distance between those categories, calculated using an adjusted Jaccard similarity index given by the formula $D(t) = \sum_{i \in l_t} \sum_{j \in l_t} l\,(i,t) l(j,t) (-\frac{\ln(J(i,j))}{\gamma})$ (Goldberg et al., 2016). In online digital markets, increasing the number of product niches served is a powerful strategy to boost visibility and sales, creating a so-called long-tail effect (Anderson, 2004). Unsurprisingly, the average level of atypicality in this setting is quite high (mean = 0.30, standard deviation = 0.33). For this reason, in line with previous work (e.g., Schilling & Green, 2011; Uzzi et al., 2013), we created a binary variable to classify crafters at the 90th percentile or above (i.e., > 1.5 standard deviations above the mean level of atypicality) as atypical.

The study of narratives in cultural dynamics has benefited tremendously from the increased availability of textual data and the development of new analytical tools for analyzing them (DiMaggio et al., 2013; Berger & Packard, 2018). We used topic modeling to explore the narratives

of the crafters on Etsy. Topic modeling is gaining increased traction in social science as a suitable approach for uncovering patterns in textual data (for a review see Hannigan et al., 2019). Recent examples include Kaplan and Vakili's (2015) topic modeling approach to infer the novelty of ideas embedded in patent applications, Croidieu and Kim's (2018) investigation of how non-professional actors become recognized as legitimate field experts, and Haans's (2019) model of the extent to which firms differentiate their positioning statements in creative industries. We used latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic models (Blei et al., 2003) to analyze the full set of documents collected in order to discover the hidden thematic structure behind the stories of the crafters. The basic assumptions of these "generative models for documents" (Steyvers & Griffiths, 2007, p. 424) are that each document is a random combination of latent topics, each of which represents a probability distribution of words which define the meaning of the topic (Mohr & Bogdanov, 2013; Hannigan et al., 2019). Since the analysis of language in a document is a useful way to unravel its cognitive content (Whorf, 1956; Duriau et al., 2007), identifying latent topics and their distribution over the entire set of narratives offers valuable insights into the different dimensions along which sellers craft their stories in this setting. To determine the optimal number of topics, we combined statistical and interpretative logics (DiMaggio et al., 2013; Hannigan et al., 2019), leading to a solution with 90 topics that balances trade-offs between topic variation, statistical validation, and ease of interpretation.[7] Table A1 in the Appendix lists all 90 topics.

We conceptualized *narrative conventionality* as a systematic bias towards topics (and thus features) that are also central in other crafters' narratives. We utilized the structure of the listing categories to define narrative conventionality. The 146 product categories identify the context: topics that are highly relevant in a product category indicate conventional features. LDA yields two important outputs: the distribution of topics in each document and the weight of topics in the

corpus of data. First, we calculated the weight of topics in each of the 146 product categories to identify the most shared and diffused topics (see Berger & Packard, 2018 for a similar application). Then, we used the actual distribution of topics in each narrative to measure narrative conventionality. Specifically, we adapted a measure developed by Durand and Kremp (2016) to capture the extent to which crafters overemphasized topics representative of the product category and of the entire marketplace. To operationalize the variable, we regressed the proportion of each crafter's narrative devoted to a particular topic against the proportion of all other artisans' narratives dedicated to that topic within the same product category using the following equation:

$$T_{in} = \hat{\alpha} \cdot \bar{T}_i + \widehat{b_i} + u_{ic} \quad \text{with } E(u_{ic}) = 0$$

where T_{in} represents the weight of topic *i* for narrative *n* and $\bar{T}_i$ is the average weight of topic *i* for all other narratives in the category. We used the slope of the regression line as the base for our measure of narrative conventionality. If a relatively large share of a crafter's narrative overlapped with topics in other crafters' stories, the slope of this regression was greater than 1, indicating an above-average presence of conventional topics. Conversely, when a narrative primarily covered topics that did not appear in other crafters' narratives, the slope was less than 1.

Figure 2 provides a graphical illustration of the process. We selected three crafters who were selling their products in the Painting category, whose narratives reflect three different levels of conventionality based on topic distribution. All the topic weights are scaled so that the largest value is equal to 1. The first narrative in Panel A is extremely unconventional: it has a strong religious orientation and revolves around Topic 53 (which accounts for 61% of the entire narrative); however, Topic 53 is scarcely diffused among the narratives of other sellers in this product category. The second narrative in Panel B incorporates some conventional features, as indicated by the fact that Topic 36 (i.e., the most diffused topic in the painting category) comprises

12% of the narrative. However, because two other topics comprise a larger share of this narrative (Topic 84: 30%; Topic 89: 23%), this story is only moderately conventional. The third narrative in Panel C shows a high level of conventionality: the majority of the narrative (51%) is devoted to Topic 36, and other highly emphasized topics (Topic 66: 16%; Topic 58: 11%), are among the most diffused among narratives of crafters targeting the same category.

Insert Figure 2 about here

To measure the *level of abstraction* in crafters' narratives, we used the Brysbaert Concreteness Index (BCI), which relies on abstraction norms for 40,000 commonly used word lemmas in contemporary English (Brysbaert et al., 2014). To build the dataset, the authors asked participants to rate, based on their personal experiences, the concreteness of each word, defined as the extent to which the word refers to a meaning that exists in reality, can be contextualized, and can be experienced directly through one's senses (i.e., by smelling, tasting, touching, hearing, or seeing) and actions. In contrast, abstract words are more difficult to visualize and cannot be experienced physically (e.g., imagination, ethics, and resentment). To derive concreteness norms, the authors asked 4,000 participants to rate each word's concreteness on a scale ranging from 1 (abstract or language based) to 5 (concrete or experience based).[8] To clearly distinguish between concrete and abstract words, we then categorized words with ratings falling 1 SD below the mean as abstract, and all other words as concrete. For example, based on this classification, the words "painter," "canvas," "woodcraftsman," and "jewel" were classified as concrete, while the words "creative", "perseverance", "meaning" were classified abstract.

Based on these two distinct categories, we used the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) text analysis application (Pennebaker et al., 2001; Boyd & Pennebaker, 2015; Harrison & Dossinger, 2017) to calculate the percentage of abstract and concrete words in each narrative.

LIWC is a dictionary-based text analysis software widely adopted to study emotional, cognitive, and structural elements present in individuals' written communications (Pennebaker & King, 1999; Boyd & Pennebaker, 2015) that utilizes user-generated dictionaries to calculate the frequency of dictionary words as a percentage of total words in a text. Using this feature, we computed a concreteness score and an abstraction score for each narrative. Since concreteness and abstraction are two qualitatively different characteristics, we operationalized the level of a narrative's abstraction as the net proportion of abstract words per text, as recommended by Brysbaert et al. (2014). Accordingly, we normalized abstraction and concreteness scores, and then subtracted the normalized concrete score from the normalized abstract score to create a continuous measure of narrative abstraction. More formally, for each narrative we computed the following measures:

$$\text{Conc. Score}_n = \frac{Number\ of\ concrete\ words}{Total\ number\ of\ words} \qquad \text{Abs. score}_n = \frac{Number\ of\ abstract\ words}{Total\ number\ of\ words}$$

$$\text{Conc.Score'}_n = \frac{\text{Conc.score}_n - \text{Conc.score}_{min}}{\text{Conc.score}_{max} - \text{Conc.score}_{min}} \qquad \text{Abs.Score'}_n = \frac{\text{Abs.score}_n - \text{Abs.score}_{min}}{\text{Abs.score}_{max} - \text{Abs.score}_{min}}$$

$$\text{Narrative abstraction}_n = Abs.Score'_n - Conc.Score'_n$$

A positive value of narrative abstraction reflects the author's tendency to invoke abstract features and concepts in the story.[9] Table 1 presents four examples of narratives at different levels of abstraction, along with their respective abstraction and concreteness scores.

Insert Table 1 about here

Control variables. We also included several control variables at the crafter, market, and narrative levels to rule out possible alternative hypotheses. Several characteristics may influence crafters' market performance. Academic research corroborates the existence of significant evaluative disparities based on gender and race. For instance, the gender imbalance has been

widely documented in entrepreneurial contexts (Brooks et al., 2014; Clarke et al., 2019), particularly in online art marketplaces.[10] Similarly, evaluative discounts are often applied against ethnic and racial minorities. This bias may also affect a well-crafted story (Polletta & Gardner, 2015). For example, Higgins and Brush (2006) showed that poor women who cast their personal stories in heroic terms are more likely to be disbelieved. Accordingly, we controlled for both the *gender* and *nationality* of each crafter. Another potential factor affecting crafters' market performance is their unobservable capabilities and skills (Zuckerman, 2017). In this respect, crafters with better reputations and more experience in the marketplace may systematically outperform newcomers. For this reason, we controlled for *average review score* (a proxy for the crafter's quality and reputation), and *years of experience* on the platform.

The likelihood of a crafter being noticed and appreciated could also depend on market-specific factors. In online marketplaces, certain product categories are more popular than others and have larger customer bases. For instance, Craft & Supplies, Handmade Items, and Jewelry are the top-selling categories on Etsy, as they embody the essence of the marketplace, and sellers operating in these categories report the highest sales.[11] However, top categories naturally lead to a high concentration in certain market niches, making it more difficult for crafters in that space to stand out and attract market attention. We therefore control for *product category* and *level of competition.*

Finally, our literature review surfaced other narrative features that may hinder or facilitate narratives' success in eliciting positive responses. Specifically, ample evidence shows that differences in text length may prompt different reactions via an attention mechanism. In addition, several studies suggest that the extent to which a narrative focuses on the present as opposed to past or future events may influence audience members' responses (Mishler, 2006; Manning &

Bejarano, 2017). Consequently, we introduced two additional control variables, *narrative length* and *narrative temporal orientation*. Table 2 summarizes all of the control variables used in the study and their operationalization.

Insert Table 2 about here

Model Specification

We adopted negative binomial regression because the dependent variable, audience positive reaction, is a non-negative count variable with over dispersion[12] (Hausman et al., 1984). We included robust estimators to control for mild violations of underlying assumptions (Cameron & Trivedi, 1998). Following a hierarchical introduction of our independent variables (Cohen et al., 2015), we created a baseline model including control variables. In Model 1 we introduced *offering atypicality* to test H1. In Models 2 and 3, we introduced interactions between *offering atypicality* and, respectively, *narrative conventionality* and *narrative abstraction* to test H2 and H3.

Findings

Descriptive statistics of the variables and their correlations are shown in Tables 3 and 4, respectively. We calculated means and SDs using untransformed measures for ease of interpretation. All correlations in the data are reasonably low. We further controlled for multicollinearity using Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs). Results show a mean VIF of 3.48; the highest VIF of 9.01 for the Shoes category is below the traditional threshold of 10 (Cohen et al., 2015). Thus, multicollinearity is unlikely to influence our analyses.

Insert Tables 3 and 4 about here

Table 5 presents the results of the negative binomial regression models. To save space, product categories and nationality dummies are not shown in the table. The baseline model shows significant relationships between several of the control variables and market appeal. Consistent with conventional wisdom, we find that better ($\beta = 0.605$, $p < 0.001$) and more experienced crafters ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.001$) are more likely to appeal to the audience. Holding other variables constant, for every additional year of experience and for every additional star in the rating, a crafter's predicted number of products sold increases by 83.0% and 24.8%, respectively. The competition coefficient is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.590$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that attracting market attention is more difficult in crowded niches. We also observe that although 87% of Etsy sellers self-identify as women (Etsy & GfK, 2019), female crafters tend to be slightly penalized compared to their male counterparts ($\beta = -0.032$, $p < 0.05$). Finally, empirical evidence shows that longer narratives ($\beta = 0.031$, $p < 0.05$) are more likely to attract attention and increase market appeal, whereas narratives with a greater focus on past events ($\beta = -0.128$, $p < 0.05$) are less likely to have market appeal.

