EXPLORING MARKET RESPONSES TO MODERNIST PRESSURES IN TRADITIONAL INDUSTRIES

by

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To my son, Alp Güney,
who arrived as this journey unfolded and made it better in every way.
You are my most beautiful chapter.

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

"Machines don't have ears. That is why we continue to make our cymbals according to the ancient tradition—with an open eye towards the music that's being made now, and in the future."
—A veteran cymbal producer, 1980s

"I wouldn't care if you made all your cymbals start to finish with a power hammer and never swing a hammer at it. That doesn't change the fact that you're a cymbal smith or an artisan."
— A contemporary cymbal producer, 2020s

Modernity has long been equated with rationalization, industrialization, and the standardization of economic life (Weber, 1946; Schumpeter, 1934). Yet, this narrative has been increasingly challenged. Scholars have argued that modernity is not solely about disenchantment and uniformity, but also about the rise of culturalization—the embedding of aesthetic, symbolic, and experiential value in economic goods (Suddaby et al., 2017). This shift has transformed capitalist economies from systems dominated by mass industrial production into arenas of cultural production and economies of singularities (Reckwitz, 2020; Karpik, 2010). Paradoxically, technological advancements that once propelled standardization have now become integral to the expression and dissemination of cultural uniqueness. Still, the symbolic and economic appeal of such products often draws from the past (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020).

Long-established industries rooted in traditional, handcrafted production have long been expected to conform to modernist imperatives of mechanization, efficiency, and scalability. Yet many of these industries have not only endured such pressures but now actively reflect the broader cultural turn in capitalism. Their persistence is neither passive nor uniform. Some have resisted standardization outright; others have selectively adapted, blending new tools with inherited practices or represent an evolution of within the same industry as the opening quotations represent. The key to endurance of these industries is the

persistence of craft traditions in the face of modernist approaches to production (Ravasi et al., 2025; Kroezen et al., 2021) which also suggest critical reflections on the nature of market transformation. Organization studies have documented numerous empirical settings where such processes play out in diverse and creative ways.

The literature on oppositional markets, for instance, has emphasized producer resistance to modernity through the formation of collective identities grounded in ideological opposition to mass production. From green energy (Sine et al., 2005) to grass-fed meat and dairy (Weber et al., 2008), micro radio (Greve et al., 2006), and traditional whisky distilleries (McKendrick & Hannan, 2014), market actors have rejected modernist production logics in favor of small-scale, handcrafted alternatives. As opposition against modernist approaches become institutionalized, these markets have often been characterized as resistant to change through innovation and are prone to authenticity crises when these codes are violated (Mathias et al., 2020; Frake, 2017).

At the same time, studies have drawn attention to new producer collectives who reinterpret traditional craftsmanship to meet evolving consumer expectations. Examples include micro eco-farms in organic agriculture (Sikavica & Pozner, 2013) and microwineries in artisanal wine (Swaminathan, 2001). While these entrants operate within the same markets as traditional producers, they introduce novelty into heritage practices, challenging prevailing market norms and reshaping the very definition of authenticity.

Other work shows that tradition and novelty are not always in conflict but can be strategically mobilized together. Emerging markets in artisanal and maker industries illustrate how symbolic contradictions between tradition and novelty can be curated as a durable source of value and differentiation (Browder et al., 2019; Wiedner et al., 2024; Hampel et al., 2020). Thus, what begins as a tension to be managed becomes a normative feature that distinguishes these markets from pure traditionalist ones.

Existing research shows that actors embedded in traditionalist markets respond to modernist pressures in diverse ways—from ideological resistance to adaptive reinterpretation—through distinct strategies of value construction and coordination. However, this growing body of work remains fragmented. Many studies examine these responses in isolation and rarely situate them within broader debates on market transformation, particularly those concerned with the culturalization of economic life—the ongoing shift from utilitarian rationality to symbolic, aesthetic, and identity-laden forms of value (Reckwitz, 2020; Karpik, 2010; Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020). As a result, we still lack an integrative account of how markets rooted in tradition navigate modernization not merely through resistance or adaptation, but through more complex forms of cultural and organizational responses.

Two key limitations continue to shape the existing literature. First, prior studies often overlook the relational processes through which producers, intermediaries, and consumers co-construct meaning structures—shared interpretive systems that define what is considered valuable, authentic, or legitimate in a given market (Fourcade, 2007; Lamont, 2012; Fligstein & Dauter, 2007). While much attention has been paid to isolated actor strategies, less is known about how meaning is collaboratively built and negotiated across interdependent actor groups, particularly in markets where symbolic value and cultural heritage play a central role. Second, research rarely traces how the interaction between tradition and modernity unfolds over time. A temporal lens is necessary to capture how evolving tensions between tradition and novelty reshape market conventions—not simply through shifts in production logic or consumer demand, but through reinterpretations, and reconfigurations of what counts as authentic and valuable. As the opening quotations suggest, what initially appears as a violation of traditional methods may later be reframed as a form of creative appropriation within the same market. These shifts complicate prevailing organization theories that assume clear and stable boundaries between tradition and modernity.

This dissertation addresses these gaps by developing a relational and temporally sensitive perspective on market transformation. It foregrounds the interdependencies among actor groups in shaping valuation, legitimation, and coordination practices in markets, and adds an evolutionary dimension that captures how these practices—and the meanings they carry—are reimagined over time. Through this lens, the dissertation shows that tradition is not a fixed inheritance but an ongoing accomplishment—continuously reworked through the situated actions of those who make, interpret, and circulate cultural products. In some cases, these interactions result in institutionalization of symbolic contradiction—between tradition and modernity—as a stable feature of market organization. By unpacking these dynamics, the dissertation contributes to a more general theory of how markets transform under the dual pressures of culturalization and rationalization.

The empirical setting for this research is the handmade cymbal industry, a context where the friction between tradition and modernity is particularly pronounced. Historically a closed craft community with centuries of embedded knowledge, the industry has undergone notable transformations since the late twentieth century. These include the rise of machine-based production, the emergence of independent cymbal smiths, and the global circulation of knowledge and practice via digital platforms. The handmade cymbal—both a crafted object and a musical icon—serves as a powerful lens through which to study market evolution, symbolic contradiction, and the endurance of tradition. Methodologically, the dissertation employs an inductive, qualitative design that leverages archival records, in-depth interviews, and field observations. This approach enables a detailed examination of the micro-processes and meaning structures through which traditionalist markets are sustained, contested, and transformed.

The dissertation consists of three papers, each contributing to theory-building while also forming a cohesive narrative on the intersection of tradition and modernity in market transformation.

Overview of Papers

The first paper (Chapter 2), coauthored with Filippo Carlo Wezel and Stefan Arora-Jonsson, explores how product singularities are collectively constructed and stabilized in response to the emergence of modernist valuation logics. Focusing on the 1980s reconfiguration of the Turkish cymbal category—a core of the handmade cymbal market—the study demonstrates how producers, intermediaries, and consumers engaged in interlinked processes of singularization, desingularization, and resingularization to reconstruct a valuation framework capable of reaffirming the worth of traditionalist products. Producers emphasized incalculable features and historical significance; intermediaries rendered these products legible to broader audiences; and consumers reattached symbolic value by framing them as tools of creative self-expression. The paper develops a process model that theorizes resistance to modernist threats through coordinated, collective efforts that privileged uniqueness over the modernist logic of consistency in product quality. It contributes a novel understanding of commensuration, valuation, and category dynamics in markets facing modernist pressures (Negro et al., 2011; Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016; Sharkey et al., 2023), by showing how traditionalist value frameworks are reconstructed through multi-actor interpretive work.

The second paper (Chapter 3) examines the emergence of a new producer collective—independent cymbal smiths—in the early 2000s, composed largely of former drummers who transitioned into handmade cymbal making by blending craft traditions with creative reinterpretations. The chapter investigates how these producers establish legitimacy while challenging established market conventions. Through an in-depth analysis of public narratives from leading community members, it identifies two key strategies that enable this process:

identity bridging, which aligns individual values, goals, and experiences with those of the collective, and practice bridging, which involves transferring and adapting drumming expertise into artisanal production. These strategies allow the collective to reinterpret tradition and incorporate contemporary logics without undermining the symbolic foundations of the market. The study extends theories of collective identity legitimation (Wry et al., 2011; Navis & Glynn, 2011) and contributes to understanding how traditionalist markets evolve through the creative integration of modernist approaches (Kroezen & Heugens, 2019; Croidieu & Kim, 2018; Wiedner et al., 2024).

The third paper (Chapter 4) zooms out to conceptualize liminal markets—a distinct form of market organization in which symbolic contradictions between tradition and modernity are not resolved but deliberately sustained. Drawing on evidence from the independent cymbal market and adjacent craft-based industries, the study develops a comparative framework of market configurations and identifies three analytically distinct types: traditionalist markets, which prioritize symbolic heritage and continuity; modernist markets, which emphasize innovation and future-oriented value creation; and liminal markets, which operate through the strategic interplay of both. The chapter analyzes how these configurations align across symbolic, material, temporal, spatial, and relational dimensions, arguing that liminal markets achieve dynamic stability by embedding symbolic contradictions into both material practices and market narratives. This paper offers a conceptual vocabulary that integrates previously fragmented empirical insights—particularly beyond the craft domain (Ravasi et al., 2025; Kroezen et al., 2021; Ganzin et al., 2024)—by theorizing markets as evolving through sustained tensions between tradition and novelty (Wry et al., 2011; Dacin et al., 2019; Fligstein & Dauter, 2007).

Together, these chapters form a cohesive theoretical arc at the intersection of tradition and modernity in markets. The first examines product valuation as a site of collective

resistance; the second explores producer identity as a medium of reinterpretation; and the third conceptualizes liminal markets as structured tension. Across these distinct focal points, the dissertation advances a dynamic relational perspective on market transformation—showing how producers, intermediaries, and consumers co-construct meaning structures that reconfigure tradition through situated practices of valuation, coordination, and legitimation.

CHAPTER 2.

SINGULARE TANTUM: THE COLLECTIVE PROCESS OF SINGULARIZATION AND VALUATION OF TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS IN MARKETS[1]

ABSTRACT

The preservation of traditional product categories is a topic of enduring importance in markets undergoing modernization and standardization. While prior research has emphasized producer identities or authenticity claims, these mechanisms often fall short in explaining how traditional products sustain distinctiveness and market appeal over time. We propose product singularization—the collective construction of a product's incommensurability with standardized products—as an alternative mechanism that enables traditional categories to resist modernist substitution. Yet how singularization unfolds and becomes sustained through market engagement remains underexplored. We address this gap by examining the category of Turkish cymbals in the 1980s. Our qualitative analysis reveals a process model involving three interconnected stages and actor groups. Producers initiate singularization by emphasizing incalculable features and enriching products with historical narratives. Intermediaries desingularize these products by introducing valuation devices and calibrating them to consumer preferences, making them commensurable while avoiding commoditization. Consumers resingularize the products by embedding them in creative self-expression, reinforcing their uniqueness. This iterative process, shaped by the product's movement across actors, reconstructs the category's meaning and establishes a valuation regime centered on

[1] This paper is a joint work with Filippo Carlo Wezel and Stefan Arora-Jonsson.

singularities. Our findings illuminate the dynamic interplay among market actors in preserving traditional product categories under modernist pressures.

INTRODUCTION

Central to the dynamics of any capitalist economy is the substitution of the old for the new, what Schumpeter famously termed the perennial gale of creative destruction (1947). Not all destruction is however seen as creative by all, as many may continue to see value in the old and the traditional (Durkheim, 1965). Growing attention to tradition can be seen as the byproduct of several societal trends, ranging from buyers' interests in escaping consumerism (Luckman, 2015; Reckwitz, 2019) to the rejection of producers of factory-driven production processes (Greer, 2008). But to retain the old in the face of the new is often a difficult task that is often derided as backward, economically irrational, or dysfunctionally inertial (Mokyr, 1992).

Traditional product categories—rooted in historically grounded craft-based methods and cultural significance—are increasingly being reconfigured to preserve their distinctiveness in competition with mass-produced and modern alternatives. These categories, also referred to as craft-based categories (Ravasi, Svejenova, Kroezen, Sasaki, and Suddaby, 2025), have historically relied on producers' collective identities as buffers against direct competition from mass producers (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Negro, Hannan, Rao, 2011). Yet recent work has shown that identity-centric strategies may be insufficient on their own. Violations by some producers blur category boundaries and confuse consumers about the substitutability between traditional and modern products (Frake, 2017; Verhaal, Khessina, and Dobrev, 2015). As perceptions of substitutability increase, traditional categories risk decline before opportunities for reemergence can materialize—as illustrated in the cases of Swiss mechanical watches (Raffaelli, 2019) and vinyl records (Wiedner, Dacin, and Furnari, 2024), both of which were displaced by modern alternatives before later being revalued.

What increasingly appears central to the preservation of such categories is the process of *singularization*—the collective work of making products incommensurable with modern alternatives. Singularized products cannot be easily compared, substituted, or absorbed into generalized standards of quality. Instead, their worth emerges through a distinct logic of value rooted in perceived uniqueness and irreducibility. According to Karpik (2010), product singularities are *structured* with indivisible qualities that complicate their visibility and presentation, *uncertain* with an unknown quality, surprise and mystery, and *incommensurable* that eschews comparison with any other product either mass produced or another singular product with equal dignity and value. This implies that their value is not merely aesthetic, but can also be narrative, hermeneutic, creative, or ludic (Reckwitz, 2019).

Despite its explanatory potential, the concept of singularization—and of singularities as singularized products—has received limited attention in organization theory. Unlike authenticity, which often hinges on claims of producer identity and may introduce ambiguity in quality inference (Lehman, O'Connor, Kovacs, and Newman, 2019; Carroll and Wheaton, 2009), singularization focuses on the product itself and its valuation as a unique market offering. Nor is it reducible to product differentiation, as conceptualized in design-oriented innovation research, which typically involves aesthetic renewal and strategic expansion into new markets (Dalpiaz, Rindova, and Ravasi, 2016; Rindova and Petkova, 2007; Cancellieri, Cattani, and Ferriani, 2022). Differentiation tends to be a one-sided process initiated by producers, whereas singularization unfolds as a collective process involving producers, intermediaries, and users alike. As Reckwitz (2019: 145) notes, the value of singularities is not simply present, "it depends on the social processes of value attribution, on valorization".

This collaborative nature of singularization has been glimpsed in studies of historical firms such as Steinway & Sons, where the sustained singularity of products like handcrafted pianos was achieved through ongoing interaction among producers, elite users, and critics

(Cattani, Dunbar, and Shapira, 2017). However, while such studies illuminate how singularity is preserved in individual firms, we know far less about how the category-level valuation of traditional products is achieved through distributed, multi-actor processes. The singularization of an entire market category requires broader coordination across multiple fronts of meaning-making and valuation.

Traces of such coordination can be found in recent studies of product category revitalization. Raffaelli (2019), for example, shows how producers redefined the meanings and values underlying mechanical watches, with consumers reinforcing these efforts by framing them as expressions of individuality and craftsmanship. Nelson, Anthony, and Tripsas (2023) similarly highlight the role of music producers in reviving analog synthesizers through their performative use, suggesting that consumer creativity can co-construct product value. Cultural intermediaries—such as critics, journalists, and distributors—have also been shown to broaden the scope of legitimate offerings and shape how product qualities are interpreted and evaluated (Delmestri and Greenwood, 2016; see also Sharkey, Kovacs, and Hsu, 2023).

Still, we lack a comprehensive understanding of how producers, intermediaries, and consumers jointly shape valuation in markets undergoing modernization. Singularization, as a collective process, introduces significant challenges. Market valuation typically depends on commensurability—the ability to compare products within a category using shared standards (Espeland and Stevens, 1998). Yet the very premise of singularized products resists such comparison, potentially undermining the viability of traditional product categories as legitimate alternatives to modern, standardized products. In these cases, valuation regimes must be actively constructed—that is, frameworks that allow singular products to retain meaning and market value despite their resistance to standardization (Cattani, Dunbar, and Shapira, 2017).

To fully capture the complexity of this process—rather than the partial perspectives offered in prior research—it is essential to examine how producers, intermediaries, and consumers collectively construct both product singularities and the frameworks through which they are evaluated. This insight motivates our study. We ask: *How do producers, intermediaries, and consumers collectively construct product singularities and their valuation in the face of modernization and standardization?*

In this paper, we examine the process of product singularization and the construction of a valuation framework amongst producers, intermediaries, and consumers. Their collective efforts facilitated the revitalization of a long-established traditional product category—the category of Turkish cymbals—in response to the rise of modern, machine-made alternatives. Turkish cymbals provide an ideal empirical setting to investigate the dynamics of product singularization and its valuation. As a key component of modern drum kits and regarded as the patriarch of contemporary cymbal making—alongside other categories such as Swiss/German, Italian, and Chinese cymbals (Pinksterboer, 1992)—Turkish cymbals underwent significant redefinition in the 1980s, when its traditional hand-hammered production method was challenged by the introduction of modern machine hammering. The modernist approach introduced a valuation framework centered on consistency and reproducibility, qualities that modernists argued were lacking in hand-hammered cymbals. In response, advocates of the traditional category of Turkish cymbals worked to establish a valuation regime that celebrated the authenticity and craftsmanship of hand-hammered production, reinforcing its distinctiveness and the promotion of singularized products.

To explore the process of product singularization and the development of a corresponding valuation framework in this market, we trace the biography of traditional Turkish cymbals as they move through from production through the market to the end customer – the drummer. Inspired by the cultural biography approach in material culture

studies (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986), this method allows us to analyze how products are singularized and valorized as they move through various actors, each contributing to their continuous reinterpretation and redefinition. By tracing their journey from producers through intermediary evaluation and distribution to consumers, this approach effectively captures the market dynamics of products in mediated markets (Hsu et al., 2012; Aspers and Beckert, 2011). We thus trace how intersubjective agreement around product value is constructed and continuously redefined. Moreover, by centering our analysis on the products themselves and the ways in which various actors engage with them, we observe the emergence of distinct yet interlinked interpretations of unique products within a traditional product category (e.g., Anthony, Nelson, and Tripsas, 2016).