Insert Table 5 about here

Model 1 introduces *offering atypicality*. The negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.269$, $p < 0.001$), indicates that, in our context, atypical offerings are more likely to be discounted. This result supports our baseline hypothesis and confirms the negative impact of atypicality on audience appeal, as suggested in prior literature. Ceteris paribus, the illegitimacy discount that crafters with atypical offerings experience corresponds to 2623 fewer sales, a considerable drop. This finding stands in contrast to recent evidence suggesting that online contexts should exhibit more tolerance for differentiation (Taeuscher, 2019; Taeuscher et al., 2020).

Turning now to our second variable of theoretical interest, Model 2 adds the interaction between offering atypicality and narrative conventionality. The main effect of *narrative conventionality* is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.103$, $p < 0.001$), confirming previous findings on the importance of displaying familiar cues to increase the effectiveness of a story (Martens et al., 2007; Navis & Glynn, 2011; Vossen & Ihl, 2020). In line with our theory, Model 2 shows that when crafters with atypical offerings incorporate conventional features into their stories, audience members are more likely to appreciate them. More formally, the interaction term between *offering atypicality* and *narrative conventionality* is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.130$, $p < 0.001$), confirming our contention that storytelling can moderate the negative effect of atypicality. By leveraging stories that emphasize conventional elements and features, atypical crafters can increase resonance with audiences and counteract the discounts they usually experience.

Finally, Model 3 assesses the effects of the interaction between *narrative abstraction* and *atypicality*. Consistent with H3, the positive and statistically significant interaction term ($\beta = 0.335$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that atypical crafters who use abstract language in their stories are more likely to mitigate confusion and elicit positive responses in the market. In contrast, the main effect of narrative abstraction is negative but non-significant. Although it falls short of statistical significance, this result not only supports previous findings on the effectiveness of linguistic concreteness (Pan et al., 2018) but also indicates that the same narrative strategy is less effective when paired with atypical offerings: linguistic abstraction makes atypical offerings more appealing. All results are consistent in the fully specified Model 4.

To elucidate the practical implications of our findings, using estimations from the fully specified model (Model 4), we can compare the percentage variation in number of sales for atypical crafters at different levels of narrative conventionality and abstraction. After controlling for

quality, experience, product category and several other individual and contextual factors, the results show that when narrative conventionality is sufficiently high, it can overturn the market appeal penalty suffered by atypical crafters. At the minimum level of narrative conventionality, audience reaction to atypicality translates into 3,444 fewer sales compared to typical crafters. In contrast, for average values of narrative conventionality, this gap diminishes to 2,447 fewer sales, and at the maximum level of conventionality, the negative discount completely disappears, with atypical crafters selling 3,915 more items than typical crafters. Similarly, when sellers with atypical offerings use concrete language, as indicated by low values of narrative abstraction in the data, they sell on average 5,580 fewer items than their typical competitors. However, increasing the abstraction level reduces this discount by an impressive 96.4%: at the maximum level of narrative abstraction, atypical sellers sell, on average, only 201 fewer craft items than more typical sellers.[13] Taken together, these findings suggest that by including conventional elements that resonate with audience expectations and beliefs, and leveraging the flexibility of a more abstract narrative style, atypical actors can harness the symbolic and cultural value of narratives to positively influence audience responses.

Additional Analyses

In addition to the reported analysis, we tested the sensitivity of our results to different model specifications and variable construction approaches (see Table A2 in the Appendix). Model 5 confirms that our results are robust to OLS estimates (with a logarithmic transformation of the dependent variable to limit the violation of OLS assumptions). Second, we addressed the concern that our results might be influenced by the measurement of conventionality, particularly by the number of topics selected. To rule out this potential source of concern, we computed our measure of narrative conventionality for 30, 70, 100 and 140 topics. The number of topics is a crucial

parameter in LDA because it directly affects the granularity of the generated model. Models 6, 7, 8 and 9 confirm that results are consistent with any of these alternatives; however, in Model 6, the interaction between atypicality and narrative conventionality is no longer significant. This supplementary finding confirms the importance of proper fine-tuning of the topic model to yield an accurate representation of the features characterizing the context under study. When analyzing 30 topics (well below the optimal number), the model tends to substantially aggregate concepts and produce a solution with a low level of granularity. This has repercussions for the measure of conventionality because the model does not effectively grasp relevant differences between narratives that use category-specific topics, given the large number of product categories at the crafters' disposal.

We also checked whether our results depend on our conceptualization of abstraction by testing the robustness of our findings using different operationalizations of the construct. Model 10 replicates our results using a different language abstraction measure proposed by Markowitz and Hancock (2016). The authors considered three linguistic elements that signal concreteness in a text—namely, the use of articles, prepositions, and quantifiers—and built an abstraction index, taking the inverse of the sum of the standardized LIWC scores for these three categories. In this abstraction index, higher values indicate a less descriptive and contextualized narrative style. Our results still hold after controlling for this alternative measure.

To ensure that our results are driven by the atypicality of an offering and not simply by variety (Goldberg et al., 2016), we also controlled for producers who pursue a more generalist approach. Model 11 introduces a binary variable that accounts for crafters whose offerings target more than one product category (without considering the conceptual distance between them). Our results remain consistent when we include this binary variable. Moreover, the positive and

significant ($\beta = 0.366$, $p < 0.05$) *offering variety* coefficient indicates that in our context, the audience is not averse to offerings that group different products together, but instead to those that combine categories positioned far apart from each other in the category space (Goldberg et al., 2016). This result adds theoretical nuance to existing evidence that in online digital markets, increasing the number of product niches covered is a powerful strategy to boost visibility and sales (Anderson, 2004; Church & Oakley, 2018). Finally, we performed additional analyses measuring audience appeal as the number of reviews received, controlling for their ratings (Model 12). In digital contexts, the number of reviews provides a further indication of market appeal and audience engagement (Zifla & Wattal, 2016; Church & Oakley, 2018). All coefficients of interest remain significant and in the expected direction, strengthening support for our findings.

Discussion

Stories are a communal currency of humanity. –Tahir Shah, *Arabian Nights*

Narratives and categories are pervasive cultural resources deployed to explore, navigate and shape reality (Zuckerman, 1999; Navis & Glynn, 2011), but their interplay has received little attention (Giorgi et al., 2015). We have attempted to bring together category- and narrative-oriented organizational scholarship to develop insights into how atypical actors can leverage the power of narratives to shape audience expectations and mitigate the evaluative discounts they usually suffer. Such an effort seems particularly timely. The rapidly changing nature of work (Barley et al., 2017; Caza et al., 2018; Kuhn & Maleki, 2017), the rise of digital platforms and their transformative impacts on market structures (Cutolo & Kenney, 2020), as well as the recent disruptions caused by the global pandemic have created unprecedented organizational challenges, exposing an urgent need for new and unconventional approaches to social problems. Yet,

audiences' well-known aversion to a lack of conformance to conventions, standards and categorical boundaries poses a significant hurdle to this call for atypicality. How can actors succeed in their attempts to advance unconventional offerings and escape the normalizing constraints so aptly described by Michel Foucault?

To address this question, we relied on literature that frames language as a resource that individuals may deploy to influence audiences' socio-cognitive processes by strategically presenting facets of reality (Semin, 2000). Combining topic modeling with dictionary-based content analysis, we examined the narratives of 78,758 crafters operating on Etsy, the largest digital marketplace for handmade and craft items. Our findings indicate that when atypical crafters incorporate conventional features into their narratives and evoke central topics in their selected product categories, they are more likely to elicit audience interest and build resonance, thereby offsetting the evaluative discounts they usually face. Our findings also show that climbing the ladder of abstraction helps atypical crafters overcome the confusion and ambiguity stemming from membership in multiple categories (Hayakawa, 1949), orienting the audience towards more favorable interpretations of atypicality. We argued that although abstraction per se is generally less effective than concreteness in convincing audiences, it can prompt a favorable interpretation of atypical offerings by simplifying the complexity of their categorization and helping to frame their features as coherent and intriguing, rather than ambiguous and confusing. Below we discuss the contributions of these findings to the cultural entrepreneurship and categorization literatures and other related studies.

First, our study contributes to the rich stream of research investigating the role of narratives in cultural entrepreneurship (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Martens et al., 2007; Wry & Lounsbury, 2013; Garud et al., 2014). We have analyzed two narrative features—conventionality and

abstraction—which shape audiences' evaluative responses. The positive interaction effect between conventionality and atypicality is consistent with prior evidence suggesting that clear, unambiguous stories effectively support resource acquisition (Martens et al., 2007; Navis & Glynn, 2011). Perhaps more intriguingly, our findings also show that atypical crafters face penalties when they infuse their narratives with concreteness, but benefit from framing their narratives in abstract terms. Abstraction is a conceptual mechanism fundamentally related to how humans think and communicate (Rosch, Mervis, et al., 1976; Martin et al., 1979; Pan et al., 2018), and it directly affects narratives' scope, comprehension, and effectiveness (Hayakawa, 1949; Martin et al., 1979). By highlighting the importance of fit between storytellers' offerings and the linguistic structures they use to describe them, we make a first step in exposing the interaction effects between these two dimensions and atypicality in shaping audience members' responses. These findings should be particularly relevant to scholars interested in the strategic choices that actors make to improve how their products are received (Cattani et al., 2017; B. K. Kim & Jensen, 2011; Younkin & Kashkooli, 2020), especially in cultural markets in which respect for aesthetic standards and an orientation towards novelty often coexist in a dialectic fashion, and decision-makers' choices typically are subject to ambiguous assessment criteria (Bielby & Bielby, 1994).

Second, our study has implications for categorization research (Zuckerman, 1999; Pontikes, 2012). In particular, we extend recent studies on the interplay between categorization and language by drawing attention to the role of narratives as navigational devices that may support audiences in making sense of atypical propositions. With few exceptions (Dobrev et al., 2006; Verhaal et al., 2015; Smith & Chae, 2016) the potential of language has not been incorporated into the debate on the consequences of atypicality. Although perhaps circumscribed to instances where audiences and candidates can interact freely with each other (i.e., without third-party mediation),

this language-informed perspective augments our understanding of the possible agentic mechanisms that may offset the perils of atypicality (Zuckerman, 2017; Smith & Chae, 2017). At a broader level, these findings substantiate the notion that narratives can support social actors' efforts at challenging the disciplinary power exerted by modern institutions which use the statistical abstraction of "normal" as their core organizing principle (Foucault, 1979). Despite being often portrayed as a deliberate attempt at reaping the benefits of innovation and competitive differentiation, the pursuit of atypicality sometimes embodies an act of resistance, an attempt to claim a different identity for oneself and carve out a space for one's distinctive voice within a society that constantly warns against the consequence of nonconformity. We demonstrate that both the content and the structure of narratives can serve this effort. Ultimately, atypical actors may strategically leverage storytelling to foster a more inclusive social space, where non-conventional objects are more likely to be tolerated and even rewarded.

Our results also contribute to previous research that conceives of (a)typicality as a multidimensional construct (Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014; Durand & Kremp, 2016; Berger & Packard, 2018; Beck et al., 2019). Indeed, social actors can simultaneously be atypical with respect to one dimension (categorical positioning) and very typical with respect to another (narrative conventionality), and our study provides evidence that these dimensions jointly influence audience appeal. This finding speaks to the literature on tradeoffs in strategy (Deephouse, 1999; Haans, 2019), suggesting that actors can balance typicality and atypicality across socio-cultural dimensions to achieve new forms of optimal distinctiveness (Barlow et al., 2019).

To the best of our knowledge, this paper offers one of the first large-scale applications of topic modeling combined with computer-based content analysis to the study of entrepreneurial narratives and their performance impacts. Computational linguistics provides excellent

opportunities to improve our understanding of narratives' pivotal role in social and cultural phenomena. With the growing availability of tools to unravel latent cognitive, structural, and emotional meanings of large collections of texts (Hannigan et al., 2019), as well as vast textual databases online (e.g., Berger & Packard, 2018), these opportunities are even more intriguing. Our approach for extracting and measuring narratives' conventionality and abstraction has the merit of being easily scalable and adaptable to a wide variety of settings; however, we are well aware that the proper application of these and related analytical approaches presuppose a strong understanding of the underlying assumptions. For instance, decisions made during text preprocessing or when tuning LDA model parameters may affect the statistical power of subsequent analyses, and ultimately, the efficacy of text mining classification results (Agrawal et al., 2018; Hickman et al., 2020). Continuing to engage with this growing methodological space is crucial to making progress in the development of reliable and rigorous analytical toolkits for the study of cultural domains (DiMaggio et al., 2013).

Finally, to illustrate the practical meaning of our findings, consider the profound transformation in the nature of work that has dramatically transformed the notion of a "typical career" (Petriglieri et al., 2019). Increasingly, individuals are embracing atypical work paths, such as by holding multiple jobs simultaneously (e.g., lawyer and yoga instructor, real estate agent and blogger) to enrich their work experiences and pursue their individual dreams, passions or serendipitous opportunities (Campion et al., 2020; Caza et al., 2018). These individuals experience severe difficulties in conveying the value of their professional endeavors to colleagues and potential employers because they deviate from prototypical career models (Zuckerman et al., 2003; Leung, 2014; Caza et al., 2018). Our work offers actionable evidence on how these atypical professionals could frame their own stories to communicate their capabilities without coming

across as dilettantes. To give a practical example, these atypical workers could strategically craft a broader narrative around their strengths and work style (e.g., in the *About* section on their LinkedIn profiles or in application cover letter) drawing attention to the conventional skills and capabilities that match specific jobs they are targeting (e.g., identifying keywords that recruiters in the industry are paying attention to), or emphasizing the overarching purpose behind all of their work experiences rather than describing each one in great detail.

Limitations and Future Research

Our study's insights should be validated in other settings exhibiting varying degrees of tolerance for atypicality. For instance, several features of digital marketplaces should increase opportunities for actors who do not conform to categorical standards to be appreciated, regardless of their narratives (Taeuscher et al., 2020). Among the technological and architectural components provided by digital platforms to limit negative externalities, reviews, rankings and recommendation systems relieve typicality pressure, as they publicly document positive past performance and signal quality, capability, and commitment. While our findings may be generalizable, in future research scholars could explore whether they hold in contexts where atypicality elicits more or less substantial penalties. Consistent with previous research (Kovács & Hannan, 2015; Goldberg et al., 2016), we inferred offering atypicality from a measure of positioning within the broad category space. While generally accurate, this approach does not capture the distance of a given offering from the category prototype, thereby providing only a partial perspective on atypicality. Indeed, offerings that do not span categories can still be atypical with respect to typical traits of that category (Askin & Mauskapf, 2017). This within-category atypicality could be explored in future conceptual and empirical research.

This study also reveals other promising opportunities for future research. For example, while we considered the mediating role of actor-level features, previous research has shown that contextual characteristics may hinder or facilitate narratives' capacity to attract audience attention (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Navis & Glynn, 2011; Haans, 2019). Among relevant contextual factors, we suggest that market competition is an important structural dimension that can drastically affect how audiences interpret and react to narratives. When a market is crowded (i.e., the number of potential actors is high), a differentiation strategy is expected to be positively correlated with competitive success (Porter, 1980). Within such an environment, we would expect a narrative strategy that mobilizes different cultural elements to prevail over one that emphasizes congruity and adherence to conventional approaches. In the future, researchers may take advantage of some of the empirical strategies employed here to shed light on this aspect.

Furthermore, the proposed mechanisms might be contingent on audience-level characteristics. For instance, differences between experts and laypersons in the appreciation of atypicality (Kim & Jensen, 2011; Pontikes, 2012) or individual differences in the tolerance for ambiguity (Furnham & Ribchester, 1995; Boulougne & Durand, 2021) may also result in heterogeneous preferences for conventionality or abstraction. More research is needed to shed light on how audience characteristics influence the interaction between categories and language. Finally, while we have focused explicitly on narratives as means for sensemaking and sensegiving, several other non-narrative forms of linguistic communication exist, such as discourses, frames and accounts (Lockwood et al., 2019). In future studies, it might be fruitful to examine the antecedents of different linguistic approaches. For example: Who is more likely to develop a narrative over other forms of communication, and under what conditions? When are actors more

likely to employ abstract as opposed to concrete narratives? Where do conventional narratives come from? These and other related questions merit further research attention.

Conclusions

We have sought to answer the question of how actors who occupy atypical positions within a market can leverage storytelling to overcome penalties for nonconformity. Drawing on research in linguistics and cognitive psychology, we have shown that conventionality and abstraction are critical features of this process. Specifically, narrative conventionality infuses legitimacy into atypical actors' offerings by aligning them with audience expectations, while narrative abstraction facilitates audience sensemaking processes by triggering a more inclusive categorization process, thereby reducing conceptual complexity. We hope this research will stimulate renewed interest in the language-category nexus and improve our appreciation of how language can shape social, cultural and economic dynamics.

References

Agrawal, A., Fu, W., & Menzies, T. (2018). What is wrong with topic modeling? And how to fix it using search-based software engineering. *Information and Software Technology*, *98*, 74–88.

Alboher, M. (2012). *One person/multiple careers: The original guide to the slash/career*. https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=06900999-9955-422B-9720-DFF8358CF4B5

Aldrich, H. E., & Fiol, C. M. (1994). Fools Rush in? The Institutional Context of Industry Creation. *Academy of Management Review*, *19*(4), 645–670.

Anderson, C. (2004). *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice is Creating Unlimited Demand*. Cornerstone Digital.

Ashcraft, M. H. (1989). *Human memory and cognition.* Scott, Foresman & Co.

Askin, N., & Mauskapf, M. (2017). What Makes Popular Culture Popular? Product Features and Optimal Differentiation in Music. *American Sociological Review*, *82*(5), 910–944.

Averbeck, J. M., & Miller, C. (2014). Expanding Language Expectancy Theory: The Suasory Effects of Lexical Complexity and Syntactic Complexity on Effective Message Design. *Communication Studies*, *65*(1), 72–95.

Barley, S. R., Bechky, B. A., & Milliken, F. J. (2017). The Changing Nature of Work: Careers, Identities, and Work Lives in the 21st Century. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, *3*(2), 111–115.

Barlow, M. A., Verhaal, J. C., & Angus, R. W. (2019). Optimal distinctiveness, strategic categorization, and product market entry on the Google Play app platform. *Strategic Management Journal*, smj.3019.

Batra, R., Lenk, P., & Wedel, M. (2010). Brand Extension Strategy Planning: Empirical Estimation of Brand–Category Personality Fit and Atypicality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *47*(2), 335–347.

Beck, N., Swaminathan, A., Wade, J. B., & Wezel, F. C. (2019). Industry Clusters and Organizational Prototypes: Evidence From the Franconian Brewing Industry. *Journal of Management*, *45*(7), 2978–3008.

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *26*(1), 611–639.

Berger, J., & Packard, G. (2018). Are Atypical Things More Popular? *Psychological Science*, *29*(7), 1178–1184.

Berry, D. S., Pennebaker, J. W., Mueller, J. S., & Hiller, W. S. (1997). Linguistic bases of social perception. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *23*(5), 526–537.

Bielby, W. T., & Bielby, D. D. (1994). " All Hits Are Flukes": Institutionalized Decision Making and the Rhetoric of Network Prime-Time Program Development. *American Journal of Sociology*, *99*(5), 1287–1313.

Bird, S. (2006). NLTK: The natural language toolkit. *Proceedings of the COLING/ACL on Interactive Presentation Sessions* -, 69–72.

Blei, D. M., Ng, A. Y., & Jordan, M. I. (2003). Latent dirichlet allocation. *Journal of Machine Learning Research*, *3*(Jan), 993–1022.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.

Boyd, R. L., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2015). A way with words: Using language for psychological science in the modern era. *Consumer Psychology in a Social Media World*, 222–236.

Brooks, A. W., Huang, L., Kearney, S. W., & Murray, F. E. (2014). Investors prefer entrepreneurial ventures pitched by attractive men. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *111*(12), 4427–4431.

Bruner, J. (1991). The Narrative Construction of Reality. *Critical Inquiry*, *18*(1), 1–21.

Brysbaert, M., Warriner, A. B., & Kuperman, V. (2014). Concreteness ratings for 40 thousand generally known English word lemmas. *Behavior Research Methods*, *46*(3), 904–911.

Buhr, H., Funk, R. J., & Owen-Smith, J. (2021). The authenticity premium: Balancing conformity and innovation in high technology industries. *Research Policy*, *50*(1), 104085.

Burgoon, E. M., Henderson, M. D., & Markman, A. B. (2013). There Are Many Ways to See the Forest for the Trees: A Tour Guide for Abstraction. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *8*(5), 501–520.

Burgoon, M. (1995). Language expectancy theory: Elaboration, explication, and extension. *Communication and Social Influence Processes*, 29–52.

Burgoon, M., Denning, V., & Roberts, L. (2002). Language expectancy theorY. In *The Persuasion Handbook: Developments in Theory and Practice* (pp. 117–136). Sage Publications.

Burgoon, M., & Miller, G. R. (1985). An expectancy interpretation of language and persuasion. In H. Giles & R. St. Clair (Eds.), *Recent advances in language, communication, and social psychology* (pp. 199–229). Routledge.

Cameron, A. C., & Trivedi, P. K. (1998). *Regression analysis of count data*. Cambridge University Press.

Campion, E. D., Caza, B. B., & Moss, S. E. (2020). Multiple Jobholding: An Integrative Systematic Review and Future Research Agenda. *Journal of Management*, *46*(1), 165–191.

Cattani, G., Ferriani, S., & Allison, P. D. (2014). Insiders, Outsiders, and the Struggle for Consecration in Cultural Fields: A Core-Periphery Perspective. *American Sociological Review*, *79*(2), 258–281.

Cattani, G., Ferriani, S., & Lanza, A. (2017). Deconstructing the Outsider Puzzle: The Legitimation Journey of Novelty. *Organization Science*, *28*(6), 965–992.

Caza, B. B., Moss, S., & Vough, H. (2018). From Synchronizing to Harmonizing: The Process of Authenticating Multiple Work Identities. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *63*(4), 703–745.

Cheng, X., Yan, X., Lan, Y., & Guo, J. (2014). Btm: Topic modeling over short texts. *IEEE Transactions on Knowledge and Data Engineering*, *26*(12), 2928–2941.

Chernev, A., Hamilton, R., & Gal, D. (2011). Competing for consumer identity: Limits to self-expression and the perils of lifestyle branding. *Journal of Marketing*, *75*(3), 66–82.

Chong, P. (2013). Legitimate judgment in art, the scientific world reversed? Maintaining critical distance in evaluation. *Social Studies of Science*, *43*(2), 265–281.

Church, E. M., & Oakley, R. L. (2018). Etsy and the long-tail: How microenterprises use hyper-differentiation in online handicraft marketplaces. *Electronic Commerce Research*, *18*(4), 883–898.

Clarke, J. S., Cornelissen, J. P., & Healey, M. P. (2019). Actions Speak Louder than Words: How Figurative Language and Gesturing in Entrepreneurial Pitches Influences Investment Judgments. *Academy of Management Journal*, *62*(2), 335–360.

Cohen, J., Cohen, P., West, S. G., & Aiken, L. S. (2015). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences*. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780203774441

Craig, T. Y., & Blankenship, K. L. (2011). Language and persuasion: Linguistic extremity influences message processing and behavioral intentions. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *30*(3), 290–310.

Croidieu, G., & Kim, P. H. (2018). Labor of Love: Amateurs and Lay-expertise Legitimation in the Early U.S. Radio Field. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *63*(1), 1–42.

Cutolo, D., & Kenney, M. (2020). Platform-Dependent Entrepreneurs: Power Asymmetries, Risks, and Strategies in the Platform Economy. *Academy of Management Perspectives*.