We focused our analysis on the period 1981–1996, at the beginning of which modern manufacturing methods were introduced by the Zildjian Company (Zildjian), an incumbent company of the Turkish cymbal industry run by the Zildjian family. This event was soon followed by the reintroduction of the traditional practices of cymbal production by Istanbul Cymbals (Istanbul). Its entry epitomized the Turkish cymbal revolution (Pinksterboer, 2012) that is currently recognized as having initiated a growing population of producers, an increasing market share, and the ongoing valuation of Turkish cymbals. This setting and the period under investigation provide a unique opportunity to examine the micro-processes through which producers, independent intermediaries (drumming journalists), associated intermediaries (distributors), and users (drummers) collectively singularized the cymbal, thereby making the products commensurable while retaining their uniqueness.

Our analysis unpacks the dynamics that revitalized a traditional product category in face of a modernist challenge. Several key actors and micro-processes played distinct roles: producers highlighted the products' incalculable features and historical significance, effectively *singularizing* them; intermediaries *desingularized* the products by calibrating them

to consumer preferences, ensuring they avoided commoditization; and consumers *resingularized* the products by positioning them as objects of creative self-expression. This cycle repeated over time, ultimately consolidating a traditionalist valuation regime that prioritized uniqueness over consistency in product quality. The interplay among producers, intermediaries, and consumers reveals the collective efforts required to establish the valuation framework required to reaffirm the value of traditional product categories in the face of modernist competition. Drawing on our rich qualitative evidence, we propose a process model that generalizes these dynamics to other settings while also specifying the boundary conditions of its applicability.

Our study makes three key contributions. First, we offer new insights into the tension between modernist and traditionalist producers and demonstrate how category boundaries are renegotiated and stabilized over time, preserving the distinctiveness of traditionalist products in markets facing pressures of modernization and standardization. In so doing, we move beyond the earlier focus on individual producers' roles and authenticity-based explanations in reshaping traditional product categories in markets (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Negro, Hannan, Rao, 2011; Delmestri and Greenwood, 2016). Second, we emphasize the pivotal role of different types of intermediaries in fostering consumer appeal for unique products. While existing research on commensuration has touched on this process (Sharkey et al., 2023), we show how the grouping together by some intermediaries and the de-singularizing efforts made by other intermediaries are essential to endow with value something that has been marketed as unique. Third, by introducing the concept of resingularization, we highlight the active role consumers play not only in consuming traditional products but also in redefining the meanings and values associated with them (Nelson et al., 2023). Through their engagement, consumers contribute to sustain and reshape the traditional product category, ensuring its continued relevance and distinctiveness in the market. Our methodological approach facilitated this

integration, deepening our understanding of how the meaning and value of unique, incommensurable products are collectively constructed. These contributions are explored in greater depth in the concluding section.

DATA AND METHODS

Before explicating our data collection and analyses, we first sketch the background of our empirical context. In the next three sections, we present the history of the Turkish cymbal, the definition and evolution of its core production processes, and the introduction of *Istanbul* as the initiator of singularization process.

The history of Turkish cymbals

Cymbals, one of the most archaic of musical instruments, are made of bronze alloy to produce musical effects through the vibration of its elements. The first cymbals were used around 3000 BC, mainly to punctuate religious music in ancient civilizations (Blades, 1992). Cymbals are known mainly, however, for their use by the Janissary Bands of Ottoman Empire, where their function was to produce marching music during wars and sieges, and through which they also influenced the European military bands. During the latter half of the 19th century, as cymbals found their way into European orchestras, the increasing demand for cymbals was satisfied primarily by a thriving cymbal industry in Turkey, in which the traditional methods of Turkish cymbal making were employed. The history of Turkish cymbal making is well documented by historians (Tuglaci, 1986; Shayt, 1989; Navin, 1949; Pinksterboer, 1992, 2012; Aykent, 2020; Brennan, 2020), and central to the story are the members of the Zildjian family who initiated the tradition in the early 1600s during the Ottoman Empire and who have sustained it to date.

Three members in the family lineage are regarded as the most influential in this history. Kerope II (1829–c1909), who oversaw the company in Turkey—called *K. Zildjian & Cie*—from 1865 until his death and who gave his initial to the *K. Zildjian* cymbals. Whereas the *K. Zildjian* company was operated by Kerope's descendants, Avedis III (1888–1979) decided in

1929 to launch the *Avedis Zildjian Company* and a small production plant in USA. Armand Zildjian (1921–2002), who was next in line, modernized cymbal production and amplified the "Zildjian sound" to suit the needs of rock drummers in a better way. In 1968, the *Avedis Zildjian Company* bought back the *K. Zildjian* trademarks from distant relatives in Turkey and closed the Turkish factory in 1978. Because *K. Zildjian* cymbals were the primary choice of jazz drummers, the *Avedis Zildjian Company* reintroduced these cymbals in 1981. Interviews published in the key industry journal—*Modern Drummer* (*MD*)—in the late 1970s and 1980s documents the fact that, although the company claims to make the "made in Istanbul" sound into a new "made in the USA" sound (Van Horn, 1993), the drummers had not found the "earthy," "buttery," or "spiritual" feeling of the old *K. Zildjian* cymbals. In the following section, we explain why the new *K* cymbals were not greatly appreciated by the drummers of the time. We summarize the tradition of Turkish cymbal making and the update of its defining processes that the Zildjian family—including *Sabian Cymbals*, which was founded in 1981 by another Zildjian family member and that followed similar production processes for improving the quality of cymbals.

The evolution of the Turkish tradition of cymbal making

The main processes in Turkish cymbal making are mixing and melting the bronze alloy, rolling, hammering, and lathing. This process transforms the metal castings into cymbals. The alloy formula, which was discovered in the 17th century and has survived until today, consists of 80% copper and 20% tin, with traces of silver that bond the two metals. Although the main ingredients are known, the Zildjian family claims that the formula, which includes the mixing process, is a secret (Shayt, 1989). In ancient times, the alloy was melted in pots that were buried under wooden logs and charcoal, then poured into molds, flattened with the use of rolling mills, hand-hammered into the shape, and then hand-lathed. Each process influences the cymbal's qualities, but the shaping and hammering are widely accepted as having the

greatest impact on the various characteristics of the sound. In the original method, the shaping and hammering were done by hand, in a process characterized by randomness.

The random hammering creates dark, warm, and complex sound characteristics, which have traditionally been favored primarily by jazz drummers. But as it is done by hand, the sound differences between two visually identical cymbals can be significant, leading to the drummer's long search and selection process, in order to find a good sounding cymbal from an old *K* line (Pinksterboer, 1992). In 1981 *Zildjian* set out to reduce the sound variability between two identical new *K* cymbals by introducing modern technology into the production process. Thus, the company is regarded as a modernist producer that introduced a standardized production process using computers to control the melting temperature, large mechanical hammers for pre-shaping cymbals, and smaller, hand-guided mechanical hammers. The new *K* cymbal production line soon became completely computerized (Van Horn, 1993) and started to deliver products of consistent quality (Pinksterboer, 1992).

***Istanbul Cymbals*: Founding and identity**

Agop Tomurcuk and Mehmet Tamdeger, two young men who became unemployed after the closure of *Zildjian* factory in Istanbul, decided to start making cymbals again and set up their own company in Istanbul. They learned the art of cymbal making as young apprentices of Mikhail Zilçan, the last Zildjian relative overseeing the factory in Istanbul (Aykent, 2020). In 1981, they founded *Zilciler Kollektif Sti* (Cymbal Makers Collective) and started to make cymbals. The next year, they started to export to the US market and rebranded cymbals as *Istanbul*, after making their first appearance in the leading music industry fair organized in USA by *the National Association of Music Merchants* (*NAMM*) Show, 1984 (Mattingly, 1984). As the cymbals were manufactured in the way of the old *K. Zildian* cymbals, their characteristics also bore close similarities to the old *K*s (Aykent, 2020). When the legendary

jazz drummer Mel Lewis first discovered the cymbals of *Istanbul*, his first reaction was. "They're back.":

> With my small-group playing, actually, I was using K.'s all along, but I became a permanent K. player from '56 on. Now, they've become collector's items… I'm very happy to find out now that this new Istanbul Cymbal Company are the makers of the old cymbal… I tried some of them and said, 'My God, they're back. These are the cymbals.' I'm now using them and endorsing them. So I think my problems are over for the rest of my life. I now have access to what I've always lived with. (Mattingly, 1985: 13)

After Mel Lewis' endorsement, *Istanbul* gained greater recognition among the most acclaimed jazz drummers of the time—Jack DeJohnette, Billy Hart, Art Blakey, Tony Williams—many of whom visited the factory, endorsed the cymbals, and appeared in the company's monthly advertisements in *MD* during 1984 and 1985. Although these developments led to an increase in the demand for *Istanbul* cymbals, the distributor explained that given the small scale of production and the long hours of handcrafting that goes into each cymbal, the production would not exceed 800 per month for the entire global market (*MD*, January 1985). Indeed, as acclaimed cymbal expert Hugo Pinksterboer (1992) observed in 1990, when he visited the *Istanbul* factory, with its workforce of 14 employees, including the founders, the facility had reached maximum production at 11,000 cymbals a year, which was less than 1.5% of the capacity of the main incumbent companies in the cymbal industry: *Zildjian*, *Sabian* and *Paiste*. The company did not intend to expand production by adopting modern manufacturing methods, and it remained true to the ancient tradition of handmade Turkish cymbal making as their motto suggests:

> Machines don't have ears. That is why we continue to make our cymbals according to the ancient tradition—with an open eye towards the music that's being made now, and in the future. (Anonymous, 1980s)

In defense of the traditional methods, *Istanbul* also showed opposition to the unification of the cymbals to which other companies were leaning:

> …each [cymbal] is hammered by hand and different pressures exerted at this stage to determine the sound that each particular cymbal will produce. No two cymbals are hammered alike. Each cymbal has an individual sound which makes Istanbul Cymbals unique, compared with machine-manufactured cymbals. (Istanbul catalog, 1980s: 2)

In 1996, when one of the founders, Agop Tomurcuk, died in a tragic accident, his two sons parted ways with the other founder, Mehmet Tamdeger. Having equal rights to the *Istanbul* name, they called the new company *Istanbul Agop*, and Mehmet Tamdeger continued as *Istanbul Mehmet*. In the same year, two new companies were founded by former craftspeople from *Istanbul*. These new entrants started a "revolution" in the Turkish cymbal market (Pinksterboer, 2012: 35). According to world percussion instrument statistics (TradeMap), it culminated by 2022 with approximately 30 producers and 20% share of the global cymbal exports being located in Turkey. The ancient traditions have also influenced large and modern cymbal producers in Europe (i.e., *Paiste* and *Meinl*), who launched Turkish cymbals as their premium cymbal series in the early 2000s by adopting traditional handmade practices. Today, Turkish cymbals are identified only with handmade practices and associated cymbal features and sometimes referred as "Turkish-made" in various media (e.g., *MusicRadar*, *MD*, *Drum!*), whereas their modern counterpart is excluded from the original label and are labelled "American-made" cymbals. Turkish cymbals are now finding their way into the drum sets of drummers who play jazz music, and into the drum sets of those who play any genre that can evolve from the drummers' creativity. The singularity of each cymbal is praised as the hallmark of their increased market value and success.

Against the current momentum in the Turkish cymbal market in favor of traditional manufacturing practices, we focus on the period between the founding and dissolution of *Istanbul Cymbals*, 1981–1996. In conducting this research, we sought to uncover the micro-processes that valorized the traditional Turkish cymbals as singular products, while paying particular attention to the key market actors that handle the cymbals—the producer (*Istanbul*), distributors and drumming journalists, and drummers. Figure 1 depicts the timeline of the case, key events, and actor activities that we identified to represent the phases of product value dynamics over time.

Insert Figure 2.1 about here.

Data Collection

We collected archival, interview, and observational data covering the period 1981–1996. We began by collecting data on the producer, *Istanbul*, which we considered the key actor in the singularization process. Through our initial interactions with the people who witnessed the *Istanbul* period and by analyzing archival data, we started to observe correspondence among producers and drummers, national and local distributors, and drumming journalists. We therefore expanded the data collection to comprise those actors in the process. In the next sections, we describe the specific forms of data we collected for each actor group (e.g., Boghossian and David, 2021) and provide an overview of the data sources in Table 2.1 in the Appendix.

Data on the producer. Our data on the *producer* comes from primary and secondary sources. The first author conducted a total of 14 semi-structured interviews, mainly with one of the founders, Mehmet Tamdeger, and former employees who are now the founders or employees of the current companies located in Istanbul. We refer to those former employees as descendants because their skills were born in the original factory. We identified the interviewees through archival data, and all the invitations we sent to the key people were accepted. The interviews were conducted in two rounds in 2021 and 2022, by visiting 11 participants in the factories where they were at work and meeting online with 3 participants via zoom. During the winter and summer of 2021, the interviews covered the question of how the establishment of *Istanbul* affected the cymbal industry in general. In the summer of 2022, the inquiry was more specific and related to the identity of *Istanbul*, its production process and

products. The interviews usually lasted more than an hour, were conducted in Turkish, transcribed, then translated into English.

In parallel to these rounds of interviews, we collected observational data during our visits to the factories, which the interviewees indicated as closely representative of the *Istanbul* factory of the 1980s. The traditional handmade method, its work organization, and processes are being sustained intact in today's factories to protect the tradition from changing, thereby supporting the relevance of using observational data in a historical case analysis. We also collected a number of photos and videos of the artifacts in 2022, during an exhibition featuring *Istanbul Mehmet*. Moreover, the availability of historical videos and photos on internet sources (e.g., YouTube, local newspapers) helps validate the continuity of production processes over time by enabling comparisons with our present-day observations.

Our third data source for the producer came primarily from *Modern Drummer* magazine (*MD*), which is a leading drum magazine that has been targeting the needs of drummers through its monthly publications since 1977. We collected each of the 44 advertisements run by *Istanbul* in *MD* during the observation period. The advertisements granted us unique insights into the product framing and meaning-making choices of the company, with particular linguistic and visual approaches. The use of advertisements for this purpose is common in other product (re)definition studies (e.g., Anthony et al., 2016; Raffaelli, 2019). During our visits to factories other data sources were made available to us (e.g., the *Istanbul* product catalogue from the 1980s), along with 2 catalogues, 2 websites of the companies of the descendants, and 5 interview articles in 4 national newspapers (*Cumhuriyet*, *Hürriyet*, *Aksam*, *Agos*), all containing historical narratives. These written archives, oral and visual evidence that come from 2 Oral History Interviews by *National Association of Music Merchants* (*NAMM*), documentaries, and 7 YouTube podcasts helped to triangulate the data described here.

Data on intermediaries. We distinguished between two main groups of *intermediaries*, based on the differences in their activities and roles in the process: independent (drumming journalists and writers) and associated (former distributors of *Istanbul* and current distributors of the products from two of the descendants' companies [*Agop*/*Mehmet*]). The data on *independent intermediaries* comes from archival sources. We collected all 27 articles published in *MD* during the observation period and drew upon 6 books and 4 historical YouTube podcasts, in which the journalists and writers reflect their views about *Istanbul* and its products, mostly in comparison with the incumbent producers and the evolving industry standards. We collected data on *associated intermediaries* through 5 semi-structured interviews conducted with distributors that had been or are currently located in Turkey, USA, and Switzerland. We approached distributors in diverse localities to gain a broader perspective and to counteract any nationality bias (e.g., Turkishness). Our primary targets were Turkish and Swiss distributors; we assumed that we would receive greater participation in these countries because of the advantage of our first author's language (Turkish) and location (Switzerland). A former US distributor was also interviewed because he was present in Istanbul during the second round of interviews. To guard against retrospective bias in the interview concerning relations to drummers, we interviewed former and current distributors. Both groups provided us with similar answers, so we believe that we were able to capture in a timeless manner their role intermediation between drummers and cymbals.

Data on drummers. Our data on *drummers* who use handmade cymbals by *Istanbul* or the companies of the descendants comprises both present-day (primary data collection) and archival interviews (secondary data collection), gathered in order to understand drummers' interpretations of the handmade cymbals. The first author conducted 15 semi-structured interviews, in Turkish with professional drummers from Turkey and in English with Swiss drummers. Again, we diversified the interview participants based on their localities to avoid

nationality bias and conducted interviews in two rounds that covered topics from broader to more specific. The interviews lasted approximately one hour.

In both interview rounds, our purpose was to understand the perspectives of drummers who preferred *Istanbul* cymbals in the 1980s, as seen through the eyes of today's drummers. We acknowledge the potential validity issues of data collection, first and foremost with respect to retrospective bias. When discussing the feelings of drummers toward their instruments, however, there was no correct answer that could become obvious in hindsight—rather a kind of timeless question of self-expression (e.g., Nelson et al., 2023; Anthony et al., 2016) that all modern drummers of all times have had, independent of the musical genre (Brennan, 2020). Nevertheless, to validate the consonance of present-day opinions with those of the 1980s, we also collected 14 archival interviews that had been collected with drummers who were associated with *Istanbul*.

Data Analysis

Our analysis focuses on understanding the process of singularizing traditional products and constructing a traditionalist valuation regime that contrast to the one deployed for modernists products. To examine this process, we adopted an inductive approach (Corbin and Strauss, 2014), following steps consistent with interpretive and process-based research (Langley, 1999). In the next section, we describe the four steps that we followed:

Historical reconstruction. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of our setting, we began by reading our archival data, available in the books and magazines previously described here. We then constructed a chronology of key events that represented the evolution of the Turkish cymbal industry since the early 17th century, as depicted by the bottom arrow in Figure 1. This helped us to identify the key actors involved and to understand the evolution of a valuation framework for the traditional cymbals over time and in parallel to key events. On the assumption that this empirical puzzle could inform central theoretical insights (Hsu and

Grodal, 2020), we decided to focus on product value dynamics within this setting (for a comparable framework on the construction of product valuation, refer to Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010).

Case periodization and phase selection. To define the empirical scope of our study, we identified key phases in the historical development of the Turkish cymbal category. Based on archival materials and historical accounts, we mapped the product's trajectory from its emergence in the 17th century to the present. We distinguished three major phases, each reflecting a shift in the dominant valuation logic used to evaluate cymbals: *Single Valuation Regime* (1673–1978), *Modernist Valuation Regime* (1978–1981), and *Dual Valuation Regime* (1981–1996). These phases, depicted in the top brackets of Figure 1, are anchored in changing evaluative dimensions and narrative framings observed in the archival data. The period after 1996 is left unnamed, as it reflects a continuation of the dual valuation regime rather than the emergence of a distinct new logic.

Rather than analyzing the full historical arc, we focused our empirical investigation on the dual valuation regime phase (1981–1996), which offers the greatest theoretical opportunity to explore the construction of singularity amid competing value logics. Prior research has extensively examined the emergence of single valuation regimes in the early formation of new categories (e.g., Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010; Weber et al., 2008), but less is known about how multiple, competing value frameworks coexist and interact in category revitalization. We treat the modernist regime (1978–1981) as an antecedent, marking the disruption that gave rise to this duality.

Within this phase, we identified the key actor groups involved in shaping product valuation—producers (*Istanbul*), intermediaries (journalists, writers, distributors), and users (professional drummers)—each of whom played distinct and traceable roles. This historical

delineation guided our data collection strategy, helping us identify which actors to engage and where additional data were needed, as detailed in the Data section.

Thematic coding of actor activities. To analyze how market actors contributed to singularization and valuation, we adopted a flexible, interpretivist approach grounded in process theorizing (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Langley, 1999). We began by structuring our dataset according to actor groups—producers, intermediaries, and users—each of whom engaged with the products in distinct ways during the focal period. Rather than applying a coding template or temporal segmentation at the outset, we treated each actor group as a narrative unit and sought to surface meaning-based activities and interpretive moves specific to their engagement with the products.

In the initial stage of coding, we generated conceptually rich, in vivo–inspired labels (e.g., *romanticizing, reclaiming, improving commensurability, probing*) that reflected how actors described and made sense of their roles. Many of these first-order codes were already abstract in form, which we found appropriate given the rich interpretive texture of our empirical material. Because actors often articulated their meaning-making in nuanced, conceptually layered terms, we found less need to extend or reframe their language during coding. These codes emerged through repeated immersion in archival texts, advertisements, interviews, and observational fieldnotes—materials that richly conveyed how actors engaged with and interpreted the product. For example, *romanticizing* captured how producers framed the cymbals through narratives of secrecy, ancestry, and spiritual depth, while *reclaiming* described their efforts to link production practices to heritage, place, and embodied knowledge. *Improving commensurability* emerged from intermediary accounts of hand-selecting cymbals and guiding drummers through sonic preferences.

We then clustered these first-order concepts into broader second-order themes that reflected more abstract and recurrent patterns of meaning-making. In doing so, we also began

to identify how the interpretive practices of one actor group influenced or conditioned the meaning-making of others. For example, we observed that intermediaries often interpreted and translated the producers' mystifying efforts, shaping which aspects of singularity were publicly validated or questioned. Likewise, consumers developed personal attachments to cymbals through acts of personalizing, but these attachments were shaped by intermediary narratives and by calibration practices that made variability intelligible and manageable. These emerging interdependencies across actor groups—surfaced through successive stages of our data analysis—informed the relational structure of the process model presented in the following section.

We then synthesized these second-order themes into more abstract aggregate dimensions, corresponding to the three phases of our process model—*singularization, desingularization*, and *resingularization*—as depicted in Figure 2. These dimensions did not arise from a stepwise escalation of abstraction but rather through a dialogue between theory and data, in which we refined our understanding of emerging constructs (e.g., *enriching, calibrating, personalizing*) in light of existing literature on cultural production and valuation (Karpik, 2010; Reckwitz, 2019; Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020). In particular, we interpreted actors' material and narrative practices through the lens of singularization as defined by Karpik (2010)—that is, the attribution of value to products that are uncertain, mysterious, and incommensurable—and further elaborated by Boltanski and Esquerre (2020), who emphasize the narrative enrichment of such products. These theoretical insights informed how we identified and conceptualized the symbolic and interpretive work through which actors made cymbals appear unique and irreplaceable.

Importantly, our abstraction was grounded in rich and heterogeneous empirical observations. Our findings rest not only on interview narratives but also on interpretive comparisons across historical advertisements, trade press coverage, in situ observations of

production, and multi-layered retrospective accounts. This triangulation enabled us to move from data to theoretical insight while preserving the empirical nuance necessary to explain how product singularization unfolds as a collective, distributed process.

Insert Figure 2.2 about here.

Developing the process model. In the final stage of analysis, we developed a process model that accounts for the above relational structure of our data, and also the temporal dynamics present in the timeline of events and value dynamics (Figure 1). We drew on a cultural biography approach (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986) to trace how cymbals moved across different actor domains—those of producers, intermediaries, and users—accumulating new meanings, values, and uses along the way.

Rather than organizing key events as discrete stages in a linear process, we focused on how the product was continuously reinterpreted as it entered and exited different activity spaces. For instance, the 1984 event depicted in Figure 1—"Istanbul Cymbals made their debut at the NAMM Show USA"—marks the moment when producer reintroduced the product to international markets, accompanied by narrative efforts to reframe its meaning. Subsequent events—such as Gretsch becoming the exclusive U.S. distributor—reflect intermediary activity, while the eventual adoption and endorsement of Istanbul cymbals by name drummers illustrate the user group's engagement. This sequence highlights how meaning was built cumulatively through a flow of engagement.

The biography metaphor allowed us to structure our process model around actor-specific inflection points, rather than chronological milestones. This approach offered two advantages. First, it captured the asymmetrical temporalities of actor activities: some events—like NAMM exposure and critical reception—occurred rapidly, while others—such as users'

development of affective attachment—unfolded gradually over years. Second, it enabled us to identify how each actor group reinterpreted the product in relation to prior framings. For example, intermediaries reconfigured producers' mystifying narratives through market communication and calibration, while users absorbed and modified those meanings through performance and personalization.

Although the model was developed inductively from our case, we also reflected on its potential generalizability. In particular, we highlight the temporal dynamics among distinct actor engagements, which follow a patterned sequence—producer, intermediary, user—with recursive influence over time. This sequence not only mirrors the empirical timeline and relational structure of our case but also aligns with broader dynamics observed in mediated markets (Hsu et al., 2012; Aspers and Beckert, 2011). We conclude by specifying the boundary conditions under which we expect our model to apply and contribute to theorizing the collective construction of product singularities in traditional market categories.

FINDINGS

We present our findings thematically, organized by the types of actors involved in the singularization and valuation of Turkish cymbals. Our analysis demonstrates how traditional cymbals were singularized and valorized in contrast to their modernist counterparts, tracing their journey from re-entry into the market through the efforts of the traditionalist producer, Istanbul. After detailing the sequence of activities undertaken by each actor, we synthesize these findings to construct a comprehensive process model.

Producer(s) initiation of market process: Singularizing traditional products

We identified two main ways in which *Istanbul* and its descendants engaged to construct their cymbals as singular and distinguish them from their modernist counterparts: (1) *mystifying* the products' origin and, drawing upon the work of Boltanski and Esquerre (2020), what we call (2) *enriching* the process of production in order to (re)forge the life history and meaning of

their products. Illustrative quotations for this analysis can be found in Table 2.2 in the Appendix.

Mystifying. The narratives of the Istanbul founders and their descendants, including former and current employees of Istanbul and Istanbul Agop/Mehmet, reveal a dual effort to both mystify and ground their products in historical and cultural significance. They sought to render mysterious the origins of their cymbals—how, by whom, and where production restarted—while simultaneously anchoring these origins in the rich tradition of Turkish cymbal craftsmanship. We interpret this activity as an attempt to not only render incalculable the defining features of their cymbals but also to establish their legitimacy and authenticity through historical grounding.

One way they mystified the origins was by romanticizing the story of how the founders, Agop and Mehmet, acquired the *Zildjian* process, which has long been assumed to be a Zildjian family secret predating the founding of *Istanbul* in 1981 (Cohan, 1999; Tuglaci, 1986). To counter this rumor, Mehmet narrated an intriguing story in his historical interviews:

> We used to watch our master Mikhail mixing and melting copper and tin from the hole in the roof holding our breath. Now we had the formula. We waited for the exercise, both working and zipping our mouths. (Aykent, 2020: 133)

While this story added to the mystique of their expertise, it also emphasized their deep roots in Turkish cymbal-making traditions, grounding their legitimacy in lifetime experience. The reality, as confirmed by other accounts, is that both founders were involved with the *K. Zildjian* factory from the age of eight or nine, mastering every nuance of cymbal production over nearly 30 years.

The founding story of *Istanbul* was similarly shaped by mystification and grounding and revolved around the founders' heroic efforts to revive cymbal production after the closure of the *K. Zildjian* factory in 1978. The Zildjian family was blamed for abandoning their employees and scrapping or selling the old production equipment to ensure that nobody else

could make cymbals in Istanbul again. Even though the founders of *Istanbul* managed to establish a small workshop, limited resources and workforce limitations made things difficult: "At the end of the day, my father's cousin once brought him [Agop] home carrying him on his back," explained Agop's son.

Beyond mystification, the founders and their descendants actively sought to ground their cymbals in historical continuity by forging associations with significant figures in Turkish cymbal history, such as Zildjian family members and legendary drummers. The association with the Zildjian family was claimed to establish a legitimate connection to the history of Turkish cymbal making and to contribute to it by adding a non-Zildjian branch: *Istanbul*. Although these relationships are often recalled respectfully, at times they were used to downplay the handmade process know-how of *Zildjian.* Furthermore, in contrast to the modernists aggressive promotional strategies aimed at securing endorsements from prominent drummers, encounters between the founders and several big-name drummers who visited the factory in the 1980s were remembered as genuine expressions of their approach and sincerity in dealing with these names.

Referring to Mel Lewis's legendary 1985 exclamation, "They're back!", the descendants' mystification of the handmade process—emphasizing the intangible qualities of the hand-hammering technique—was accompanied by efforts to reclaim the origins of Turkish cymbals through grounding them in terroir. As descendants of Istanbul noted, their cymbals were authentically made in Turkey, unlike Zildjian's products, which were no longer produced there. By references to the modern manufacturing methods, the descendants pointed to how the modernist incumbents have tried to change the established meaning of the "handmade" process—in particular the hand-hammering aspect. A descendant complained, for example, that the modernist incumbents are using a machine hammer "…that strikes. Under the hammer, a man turns the cymbal in his hand, and this is called handmade." For them, the true

handmade process would have vanished if *Istanbul* had never been founded, and cymbals would never have come close to the sonic harmonies of an old *K. Zildjian* cymbal.

To further distinguish themselves, *Istanbul* and its descendants declared themselves to be the true custodians of the Turkish cymbal tradition. They used the label "Handmade in Turkey" to emphasize their authentic connection to the terroir and to counter their Trans-Atlantic competitors, who marketed their products as "Genuine Turkish Cymbal, Made in USA." Both in interviews and advertisements (see Table 2.2 in the Appendix), they employed metaphors rooted in Turkishness and Turkish culture to further ground their products in a narrative of heritage and authenticity.

Enriching. In our analysis of interview, observational, and archival data related to the production process, we have also identified several narrative practices of producers that seek to *enrich* the link between the products and craftspeople who make them—the producers who aim to direct attention to the holistic and embodied organization of work (See also Kroezen et al., 2021). Those narratives revolve around the unstructured or random work processes that are inherent in the ancient tradition and the attitudes and skills required, not for the purpose of structuring them to ensure consistent product quality, but to justify the randomness, in order to represent the uniqueness of each cymbal. Claims of product singularity are aimed at weakening the predictability and thereby the substitutability of their cymbals, compared with their standardized counterparts. These claims are also connected to the idea that quality judgments are believed to be made objectively only by the craftspeople responsible for making the products.

We were often told in interviews that the craftspeople of *Istanbul* were extremely dedicated to the ancient practices of handmade cymbal making—sometimes even at the cost of their health. We were told, for instance, that given the primitive method of heating the melting pots and the manual treatment of heated metals for further processing, the temperatures were

often uncontrollable, and many craftspeople witnessed life-threating explosions. As one descendant explained in an interview, "…this is a very dangerous and risky technique to work in that way. God has helped us, that's all." The visible scars from these accidents are portrayed as a testament to the craftspeople's dedication. The most extreme case we came across was that of Mehmet Tamdeger, who is missing one eye behind his darkened glasses.

The ancient and random production practices were discussed in both our interviews and the archival interviews to demonstrate that they are somewhat holistically organized, which allows for a clear understanding of how particular aspects of production interrelate. The training of apprentices, which seems the most controllable of the processes, is also enriched with stories of young apprentices' gradual, yet sporadic and casual learning processes that essentially go hand in hand with the randomness of the production. This type of learning was deemed necessary for apprentices to gain a holistic understanding of the production. This understanding was considered crucial because the production process be standardized, and the craftspeople should possess an embodied and tacit expertise to somewhat control the uncontrollable processes by trusting the naked eye. The interviewees routinely mentioned that every element of the production process is crucial for product quality and that each sub-process of the ancient methods should incorporate variation and an element of unpredictability. To qualify these processes as a work of art rather than science (Hall and Johnson, 2009), *Istanbul* started a tradition of "museification" (c.f., Boltanski and Esquerre, 2020) of the production, by which it related visual artifacts to narratives that were maintained by the descendants in today's factories. Museification involves the embodied representation of the cymbal-making tradition, either in the factory or at the fairs and exhibitions and in the advertisements, in order to define what is the real handmade cymbal with the goal of improving the perceived singularity of the cymbals.

When visiting the factory, accompanied by a guide who leads them through the in-vivo museum, drummers can observe every stage of the production process. In our visits to these factories, it was impossible not to be impressed by the craftspeople's commitment to the production process: the old-fashioned logs and charcoal, the smoke, and the spectacular flames coming out of the foundry and rolling mills, and the hammerers on kitchen chairs, hammering cymbals into shape all day long. The narratives offered by the guides usually began with the origin of the cymbal-making tradition from the 17th century, the romanticized story of how it is maintained by the non-Zildjian branch of history since the late 20th century, through the description of the craftspeople's activities as we walk around the production area.

Walking toward the office area, we encountered walls of photos or paintings from the past, depicting the founders with their ancestors and big-name drummers, the old *K. Zildjian* or *Istanbul* cymbals once owned by the *Istanbul* endorsers, and the storage area where drummers can try and choose the cymbals they want to buy. Visiting fairs and exhibitions in Istanbul during the summer of 2022, we saw, in addition to the visual artifacts, the most distinctive process of cymbal making—hand-hammering—almost always on display. A hammerer starts and finishes hammering a cymbal in front of the curious eyes of the onlookers. Hand-hammering has also been visualized in advertisements, first by *Istanbul* in 1990s, then by the companies of the descendants.

The special sound characteristics of handmade cymbals, which have long been epitomized by the old *K. Zildjian* cymbals, are also reclaimed and further enriched through characterizing narratives by the founders and the descendants of *Istanbul*. One salient feature of our interviews was the definition of the handmade cymbal as unique, given the individualized and variable production processes that each cymbal undergoes. The individuality of the in-pitch tones of each cymbal, even in the same series of cymbals, is so large that the craftspeople treat each cymbal as an art object that cannot be exactly replicated,

even by the craftsperson who made them. The founders and descendants often narrated instances of how the craftspeople could not achieve highly consistent results, and they stress this phenomenon at every turn, as they consider it the main factor that distinguishes their cymbals from the machine-made counterparts. Those efforts by the producers to reclaim and enrich the product were reinforced during the early days of *Istanbul* through the public endorsements of big-name drummers. (See the "Advertisements related to characterizing" between 1984 and 1996 in Table 2.2 in the Appendix.)

Narrating singularity or uniqueness as an inherent quality of handmade cymbals, the interviewees also asserted the rules for quality judgments. In their view, only the craftspeople and the product testers, who *have no knowledge about drumming*, are able to make objective decisions on how a good or bad a cymbal sounds when evaluated within the framework of the main character of the cymbal. The drummers are not as able to make this evaluation because of the perceived complexity of the cymbal as an instrument and the cymbal playing; not being drummers, the descendants consider themselves free of this complexity. As one descendant told us, "You don't have to be a musician for that. I'm not a musician, frankly. But we've always had open ears since long…." And another said, "We look at a cymbal, we know whether it is good or bad from its shape. We have such a memory…"

Since the early days of *Istanbul*, preselection of cymbals for sale has been conducted using these principles, by leaving the final choice up to the personal preference of the distributors and professional drummers. Thus, by targeting professional drummers and stimulating in-person exchanges, *Istanbul* and its descendants have imagined a market structure that would work smoothly, as long as the actors who are next in line to receive the products value the narratives that add an air of mystique and enrichment to them (cf. Appadurai, 1986).

The funneling work of intermediaries: Desingularizing unique products

Our analysis of archival data related to the commentary of independent intermediaries (drumming *MD* journalists and writers), along with interviews with associated intermediaries (former distributors of *Istanbul* and current distributors of two of the descendant companies' products, *Agop/Mehmet*) suggest that these intermediaries have played distinct but interrelated roles. We describe their contribution as 'funneling' disparate products into a group close enough to form the basis of a market category. This process was achieved through (1) the dequalification of the producer's assertion of singularity, the legitimation of the product inconsistencies by *independent* intermediaries, and (2) the calibration of the offerings to the customer demand by *associated* intermediaries. Illustrative evidence for this analysis can be found in Table 2.3 in the Appendix.

Dequalifying & legitimizing by independent intermediaries. After the first entry of *Istanbul* cymbals at the 1984 US Summer *NAMM* Show, drumming journalists and writers began to take notice of them. *Istanbul*'s cymbals however aroused little interest among the journalists when their cymbals first appeared on the US market, perhaps because their main distributor, *Gretsch Drum Company*, and the endorsers—Mel Lewis and Jack DeJohnette—had long been associated with the old *K. Zildjian* cymbals. As *Istanbul* established an image close to that of the old *K*s through these relationships, the journalists did not go beyond validating the claims of *Istanbul* regarding their production and product qualities, as commonly transmitted by the distributor during the *NAMM* Shows in the second half of 1980s.