Danziger, P. N. (2018, July 8). Millennials Are Ready For Crafting, But Is The $36B Crafting Industry Ready For Them? *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/pamdanziger/2018/07/08/millennials-are-ready-for-crafting-but-is-the-36b-crafting-industry-ready-for-them/#1ad162973a2c

Deephouse, D. L. (1999). To Be Different, or to Be the Same? It's a Question (And Theory) of Strategic Balance. *Strategic Management Journal*, *20*(2), 147–166. JSTOR.

Delmestri, G., Wezel, F. C., Goodrick, E., & Washington, M. (2020). The Hidden Paths of Category Research: Climbing new heights and slippery slopes. *Organization Studies*, *41*(7), 909–920.

DiMaggio, P., Nag, M., & Blei, D. (2013). Exploiting affinities between topic modeling and the sociological perspective on culture: Application to newspaper coverage of U.S. government arts funding. *Poetics*, *41*(6), 570–606.

Dobrev, S. D., Ozdemir, S. Z., & Teo, A. C. (2006). The Ecological Interdependence of Emergent and Established Organizational Populations: Legitimacy Transfer, Violation by Comparison, and Unstable Identities. *Organization Science*, *17*(5), 577–597.

Dobush, G. (2017). *Crafter's paradise: The US creativity market is a $44 billion industry*. Quartz. https://qz.com/928235/the-business-of-creativity-is-worth-44-billion/

Durand, R., & Kremp, P.-A. (2016). Classical Deviation: Organizational and Individual Status as Antecedents of Conformity. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*(1), 65–89.

Durand, R., & Paolella, L. (2013). Category Stretching: Reorienting Research on Categories in Strategy, Entrepreneurship, and Organization Theory: Reorienting Research on Categories. *Journal of Management Studies*, *50*(6), 1100–1123.

Duriau, V. J., Reger, R. K., & Pfarrer, M. D. (2007). A Content Analysis of the Content Analysis Literature in Organization Studies: Research Themes, Data Sources, and Methodological Refinements. *Organizational Research Methods*, *10*(1), 5–34.

Elsbach, K. D., & Kramer, R. M. (2003). Assessing creativity in Hollywood pitch meetings: Evidence for a dual-process model of creativity judgments. *Academy of Management Journal*, *46*(3), 283–301.

Ertug, G., Yogev, T., Lee, Y. G., & Hedström, P. (2016). The Art of Representation: How Audience-specific Reputations Affect Success in the Contemporary Art Field. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*(1), 113–134.

Espeland, W. N., & Sauder, M. (2007). Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds. *American Journal of Sociology*, *113*(1), 1–40.

Etsy & GfK. (2019). *Celebrating Creative Entrepreneurship Around the Globe*. https://extfiles.etsy.com/advocacy/Etsy_GlobalSellerCensus_4.2019.pdf

Ewick, P., & Silbey, S. S. (1995). Subversive Stories and Hegemonic Tales: Toward a Sociology of Narrative. *Law & Society Review*, *29*(2), 197.

Feldman, R., & Sanger, J. (2007). *The text mining handbook: Advanced approaches in analyzing unstructured data*. Cambridge University Press.

Ferguson, J.-P., & Carnabuci, G. (2017). Risky Recombinations: Institutional Gatekeeping in the Innovation Process. *Organization Science*, *28*(1), 133–151.

Foster, J. G., Rzhetsky, A., & Evans, J. A. (2015). Tradition and Innovation in Scientists' Research Strategies. *American Sociological Review*, *80*(5), 875–908.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Penguin.

Furnham, A., & Ribchester, T. (1995). Tolerance of ambiguity: A review of the concept, its measurement and applications. *Current Psychology*, *14*(3), 179–199.

Garud, R., & Giuliani, A. P. (2013). A Narrative Perspective on Entrepreneurial Opportunities. *Academy of Management Review*, *38*(1), 157–160.

Garud, R., Schildt, H. A., & Lant, T. K. (2014). Entrepreneurial Storytelling, Future Expectations, and the Paradox of Legitimacy. *Organization Science*, *25*(5), 1479–1492.

Giorgi, S. (2017). The Mind and Heart of Resonance: The Role of Cognition and Emotions in Frame Effectiveness: The Mind and Heart of Resonance. *Journal of Management Studies*, *54*(5), 711–738.

Giorgi, S., Lockwood, C., & Glynn, M. A. (2015). The Many Faces of Culture: Making Sense of 30 Years of Research on Culture in Organization Studies. *The Academy of Management Annals*, *9*(1), 1–54.

Giorgi, S., & Weber, K. (2015). Marks of Distinction: Framing and Audience Appreciation in the Context of Investment Advice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *60*(2), 333–367.

Glenn, J., & Walker, R. (Eds.). (2012). *Significant objects*. Fantagraphics Books.

Glynn, M. A., & Navis, C. (2013). Categories, Identities, and Cultural Classification: Moving Beyond a Model of Categorical Constraint: Categories, Identities, and Cultural Classification. *Journal of Management Studies*, *50*(6), 1124–1137.

Goldberg, A., Hannan, M. T., & Kovács, B. (2016). What Does It Mean to Span Cultural Boundaries? Variety and Atypicality in Cultural Consumption. *American Sociological Review*, *81*(2), 215–241.

Haans, R. F. J. (2019). What's the value of being different when everyone is? The effects of distinctiveness on performance in homogeneous versus heterogeneous categories. *Strategic Management Journal*, *40*(1), 3–27.

Hahl, O., & Ha, J. (2020). Committed Diversification: Why Authenticity Insulates Against Penalties for Diversification. *Organization Science*, *31*(1), 1–22.

Hall, B. K. (1999). The paradoxical platypus. *BioScience*, *49*(3), 211–218.

Hannan, M. T. (2010). Partiality of Memberships in Categories and Audiences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *36*(1), 159–181.

Hannan, M. T., Le Mens, G., Hsu, G., Kovács, B., Negro, G., Pólos, L., Pontikes, E. G., & Sharkey, A. J. (2019). *Concepts and Categories: Foundations for Sociological and Cultural Analysis*. Columbia University Press.

Hannan, M. T., Pólos, L., & Carroll, G. (2007). *Logics of organization theory: Audiences, codes, and ecologies*. Princeton University Press.

Hannigan, T., Haans, R. F. J., Vakili, K., Tchalian, H., Glaser, V., Wang, M., Kaplan, S., & Jennings, P. D. (2019). Topic modeling in management research: Rendering new theory from textual data. *Academy of Management Annals*.

Hansen, J., & Wänke, M. (2010). Truth From Language and Truth From Fit: The Impact of Linguistic Concreteness and Level of Construal on Subjective Truth. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *36*(11), 1576–1588.

Harrison, S. H., & Dossinger, K. (2017). Pliable guidance: A multilevel model of curiosity, feedback seeking, and feedback giving in creative work. *Academy of Management Journal*, *60*(6), 2051–2072.

Hausman, J., Hall, B., & Griliches, Z. (1984). *Econometric Models for Count Data with an Application to the Patents-R&D Relationship* (No. t0017). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Hayakawa, S. I. (1949). *Language in thought and action* (1st ed). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Hickman, L., Thapa, S., Tay, L., Cao, M., & Srinivasan, P. (2020). Text Preprocessing for Text Mining in Organizational Research: Review and Recommendations. *Organizational Research Methods*, 109442812097168.

Higgins, L. D., & Brush, L. D. (2006). Personal Experience Narrative and Public Debate: Writing the Wrongs of Welfare. *College Composition and Communication*, *57*(4), 694–729. JSTOR.

Hsu, G. (2006). Jacks of All Trades and Masters of None: Audiences' Reactions to Spanning Genres in Feature Film Production. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *51*(3), 420–450.

Hsu, G., Hannan, M. T., & Koçak, Ö. (2009). Multiple Category Memberships in Markets: An Integrative Theory and Two Empirical Tests. *American Sociological Review*, *74*(1), 150–169.

Hsu, G., Roberts, P. W., & Swaminathan, A. (2012). Evaluative Schemas and the Mediating Role of Critics. *Organization Science*, *23*(1), 83–97.

Kacperczyk, A., & Younkin, P. (2017). The Paradox of Breadth: The Tension between Experience and Legitimacy in the Transition to Entrepreneurship. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *62*(4), 731–764.

Kang, S. K., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2015). Multiple Identities in Social Perception and Interaction: Challenges and Opportunities. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *66*(1), 547–574.

Kaplan, S., & Vakili, K. (2015). The double-edged sword of recombination in breakthrough innovation: The Double-Edged Sword of Recombination. *Strategic Management Journal*, *36*(10), 1435–1457.

Kim, B. K., & Jensen, M. (2011). How Product Order Affects Market Identity: Repertoire Ordering in the U.S. Opera Market. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *56*(2), 238–256.

Kim, H. (2018). *Knitting Community: Human and Social Capital in the Transition to Entrepreneurship* [Working Paper].

Kovács, B., & Hannan, M. T. (2015). Conceptual Spaces and the Consequences of Category Spanning. *Sociological Science*, *2*, 252–286.

Kovács, B., & Johnson, R. (2014). Contrasting alternative explanations for the consequences of category spanning: A study of restaurant reviews and menus in San Francisco. *Strategic Organization*, *12*(1), 7–37.

Kuhn, K. M., & Galloway, T. L. (2015). With a Little Help From My Competitors: Peer Networking Among Artisan Entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *39*(3), 571–600.

Kuhn, K. M., & Maleki, A. (2017). Micro-entrepreneurs, Dependent Contractors, and Instaserfs: Understanding Online Labor Platform Workforces. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *31*(3), 183–200.

Leung, M. D. (2014). Dilettante or Renaissance Person? How the Order of Job Experiences Affects Hiring in an External Labor Market <sup/>. *American Sociological Review*, *79*(1), 136–158.

Leung, M. D., & Sharkey, A. J. (2014). Out of Sight, Out of Mind? Evidence of Perceptual Factors in the Multiple-Category Discount. *Organization Science*, *25*(1), 171–184.

Lin, T., Tian, W., Mei, Q., & Cheng, H. (2014). The dual-sparse topic model: Mining focused topics and focused terms in short text. *Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on World Wide Web - WWW '14*, 539–550.

Lockwood, C., Giorgi, S., & Glynn, M. A. (2019). "How to Do Things With Words": Mechanisms Bridging Language and Action in Management Research. *Journal of Management*, *45*(1), 7–34.

Lounsbury, M., & Glynn, M. A. (2001). Cultural entrepreneurship: Stories, legitimacy, and the acquisition of resources. *Strategic Management Journal*, *22*(6–7), 545–564.

Lupyan, G., & Lewis, M. (2019). From words-as-mappings to words-as-cues: The role of language in semantic knowledge. *Language, Cognition and Neuroscience*, *34*(10), 1319–1337.

Lynn, M., & Harris, J. (1997). The desire for unique consumer products: A new individual differences scale. *Psychology and Marketing*, *14*(6), 601–616.

Manning, S., & Bejarano, T. A. (2017). Convincing the crowd: Entrepreneurial storytelling in crowdfunding campaigns. *Strategic Organization*, *15*(2), 194–219.

Markowitz, D. M., & Hancock, J. T. (2016). Linguistic Obfuscation in Fraudulent Science. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *35*(4), 435–445.

Martens, M. L., Jennings, J. E., & Jennings, P. D. (2007). Do the Stories They tell get them the Money They Need? The Role of Entrepreneurial Narratives in Resource Acquisition. *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*(5), 1107–1132.

Martin, J., Patterson, K., & Price, R. (1979). *The effects of level of abstraction of a script on accuracy of recall, predictions and beliefs* [Research paper No. 520].

Meints, K., Plunkett, K., & Harris, P. L. (1999). When does and ostrich become a bird? The role of typicality in early word comprehension. *Developmental Psychology*, *35*(4), 1072.

Mervis, C., Catlin, J., & Rosch, E. (1976). Relationships among goodness-of-example, category norms, and word frequency. *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society*, *7*(3), 283–284.

Mervis, C., & Rosch, E. (1981). Categorization of Natural Objects. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *32*(1), 89–115.

Miller, E. G., & Kahn, B. E. (2005). Shades of Meaning: The Effect of Color and Flavor Names on Consumer Choice. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *32*(1), 86–92.

Mishler, E. G. (1992). Work, identity, and narrative: An artist-craftsman's story. In G. C. Rosenwald & R. L. Ochberg, *Storied lives. The cultural politics of self-understanding* (pp. 21–40). Yale University Press.

Mishler, E. G. (2006). Narrative and identity: The double arrow of time. In A. De Fina, D. Schiffrin, & M. Bamberg (Eds.), *Discourse and Identity* (pp. 30–47). Cambridge University Press.

Mohr, J. W., & Bogdanov, P. (2013). Introduction—Topic models: What they are and why they matter. *Poetics*, *41*(6), 545–569.

Navis, C., & Glynn, M. A. (2011). Legitimate Distinctiveness and The Entrepreneurial Identity: Influence on Investor Judgments of New Venture Plausibility. *Academy of Management Review*, *36*(3), 479–499.

Nedungadi, P., & Hutchinson, J. (1985). The prototypicality of brands: Relationships with brand awareness, preference and usage. *ACR North American Advances*.

Negro, G., & Leung, M. D. (2013). "Actual" and Perceptual Effects of Category Spanning. *Organization Science*, *24*(3), 684–696.

Palmer, S. E., Schloss, K. B., & Sammartino, J. (2013). Visual Aesthetics and Human Preference. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *64*(1), 77–107.

Pan, L., McNamara, G., Lee, J. J., Haleblian, J. (John), & Devers, C. E. (2018). Give it to us straight (most of the time): Top managers' use of concrete language and its effect on investor reactions. *Strategic Management Journal*, *39*(8), 2204–2225.

Parhankangas, A., & Renko, M. (2017). Linguistic style and crowdfunding success among social and commercial entrepreneurs. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *32*(2), 215–236.

Pennebaker, J. W., Francis, M. E., & Booth, R. J. (2001). Linguistic inquiry and word count: LIWC 2001. *Mahway: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates*, *71*(2001), 2001.

Pennebaker, J. W., & King, L. A. (1999). Linguistic styles: Language use as an individual difference. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *77*(6), 1296–1312.

Pennebaker, J. W., Mehl, M. R., & Niederhoffer, K. G. (2003). Psychological Aspects of Natural Language Use: Our Words, Our Selves. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *54*(1), 547–577.

Petriglieri, G., Ashford, S. J., & Wrzesniewski, A. (2019). Agony and Ecstasy in the Gig Economy: Cultivating Holding Environments for Precarious and Personalized Work Identities. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *64*(1), 124–170.

Petriglieri, G., Petriglieri, J. L., & Wood, J. D. (2018). Fast Tracks and Inner Journeys: Crafting Portable Selves for Contemporary Careers. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *63*(3), 479–525.

Phillips, D. J., Turco, C. J., & Zuckerman, E. W. (2013). Betrayal as Market Barrier: Identity-Based Limits to Diversification among High-Status Corporate Law Firms. *American Journal of Sociology*, *118*(4), 1023–1054.

Phillips, D. J., & Zuckerman, E. W. (2001). Middle-Status Conformity: Theoretical Restatement and Empirical Demonstration in Two Markets. *American Journal of Sociology*, *107*(2), 379–429.

Piters, R., & Stokmans, M. J. W. (1997). The influence of typicality of book covers on preferences. In G. Guzman, A. Jose, & S. Sanz (Eds.), *The XXII International Colloquium of Economic Psychology* (Vol. 1, p. 41). Unknown Publisher.

Podolny, J. M. (2005). *Status signals: A sociological study of market competition*. Princeton University Press.

Polletta, F., & Gardner, B. G. (2015). Narrative and Social Movements. In D. Della Porta & M. Diani (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*. Oxford University Press.

Pontikes, E. G. (2012). Two Sides of the Same Coin: How Ambiguous Classification Affects Multiple Audiences' Evaluations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *57*(1), 81–118.

Porter, M. E. (1980). *Competitive strategy*. Free Press.

Rao, H., Monin, P., & Durand, R. (2005). Border Crossing: Bricolage and the Erosion of Categorical Boundaries in French Gastronomy. *American Sociological Review*, *70*(6), 968–991.

Reber, R., Schwarz, N., & Winkielman, P. (2004). Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure: Is Beauty in the Perceiver's Processing Experience? *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *8*(4), 364–382.

Rosa, J. A., Porac, J. F., Runser-Spanjol, J., & Saxon, M. S. (1999). Sociocognitive Dynamics in a Product Market. *Journal of Marketing*, *63*(4_suppl1), 64–77.

Rosch, E. (1975). Cognitive representations of semantic categories. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *104*(3), 192–233.

Rosch, E. (1978). Principles of categorization. In E. Rosch & B. Lloyd (Eds.), *Cognition and categorization* (pp. 28–49). Erlbaum.

Rosch, E., & Mervis, C. (1975). Family resemblances: Studies in the internal structure of categories. *Cognitive Psychology*, *7*(4), 573–605.

Rosch, E., Mervis, C., Gray, W. D., Johnson, D. M., & Boyes-Braem, P. (1976). Basic objects in natural categories. *Cognitive Psychology*, *8*(3), 382–439.

Rosch, E., Simpson, C., & Miller, R. S. (1976). Structural bases of typicality effects. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, *2*(4), 491–502.

Rubini, M., Menegatti, M., & Moscatelli, S. (2014). The strategic role of language abstraction in achieving symbolic and practical goals. *European Review of Social Psychology*, *25*(1), 263–313.

Ruef, M., & Patterson, K. (2009). Credit and Classification: The Impact of Industry Boundaries in Nineteenth-Century America. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *54*(3), 486–520.

Schilling, M. A., & Green, E. (2011). Recombinant search and breakthrough idea generation: An analysis of high impact papers in the social sciences. *Research Policy*, *40*(10), 1321–1331.

Semin, G. R. (2000). Language as a Cognitive and Behavioral Structuring Resource: Question—Answer Exchanges. *European Review of Social Psychology*, *11*(1), 75–104.

Semin, G. R., & De Poot, C. J. (1997). The question-answer paradigm: You might regret not noticing how a question is worded. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *73*(3), 472–480.

Semin, G. R., & Greenslade, L. (1985). Differential contributions of linguistic factors to memory-based ratings: Systematizing the systematic distortion hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *49*(6), 1713–1723.

Semin, G. R., & Smith, E. R. (1999). Revisiting the past and back to the future: Memory systems and the linguistic representation of social events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *76*(6), 877–892.

Sgourev, S. V., & Althuizen, N. (2014). "Notable" or "Not Able": When Are Acts of Inconsistency Rewarded? *American Sociological Review*, *79*(2), 282–302.

Shiff, R. (1986). *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art*. University of Chicago Press.

Shih, W. C. (2021). Increasing the Level of Abstraction as a Strategy for Accelerating the Adoption of Complex Technologies. *Strategy Science*, *6*(1), 54–61.

Sinha, P. N., Jaskiewicz, P., Gibb, J., & Combs, J. G. (2020). Managing history: How New Zealand's Gallagher Group used rhetorical narratives to reprioritize and modify imprinted strategic guideposts. *Strategic Management Journal*, *41*(3), 557–589.

Smith, E. (2011). Identities as Lenses: How Organizational Identity Affects Audiences' Evaluation of Organizational Performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *56*(1), 61–94.

Smith, E., & Chae, H. (2016). "We do what we must, and call it by the best names": Can deliberate names offset the consequences of organizational atypicality?: Deliberate Naming. *Strategic Management Journal*, *37*(6), 1021–1033.

Smith, E., & Chae, H. (2017). The Effect of Organizational Atypicality on Reference Group Selection and Performance Evaluation. *Organization Science*, *28*(6), 1134–1149.

Solesvik, M. Z. (2017). Hybrid Entrepreneurship: How and Why Entrepreneurs Combine Employment with Self-Employment. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, *7*(3). http://timreview.ca/article/1063

Steyvers, M., & Griffiths, T. (2007). Probabilistic topic models. *Handbook of Latent Semantic Analysis*, *427*(7), 424–440.

Taeuscher, K. (2019). Reputation and new venture performance in online markets: The moderating role of market crowding. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *34*(6), 105944.

Taeuscher, K., Bouncken, R. B., & Pesch, R. (2020). Gaining Legitimacy by Being Different: Optimal Distinctiveness in Crowdfunding Platforms. *Academy of Management Journal*. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2018.0620

Thorgren, S., Nordström, C., & Wincent, J. (2014). Hybrid entrepreneurship: The importance of passion. *Baltic Journal of Management*, *9*(3), 314–329.

Trapido, D. (2015). How novelty in knowledge earns recognition: The role of consistent identities. *Research Policy*, *44*(8), 1488–1500.

Uzzi, B., Mukherjee, S., Stringer, M., & Jones, B. (2013). Atypical Combinations and Scientific Impact. *Science*, *342*(6157), 468–472.

Vaara, E., Sonenshein, S., & Boje, D. (2016). Narratives as Sources of Stability and Change in Organizations: Approaches and Directions for Future Research. *Academy of Management Annals*, *10*(1), 495–560.

van Werven, R., Bouwmeester, O., & Cornelissen, J. P. (2015). The power of arguments: How entrepreneurs convince stakeholders of the legitimate distinctiveness of their ventures. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *30*(4), 616–631.

Verhaal, J. C., Khessina, O. M., & Dobrev, S. D. (2015). Oppositional Product Names, Organizational Identities, and Product Appeal. *Organization Science*, *26*(5), 1466–1484.

Vossen, A., & Ihl, C. (2020). More than words! How narrative anchoring and enrichment help to balance differentiation and conformity of entrepreneurial products. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *35*(6), 106050. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2020.106050

Wagner, C. S., Whetsell, T. A., & Mukherjee, S. (2019). International research collaboration: Novelty, conventionality, and atypicality in knowledge recombination. *Research Policy*, *48*(5), 1260–1270.

Ward, J., & Loken, B. (1988). The generality of typicality effects on preference and comparison: An exploratory test. *ACR North American Advances*.

Whorf, B. L. (1956). Science and linguistics. In J. B. Carroll (Ed.), *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* (pp. 207–219). MIT Press.

Winkielman, P., Halberstadt, J., Fazendeiro, T., & Catty, S. (2006). Prototypes Are Attractive Because They Are Easy on the Mind. *Psychological Science*, *17*(9), 799–806.

Wry, T., & Lounsbury, M. (2013). Contextualizing the categorical imperative: Category linkages, technology focus, and resource acquisition in nanotechnology entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *28*(1), 117–133.

Younkin, P., & Kashkooli, K. (2020). Stay True to Your Roots? Category Distance, Hierarchy, and the Performance of New Entrants in the Music Industry. *Organization Science*, *31*(3), 604–627.

Zhao, E. Y., Ishihara, M., & Lounsbury, M. (2013). Overcoming the Illegitimacy Discount: Cultural Entrepreneurship in the US Feature Film Industry. *Organization Studies*, *34*(12), 1747–1776.

Zifla, E., & Wattal, S. (2016). *Community engagement in peer-to-peer business: Evidence from Etsy. Com* [Research paper].

Zuckerman, E. W. (1999). The Categorical Imperative: Securities Analysts and the Illegitimacy Discount. *American Journal of Sociology*, *104*(5), 1398–1438.

Zuckerman, E. W. (2000). Focusing the Corporate Product: Securities Analysts and De-Diversification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *45*(3), 591.

Zuckerman, E. W. (2017). The Categorical Imperative Revisited: Implications of Categorization as a Theoretical Tool. In R. Durand, N. Granqvist, & A. Tyllström (Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (Vol. 51, pp. 31–68). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Zuckerman, E. W., Kim, T., Ukanwa, K., & von Rittmann, J. (2003). Robust Identities or Nonentities? Typecasting in the Feature-Film Labor Market. *American Journal of Sociology*, *108*(5), 1018–1073.