As *Istanbul* cymbals became more popular among jazz drummers, some journalists went to greater lengths in exploring the producer's claims. One of them, Hugo Pinksterboer, is an acclaimed drumming journalist who is focused on the cymbal industry. In the late 1980s, in preparing his *Cymbal Book* (1992), he visited the main producers around the world: *Zildjian, Sabian, Istanbul, Paiste, Meinl,* and *UFIP*. He provided a detailed commentary on the

characteristics of the products from different cymbal categories and their production methods by drawing on his personal observations and comparing the claims of the various producers. In the section devoted to *Istanbul*, Pinksterboer validated the artisanal features of the producer, albeit in a less romantic fashion than the founders did. As he reported, *Istanbul* was the only producer using the Turkish method in its most traditional way by making cymbals "almost entirely by hand" (114). In his view, the distinctiveness of the production method they use should not be overrated, however, because "…the differences between "identical" cymbals will be bigger as more is done by hand" (114). Because the methods applied by the main producers are "…as different as day and night" (111), he opined that quality judgments could be made only according to the consistency of specific characteristics of the final products. Other journalists agreed with the idea that quality assessment required a somewhat consistent quality dimension, and cymbal manufacturers worked toward improving this consistency, whatever their production process.

At the same time however, journalists and writers began to portray individualized cymbal characteristics in a positive light. In the case of cast cymbals —a synonym used by journalists to refer to Turkish cymbals—they argued that an individualized consistency is to be expected, as it is the automatic result of processing Turkish bronze by machine, given that "…the individual castings create a unique tonal personality for each cymbal" (Mattingly, 2006: 86), ":…bringing the 'complexity' or 'mystery' for the more acoustic jazz player." (Nicholls, 2004: 112). This excerpt from a book of percussion instruments nicely portrays this view:

> The most difficult quality to achieve in cymbal making is individualized consistency—the ability to produce cymbals that are consistent within their model classification but individualized in sound and character, cymbal to cymbal. (Beck, 1995: 198)

While larger differences between hand-hammered cymbals were sometimes viewed as inconsistencies, journalists acknowledged that absolute uniformity was unattainable, even with

modern production methods. Pinksterboer (1992) emphasized this point, noting that "a metal consistency of 100% is idealistic" (129). This sentiment was echoed in the broader discourse on drumming, which stressed the importance of the musician's skill over the instrument's precision:

> A good drummer instinctively understands that while excellent instruments are essential, it is the manner in which they are played that brings great cymbals to life. (Burns, Modern Drummer Magazine, November 1981: 49)

Independent intermediaries, thus, played a dual role: dequalifying the notion of absolute consistency as a marker of quality and legitimizing Istanbul cymbals by framing individualized differences as hallmarks of craftsmanship and artistry. By doing so, they bridged consumer expectations and producer claims, enabling *Istanbul* to strengthen its foothold in the market.

Calibrating by associated intermediaries. Our analysis of interviews with cymbal *distributors* suggests that they calibrated the divergent interpretations of product singularity by the producer and the drumming journalists. In particular, by building on both actors' interpretations, they increased the appreciation of inconsistencies by improving product commensurability and by educating the users about how to choose among them.

The distributors agreed with the journalists' inconsistency image and aimed at reducing the experienced sound variability of two identical hand-hammered cymbals in their shops. They did this by visiting the *Istanbul* factory and selecting the cymbals that sounded good to their ears. In many cases, this task was facilitated by professional experience of some of the distributors as drummers. Since the early days of *Istanbul Cymbals* many of them spent a great deal of time and energy going through all the cymbals available in the storage area of the factories to find a batch of similar-sounding cymbals in the same series. As one distributor explained, "I must say that every cymbal is unique… but they used to be unique both in the good and the bad ways".

Having selected a batch for sales, the distributors contributed to improving the comparability and commensurability of the cymbals, thereby insulating the drummers from the extreme sound variability that they experienced during the (pre)selection process. This variation is a significant step in (re)forming drummers' attachments to handmade cymbals. Yet, matching their sound preferences to the available cymbal sounds is more critical and the most challenging activity in the commensuration process, mainly because of the difficulty of describing cymbal sounds—a difficulty amplified in handmade cymbals because their harmonic complexities are far more complex than those of machine-made cymbals. As one distributor explained,

> Now describe the taste of a food or wine. Some people will say, "Oh, I smell cherry," another will say, "I smell vanilla," or whatever. Everybody is different. Describing the sound of a handmade cymbal or describing the sound in general is the same. It's very hard, so you need to try. (Interview with Distributor 2)

This analogy underscores the subjective and interpretive nature of evaluating handmade cymbals, suggesting that the appreciation of their unique sound profiles requires personal exploration and direct engagement. Much like tasting wine, drummers must rely on their sensory experience rather than predefined metrics or descriptions, highlighting the challenges distributors face in bridging the gap between the inherent variability of handmade cymbals and drummers' expectations. As the same distributor further elaborated during our interview:

> At least from those hand hammered cymbals from Turkey, it's very hard to find two similar cymbals within the same series. I think that is this ground market and trying to get the real musicians that have good ears to check out those cymbals compared to the big brand makes the difference now and it pays off. Now it took years, actually. (Interview with Distributor 2)

Through knowledge and experience, the distributors have developed their own methods to satisfy the needs of drummers with handmade cymbals, at times by educating them in the specific characteristics and singularity of these cymbals.

Consumers' valuation: Resingularizing comparable products

In our analysis of in-person and archival interviews with the drummers who prefer handmade cymbals from *Istanbul* and the companies of the descendants, we identified three main

activities by which they resingularized the products that they acquired mostly from associated intermediaries. The users (1) internalized the process of production and distinguishing features of the products, then (2) rationalized the inconsistencies that they recognized, and (3) personalized the products with their creative performances, to forge an ultimate interpretation of the product meaning and value. Illustrative quotations for this analysis are provided in Table 2.4 in the Appendix.

Internalizing. Our interviews with drummers suggest that they tried to endow the handmade cymbals with mysticism surrounding their production to distinguish them from the modernist counterparts. This process developed as they became acquainted or reacquainted with the handmade cymbals through intermediaries. The drummers we interviewed valued the opinions of independent intermediaries—in this case, the drumming journalists. What they needed to decide, one drummer explained, is "…to play the cymbal and feel how it feels to play, how it sounds, how it reacts to my playing. That's the most important thing, and only I can experience it." This is why many drummers have been further exploring handmade cymbals with the help of their distributors. As one former USA-based distributor and a veteran drummer asserted, the drummers from the 1980s who use *Istanbul* cymbals, including Mel Lewis, made one famous distributor of handmade cymbals a popular hangout place.

Once the drummers buy their cymbals, their attachment to them begins with a process of re-mystifying their history, mainly related to the cymbal-making process and distinguishing their main characteristics in relation to the machine-made counterparts. These drummers all valued the traditional practices of cymbal making, as it resonates with the opposition among drummers to the industrialized production of cymbals. One of the drummers described the industrialization of cymbal production as one of the two breakthroughs in the development of the modern drum set, but "…in a bad sense… Because the making of the cymbals hadn't actually changed in so many years, in so many centuries, until the start of fabrication

cymbals." Another drummer explained why he was attracted to the handmade cymbals in the first place: "…I love how they produce cymbals in Turkey. Because I'm not a fan of capitalism, I have to say." As the drummers became interested in these cymbals, they exposed themselves to the museification activities of the producers whenever producers invited them or if they happened to be in Istanbul for concerts.

It has been a tradition to visit the cymbal factories since the 1980s, when big-name drummers such as Billy Hart and Elvin Jones visited the *Istanbul* factory. When the drummers see the production process, they are often astonished; it evokes the historical roots of the tradition, and it allows them to witness how the extensive manual labor of the craftspeople come to be materialized in the cymbals they make. The simplicity of that random work organization and the hand-hammering often impressed them, as together they represent the magical process through which a metal cast becomes a cymbal. As one drummer explained: It feels

> …really original, these workshops are not super complex. It's just people working there, doing their thing… It was really fascinating to see that you have this initial idea, a piece of metal, then you have a musical instrument, which can be so diverse. That's amazing and so simple! (Interview with Drummer 8)

And given the importance of how a cymbal is made for its sound, another drummer asserted, "The master who hammers the cymbal may not be aware, but he can change the music".

The internalization process of the drummers also involved the process of distinguishing the two types of cymbals—constructing the handmade cymbals as embodying a long-established special character, a personality, and the machine-made cymbals as lacking personality for the sake of consistency. One drummer told us,

> It [the machine-made cymbal] gives you a sound in the middle. It's not bad at all, just a bit lacking in character. Every handmade cymbal gives a completely different timbre. Look at five cymbals made in the same model. All give different timbres actually. Because it's handmade, the place of every hammer stroke is different. (Interview with Drummer 3)

Thanks to the distributors' pre-selections, handmade cymbals became distinctive yet similar within the range of the cymbal. At the outset, the drummers believed that "…each handmade

cymbal is like a person" and getting to know one is "…like getting to know a person"—full of the novel feelings and surprises that a creative drummer may creatively leverage. Through their chosen cymbal, the drummers distinguished themselves from colleagues who were interested in standard and consistent sounds. The drummers thus internalized the life history of handmade cymbals, and the general characteristics created by this process of re-welcoming the cymbal into their world as a choice over a machine-made cymbal.

Rationalizing. After choosing the ideal handmade cymbal, the drummers went to great lengths to justify their choice by rationalizing the imperfections observed in the production process and experienced in the cymbal. They probed the production process to make better sense of it and justified the inconsistencies as a hallmark of uniqueness and an added source of value.

The drummers who were familiar with other similar workshop organizations spoke about the working conditions at *Istanbul* factory as far from perfect. The imperfections that they observed were mostly related to a dirty working environment, which is inherent in such metal work, and to the craftspeople's true feelings behind making such a valuable instrument. As one veteran drummer described a visit to *Istanbul*,

> They were working very diligently, primitively, that state in that foundry, the pots, and melting them down and bringing them to this side, the cylinders, everything. There is filth everywhere and so on. There were no good conditions, no human health, the kids eat yogurt so that they are not poisoned by the smoke coming out of the casting. (Interview with Drummer 1)

Today, in the factories of the descendants, the working conditions of the craftspeople do not seem as extreme, but the appearance of the factory at the outset was not actually what the drummers were expecting to see. A drummer talking about his visit to the factory of a descendant explained, "Maybe you come from other parts of the world, you go to Istanbul and visit that factory. Maybe it's a bit like a mess or you feel like it's not organized…" He adds, "But I like that; it felt real."

Furthermore, most of the drummers were impressed by the fact that it is an everyday, routine job for a craftsperson to make a cymbal from start to finish, especially the hand-hammering part of it, because "…They both talk and hammer. There is no principle, there is no discipline. He drinks tea and talks; he doesn't know where he hammers on the cymbal." What all drummers agree upon, however, is that it is this simple and sincere representation of the cymbal production that endows these cymbals with their characteristic personality—unlike their machine-made counterparts. Thus, even after realizing that the craftspeople have been "…. making cymbals without knowing…" or disdaining to show that they care about making cymbals, the drummers feel that they are "…even more in love with those cymbals, the place, and everything."

As a result of the production process characterized by some degree of randomness, the coincidental results—the variable cymbal sounds in the same series of cymbals—were justified by the drummers. This is particularly the case when they were searching for a specific sound, such as when they decide to replace an old cymbal with a new one. Seeking a cymbal within a specific series means that the drummers also realize that they may never find what they are looking for, but "…that's not the point in choosing these cymbals". Rather, it is seen as an opportunity to find sounds that will make a difference in their music because they are surprisingly interesting. As one drummer, explaining his feelings about variability of cymbal sounds, told us:

> Sometimes it's difficult when you have to replace a cymbal that you like—when it breaks for example. But you can't really find one the same. But it's part of it... I like the fact that it's not consistent all the time, because I think there is a sort of poetry in that. You're surprised that a cymbal sounds weird, and you like it. If every cymbal sounded the same, it wouldn't be interesting to me. (Interview with Drummer 6)

Thus, the drummers rationalized all the imperfections and accepted the handmade cymbal for better or for worse before making it a permanent musical career choice and digging deeper to interpret its meaning and value through its uses and performances.

Personalizing. As the handmade cymbals became a permanent choice for the drummers, they turned into objects of the drummers' professional identity in their performances. We identified two steps by which this process happens. The drummers first learn how to use the cymbal to its full sound potential, and then enrich it with their personal creative self-expression. Personalization is key to the way in which the drummers developed their own interpretation of the product's meaning and value. As the products became entangled in the world of the users, it was through their performances that the cymbals gained an ultimate interpretation of uniqueness.

In our interviews, drummers highlighted the fact that even though they have been attracted to handmade cymbals, to be able to play them to their full sound potential is a long process that requires experimentation and patience. As a veteran drummer from the *Istanbul* period asserted:

> It has always been hard to play handmade cymbals made in Turkey, particularly those from the 1980s. They aren't like pressed [machine-made] cymbals, which have a bit more ready-made sound, and are easier to play, even for a high-school student. But you have to work hard, play the stick in and out of a handmade cymbal to get a clean sound. (Interview with Drummer 2)

But once the drummers got to know their cymbals and to make good sound from them in different situations, they became more attached to them. This process helped to create professional drummers who could define what they expected to hear from a cymbal.

By spending a long time with handmade cymbals that have "good" sound, the drummers started to re-enrich the cymbals with their own creative self-expression—their own signature sound or "touch" that could be recognized by their audiences. As one drummer explained, drummers want to own and play

> …great-sounding cymbals. Maybe it's the same for all instruments, but the cymbals are very special… What I think of the signature of a drummer is having great cymbals and finding your sound with it. (Interview with Drummer 6)

Such standpoints of present-day professional drummers are similar to those of the early big-name drummers who became associated with *Istanbul* cymbals in the 1980s. As Jack DeJohnette reportedly said in his interview with Hugo Pinksterboer in 1989:

> I know that at some point in life, every drummer finds that special cymbal—an irreplaceable sound, a one and only. I know of drummers who wouldn't think about playing without that cymbal; it's their voice. (Pinksterboer, 1992: 51)

It is usually through the drummers' emotional attachment to and relationship with a cymbal that such a personal art of cymbal playing emerges:

> If I love a cymbal, I find the quickest way to express what I want to do. I don't have to fight the instrument. If I don't know the cymbal, there would always be something between me and the music to make the right thing. So, if I know the cymbal well, it's just there. And it's part of my personality, of my sound. (Interview with Drummer 8)

Although a few of the drummers that we interviewed believed that it is the drummer that makes the difference in the sound of a cymbal, many others thought that there are limits to what can be manipulated on a cymbal simply by playing. In either case, such personable aspects of a handmade cymbal are unique to its drummer and cannot be imitated or replicated by another drummer, because of the individuality of the cymbal and the variability of cymbal playing Another drummer explains this phenomenon:

> [If] you have one cymbal and two different drummers who play it, there will be two totally different sounds. The way you hold the stick, how much vibration you leave up to the stick, the way the stick is made, and its tip, all these make a huge difference… It's really crazy! (Interview with Drummer 14)

As the drummers develop their unique self-expression, thanks to the variabilities in cymbal playing, they also develop their own interpretation of the singularity, the uniqueness, of each handmade cymbal. As one present-day drummer reflected, "…it becomes uniqueness when you spend time with the cymbal… and handmade cymbals gave me the opportunity to sound unique". Mel Lewis, the first and long-time endorser of *Istanbul* cymbals expressed a similar sentiment in his quote in an *Istanbul* ad in 1985: "Individuality is important to me. When I play *Istanbul*, I know that the sound is mine alone… They are absolutely the greatest."

Thus, as the drummers personalize the cymbals, they gain their own interpretation of uniqueness that emerges from playing them. Even though a drummer's touch cannot be replicated, the cymbals that symbolize it have been subject to replication, first by *Istanbul*, and later by the companies of the descendants as a prestigious activity. After his death in 1990, Mel Lewis's iconic *Istanbul* cymbals were flown back to the *Istanbul* factory and the craftspeople tried to duplicate every detail of the cymbals by measuring, weighing, feeling, and listening to them. As a journalist reported in his review in *MD*, "These artisans even went so far as to match the custom contours [i.e., imperfections] of Mel's cymbals" (Miller, 1996). He added that although the cymbals were "quite individual" in nature, they did have general similarities that could be traced back to the original cymbals. These cymbals are still available in the catalogue of *Istanbul Agop* as the premium cymbal series, along with other signature series. Another similar but more recent example is *Tony Williams Tribute Cymbals* in *Istanbul Mehmet*'s current catalogue.

Such replication processes reflect how personalization activities in the drummers' sphere provide feedback to the producers, mainly by shaping their enrichment activities. A personalized cymbal is re-personalized when it travels from the world of the producer to that of the drummer, as the very act of playing it results in an enhanced feeling of uniqueness, to increased mysticism. A veteran drummer explained how it feels to play a signature series cymbal:

> Maybe a question of prestige, like an old wine, like an old whiskey. If you play a cymbal of Tony Williams', it is something that you say, "Oh my god!". You will never sound like Tony Williams because you are not Tony Williams in the end. But playing these cymbals gives you the feeling like you have a beautiful piece of art in your hands, I would say. Something to do with prestige, also the history of it, you know. It gives quality, and it gives meaning to an object. (Interview with Drummer 12)

The interplay of personalization and re-personalization underscores how the users, as they reach the epitomes of their world of art, become pivotal actors in constructing and

reconstructing product meaning and value of products, shaping their legacy for future consumers and producers.

A process model of singularization and valuation of traditional products in markets

Based on our analysis, we developed a process model illustrating how traditionalist cymbals—hand-hammered and characterized by their inconsistencies—reclaimed their status as unique yet commensurable products meaningfully valorized by key market actors in contrast to modernist, machine-hammered counterparts. This process followed a modernist challenge that shifted the market's valuation regime to prioritize sound consistency. Using a cultural biography approach (Kopytoff, 1986), we traced the movement of these products within the market and mapped their transitions between actors. Our goal was to demonstrate how value of traditionalist products is constructed around their singularity and to reveal the ways by which traditional products may regain market appeal amidst modernization and standardization pressures. Figure 3 presents the process model we developed, incorporating the timeline of events outlined in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 2.3 about here.

Following the modernist challenge that introduced a new valuation framework centered on consistency, the process begins with the offering of traditional products. Traditionalist producer(s) seek to render their products singular by mystifying their origins and enriching them with narratives about the underlying production process. These efforts aim to highlight the unique qualities of their cymbals during the reproduction stage. Such producer-driven activities resonate with findings from previous research (Raffaelli, 2019; Cattani et al., 2017; Kroezen and Heugens, 2019) and align with the broader concept of *product singularization*. However, the emphasis on enrichment adds an important nuance, as these narratives frame the

singularity of traditional products not merely as an inherent quality but as a socially constructed characteristic, laying the foundation for the emergence of a new valuation regime in the market.

The producers' efforts, however, represent only one part of the singularization process. Intermediaries play a critical role in furthering this process, particularly by desingularizing the producers' offerings to make them commensurable and accessible to consumers. Intermediaries achieve this by grouping singularized products into meaningful clusters and advancing judgment devices that facilitate their valuation, exchange, and transition to consumers. Their contributions are best understood by distinguishing between two complementary groups of intermediaries—independent and associated—each engaging in distinct but interconnected activities. *Independent* intermediaries, such as journalists, dequalify the producer's framing of singularity as an inherent quality of each product, reframing it as uniqueness in terms of variability, in contrast to the predictability of modernist products. At the same time, they acknowledge that inconsistencies are a feature of all products, including modernist ones, and even portray these variations in a positive light. Independent intermediaries further contribute to the valuation regime by publicizing endorsements from high-status users, emphasizing authenticity as a key dimension of value. *Associated* intermediaries, such as distributors, calibrate the offerings to reduce uncertainty for consumers and enhance the commensurability of products across two dimensions: within the product range and with individual consumer preferences. Distributors balance the interpretations of producers and journalists, enabling consumers to navigate the market with greater confidence. Together, the activities of independent and associated intermediaries can be described as *product desingularization*, a process fundamental to ensure that singularized products remain accessible and marketable. While some aspects of these activities align with existing literature (e.g., Sharkey et al., 2023; Karpik, 2010), our study highlights the vital role of associated

intermediaries, an overlooked group essential to mitigate the commoditization of singularized products.

The significance of associated intermediaries becomes even clearer when examining the consumer side of the process. Once products reach consumers through associated intermediaries, consumers engage in resingularization by personalizing and reinterpreting them. This involves internalizing the mystified production history and product characteristics, rationalizing imperfections, and re-enriching the products through personalization, ultimately transforming them into objects of artistic self-expression. For consumers who achieve prominence in their field their personalized products contribute further to the producer's singularization efforts, providing additional material for an enrichment narrative and for reinforcing the quest for singularity among future consumers. These activities collectively constitute *product resingularization*.

While the role of users in artistic self-expression and product resingularization aligns with recent research (Nelson et al., 2023), our findings highlight a few critical distinctions. Unlike prior studies, where consumer identity alone may drive resingularization, our analysis emphasizes the work of independent and associated intermediaries to this aim. Counterfactual evidence from the rise of online sales of Istanbul cymbals corroborates this distinction. As one distributor noted:

> Drummers must be educated … They don't even go to shops, which is a pity because you cannot select a cymbal based on the recording of your favorite drummer. … The education required is getting those customers to come into shops to check out the cymbals in person. Because if you like that one, don't think you can go online and have the same one. It will be different. At least from those hand-hammered cymbals from Turkey, they are very hard to find two similar ones in the same series. (Interview with Distributor 2)

The absence of calibration by associated intermediaries, we believe, may feed confusion and disappointment among consumers and eventually pose a threat to the market appeal of traditional products in face of modernization. While professional identities matter, calibration

through intermediaries remains essential to the resingularization of products, and to the reinforcement of traditional products' valuation regime in the market.

In sum, our process model represents the stylized flow of the product from production to consumer, highlights the fundamental roles played by producers, independent intermediaries, associated intermediaries, and consumers in the singularization and valuation processes. Together, these actors and their activities enable the valuation of traditional products as an alternative market category in the face of modernist competition.

Boundary conditions

As our process model illustrates, product singularization in markets results from the co-construction of a product category's singularity and its valuation by multiple actors. However, our such a model is bounded by several conditions, three of which warrant particular attention.

First, the valuation of traditional products in our context was facilitated by the continued association of the "Turkish cymbal" label with its traditionalist interpretation. In other words, the market had not been fully commoditized, and the label "Turkish cymbals" had not become synonymous with modern production methods. This condition suggests that a minimal degree of demand heterogeneity is necessary to sustain the appeal of traditional products in markets challenged by modernization. This is not an unusual condition though, as multiple studies have made similar assumptions (e.g., Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Dupin and Wezel, 2023).

Second, the unique characteristics of our industry—specifically, the pre-existence of traditional cymbals as a legitimate product—played a significant role in supporting the efforts of traditional producers. These producers successfully leveraged traces and institutional remnants of the past (Kroezen and Heugens, 2019). Additionally, the early endorsement of traditional cymbals by prominent drummers was critical. These endorsements contributed to

the establishment of judgment devices that, over time, became institutionalized within a novel valuation regime.

Third, our model relies on the relevance and reputation of intermediaries between producers and consumers. While this condition holds true in many experience goods, it is less certain in markets increasingly dominated by online marketing and sales. Using Karpik's (2010) terminology, our theory remains applicable as long as intermediaries continue to act as *cicerones* (i.e., experts) and *confluences* (i.e., dedicated shops). But, for instance, the theory may hold less relevance in contexts where these actors are replaced by *appellations* (i.e., brands) or rankings.

We view these boundary conditions as key to the generalizability of our framework and encourage future research to extend and refine our process model. Testing our findings in other empirical contexts will further enhance understanding of product singularization and valuation.

DISCUSSION

How can traditional products thrive in a society that values modern and standardized alternatives? Our study explored how, by seeking to singularize and valorize a traditional product category, producers, intermediaries and consumers can resist a modernist challenge. This resistance does not result in the defeat of the modernist challenger but rather the emergence of two distinct, sustained categories—a bifurcation commonly observed in various markets. Our findings reaffirm the need to closely examine the specific products, in order to understanding the dynamics of how traditional practices can maintain their position in a modernizing society. Products, situated at the intersection of all relevant market actors, function as embodiments of meanings, they offer a way for these actors to express their values (Fligstein and Dauter, 2007; Lounsbury and Rao, 2004).

While earlier studies have explored selected aspects of product singularization and the of the valuation of singularized products, our research integrates these fragmented insights into

a cohesive process model. This model positions (1) product singularization as an alternative mechanism to identity- and authenticity-based approaches on traditionalism and modernism in organizational sociology literature, (2) product singularization and valuation as a multi-actor process that sustains the growing appreciation of tradition in post-industrial economies, and (3) the distinct activities of different market actors and how they interrelate in the process of the valuation of unique and incommensurable products in markets by the construction of an alternative valuation regime. In the next sections we spell out the contributions of these insights to several streams of research.

Preservation of traditional product categories through singularization

Our study advances understanding of how traditional product categories can be preserved in the face of modernization—not through adaptation or redesign, but through the collective singularization of products and the construction of an alternative valuation regime. Prior research has emphasized the role of producers' collective identities in sustaining traditionalism in markets (Negro et al., 2011; Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000). More specifically, this literature has focused on how producer-led initiatives preserve the distinction between traditional and modern product categories through authenticity claims grounded in producers' identities. Yet recent research has shown that these mechanisms are not always sufficient to preserve the value of traditional products, as they are open to violation and erosion over time—particularly when producers deviate from identity standards, as found in follow-up studies of the craft beer industry (e.g., Verhaal et al., 2015; Frake, 2017).

In contrast, our findings suggest that preserving a traditional product category requires mechanisms that go beyond identity or authenticity claims. It involves a sustained process of product singularization—rendering the product incommensurable with modern alternatives—and the collective construction of a valuation regime that legitimizes its uniqueness. This process engages not only producers, but also intermediaries and users, who together create the

interpretive scaffolding through which singular products can be understood, appreciated, and defended against standardization.

In our case, Turkish cymbals—long valued for their craft-based production—were reintroduced into a market dominated by modern, machine-made alternatives. These modernist cymbals emphasized consistency and comparability, posing a direct threat to the survival of the traditional category. Rather than competing on modernist terms, traditionalist actors collectively constructed a valuation regime that redefined inconsistency as a virtue. Producers framed tonal variation as an outcome of heritage and embodied skill; intermediaries translated this variation into educational narratives and selection advice; and users resingularized cymbals through performance, personalization, and public endorsement. Together, these interpretive activities rendered the products non-substitutable with modern cymbals.

Notably, this was not a one-time reframing but a recursive process: as singularized products circulated through the market, they were continuously reinterpreted and revalorized by different actor groups in ways that reinforced their distinctiveness. The resulting valuation regime enabled traditional cymbals to avoid direct substitution by modern alternatives, thereby preserving the category in the face of standardization pressures.

Even today, although Turkish cymbals appeal to drummers across musical genres, they remain most preferred by professional jazz drummers, whose aesthetic values align closely with the singularized qualities of the product. Our study therefore offers a stronger and more dynamic explanation for the preservation of traditional product categories than prior work rooted in identity, authenticity, or product differentiation. It shows that singularization—when supported by a robust, multi-actor valuation regime—can sustain market relevance for traditional products without requiring their transformation. Conversely, when singularization breaks down or is unsupported, markets tend to drift toward standardization, allowing modernist value regimes to dominate (Lee et al., 2017; Sikavica and Pozner, 2013).

A multi-actor perspective on the valuation of singular products

Because markets are socially constructed (Fligstein and Dauter, 2007; Rosa et al., 1999), the construction of product value requires a look beyond a single set of market actors (Grodal and Kahl, 2017; Grodal, 2018). Yet, extant literature on traditional products has focused on producers (e.g., Navis and Glynn, 2010; Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010; Weber, Heinze, and Desoucey, 2008; Raffaelli, 2019), or intermediaries (e.g., Khaire, 2017; Anand and Jones, 2008; Lee et al., 2017; or consumers (e.g., Nelson et al., 2023) (for an exception, see (Boghossian and David, 2021).

Our study highlights the distinct characteristics and activities of several actors—producers, intermediaries, and consumers—that contribute to the construction of the lasting success of traditional products. Zooming in on the individual role of each actor provides several insights into the meaning of product inconsistency. A special role in the process is played by intermediaries. Our distinction among multiple types of them allows us to unpack the complementary contributions of these actors to the process of product singularization. Independent intermediaries dequalified the producer's interpretations and announced the products as merely inconsistent, while simultaneously legitimizing inconsistencies as a feature of modernist products; associated intermediaries eased commensuration through their careful and informed calibration of products. Their critical role is most apparent when placed in-between the efforts of producers at mystification and enrichment, and those of the consumers aimed at internalizing such activities via personalizing the product (see also Nelson and his colleagues 2023).

Altogether, the role of intermediaries highlighted in our work speaks to the literature on singular products. The problem of reducing the uncertainty of valuing the quality of singular products is partly explored by the work of Karpik (2010). In his conceptualization, judgment devices—i.e., cognitive devices in the form of social actors or social artifacts—are necessary

to reduce the uncertainty involved in the comparison of singular products (Aspers and Beckert 2011). Empirical examples of judgment devices include critics and rankings, for instance (Espeland and Sauder, 2007). It is not surprising that subsequent work in organizational sociology has mostly focused on those critical intermediaries (for a review see Sharkey et al., 2021). Our paper builds on this works, but at the same time is the first to show how their grouping and calibration efforts is essential to endow with value products that have been marketed as unique.

On the process of product singularization

Our paper deepens also the understanding of how the meaning and value of unique and incommensurable products are constructed. We accomplish this goal by integrating the activities of cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1984), judgment devices and valuation regimes (Karpik, 2010). Our research is among the firsts to empirically illustrate how multiple actors contribute to co-construct the perception of product singularities and their valuation in markets challenged by modernization and standardization. This process involves the reiterated and simultaneous work of different actors who contribute to (a) establish product singularities in markets, (b) maintain them against the forces of commoditization, (c) and reaffirm them through choice and use also in relation to other singular products. Our cultural biography approach (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986) was essential to this aim as it allowed the tracking of product life from one actor to another. We opted for this approach because it reflects not only the timeline of the events under study, but also the market process around the products themselves. Thus, it helps us to understand how intersubjectivity of meaning is achieved—a long-utilized hypothesis behind value-based indicators, such as transaction values in various studies (e.g., Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010).

We recognize that this methodological approach may not suit every empirical context. To which industries could the cultural biography and product singularization apply? Although

seemingly unique, the detailed process described in this paper may be approached in similar ways in other craft industries (e.g., piano production, violins, artisanal knives; see Cattani et al., 2013; 2017; also, Kroezen et al., 2021), or any other markets in which product singularization may emerge via personalization and customization (Boltanski and Esquerre, 2020). Indeed, the process of personalization and customization is naturally suited to be approached from a cultural biography approach. We remain convinced, therefore, that the potential limitations of our empirical approach are outweighed by the unique opportunity it provides for exploring the process of product singularization and the valuation of traditionalist products in various markets.

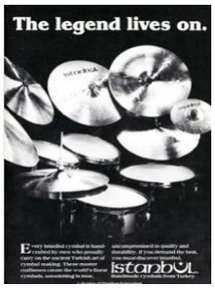
Table 2.1. Description of Data

Actor	Data Source	# of Sources	Use in Analysis
Producer (*Istanbul*)			
	Interviews		
	First round (2021): The descendants of *Istanbul* (former members of *Istanbul*—4 founders and 1 employee of current cymbal producers in Istanbul	5	Informed our understanding of Turkish cymbal history, establishment of *Istanbul*, and how it affected the evolution of the cymbal industry in general.
	Second round (2022): 1 co-founder of *Istanbul* (Mehmet Tamdeger) and the descendants of *Istanbul*: 2 founders and 6 employees of current cymbal producers in Istanbul	9	More detailed insights into the identity of company, handmade method, and the cymbal features. Identification of narratives related to emergent mechanisms of product valuation.
	Observations		
	Visits to the factories of the descendants (2021 and 2022)	4	Non-participant (as if a drummer) observation of the entire production process, always accompanied by a narrator. Collection of a number of photos and videos from the production and from the office areas, which are full of historical artifacts. Yielded insights into the interpretation and narration of the cymbal-making tradition by the representatives, which helped refining the relevant findings (e.g., *museification*)
	Visit to cymbal exhibition organized by a municipality in Istanbul featuring *Istanbul Mehmet* in 2022	1	Collection of evidence (photos and videos) of the artifacts that are informative of the history, production process, and products of *Istanbul*. Provided additional insights into the emerging findings.
	Archival		
	Advertisements by the company in *Modern Drummer* magazine, 1981–1996	44	Understanding the company's product-framing choices in terms of cymbal features and meaning.
	Catalogues and websites: Product catalogue of the company from 1980s; 2 recent catalogues and 2 websites of the descendants' companies	5	Providing insights into the founding stories through historical narratives included and the evolution of product framing.
	Articles in national newspapers (*Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Aksam, Agos*) between 2014 and 2018, containing interviews with the founders and descendants	5	Triangulation of the data from present-day interviews and observations.
	NAMM Oral History Interviews with the founders and descendants in 2000s	2	Triangulation of the data from present-day interviews and observations.

YouTube documentaries and historical podcasts (e.g., *Drum History Podcast*) on Turkish cymbal making between 2016 and 2021	7	Documentaries provided visual evidence on the production processes, how they are narrated by the founders and descendants. Podcasts that include interviews with several descendants helped triangulation of the primary data above.
Independent intermediaries (i.e., drumming journalists, writers)		
Archival		
Articles and opinion columns in *Modern Drummer* magazine by the journalists between 1981 to 1996, containing reference to *Istanbul* and its products	27	Informed our understanding of journalists' views and evaluations of the company's processes and products, at times in comparison with that of incumbents.
Books on drumming, drums, and cymbals by industry specialists and historians (Tuglaci, 1986; Pinksterboer, 1992; Beck, 1995; Nicholls, 2004; Mattingly, 2006; Brennan, 2020)	6	Provided insights into the cymbal industry standards established and updated by the specialists over time, how *Istanbul* cymbals are evaluated against them.
YouTube podcasts (*Drum History Podcast*), including interviews with cymbal specialists in 2020 and 2021	4	Triangulation of the insights from written sources as reflections on the evolution of the cymbal industry and *Istanbul Cymbals* within this evolution.
Associated intermediaries (distributors)		
Interviews		
First round (2021–2022): Current local distributors of two descendant companies' products (*Istanbul Agop* and *Istanbul Mehmet*) in Istanbul	2	Introductory understanding of the roles and activities of the distributors as intermediaries between producers and drummers.
Second round (2023): A former regional distributor of Istanbul in USA, a current national distributor of *Istanbul Agop* in Switzerland, and a current local distributor of descendants' products in Istanbul	3	Provided in-depth understanding of the specific distributor activities since the early times of *Istanbul* to date in mediating the purchase decisions of the drummers.
Drummers who currently play *Istanbul* and/or cymbals from the companies of descendants		
Interviews		
First round (2022): 4 professional drummers from Turkey	4	Introductory understanding of the background of choosing and playing handmade cymbals.
Second round (2023): 4 professional drummers from Turkey and 7 from Switzerland	11	More specific insights into the process that guides cymbal choices and the formation of attachment and interpretation of the instrument.
Archival		
Interviews in *Modern Drummer* magazine and a book (Pinksterboer, 1992) with name drummers who were associated with *Istanbul,* 1981–1996	14	Validation of consonance between the reflections of past and present-day drummers.