Footnotes

1. From this point forward, we use the term narratives and stories interchangeably.
2. Zuckerman (2017) offered a clear account of why (and under what conditions) this process applies equally to offerings and producers.
3. For example, in 2010, two journalists devised an experiment to gauge the extent to which perceptions of value could be altered through the use of language. After putting together a collection of "ordinary objects" (i.e., random junk rescued from thrift stores and yard sales), the two authors asked 100 creative writers to craft stories about the "meanings" of those objects. In one story, a small Russian figurine became "an icon of the fourteenth-century Saint Vralkomir of Dnobst, the patron saint of extremely fast dancing … [which] may come to life and begin dancing, throwing sparks from their wooden pedestals." In another story, a 7-Up glass became the present a girl received for her 13th birthday from her dad, who had abandoned the family a few days before. Next, the authors posted the items and associated stories on eBay to test whether the narratives enhanced the value of the objects. Eventually, the items sold out, turning a profit of more than $3,600. Insignificant objects thus had been transformed into valuable products through narratives (Glenn & Walker, 2012).
4. In many everyday behaviors, people observe conventions—agreements regarding how to act in a specific group or community. Prominent among activities that depend on conventions is our use of language, whereby vocabulary, syntax and general patterns of usage convey an array of agreed-upon meanings.

5. We ran separate analyses excluding narratives with less than 5 (53 documents), 15 (1,365 documents), and 25 (3,219 documents) words. Although results were not significantly different from those reported here, we noticed that after preprocessing (e.g., removing stopwords and extremely uncommon words) these thresholds rendered narratives too short to perform meaningful analyses. For this reason, we followed canonical recommendations in the field of computational linguistics and selected 30 words as the minimum threshold for short documents (Hickman et al., 2020). Correspondingly, the total number of narratives excluded from our sample due to their length is 4,326.
6. Initially, we had intended to collect a longitudinal dataset. Starting in April 2018 we crawled the profiles once a month for almost a year, but in this timeframe, less than 1% of the crafters in the sample modified their narratives. We therefore opted for a cross-sectional dataset obtained from our latest website scrape, which occurred in March 2019.
7. A description of the technical details and the parameters used to fine tune the model is available upon request.
8. For instance, the word "apple" received a concreteness rating of 5, whereas the word "spirituality" received a rating of 0.37 on the same scale.
9. To ensure that our computer-aided content analysis was properly capturing the level of abstraction of the narratives, we manually examined a random set of 30 narratives.
10. https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4er8zOc_D_QQ1l0d3FSemNPeTg/view
11. https://cedcommerce.com/blog/sell-on-etsy-top-selling-items-on-etsy/
12. A likelihood ratio test and a Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test from Cameron and Trivedi (1986) indicated that a pure Poisson model was not appropriate for the data. Nevertheless, to increase confidence in the results, we ran each of the models using a Poisson specification and obtained similar results.
13. The values in this section were predicted using the *margins, at* command in Stata.

Figures

Figure 1. Example Etsy narratives with essential narrative features highlighted (blue: presence of past events/characters; red: events temporally ordered; green: events and characters intertwined).[9]

Sometimes all you need is a good book, a cup of coffee and a nice warm blanket.

I remember the first time my grandma taught me how to knit. I was around eight-year-old and to this day it is one of my most precious memories. We used to sit together, just the two of us, listening to same local radio station, drinking tea, laughing and knitting our troubles away. Sometimes I was just watching her work.

She got sick a few years ago and I desperately wanted to find a nice Christmas present that would keep her warm. When I was shopping for gifts, I saw this amazing chunky yarn made from merino wool. It was thicker and softer than any yarn I've seen before. I felt in love with it right then and I just knew everyone would love it too. It was freezing and snowing when I was carrying this huge skein home, but a smile never left my face. I found my perfect gift! The first two blankets I've ever made were for my Grandma and for my Mum. The two most important women in my life. Women whose love and compassion have shaped me into a person I am today. I poured my heart and soul into those blankets and when I saw a smile on their faces, I knew it was worth it. To this day, whenever I make a red chunky blanket I think of my Grandma.

I love my job. My shop brings me so much joy every day, but nothing makes me happier than the knowledge that somewhere across the globe someone will open their order and feel the same glee and excitement I felt when I touched this beautiful yarn for the first time.

Thank you for visiting my shop:)

Become the woodcarver

I was born in 1980 in the small republic of the Soviet Union, Kirghizstan. In 2003, I graduated from the Kyrgyz Technical University as an electrical engineer. One year later, I realized that this area does not for me. In 2004, I opened a chain of menswear stores. In 2008, I sold my business and emigrated to Canada in the province of Quebec. I started my life all over again. Plus, a new language that should be studied. But, since my arrival, I felt at home! When I left Kirghizstan, I decided to find a profession that I would have liked indeed. In 2009 I was lucky enough and I found myself in an unknown area for me -woodcarving. I started in Workshop "St-Louis-De-France" with Pierre Goulet-professor, who became, later, one of my best friends. I quickly realized that I cannot live without creation.

In the summer of that same year, I found a place at the woodcarving shop where I started like a sculptor. In 2010, I became a member of the Club of woodcarvers of Quebec City. it has opened for me a lot of new horizons and gave me a chance to work with other sculptors. Afterwards, I took part in many competitions and exhibitions. In 2011, I was elected treasurer in the club administration. In the summer 2011, I opened my own workshop. Since that time, I give courses of woodcarving.

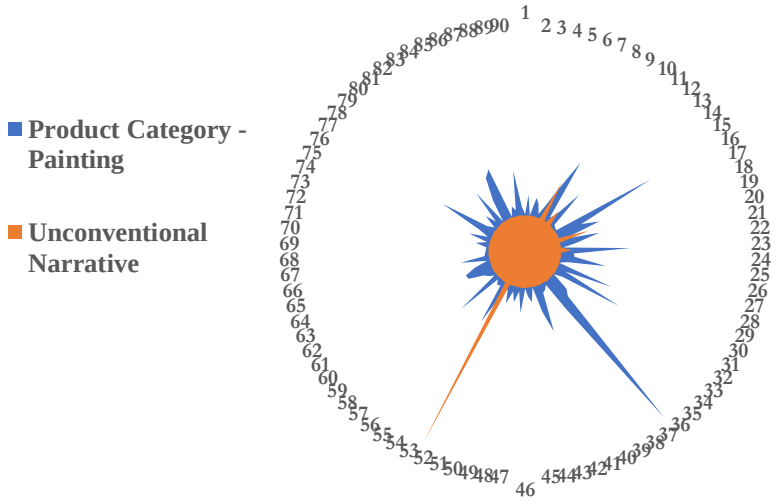
All baggage accumulated and my participation in the work of the club, gave me everything I needed for turn my passion into a real career! In March 2012, I left my job and started working for myself.
At this point I am completely immersed in my professional career. I continue to give woodcarving courses. I am doing special orders, and participating in exhibitions, competitions, and in salons. In November 2012 I was recognized as a professional artist and became a professional member of the CMAQ

[9] These narrative features were identified by Ewick and Silbey (1995) and Garud and Giuliani (2013).

Figure 2. Narrative conventionality relative to the "Painting" product category in which the most diffused topics are Topic 36 (*Artworks, Canvas, Paint, Painting, Art*), Topic 16 (*Love, Create, Share, Life, Inspire*), and Topic 31 (*Art, Work, Gallery, Artist, Create*).

A Father to the Fatherless & Creator of All That is Good
At the age of 19, I ended up on an orphanage in Mexico and it was there God changed my heart forever as He set in my heart a vision to reach the orphan through the Heart of God Ranch. In 2007, God granted me the gift of a beautiful son named Peyton. Not only has God been preparing me through all of my experiences as a born-again believer and teacher to be able to help the orphan, He now entrusted me with the honorable role of being a "Mother" to one of His very own treasures. As a family brought together by God along with our beautiful Aussies, our desire is to build His Kingdom here on earth with the spiritual gifts and physical talents He has given us. As we wait upon Him to reveal the fullness of the Heart of God Ranch, we hope this shop is a blessing to many. We believe as God expands the Heart of God Ranch Sign Co., it will be a part of the physical Ranch yet to come in Tennessee. May "His Kingdom come, His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven" in our lives until that glorious day! "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them..." All glory is His through the name above all names, Jesus Christ our Lord!

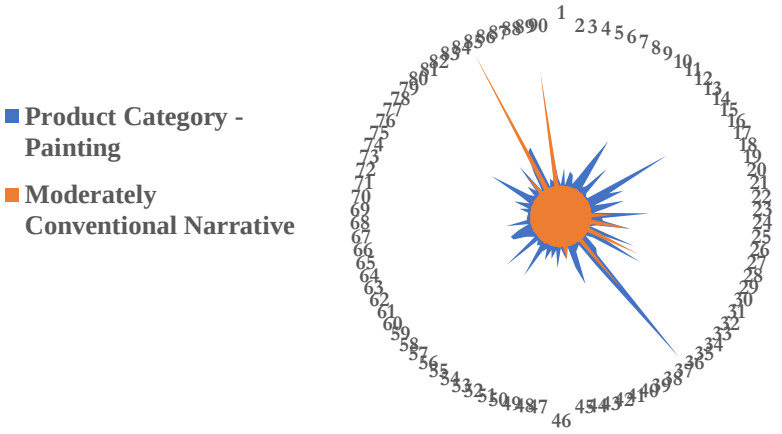
Most diffused topics: Topic 53 (*God, Bless, Give, Serve, Lord*), Topic 8 (*Life, Time, Feel, People, Change*), Topic 19 (*Farm, Live, Animal, Family, Barn*)



Panel A: Unconventional Narrative

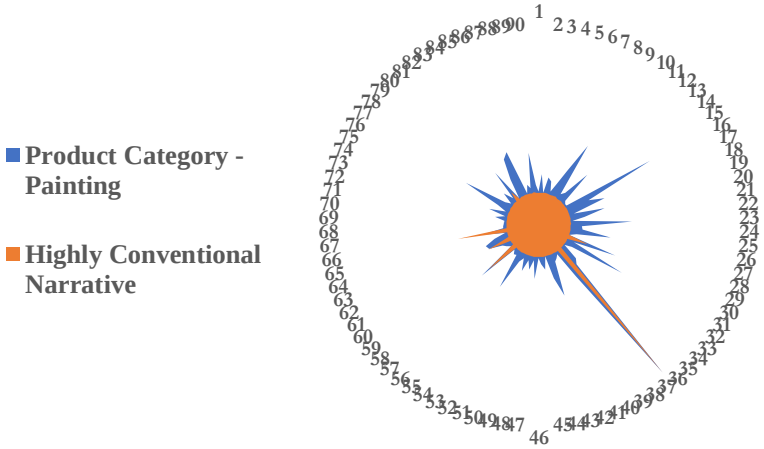
Artist-Turned Biologist-Turned Artist Again
After a decade spent working as a graphic designer for advertising and promotions, I began to feel that I needed a new challenge. Having loved science as a high school student, I decided to return to college to earn a degree in natural resources conservation. This led to my move to Colorado to earn my Wildlife Biology degree at Colorado State University. After another 10 years in wildlife, working with animals both in the field and supporting research and conservation efforts in an office setting, I got the urge to do artwork again. In 2007 I began wildlife watercolor portraits and they were so popular with friends and family that I began selling them online. Nothing makes me happier than being able to make someone's living space a little brighter with one of my prints, depicting one of nature's most noble creatures. Enjoy browsing. Comments and suggestions are always welcome.