Table 2.2. Illustrative Evidence for Singularization by the Producer

Illustrative quotations	First-order codes	Second-order themes
"When [*K. Zildjian*] factory was closed in 1977,' he [Agop] says, 'I have become a fish out of water,' in his own words. Because he has always done this job throughout his life." (Interview with Descendant 1—*Agop's son*)	Romanticizing	Mystifying and Grounding
"We struggled a lot, it wasn't easy. We created it from nothing. I had a car. I sold my car. I had a gold bracelet on my wrist, I sold it. They were not enough, but we started gradually. Of course, we were the only ones making cymbals in Turkey… We would use the machines in other workshops and roll the cymbals, and we'd go over the cars... I would go and borrow from the grocery store and say, 'I'm going to pay salaries of my workers.' That was the case, that is, out of nothing, I am telling the truth." (Interview with Mehmet Tamdeger)		
"When closing the factory, they [Zildjians] cut everything related to cymbal making, gave it to the scrap dealers. They cut all the equipment so that no one could use them, no one could make this. Those who come out after them had a lot of difficulty. For example, Mehmet and Agop—they didn't have a cylinder or furnace, nothing…They're founded like this, there was nothing like we have now. (Interview with Descendant 3)		
"Zildjian... a family that we respect a lot. They named the cymbal. I have great respect for them, both as a company and as a family… But their techniques are different from the real handmade Turkish cymbal." (Interview with Descendant 1)	Associating	
"When the factory here was closed, there were Agop and Mehmet masters working in this factory, and there was also a Mike master, Mike Zildjian… In fact, today he is a very important person in the existence of *Zildjian* and *Sabian*. Mr. Mehmet's very close friend, childhood friend… when the factory was closed, Avedis Zildjian transferred Mike Zildjian to America... They convinced him to buy the *K. Zildjian* trademark, which implies Turkish cymbal. And they want to make *K. Zildjian* in America, but they don't know how to do it… Who will do it? Someone from the family—Mike Zildjian." (Interview Descendant 2)		
"It's very, very important for Elvin Jones to use a company's product. Because one of the most important musicians and drummers of all time is Elvin Jones… They wanted to use these special cymbals. There was no such thing to go them ourselves at that time… "Because of the quality of the product, namely *Istanbul* cymbals, they came to us, and we sponsored them... Some even bought the cymbals. Tony Williams… comes to our workshop… he chooses 3 to 5 cymbals. My father says, 'This's how much these cost.' The guy may not have given money and received a cymbal until then… But Mr. Agop also says, 'We have manual labor here; we have sweat of brow; there must be a price to this.' Of course, after a certain period of time, when things got a little different, we gave free sponsorship to Elvin Jones, Mel Lewis, Jack de Johnette, Art Blakey." (Interview with Descendant 1)		
"An American drummer named Billy Hart came, a very important drummer. He came and looked at the cymbals. He liked them very much. "Let me take this, take this, take this, take all?" he said, and we said, 'Take them.' We should have given them to the very famous drummer without a fee, but he paid for all of them... He was a big help, and he said, 'I'm going back to USA now, look who I'm going to send you...' And that was enough for us." (Interview with Mehmet Tamdeger)		
"When Mel Lewis, the legendary drummer saw our cymbals, he said, 'They're back!' A motto emerges. These products or this kind of cymbal making is back again. These harmonies are back. The warm timbres are back. Inevitably they made a place in the cymbal market. Because it was gone, it was over... If this work had not been built by Mr. Agop—that is, the art of making Turkish style cymbals again, there would not have been such a profession now." (Interview Descendant 7)	Reclaiming	
"Since the product is already nice and original *K*., the reaction was, "Oh, they are back!" Because everyone knows that the *K.* produced in USA is not actually *K. Zildjian*." (Interview with Descendant 2)		
"Their (*Zildjian*'s) motto is 'Genuine Turkish Cymbals, Made in USA' which is actually such a ridiculous thing when we look at it. Well, it's actually more interesting when you type Swiss Watch onto a watch made in China. They still want to use that image." (Interview with Descendant 4)		
Advertisements related to reclaiming (MD)		

 "They're here. From the birthplace of the cymbal come an instrument of unparalleled beauty. The sound of the future is ancient. Cymbals handmade in Turkey." (1984)  "The legend lives on. Every Istanbul cymbal is hand-crafted by men who proudly carry on the ancient Turkish art of cymbal making. These master craftsmen create the world's finest cymbals, astonishing in tone, uncompromised in quality and durability. If you demand the best, you must discover Istanbul." (1984)  "Genuine Turkish delight. If you want genuine TURKISH cymbals, then you must choose Istanbul. ONLY Istanbul Cymbals are HANDMADE in TURKEY by craftsmen using traditional methods going back generations. Don't be fooled, American Candy is American Candy, Swiss Chocolate is Swiss Chocolate but only Istanbul is genuine Turkish Delight." (1985)		
"At the time, we were 9 or 10 employees working in the workshop and my father was very disciplined. My father always forced Arman and me to work much more than anybody else, so that we could understand every single detail about the art of cymbal making. The production process, in those days was much more difficult. We used to work with charcoal heaters to melt the alloy for casting. After melting, I had to carry a 55–60 kg bronze-filled melting pot between my legs with a special lifting device that we had fabricated, and then pour the melted alloy into pans very carefully so that it wouldn't splash. The temperature inside the melting pot would often exceed 1000 C, so I would first soak my pants with cold water, in order to avoid burning myself. My pants would become dry from the heat before I even began to pour the alloy into pans. The whole thing would take maybe 7 or 8 seconds and my pants would begin to burn if I took too long. This is how we cast every single cymbal at the time." (Agop's son, an excerpt from website/catalog)	Dedication	Enriching
"[Interview about whether production process could be standardized] No, but I don't think it's right to do either. It can't be done anyway. So, for example, I'm a cymbal master; I'm a hammerer. You put a 16-inch crash in front of me and I'm going to hammer it, and I start hitting. I can't count the number of hits, and I can't always hit the same spot. Today I feel more tired, I hammer 400 times. Tomorrow I am more energetic, and I hammer 420 times… The shape [is important] of course; for the shape, he must have hammered with a certain frequency. He also controls with his eyes, and after getting the required shape, he stops. He gives it to the turner. The turner then does its lathing and compression." (Interview with Descendant 5)	Randomizing	
"We started with apprenticeship, but how much can an 11-year-old do this work? For example, holding the hammer and hammering the cymbal, working in the casting... Since they are all under the same roof, wherever there is a need. The production starts from the casting, and after the casting begins, the processing of these starts. You also get into the casting. After that, there is the hammering process. You also enter the hammering process. You also get into the plastering process. So, you're learning all at the same time, not in stages." (Interview with Descendant 3)		
"The drummers come and visit from all over the world, like pilgrims. We have already been exporting many countries, the rest come, visit and buy themselves here. They say such beautiful words when they see how we produce cymbals, and it's enough for me. I don't care about making money, I like the way they become interested and fascinated. They even take pictures with me." (Archival interview with Mehmet Tamdeger, 2016)	Museification	

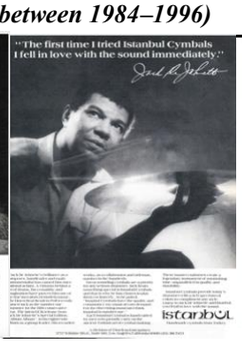
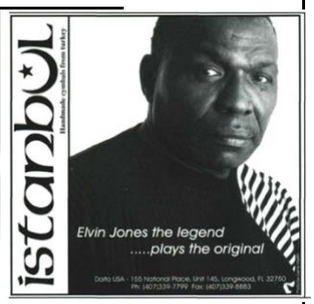
"All drummers who visit here, either when they're in Istanbul or transferring in Istanbul. They're already very interested. They want to see the process and hear the hammering sounds. It blows their minds! When they could choose one cymbal out of what is available in Europe or USA, here they like them all and enter into a very difficult selection process." (Interview with Descendant 5)	
"In the handmade Turkish cymbals, there is a warm timbre. There are different harmonies. These are the features that the hand hammering gives... Because the more irregular the hammering, the more harmony there is, and the more complex sounds emerge.... When you put those [machine-made] cymbals and our cymbals together, when you put them side by side, even someone who is not a musician says, "Yes, there's a different timbre; there's another harmony here". They can take that warmth from our cymbals. There is no cold metal sound in our products." (Interview with Descendant 1)	Characterizing
"Handmade is not like machine-made. The most important feature of a handmade cymbal is that it is like a painting. Even if I want to make the same, I can't, because it has a unique sound. What I can do is to make a similar one. It's not possible to make the same cymbal. For instance, if there's a crash cymbal, I can make another very similar crash, but not the same... The cymbal you get from us will be yours alone." (Archival interview with Mehmet Tamdeger, 2016)	
"There are a lot of variables [in the production process]. Since there are many variables, each cymbal is unique… When we look at it now, there are differences in both *Zildjian*'s *K.*s and *Sabian*'s *HH*, but they do a lot of the processing with machines. So, the difference between the cymbals is decreasing." (Interview with Descendant 8)	
Advertisements related to characterizing (MD, between 1984–1996)	
   	
"The production technique cannot be improved. You can only keep the criteria much stricter in selection, but it doesn't make any sense. In the end, the product is produced and is beautiful, but maybe a little low-pitched character or high-pitched character. What are we going to do? Are we going to throw it away? … So now each model has its own character. In that character, it doesn't matter if it's a little higher or lower pitched." (Interview with Descendant 4)	
In the past, we worked with a musician friend. He was testing the products; he didn't like the sound. And I said, "Look, you might not like it, but it's your own choice… You can't say that this is good and that's bad. It can be bad for you." Here every cymbal is being tested based on its sound and sent after that. There is no such thing as a very good musician can choose a very good cymbal. It's his own personal preference. It is important to produce good products that appeal to everyone." (Interview with Descendant 1)	Judging
"There is no such thing as "I don't like it"." If you don't like it, I like it, or if I don't like it, he likes it… Of course, they are different because they're handmade, so you can't find two identical cymbals… That's why professionals usually use our cymbals. They try and buy it if they like it. The price does not matter to them." (Interview with Descendant 3)	

Table 2.3. Illustrative Evidence for Desingularization by the Intermediaries

Illustrative quotations	First-order codes	Second-order themes
"A new entry to the cymbal field that represented a complete throwback to previous traditions was the Istanbul brand, which debuted in the October '84 issue. These cymbals were promoted on the basis of being made in Turkey - "birthplace of the cymbal" and become quite popular with jazz players." (Van Horn, *Modern Drummer Magazine*, January 1986)	Objectifying the qualities	Dequalifying and legitimizing ***(by independent intermediaries)***
"The artisan nature of the company is well reflected in the sound and the character of the Istanbul Cymbals. The main series, simply called Istanbul, are quite close to the old K's. This also goes for their consistency: as implied by the manufacturing process, the differences in exact size, profile, hammering and weight between two "identical" cymbals generally is considerably larger than is the case with their Trans-Atlantic counterparts," (Pinksterboer, 1992)		
"When dealing with cast cymbals, one must remember that there can be tremendous variety between two cymbals of the same size and type… The point is, don't buy cast cymbals through mail order, or even through a special-order arrangement where you can't check them out first. You might be lucky and get exactly what you want, but you might not. In this particular case, if you've always wanted an old K, you can't assume that ordering an Istanbul will give you that sound... But I can't deny the evidence of all those other Istanbuls I've heard over the past few years." (Mattingly, *Modern Drummer Magazine*, May 1988)		
"Istanbul - This Turkish company specializes in "traditional" hand-hammered cymbals… However romantic the idea of true hand hammering might sound, machine hammering is much more consistent. If a cymbal really is hammered by hand, you'll want to hear it before you buy it. (Mattingly, 2006)		
They [the drumming journalists] were right. Because when I went through all the cymbals at Istanbul at that time, there were some models where I could check 30 cymbals and find one that was good. One out of 30. And out of 13–15 small crashes, most of them were crap." (Interview with Distributor 2)	Improving commensurability	Calibrating ***(by associated intermediaries)***
It wasn't consistent. We couldn't keep up with a continuous standard. So, the cymbals came out a bit by chance…. In the short time that I was involved, this problem was being solved with guys like me as dealers. For example, someone calls from New York and says, "Mel Lewis has arrived. He wants this and that," for example... I have to give back to him with cymbals that I have. Because I didn't give it once, when I didn't give it two times, then it also cools it off from the brand, you know? Or they can think that I don't know this job. (Interview with Distributor 1)		
"A handmade cymbal is something very esoteric, it's hard to define. For example, someone is calling and asking for '18 inches of a bit, dry or wet, whatever, crash.' It's something that we describe using very strange adjectives. It takes a lot of skill to turn all of these into sound adjectives and find the guy exactly what he wants. I had this experience; 200 to 250 handmade Turkish cymbals came to the [...] Symphony Orchestra. I and a few teachers scanned 250 cymbals, put a secret cross sign on 3 of them. I put the cymbals on the drum set in the symphony hall, but I didn't praise them to the guys who will play them, as they were very heavy cannons. Then I went, sat in the back. After half an hour, they excitedly came running with one of the cymbals in their hands. After that, this went into my file to emphasize how knowledgeable and experienced I was in the cymbal selection." (Interview with Distributor 3)		
"When the *Istanbul* brand was just starting, the way they manufacture cymbals, you know hand-hammered, made and still makes the difference. But a lot of drummers needed to be educated… But try and ask any musician to describe a sound, and that's where the problem starts...and every time, I would say 95% of the case, when I ask them what kind of cymbal they're looking for, they use words that cannot work together... It's like describing a painting, some people say that 'it has some depth,' but nobody can really describe colors. It's the same with the sound. So, I start by asking them, 'OK, what kind of music do you play?' That's where we start. And say if the guy said, 'jazz,' then we start with one ride cymbal... What they have in mind would sometimes be totally different than the cymbal that they go out with. Because, as I said, it's so difficult to describe a sound and I just show them by changing sticks. A cymbal can sound suddenly great, and the harmonies that you were getting out of that cymbal with this stick is different than the sticks made by another wood. Then it becomes another cymbal.		

And they're like, ‘Wow, I didn't know that!’ So, it needs education." (Interview with Distributor 5)	

Table 2.4. Illustrative Evidence for Resingularization by the Users

Illustrative quotations	First-order codes	Second-order themes
"It's [the factory] like Disneyland for the drummers. It's very, very exciting. Because it's like you're seeing something prehistoric. It is better if you coincide with the day of casting. Those raw materials are poured into pots carved out of that stone. Vapors come out. It's a dark place, and people are pulling those raw materials. Everything makes you feel like you are jumping back in time." (Interview with Drummer 3)	(Re)mystifying	Internalizing
"I was really amazed that a big part of the making of cymbals in *Agop* was really handmade. The guys are hammering the metal, and it becomes a cymbal. I mean it's a hard work. It's 2023, but it feels like from another time, you know. I mean the sound is great and I guess that's part of it. They really hammer it, listen to it. That's something that makes it sound special." (Interview with Drummer 6)		
"If you have a handmade cymbal, it's like somebody was sitting there hammering it, listening to it and trying to build a sound which he was hoping somebody's going to use it for the music. That's such a typical human thing to do. It's like you write a book, or I do a record and I know people are going to listen to it, and it's going to be there and in their mind. The cymbal smith is making a cymbal, then it's on my cymbal stand at the end and I play it on stage, so it becomes its own thing." (Interview with Drummer 8)		
"It was maybe 10 years ago when I first saw that video [*Agop* documentary]. It was surprising because I thought it would be way bigger than that. It was just some people in a small workshop, maybe just five people. It was really small. I found it crazy, because already back then you saw it all around world, and quality was really, really good. Seeing just five people working and hammering those cymbals, I thought, 'Wow!' In such a small place, such a small team, in such a modest environment, such quality things that have such a big impact on the music scene. I found this astonishing." (Interview with Drummer 13)		
"Every drummer thinks that these cymbals have a personality or identity. It's a bit like a reference to the past. Just as violinists are still chasing Stradivarius, this is also like that. It's valuable because it's handmade and a continuation of a tradition." (Interview with Drummer 7)	Distinguishing	
"What is interesting about the 100% hammered cymbals is that the touch and the rebound of the stick is different. You have the feeling that your stick almost goes into the metal. It's a feeling. It's a bit hard to describe, but it's a bit like that." (Interview with Drummer 11)		
"I think getting to know a cymbal is like getting to know a person. Because of that, I just can't believe if a cymbal is a copy of another. Because there's nothing there that I can get to know and discover. It's what it is. But when a master makes a cymbal, there is a margin of error. It's not faulty, but maybe the hammering or the lathing is different, and those are the things that make a cymbal special to me. It is a stroke of luck to find a cymbal and when I find it, I have to take it, it's always like that for me." (Interview with Drummer 9)		
"I think the hand hammering is definitely the best method. Because it has something, how could I say, chaotic in it somehow. If you take ... [an industrial cymbal brand], what they try to do is to make every cymbal of the same line sounding the same by making a machine program to always do the same thing. And if you play it, you feel a bit disappointed because you don't get any surprise or just a minimum surprise. But on a hand-hammered cymbal, each item in each model is totally different somehow. It has much more character, you know." (Interview with Drummer 14)		
"You're too romantic or, think that they [craftspeople] bring all their hearts in hammering those cymbals. But maybe they don't even care. They probably know that the cymbals are great and everything, but they don't know how people feel behind playing those cymbals. Or they don't even think about it, or maybe they do. But I mean, that's a part of it, you know, it felt like they're working like any worker in any factory where they do repetitive movements and stuff without even loving what you're doing or knowing anything about cymbals. I'm going too far away, but I had this kind of thinking. Because those guys were hammering those all day long." (Interview with Drummer 6)	Probing	Rationalizing
"If I were a cymbal master and my job was to make cymbals, it would be interesting for me to be doing something so special all the time. I couldn't believe that the guys go there every day and make dozens of cymbals. The production of such a special instrument should not be so normal. The guy takes the cymbal from here, throws it there, and from there the spark explodes. He smokes his cigarette,		

he drinks his tea, he talks, '*Lan, lun*,' [Turkish slang for addressing], and so on. But the material he holds is just as natural as he is. In other words, he does not claim that he is doing the best, 'This is it, this is the best of it, do you want it or not?' or rather, 'Are you good enough for it?' So, when I watched the guys, I thought, 'Oh, look at the guys. Nobody's like in McDonald's.' The guys don't really care if you like a cymbal and take it. The presentation of the other American brands is so capitalist, what they say is, 'We have the best.' They make such an advertisement with the impression that the cymbal is wonderful. It's not up to me that that cymbal is so good, so I don't make it good. That cymbal is good. That's why those cymbals are so cold for me." (Interview with Drummer 9)		
"Ours is very natural next to it [industrial production facilities]. It's in a small industrial area, in a modest place. From the outside, it feels like you came to a car repair service, but inside, it's the production place of the musical and artistic products that have cost the world. And that's interesting to me. Europeans are also surprised and say, 'Where have we come?' But it's natural and beautiful. There is a great deal of manual labor. It's not like such a big factory, but more sincere, sympathetic, and humble. I think it must be protected." (Interview with Drummer 10)		
"Sometimes it's difficult when you have to replace a cymbal that you like. There is a great one you've been playing for three years and then I don't know, it breaks, and then you have to find the same one. But you don't really find the same. But it's part of it... I like the fact that it's not consistent all the time, because I think there is a sort of poetry in that. You're surprised that a cymbal sounds weird, but you like it. If every cymbal was sounded the same, it wouldn't be interesting to me. I think it's more interesting this way." (Interview with Drummer 6)		
"When I buy the same cymbal again, I feel the difference. But it's a very natural thing. I think that's the beautiful part, that there's a difference, even if it looks like the standard, the same size, the same color. But it's a natural thing that handmade gives. If you cook the same meal every evening, there will always be a difference." (Interview with Drummer 10)		
"You look for a cymbal sound, but you can't have the exact sound you have in your mind. That's not possible, I guess. You try to reach it, but you can't, that's the game... It's the capitalist way of seeing things that you want something, and you can have it, and then it's done. That's not the point here, I guess. For me, it is a bit of fun. You have something in mind, you try to reach it, but you can never have it. You can just try to get it, but you won't get it in your life. But in that way, you get other results you haven't thought of. You might find a cymbal you haven't thought of and that's also good. You just can discover something else on the way, which is also important." (Interview with Drummer 13)	Justifying	
"A lot of those cymbals [*Istanbul* cymbals] were not at all good. I think it's the same now, at least for the handmade ones. But with the machine ones, they try to reproduce the same sound all the time. If they find a nice-sounding cymbal, they want to replicate it, which is fine, of course. But I think with Turkish handmade cymbals, there is this idea of having a unique piece of art, because it's handmade. So it's not all perfect, you know? It can have some defaults, or some other things that make the cymbals very particular, very singular." (Interview with Drummer 12)		
"I prefer handmade. Because I'm a bit of an analog person… I think it changes all the time for drummers, as they grow and develop, as they make music. Is the cymbal you bought years ago the cymbal you will buy today? Never. You will choose different cymbals. As I said, the style also affects a lot. That person won't stay as a pop drummer forever, or maybe he won't stay as a jazz drummer. I think that's a little bit against the nature of the musician." (Interview with Drummer 3)		
"I liked that [machine-made] cymbal at first when I was looking for the exact sound I was listening to, but then by playing and improving, I started to find my own style and myself, not the sound I listen to. After that point, things changed a little bit more. Not to do what I hear there, but to be able to come up with something myself." (Interview with Drummer 4)	Learning	Personalizing
"I had my first cymbal when I got my first cheap drums, it was very simple ... [machine-made brand] cymbals that were not handmade at all. But then as soon as you start playing, you realize pretty fast that the sound of the cymbals is so important for how it feels to play, how you sound when you play, and what you can get out of your instrument and all that.... Talking about handmade cymbals, every cymbal is different, and the more you get into it and the more you learn to play it, because it's not easy to play them to make them sound, and when you learn to make them sound, you get more and more specific about what you hear and what you're looking for. And each time when you come by a cymbal that has		

the certain thing that you are looking for, you're just like, ‘Wow, unbelievable!’” (Interview with Drummer 14)		
"I love that [handmade] cymbal. It's not so easy to play, but it's really like a relationship actually. You have to get to know it. You have to work with it in different situations. And then it takes like 2 to 3 years to get into it. I think I'm going to play that cymbal for a long time. I'm not going to play it always. But it's going to stay in my collection for sure. Yeah, because it’s actually the relationship sums up the best, I think." (Interview with Drummer 8)		
"What is a cymbal? It is actually a piece of metal put and hammered under pressure, is it not? It isn't much like a musical thing by itself, like a flute or a violin. And I’m trying to get a timbre out of it, a timbre that everyone can recognize that it’s mine. Because you really know the drummers who played in the fifties, sixties and seventies by their cymbal sounds. It's a bit like your signature, you know." (Interview with Drummer 7)		
"When I played it [handmade cymbal], and I listened to it, I heard something deep that I really liked. And then I thought, ‘Maybe it's just me who hears that. It has a unique sound only for me.’ That's why I liked that sound, that's my sound. It felt a bit unique for me." (Interview with Drummer 13)	(Re)enriching	
"You have a product, and you fill it with yourself. Yeah, it's a product and then that's the human experience of it. You make music with it, and that's something that astonishes me again and again." (Interview with Drummer 8)		
"When I say handmade, it sounds like something unique. It's a personality when I communicate with it in a certain way. It becomes an integral part of my identity. A part of me, actually. It tells the past, and it somehow tells the present." (Interview with Drummer 9)		

Figure 2.1. Timeline of events and value dynamics in Turkish cymbal market, *observation period: 1981–1996*

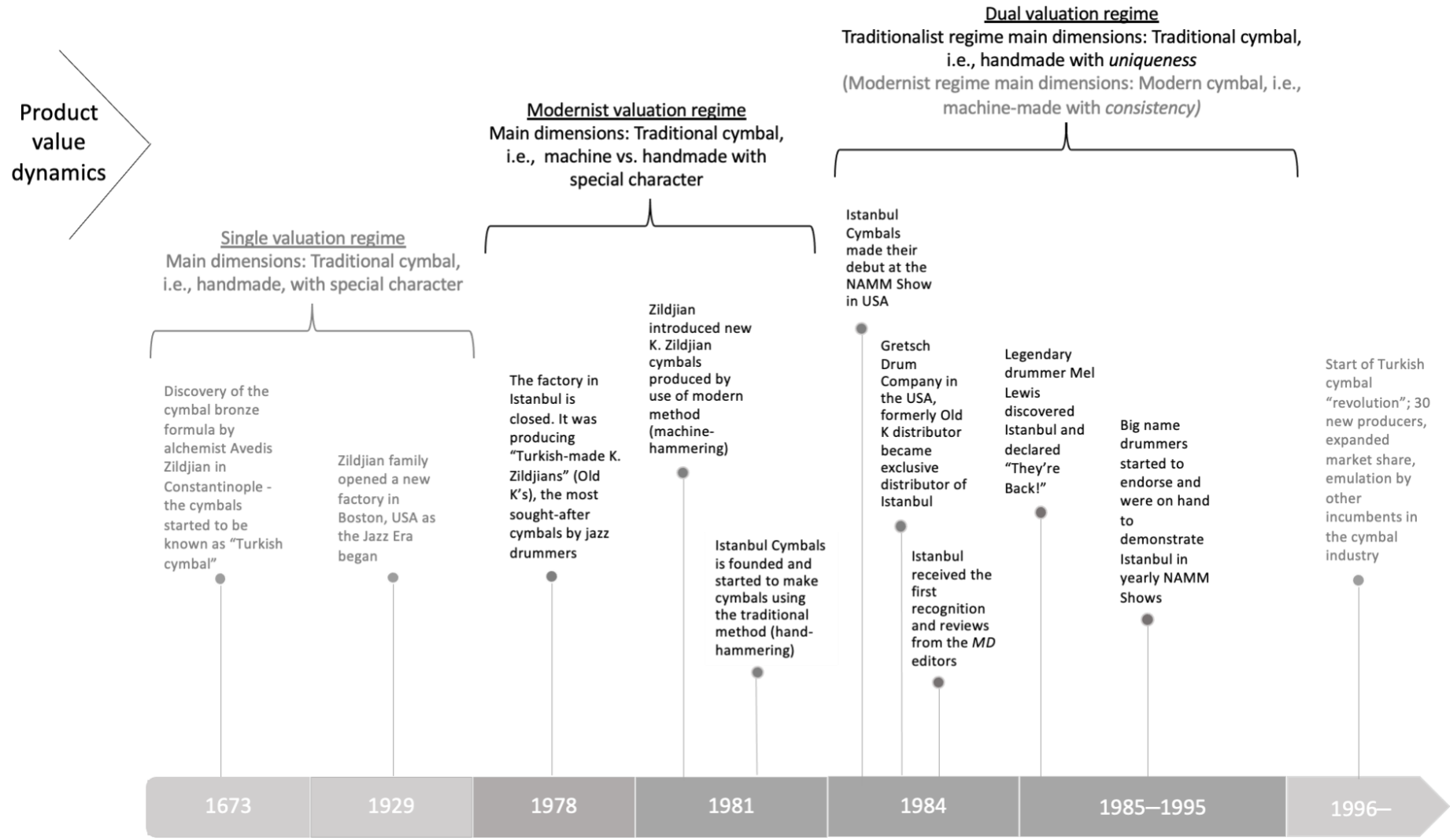


Figure 2.2. Data Structure

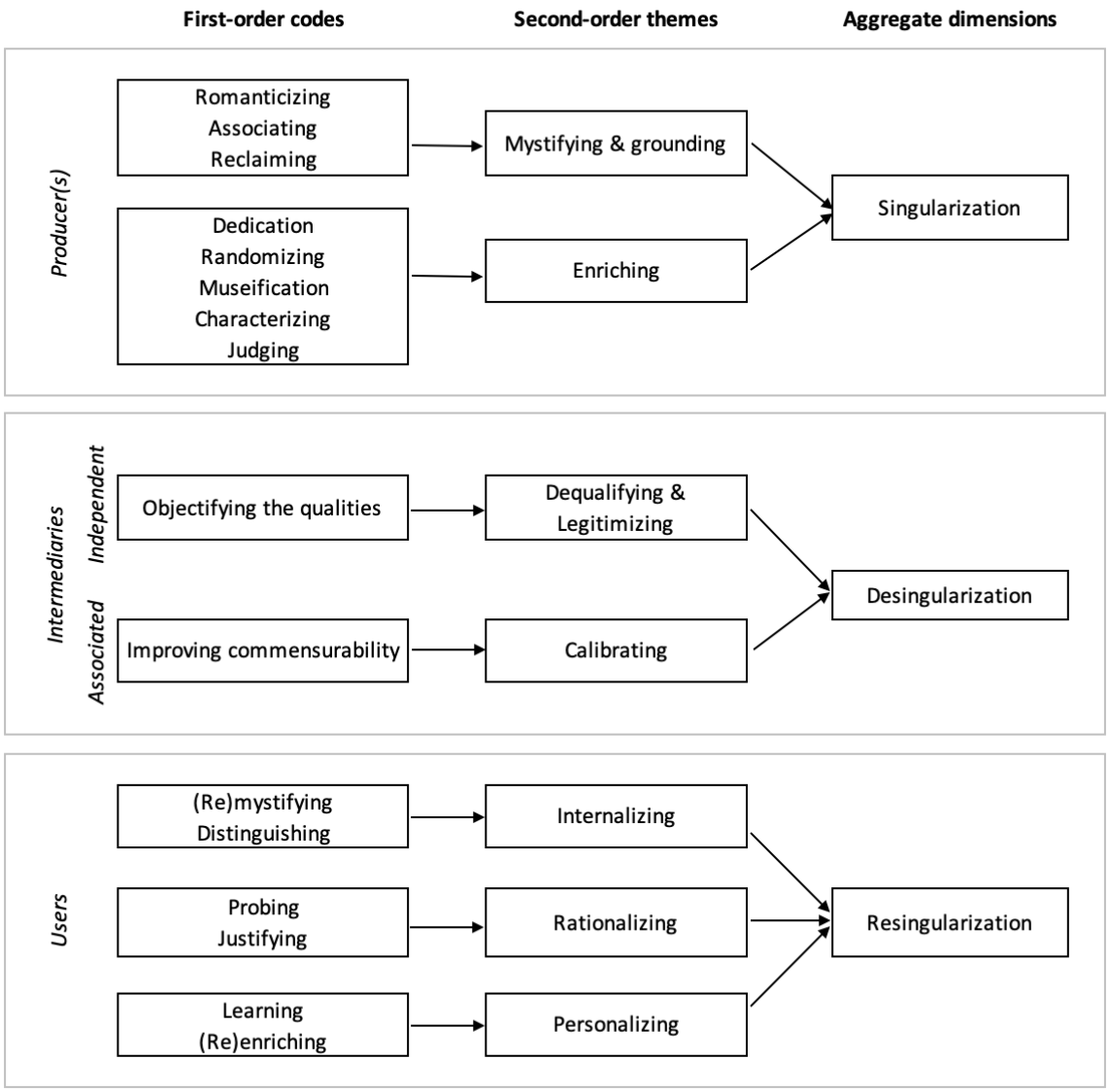
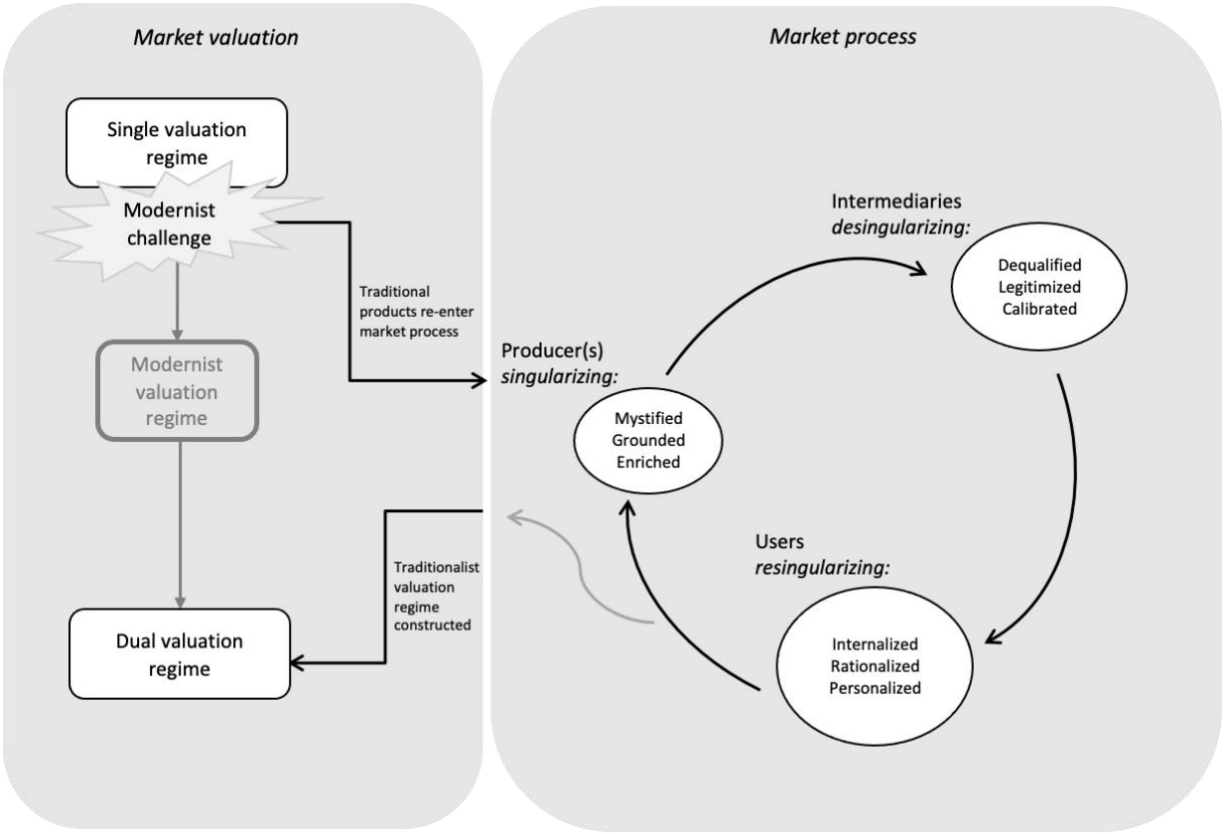


Figure 2.3. Process Model of Singularization and Valuation of Traditional Products



CHAPTER 3.

BRIDGING STRATEGIES AND LEGITIMATION OF NEW COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES WITHIN TRADITIONALIST MARKETS

ABSTRACT

How do new producer collectives establish legitimacy within traditionalist markets that prioritize continuity and resist changes to long-standing handcrafted practices? This study examines the emergence of independent cymbal smiths, a collective of former drummers who have transitioned into handmade cymbal making, blending craft traditions with creative reinterpretations. Through an in-depth qualitative analysis of their public narratives, I identify two interrelated legitimation strategies: identity bridging—which links their prior identity as musicians to their new role as craftspeople—and practice bridging—which frames their production techniques as an extension of their embodied expertise as drummers. These strategies allow them to navigate the rigid expectations of a traditionalist market while establishing a distinct position within it. Rather than disrupting existing conventions, they reinterpret and adapt them, subtly reshaping the boundaries of handmade craftsmanship. This study contributes to research on collective identity legitimation, the evolution of craft traditions, and the negotiation of product singularization. It highlights how new producer collectives drive market transformation not through direct opposition but through embedding novel approaches within existing cultural narratives—offering broader insights into the interplay between tradition and creativity in contemporary markets.

INTRODUCTION

The dominant view of markets has long been shaped by the narrative of progressive rationality and creative destruction, where technological advancements replace traditional practices (Weber, 1946; Schumpeter, 1934). Yet, this perspective overlooks the persistence of traditionalist markets, where craft-based production endures amid industrialization (Suddaby et al., 2017). Scholars have documented the resurgence of craft industries, such as brewing (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000) and grass-fed meat (Weber et al., 2008), often portraying them as resistant to external influences. However, contemporary market dynamics suggest a more fluid reality, where new entrants blend historical craft traditions with creative reinterpretations. Rather than merely preserving the past, they introduce innovations that reshape how singular products are framed and valued (Reckwitz, 2020; Boltanski and Esquerre, 2020). This evolving landscape highlights a form of creative destruction that occurs within, rather than against, traditionalist markets, raising questions about how new entrants introduce change while gaining legitimacy.