Most diffused topics: Topic 84 (*School, Year, Work, Art, College*), Topic 89 (*Make, Start, Friend, Family, Sell*), Topic 36 (*Artworks, Canvas, Paint, Painting, Art*)



Panel B: Moderately Conventional Narrative

Yuri Sinchukov Fine Art
My name is Yuri Sinchukov, I am a professional artist. I was born and grew up in small town Sokal in the west of Ukraine. I started drawing from childhood. I lived without a father, and my mother told me that he was also an artist, and his artworks was beautiful. I wanted to be like my father. I remember I drew my portrait with a ballpoint pen when I was 12 years old. I just looked in the mirror and drew. I was glad of my result. I like to work in different styles of painting and fine arts - realism, impressionism, abstract art, minimalism, etc. I like to draw with a graphite pencil in a realistic style. I also like watercolor, oil painting and color pencils. I am also a drawing teacher for several years and very glad that I can help people draw beautifully. I hope you will enjoy my art! I am always happy when people like my works and value it. Please be sure every artwork I did with positive and good feelings. You can find original, one of a kind painting in my shop as well as many affordable fine art prints.
Most diffused topics: Topic 36 (*Artworks, Canvas, Paint, Painting, Art*), Topic 66 (*Work, Create, Make, Material, Product*), Topic 58 (*Art, Draw, Create, Love, Color*)



Panel C: Highly Conventional Narrative

Tables

Table 1. Narrative abstraction

Narrative	Narrative abstraction	Abstraction score	Concreteness score
I'm a sleepy artist Hi! My name is Saul and I'm an artist! I've been running this Etsy Store since I was around 13 years old. Here I sell my art, which includes painting, prints, stickers, zines, even art dolls! I make everything myself, including the printed goods with a printer I bought myself a few years back. Have any questions? Feel free to ask!	-0.71	17.65%	62.36%
Where love is being created and shared Our shop is a destination to enhance your true style with heartfelt headpieces. We cater for all styles and create everything from earthy bohemian accessories to modern luxe bridal adornments - the perfect addition to your dream day. The shop was originally founded in 2013 on Etsy. Our business grew and we currently have more than 1200 followers from all over the world with extremely positive feedback from previous clients. The key to success is forming a personal connection with every single client to ensure that our fascinating and high-quality designs cater to your individual taste. This personalized touch combined with the professionalism of service that we have become revered for means that we now have a wide base of repeat customers that share in the joy of specially created adornments by us. Each piece is exclusively handmade with love and care in Australia. Most pieces are created with delicate fabrics and feminine beads shining romantically. Only the best materials are carefully handpicked for uniqueness and quality, which is the essence of creating a keepsake heirloom. Let us take you on a journey to reach your perfect look!	-0.69	21%	67%
Everything can be completely different Architect since 1992 I was always fascinated by a poem by Salvatore Quasimodo: "Laughs the magpie, black on the oranges" and especially from that laugh, so humane, that you would never expect from a magpie ... then I like to think that things can be different from what we know and that they can mostly "turn" !!! A crocheted wool thread is the ultimate in the concept of transformation because it is infinitely changeable. The lamps I realize are all different and have only one thing in common: my passion for light, architecture and ... the crochet.	0.33	51.61%	38.7%

Design is a way of life, a point of view. To design is to transform Prose into Poetry" **Paul Rand** Spaces have the potential to physically connect and transport us; our memories, our dreams, and our aspirations. Inspiring spaces activate our senses and refresh our spirits. Design opens the door to the great opportunity of dignifying and adding value and meaning to a space. We create unconventional and unexpected re-imagined designs that have a sense of understated originality, character, and context. Our themes focus on the details of the Bourbon Whiskey and Wine trades, along with Vintage Originality to create unique décor pieces for collectors and connoisseurs.	0.36	48.05%	33.77%

Table 2. Operationalization of control variables

Variable	Operationalization
Seller quality	Average star rating (on a 0–5 scale) received by each seller in the previous 12 months
Experience	Number of years the seller had been on Etsy
Competition	Average number of sellers in the product category
Gender	Binary variable: 0 = male, 1 = female
Nationality	Set of binary variables to account for the sellers' countries of origin: 1 = United States 2 = Europe 3 = South America 4 = Africa 5 = Asia 6 = Oceania 7 = Canada 8 = Not reported
Product category	Set of binary variables for each of the 146 product categories (the full list of product categories is available at https://www.etsy.com/categories)
Narrative length	Number of words in each narrative
Narrative past focus	Normalized percentage of words in each narrative that reflects an individual's past focus (based on a dictionary built in the LIWC program that specifies a set of 145 past oriented words such as "had," "did," "was," "were")
Narrative present focus	Normalized percentage of words in each narrative that reflects an individual's present focus (based on a dictionary built in the LIWC program that specifies a set of 169 past-oriented words such as "is," "does," "are")
Narrative future focus	Normalized percentage of words in each narrative that reflects an individual's future focus (based on a dictionary built in the LIWC program that specifies a set of 48 past-oriented words such as "will," "may," "might," "shall")

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

Binary variable	%	Binary variable	%
Gender		Macro product category	
Male	34.6 %	Shoes	4.02%
Female	65.34%	Clothing	5.47%
Nationality		Books, movies & music	4.60%
USA	55.87%	Paper & party supplies	3.06%
Europe	24.54%	Toys & games	5.37%
South America	0.34%	Craft supplies & tools	7.12%
Asia	2.43%	Weddings	9.49%
Oceania	2.51%	Accessories	16.40%
Africa	0.26%	Bath & beauty	11.70%
Canada	4.31%	Art & collectibles	18.03%
Not declared	9.75%	Electronics & accessories	5.78%
		Pet supplies	7.42%
Atypicality		Home & living	22.10%
Yes	9.02%	Jewelry	16.40%
No	90.98%	Bags & purses	13.14%

Table 4. Correlation matrix

Continuous variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Number of sales	3020.26	12431.07	0	1630579	1									
2. Seller quality	4.57	1.27	0	5	0.065	1								
3. Experience	5.07	2.8	0	14	0.162	0.138	1							
4. Competition	2838.36	648.44	925	4469	-0.089	-0.006	0.014	1						
5. Narrative length	203.1	128.07	39	1640	0.035	0.040	0.123	0.042	1					
6. Narrative past focus	3.54	2.38	0	19.05	-0.008	-0.001	0.001	-0.005	0.001	1				
7. Narrative present focus	8.20	2.80	0	23.94	-0.002	0.001	0.000	0.002	0.003	-0.347	1			
8. Narrative future focus	0.85	0.86	0	10.48	-0.002	-0.002	-0.001	0.003	0.006	-0.036	0.174	1		
9. Narrative conventionality	1.05	0.63	-0.61	4.73	0.013	-0.010	-0.056	0.010	-0.047	-0.001	-0.004	0.002	1	
10. Narrative abstraction	-0.25	0.15	-1.42	0.43	-0.014	-0.023	-0.082	0.028	0.070	-0.001	0.000	0.002	0.000	1

Table 5. Negative binomial regression models for market appeal (coefficients reported)

Variable	Baseline model		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.
Seller quality	0.605***	0.007	0.604***	0.007	0.604***	0.007	0.604***	0.007	0.604***	0.007
Experience	0.222***	0.003	0.222***	0.003	0.223***	0.003	0.222***	0.003	0.223***	0.003
Competition (logged)	-0.590***	0.059	-0.595***	0.059	-0.590***	0.063	-0.595***	0.059	-0.590***	0.060
Gender	-0.032*	0.016	-0.031	0.016	-0.035*	0.015	-0.031	0.016	-0.035*	0.016
Narrative length (logged)	0.031*	0.014	0.031*	0.014	0.037**	0.013	0.032**	0.014	0.037**	0.014
Narrative past focus	-0.128*	0.065	-0.133*	0.065	-0.128*	0.064	-0.133*	0.065	-0.128*	0.065
Narrative present focus	-0.077	0.071	-0.081	0.071	-0.072	0.071	-0.081	0.071	-0.072	0.071
Narrative future focus	-0.069	0.090	-0.068	0.090	-0.070	0.090	-0.069	0.090	-0.071	0.090
Offering atypicality			-0.269***	0.034	-0.372***	0.052	-0.186***	0.051	-0.288***	0.066
Narrative conventionality					0.103***	0.013			0.103***	0.013
Narrative conventionality x Offering atypicality					0.130***	0.040			0.130***	0.040
Narrative abstraction							-0.042	0.055	-0.051	-0.054
Narrative abstraction x Offering atypicality							0.335*	0.147	0.338*	0.147*
Nationality	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Product categories	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Constant	2.621***	0.088	2.602***	0.088	2.461***	0.088	2.590***	0.090	0.388***	0.086
Ln alpha	0.464	0.006	0.463	0.006	0.461	0.006	0.463	0.006	0.398	0.006
Log pseudo likelihood	-635135.67		-635067.92		-634951.84		-635062.75		-634946.37	
Wald Chi-square (d.f.)	39949.13 (132)		40413.89 (133)		40470.24(135)		40470.85 (135)		40519.61 (137)	
p-value	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. N = 78,758

Appendix

Table A1. Complete list of topics and respective weights in the corpus (strongest keywords for each topic are in boldface)

Topic #	Topic weight	Keywords	Topic #	Topic weight	Keywords
1	0.016	**wedding**, bride, bridal, accessory, dress	46	0.026	**product**, natural, skin, ingredient, organic
2	0.050	**gift**, special, personalize, create, make	47	0.105	**make**, quality, create, piece, item
3	0.009	**candle**, oil, scent, essential_oil, perfume	48	0.025	**fashion**, design, designer, accessory, brand
4	0.076	**vintage**, item, find, love, treasure	49	0.034	**house**, home, room, space, work
5	0.036	**order**, item, ship, day, shipping	50	0.022	**doll**, toy, make, child, miniature
6	0.015	**tea**, coffee, cup, bottle, wine	51	0.028	**beach**, sea, nature, tree, beautiful
7	0.044	**make**, size, hand, clean, dry	52	0.009	**music**, play, guitar, instrument, sound
8	0.058	**life**, time, feel, people, change	53	0.015	**god**, bless, give, rosary, serve
9	0.141	**time**, work, business, love, home	54	0.130	**day**, thing, make, time, find
10	0.012	**glass**, piece, stained_glass, art, work	55	0.060	**jewelry**, bead, make, piece, bracelet
11	0.020	**energy**, crystal, healing, spiritual, heal	56	0.022	**year**, diagnose, cancer, health, find
12	0.108	**make**, time, start, work, year	57	0.019	**wool**, silk, fiber, natural, linen
13	0.013	**flower**, floral, wreath, bouquet, make	58	0.030	**art**, draw, create, love, drawing
14	0.030	**clothing**, clothe, make, dress, fabric	59	0.022	**fabric**, quilt, make, sew, pillow
15	0.018	**girl**, make, bow, daughter, accessory	60	0.033	**baby**, child, make, kid, mom
16	0.117	**love**, create, life, world, bring	61	0.044	**style**, woman, design, fashion, wear
17	0.078	**sell**, year, start, business, store	62	0.068	**family**, mother, child, love, year
18	0.025	**print**, design, illustration, work, art	63	0.061	**design**, create, material, modern, piece
19	0.014	**farm**, horse, chicken, live, barn	64	0.055	**item**, find, store, sell, supply
20	0.036	**home**, decor, design, wall, style	65	0.012	**planner**, sticker, button, disney, pin
21	0.021	**paper**, card, stamp, hand, print	66	0.061	**work**, create, make, material, product
22	0.031	**crochet**, knit, yarn, pattern, make	67	0.014	**clay**, ceramic, pottery, piece, work
23	0.075	**world**, life, work, nature, beauty	68	0.015	**plant**, grow, garden, herb, seed
24	0.029	**vintage**, antique, item, piece, collection	69	0.014	**metal**, tool, make, work, hand
25	0.031	**wedding**, party, design, event, invitation	70	0.017	**jewelry**, stone, ring, gemstone, gold
26	0.043	**design**, graphic, designer, work, create	71	0.029	**costume**, make, mask, character, movie
27	0.018	**color**, blue, white, black, glitter	72	0.010	**light**, lamp, design, make, clock
28	0.011	**soap**, make, product, skin, natural	73	0.019	**photography**, photo, image, photograph, camera
29	0.119	**make**, love, thing, people, start	74	0.009	**case**, cover, design, phone, product
30	0.017	**animal**, bird, pet, fur, creature	75	0.018	**sign**, paint, wood, make, frame
31	0.044	**art**, work, artist, create, gallery	76	0.111	**create**, design, business, passion, creative
32	0.032	**dog**, pet, cat, collar, love	77	0.034	**wood**, furniture, piece, make, build
33	0.020	**leather**, make, hand, product, good	78	0.021	**jewelry**, metal, piece, make, silver
34	0.060	**jewelry**, make, design, range, color	79	0.044	**business**, company, team, work, family
35	0.025	**magazine**, feature, show, award, include	80	0.047	**sew**, sewing, machine, make, embroidery
36	0.032	**paint**, art, painting, artist, work	81	0.056	**live**, travel, home, love, mountain
37	0.112	**love**, craft, create, make, enjoy	82	0.009	**hair**, hat, tie, bow_tie, wear
38	0.016	**food**, cake, make, treat, cookie	83	0.106	**product**, quality, high, customer, good
39	0.036	**material**, make, product, recycle, environment	84	0.070	**school**, year, work, art, college
40	0.016	**book**, journal, write, read, story	85	0.113	**custom**, order, make, question, item
41	0.025	**print**, design, shirt, art, quality	86	0.022	**bag**, make, fabric, purse, design
42	0.061	**customer**, love, good, quality, great	87	0.026	**support**, donate, community, local, charity
43	0.007	**shoe**, pair, boot, sock, sandal	88	0.018	**design**, vinyl, custom, decal, engrave
44	0.030	**website**, link, sign, update, visit	89	0.116	**make**, start, friend, family, year
45	0.012	**map**, sport, game, bike, team	90	0.027	**culture**, traditional, artisan, tradition, craft

Table A2. Robustness checks

Variable	Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.
Seller quality	0.562***	0.004	0.604***	0.007	0.604***	0.007	0.604***	0.007
Experience	0.247***	0.002	0.223***	0.003	0.223***	0.003	0.223***	0.003
Competition (logged)	-0.374***	0.036	-0.589***	0.060	-0.594***	0.060	-0.591***	0.060
Gender	-0.022*	0.011	-0.037*	0.016	-0.035*	0.016	-0.035*	0.016
Narrative length (logged)	0.083***	0.010	0.041**	0.013	0.038**	0.013	0.040**	0.013
Narrative past focus	-0.114**	0.044	-0.124+	0.065	-0.132*	0.065	-0.128*	0.065
Narrative present focus	-0.074	0.047	-0.069	0.066	-0.076	0.066	-0.067	0.066
Narrative future focus	-0.035	0.063	-0.072	0.088	-0.072	0.088	-0.074	0.088
Offering atypicality	-0.426***	0.053	-0.172**	0.066	-0.253***	0.066	-0.278***	0.067
Narrative conventionality	0.109***	0.009	0.124***	0.012	0.101***	0.012	0.087***	0.012
Narrative conventionality x Offering atypicality	0.257***	0.032	0.008	0.039	0.095*	0.038	0.127**	0.040
Narrative abstraction	-0.123***	0.037	-0.045	0.055	-0.045	0.055	-0.041	0.055
Narrative abstraction x Offering atypicality	0.244*	0.037	0.341*	0.147	0.327*	0.147	0.341*	0.148
Nationality	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Product categories	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Constant	1.145***	0.061	2.401***	0.090	2.439***	0.089	2.440***	0.090
Ln alpha			0.460	0.006	0.461	0.006	0.461	0.006
R-squared/ Log pseudo likelihood	0.5352		-634914.96		-634950.92		-634965.98	
Wald Chi-square (d.f.)			41347.83 (137)		41155.12 (137)		40767.21 (137)	
p-value			0.000		0.000		0.000	

Note: + $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. N = 78,758

Table A2. Robustness checks (continued)

Seller quality	Model 9		Model 10		Model 11		Model 12 (DV: No. of reviews)	
	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.	Coeff.	Robust Std. Err.
Seller quality	0.603***	0.007	0.604***	0.007	0.605***	0.007	0.605***	0.007
Experience	0.222***	0.003	0.223***	0.003	0.223***	0.003	0.274***	0.003
Competition (logged)	-0.593***	0.059	-0.590***	0.060	-0.583***	0.060	-0.410***	0.063
Gender	-0.033*	0.016	-0.035*	0.016	-0.035*	0.016	-0.013	0.015
Narrative length (logged)	0.038**	0.014	0.037**	0.013	0.038**	0.013	0.064***	0.013
Narrative past focus	-0.130*	0.065	-0.127*	0.065	-0.133*	0.065	-0.140*	0.061
Narrative present focus	-0.074	0.071	-0.068	0.066	-0.077	0.066	-0.052	0.066
Narrative future focus	-0.067	0.090	-0.067	0.088	-0.074	0.088	-0.054	0.088
Offering atypicality	-0.334***	0.066	-0.373***	0.066	-0.223***	0.066	-0.257***	0.064
Offering variety					0.366***	0.040		
Narrative conventionality	0.044***	0.011	0.103***	0.012	0.101***	0.013	0.098***	0.012
Narrative conventionality x Offering atypicality	0.189***	0.040	0.130***	0.039	0.136***	0.040	0.110**	0.038
Narrative abstraction	-0.040	0.040	-0.005	0.055	-0.050	0.055	-0.027	0.052
Narrative abstraction x Offering atypicality	0.371*	0.148	0.027*	0.147	0.372*	0.145	0.275*	0.138
Nationality	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Product categories	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Constant	2.504***	0.090	2.453***	0.088	2.469***	0.090	0.388***	0.086
Ln alpha	0.462	0.006	0.461	0.006	0.460	0.006	0.398	0.006
R-squared/ Log pseudo likelihood	-635009.91		-634946.78		-634874.08		-510997.83	
Wald Chi-square (d.f.)	40515.19 (137)		40570.66 (137)		41182.04 (138)		41052.81 (137)	
p-value	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	

Note: + $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. N = 78,758

CONCLUSION

"…We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it'

(Foucault, 1990, p. 100)

This dissertation's objective was to investigate how actors who do not comply with categorical standards can strategically use linguistic and structural features of narratives to mitigate against the penalties they often face. While past research has explored the contextual and individual features that give social actors more leeway to experiment with atypical identities and practices (Ruef & Patterson, 2009; Cattani et al., 2014; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014; Zuckerman, 2017), this dissertation proposes a narrative framework that illuminates how atypical actors can actively influence the evaluative process of social categorization and mitigate against a negative evaluation.

Acknowledging that narratives provide atypical actors with symbolic and cultural resources to influence social evaluation casts a more positive light on individual ability to defeat or even resist the suffocating system of normalization. An essential feature of Foucault's studies is that language is a critical element for understanding how discourses as a form of de-centered agency opens possibilities of action and change in the social world (Caldwell, 2007). This dissertation empirically demonstrates how narratives may help thwart the disciplining function of categories and support actors to engage with atypical propositions without incurring penalties.

Theoretical Contributions

Drawing on different research streams, this dissertation adds to the management literature by depicting a dialogic and interactive process of category-based evaluation, one where actors can actively shape how audience interprets violations of typical and expected categorical norms. Narratives and categories indeed interact to constitute and shape our reality, influencing how individuals interpret and make sense of the social world. In addition, this dissertation advances our understanding of the notion of atypicality in social settings by distinguish between two previously conflated forms of atypicality – incongruity and blending. Based on this renewed conceptualization, my work proposes a theoretical framework that coherently integrates the large and highly heterogeneous literature that has touched upon or directly grappled with atypicality in such fields as economic sociology, entrepreneurship, psychology, marketing, organizational theory, and strategy, among others. This effort is particularly timely in light of the profound transformations of social and economic settings that have created more space than ever for atypicality. For instance, the changing nature of work and the increasing propensity toward eclectic career trajectories (Barley et al., 2017; Kuhn & Maleki, 2017), the rise of platforms enabling people to juggle multiple jobs and roles (Campion et al., 2020), or the emergence of digital markets where users may expect atypical and unconventional strategies from producers (Taeuscher et al., 2020), emphasize how crucial it is for organizational and management scholars to deepen their focus on this important construct. Finally, by capitalizing on advancements in computational linguistic this dissertation introduces a novel measurement approach to narrative's stylistic features that offers the promise of further illuminating the central role narratives play in shaping social and cultural phenomena.

Managerial Implications

Two main managerial guidelines emerge from this dissertation. First, given the vast diffusion and importance of narratives and storytelling in organizational life and the significant amount of textual data produced, the proposed approach presents itself as a worthy tool that organizations could develop to identify the relevant characteristics that make their (and their competitors') stories more or less effective in persuading the internal and external public. Second, my findings carry direct implications for organizations with atypical features or offering within a category. To avoid a negative market response, these organizations can use storytelling and craft their narratives to incorporate contextually conventional features and a more abstract language.

References

Barley, S. R., Bechky, B. A., & Milliken, F. J. (2017). The Changing Nature of Work: Careers, Identities, and Work Lives in the 21st Century. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, *3*(2), 111–115. https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2017.0034

Caldwell, R. (2007). Agency and Change: Re-evaluating Foucault's Legacy. *Organization*, *14*(6), 769–791. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508407082262

Campion, E. D., Caza, B. B., & Moss, S. E. (2020). Multiple Jobholding: An Integrative Systematic Review and Future Research Agenda. *Journal of Management*, *46*(1), 165–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206319882756

Cattani, G., Ferriani, S., & Allison, P. D. (2014). Insiders, Outsiders, and the Struggle for Consecration in Cultural Fields: A Core-Periphery Perspective. *American Sociological Review*, *79*(2), 258–281. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414520960

Foucault, M. (1990). *The History of Sexuality* (Vintage Books ed). Vintage Books.

Kuhn, K. M., & Maleki, A. (2017). Micro-entrepreneurs, Dependent Contractors, and Instaserfs: Understanding Online Labor Platform Workforces. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *31*(3), 183–200. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2015.0111

Ruef, M., & Patterson, K. (2009). Credit and Classification: The Impact of Industry Boundaries in Nineteenth-Century America. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *54*(3), 486–520. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2009.54.3.486

Sgourev, S. V., & Althuizen, N. (2014). "Notable" or "Not Able": When Are Acts of Inconsistency Rewarded? *American Sociological Review*, *79*(2), 282–302. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414524575

Taeuscher, K., Bouncken, R. B., & Pesch, R. (2020). Gaining Legitimacy by Being Different: Optimal Distinctiveness in Crowdfunding Platforms. *Academy of Management Journal*. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2018.0620

Zuckerman, E. W. (2017). The Categorical Imperative Revisited: Implications of Categorization as a Theoretical Tool. In R. Durand, N. Granqvist, & A. Tyllström (Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (Vol. 51, pp. 31–68). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20170000051001

ESSAYS ON ATYPICALITY: A NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE TO ILLUMINATE HOW ATYPICAL ACTORS CAN COUNTER THE DISCIPLINING EFFECT OF CATEGORIES

Using Big Data and Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools, this dissertation investigates the narrative strategies that atypical actors can leverage to deal with the adverse reactions they often elicit. Extensive research shows that atypical actors, those who fail to abide by established contextual standards and norms, are subject to skepticism and face a higher risk of rejection. Indeed, atypical actors combine features and behaviors in unconventional ways, thereby generating confusion in the audience and instilling doubts about their propositions' legitimacy. However, the same atypicality is often cited as the precursor to socio-cultural innovation and a strategic act to expand the capacity for delivering valued goods and services. Contextualizing the conditions under which atypicality is celebrated or punished has been a significant theoretical challenge for scholars interested in reconciling this tension. Nevertheless, prior work has focused on audience side factors or on actor-side characteristics that are only scantily under an actor's control (e.g., status and reputation). This dissertation demonstrates that atypical actors can use strategically crafted narratives to mitigate against the audience's negative response. In particular, when atypical actors evoke conventional features in their story, they are more likely to overcome the illegitimacy discount usually applied to them. Moreover, narratives become successful navigational devices for atypicality when atypical actors use a more abstract language. This simplifies classification and provides the audience with more flexibility to interpret and understand them.

Keywords: atypicality; narratives; topic modeling; categories, normalization

Thesis Supervisor*: Simone Ferriani*