Although research has extensively explored how new markets emerge and evolve (Lo et al., 2020; Durand and Khaire, 2017), less is known about how new cohorts of producers enter into established markets and gain legitimacy for alternative interpretations of existing market conventions. This challenge is particularly acute in traditionalist markets—those rooted in cultural heritage and pure handcrafted production—which are often viewed as slow-moving and resistant to change (Negro et al., 2011; Dupin and Wezel, 2023). In these markets, the constraints faced by newcomers are primarily imposed by established producers and enthusiasts, alongside other audiences who serve as vanguards of the markets (Koçak et al., 2014). These actors reinforce prototypicality pressures (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; McKendrick and Hannan, 2014), uphold rigid authenticity markers (Negro et al., 2011; Mathias et al., 2020), and sustain knowledge-transfer mechanisms that privilege insider

expertise (Cattani et al., 2013). Together, these forces make it difficult for new entrants to legitimate their collective identity—that is, to establish broadly accepted understandings of "who they are" and "what they do." (Wry et al., 2011). As a result, their reinterpretations of craft traditions are often perceived as deviations rather than valued contributions.

Despite these barriers, emerging producer collectives have begun to carve out space within traditionalist markets by developing alternative approaches to craft production. Rather than simply replicating traditional models, these new entrants reinterpret craft practices through contemporary influences, blending historical techniques with novel materials, aesthetics, and production philosophies. For example, independent microwineries offer artisanal alternatives to farm wineries (Swaminathan, 1995; Fisher, 1993), while small-scale eco-farms emphasize sustainability in ways that challenge and extend the organic farming movement (Sikavica and Pozner, 2013). In other cases, craft brewers integrate historical brewing techniques with innovative flavors (Kroezen and Heugens, 2019), and vinyl record manufacturers revive traditional production methods while introducing modern adaptations (Wiedner et al., 2024). These producer groups operate within traditionalist markets yet simultaneously push their boundaries, leading to a softening of once-rigid market conventions.

Yet, a key question remains: *How do new producer collectives legitimize their identity while navigating the constraints of traditionalist markets?* Addressing this question is essential for understanding how innovation can emerge and take hold in markets that are conventionally viewed as static, slow-moving, and resistant to change. The growing presence of new producer collectives within these markets suggests that innovation does not always come in the form of wholesale disruption of entrenched practices; rather, it can emerge through their reinterpretation and adaptation. Understanding this process is crucial, as the ability of these collectives to establish legitimacy not only determines their survival but also

influences how traditionalist markets evolve over time. Whether these collectives reinforce, alter, or expand existing market boundaries has broader implications for the endurance of craft traditions, the negotiation of product singularities, and the mechanisms through which markets accommodate both tradition and creativity.

This study explores how new producer collectives establish legitimacy within culturally entrenched markets through the case of independent cymbal smiths— an emerging group that has carved out a distinct position within the cymbal industry. Often former drummers, these artisans craft unique, handmade cymbals that contrast sharply with mass-produced alternatives while drawing from the long-established Turkish handmade cymbal-making tradition. Despite incorporating novel practices that challenge conventional understandings of this tradition —particularly from the perspective of established producers—they have successfully established the 'independent market' as a legitimate and distinct producer collective within the handmade cymbal market.

Through an in-depth analysis of the public narratives of leading members of the smiths community, the study identifies two narrative strategies that enable them to navigate the challenges of situating their collective identity within a traditionalist market. These strategies correspond to the two essential components of collective identity: "who we are" (defining attributes and ethos) and "what we do" (core practices and competences). The first strategy, *identity bridging*, aligns personal values, goals, and experiences with those of the new community. The second, *practice bridging*, involves the transfer and adaptation of skills, knowledge, and practices from their prior experiences to their new roles. By bridging their drumming heritage with their craftsmanship, the smiths have solidified their presence within the market, showcasing the viability of an alternative approach that upholds tradition while resisting standardization within the industry.

This study deepens our understanding of how new producer collectives achieve legitimacy in traditionalist markets—not by disrupting established practices, but by creatively reinterpreting and adapting them. More broadly, the findings contribute to research on collective identity legitimation in markets (Navis and Glynn, 2011; Wry et al., 2011) and, more specifically, in traditionalist settings (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Negro et al., 2011). By showing how traditionalist markets evolve through the creative embedding of contemporary logics into established cultural narratives and craft traditions, the findings offer fresh insights into the contemporary craft-based production (Kroezen et al., 2021)—particularly how legacy practices are reinterpreted to shape product singularization in novel and distinctive ways (Karpik, 2010; Reckwitz, 2020).

THEORY

Markets provide shared cognitive frameworks that categorize and differentiate producers, shaping how participants interpret the industry landscape and how producers align with prevailing norms and expectations (Lo et al., 2020; Glynn and Navis, 2013). These frameworks define the categorical boundaries around collective identities—shared understandings of "who we are" and "what we do" as producer groups (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). While these structures help establish market conventions, they do not always dictate rigid paths for participation. New producer collectives can emerge within existing markets, working both within and against established categorical boundaries to reinterpret what is considered legitimate production and identity (Kennedy et al., 2010; Durand and Khaire, 2017).

Although prior research has largely focused on how new producer collectives disrupt existing classification systems by creating entirely new market categories (Weber et al., 2008; Navis and Glynn, 2010), less attention has been paid to how they gain legitimacy while operating within entrenched categorical systems. In many cases, such collectives do not

introduce material novelties wholly external to the market but instead reinterpret or recombine existing practices, meanings, and identities (Durand and Khaire, 2017) in response to shifts in consumer demand, technological advancements, or cultural movements (Hsu and Hannan, 2005; Fiol and Romanelli, 2012). In doing so, they gradually assert their distinctiveness while remaining anchored in broader market expectations (Durand and Khaire, 2017). To be recognized and accepted, however, these producer groups must engage in a process of identity legitimation, actively shaping how their emerging collective identity is perceived and evaluated by relevant market audiences.

Legitimacy refers to a generalized perception that an entity and its actions align with socially accepted norms, values, and beliefs (Suchman, 1995). For new collective identities, gaining legitimacy depends on producers actively constructing and reinforcing shared identity claims—defining who they are and what they represent as a group (Wry et al., 2011; Navis and Glynn, 2011). This process involves narrative strategies that draw boundaries around the emerging collective identity, distinguishing it from other groups in the market. Key among these strategies is storytelling, where producers craft narratives that frame their practices and value propositions in ways that resonate with market audiences (Wry et al., 2011; Fiol and Romanelli, 2012). Through these narratives, audiences engage in sense-making, evaluating the distinctiveness and legitimacy of the new collective (Navis and Glynn, 2010).

The legitimation process is shaped by the characteristics of the broader market environment in which it emerges (Durand and Khaire, 2017). In institutionalized markets rich in cultural resources—such as history, rituals, and long-standing traditions—new entrants have more material to draw from when crafting narratives to establish and legitimize their shared identity (Dacin et al., 2010; Weber and Dacin, 2011). These cultural elements serve as

valuable reference points that help frame the new collective identity in ways that resonate with market audiences and align with preexisting understandings.

However, not all markets are equally receptive to transformation. In markets where deeply ingrained logics and long-established practices dominate, existing producers tend to conform to isomorphic pressures, reinforcing uniformity rather than adaptation (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This rigidity creates significant challenges for newcomers, whose alternative interests and identities often face resistance from market audiences seeking to preserve established norms (Kennedy, 2008). These dynamics are particularly pronounced in traditionalist markets, which are defined by an emphasis on pure handcrafted production practices that explicitly reject standardization (Negro et al., 2011; Dupin and Wezel, 2023). Paradoxically, while these markets often emerge as a reaction against dominant industrial logics (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Verhaal et al., 2015), over time, their prevailing cultural codes and shared repertoires become deeply entrenched, making them resistant to reinterpretation by new entrants.

Research on traditionalist markets has identified several mechanisms through which established producers and enthusiasts—as vanguard market audiences—impose constraints that limit new entrants' ability to redefine market norms (Koçak et al., 2014). First, these markets impose strong prototypicality standards, meaning that producers within a collective identity must conform to shared expectations, and deviations can hinder recognition by market audiences. For instance, traditional Scotch whisky producers struggled to be recognized as a collective because each producer emphasized different attributes for differentiation, preventing the formation of a coherent identity (McKendrick and Hannan, 2014).

Second, traditional production methods tend to resist reinterpretation through creativity and innovation. For example, a novel vinification method designed to improve the

technical quality of Barolo and Barbaresco wines failed to gain legitimacy because it challenged established market conventions (Negro et al., 2011).

Third, small-scale production and the downplaying of commercial motives are often key signals of specialization and commitment to craft. In the craft brewing industry, for example, brewers who pursued various market expansion strategies faced legitimacy challenges, as their actions conflicted with the collective identity associated with small-scale, community-oriented production (Mathias et al., 2020; Verhaal et al., 2017).

Finally, the knowledge and expertise required in traditionalist markets are often embedded within established producers and transferred through exclusive socialization mechanisms, making it difficult for outsiders to enter. The market for Cremonese stringed instruments, for example, has been sustained through master-apprentice relationships within long-standing producers, limiting access for new entrants who lack connections to these craft-based learning networks (Cattani et al., 2013). Given these structural rigidities, existing research on traditionalist markets has predominantly focused on how established organizations maintain these markets, rather than how new collectives of producers emerge and establish legitimacy within these entrenched environments.

While traditionalist markets are often characterized by strong resistance to change, anecdotal evidence suggests that new producer collectives have emerged in some of these markets, coexisting with established producers while jointly opposing mass production and standardization—albeit through distinct approaches. These new entrants challenge industrialization while reinterpreting traditionalist values, often introducing novel variations of craftsmanship that appeal to evolving consumer expectations.

Examples of such producer collectives include independent microwineries, which, despite being much smaller than farm wineries, effectively cater to wine enthusiasts seeking unique and artisanal experiences (Swaminathan, 1995; Fisher, 1993). Similarly, within the

organic farming market, micro eco-farms have emerged with a philosophy that emphasizes the original sustainability ethos of the organic movement, positioning themselves as a more authentic alternative to larger-scale organic farms (Sikavica and Pozner, 2013). Beyond these, several cases demonstrate a softening of once-rigid market conventions. In Dutch craft brewing, brewers integrate historical brewing techniques with innovative flavors, expanding the craft ethos without entirely abandoning tradition (Kroezen and Heugens, 2019). In vinyl record manufacturing, enthusiasts have reintroduced craft-based production methods, commercializing their expertise to sustain novel variations of the practice (Wiedner et al., 2024). Likewise, in amateur radio operations, hobbyists have successfully legitimized their expertise, bypassing conventional professionalization pathways to gain recognition in the market (Croidieu and Kim, 2018).

A key distinction in these markets lies in how established producers and new entrants differently uphold and reinterpret craft traditions. While legacy producers maintain a craft ethos centered on "anti-industrial purity in making," reinforcing long-standing norms, new producer collectives reinterpret craftwork as "creative stimulation through making" (Kroezen et al., 2021, p. 513). Rather than rejecting tradition outright, these new entrants leverage its foundational ethos while incorporating contemporary production techniques, materials, and philosophies. In doing so, they introduce alternative ways of delivering product singularities (Karpik, 2010; Reckwitz, 2020)—products that maintain the aura of craftsmanship and uniqueness but break from rigid traditions by embedding modern influences.

These collectives often emerge from long-time market participants who transition from users to producers, leveraging their deep product knowledge and community ties (Clegg et al., 2007; Shah and Tripsas, 2007). As they develop, these collectives often cultivate a more dynamic understanding of authenticity, aligning with evolving consumer preferences that blend nostalgia with creativity and innovation. Their emergence reflects broader shifts

within the "maker movement" which represents high levels of social exchange, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing (Browder et al., 2019) and challenges conventional notions of craft by fostering experimentation, collaboration, and customization. As a result, new producer collectives not only coexist with established producers but also expand the scope of what constitutes craft-based singular production, softening once-rigid market conventions (Kroezen et al., 2021; Reckwitz, 2020). Despite these evolving dynamics, we still lack a clear understanding of how these collectives navigate market constraints and gain legitimacy within entrenched traditionalist markets.

METHODS

Setting

This study examines independent cymbal smiths (hereafter "smiths")—a legitimate and distinct producer collective that has emerged within the handmade cymbal market. The earliest roots of the emergence of this collective intersect with the period analyzed in Chapter 1 (1981–1996), which explores the reinterpretation of Turkish handmade cymbal-making in response to the introduction of mass-produced alternatives. Since then, the market for handmade cymbals has expanded to accommodate two different producer collectives; Turkish producers and independent cymbal smiths.

The first recognized smith is often considered to be Roberto Spizzichino, an Italian professional drummer who transitioned into cymbal making in 1991, establishing what he referred to as a "one-man cymbal factory" (Pinksterboer, 2012). Unlike traditional manufacturers operating within established factory settings, Spizzichino explored the craft without formal training or inherited knowledge. Reflecting on his beginnings, he stated:

> I started without any knowledge about how to make cymbals… If you want to make your own cymbals, you have to start from a piece of bronze and then try to understand for yourself what to do. (Healey, 2008).

His pioneering approach inspired a new wave of enthusiasts who previously believed that cymbal-making was only possible within industrial foundries. He demonstrated that artisanal cymbal production could be achieved independently by sourcing bronze blanks from Turkish manufacturers and refining them through improvisation and experimentation, thus building upon the long-established Turkish cymbal-making tradition (as detailed in Chapter 1, Methods section).

As Spizzichino's work gained international recognition, he inspired a growing number of drummers and cymbal enthusiasts to transition into cymbal making. By the early 2000s, cymbal journalists had begun describing this movement as a "renaissance" within the cymbal industry (Pinksterboer, 2012). The establishment of Cymbalholic.com in 2001, a dedicated forum for the art and science of cymbals, further accelerated this trend. The website provided a collaborative space for knowledge-sharing, enabling new entrants to learn techniques, exchange expertise, and establish themselves as independent makers. While these smiths were initially inspired by Turkish craftsmanship, they expanded beyond traditional methods, experimenting with unconventional materials, bespoke designs, and customized production techniques to create distinct sonic identities.

By 2024, the number of independent cymbal smiths had grown to over 80, reaching a peak in 2023 (Cymbal.Wiki, n.d.). Although they still represent the smallest share within the handmade cymbal market, their influence on the industry's overall outlook is substantial. Their craftsmanship is highly valued by expert users and collectors, who are willing to pay a premium for their work. For instance, a Spizzichino ride cymbal can sell for up to $3,000 on eBay—the highest price point in the cymbal market, surpassing even rare vintage Turkish K. Zildjian cymbals. This high resale value signals a level of singularity (Karpik, 2010) that not only matches but sometimes transcends the perceived exclusivity of Turkish cymbals. Some independent smiths have earned the respect of legendary drummers—from Elvin Jones to

Tony Williams—while contemporary professional drummers, such as Tim Metz, have publicly speculated that independent smiths represent the "FUTURE of cymbal making" (Metz, 2022).

Over the years, the visibility of the independent market has grown through major industry events such as the Chicago Drum Show, which serves as a key exhibition platform for smiths. These fairs not only increase public recognition but also help strengthen community ties among smiths, facilitating in-person collaboration and knowledge exchange. Additionally, their prominence has been reinforced by innovative sales platforms, such as Cymbal Swap, which prioritize independent makers, giving them greater access to specialized consumers. Through these developments, the independent market has successfully established itself as a legitimate producer collective, earning recognition among musicians, industry media, and distributors.

This setting provides a valuable context for examining the legitimation of new collective identities within traditionalist markets. First, the independent market operates within a traditionalist market deeply rooted in historical traditions, where authenticity is closely tied to producers and long-established craft methods (Negro et al., 2011). Turkish cymbal producers, widely regarded as the custodians of craft expertise (Pinksterboer, 1992), have historically questioned the legitimacy of independent cymbal smiths. As the smiths gained recognition, some Turkish producers responded with skepticism. For example, during my field visits to Turkish producers in 2021, one artisan dismissed independent cymbal makers as "crazy" for attempting to craft cymbals in confined spaces with no prior experience in the craft. He argued that without adhering to the traditional methods required to produce high-quality cymbals, these makers could not be considered true craftsman. The emergence of a new producer collective within such a rigid market presents an opportunity to

explore how new identities navigate constraints within traditionalist markets and establish legitimacy despite such established conventions.

Second, the smiths exemplify high levels of social exchange, collaboration, and mutual support, primarily facilitated by online platforms (Browder et al., 2019) which played a critical role in shaping the coherence and distinctiveness of their collective identity. Unlike traditional producers, who inherit craft knowledge through apprenticeship-based training, smiths engage in continuous peer interaction, where knowledge, production techniques, and market strategies are openly shared. This fluid exchange fosters shared understandings of craftsmanship, sound aesthetics, and values, reinforcing a collective ethos that differentiates them from both traditional Turkish cymbal producers and mass manufacturers.

Third, these smiths are primarily enthusiasts-turned-producers, meaning they enter production with embedded market knowledge and cultural legitimacy as long-time users (Shah and Tripsas, 2007). Their deep familiarity with cymbals—both as musicians and as consumers—allows them to position themselves as insiders with a refined understanding of sound, quality, and player preferences, even in the absence of traditional training. This combination of peer-based exchange and preexisting legitimacy makes independent cymbal smiths an ideal context for studying how new producer collectives leverage strategic resources in their narratives to establish legitimacy within a traditionalist market.

Data

Because the independent cymbal smiths' movement has emerged as a distinct and growing producer community within the handmade cymbal market—despite its unconventional origins and departure from traditional industry structures—it captured my interest during my broader field research for Chapter 1. As I engaged with established handmade cymbal producers, it became evident that independent smiths were gaining increasing recognition, yet their presence was largely outside the formal channels of the industry. This realization led me

to explore alternative data sources, particularly those embedded in the virtual spaces where this movement has been shaped and sustained. Given that the independent smiths community has largely organized itself through digital platforms such as CymbalHolic, YouTube, and other online forums, these spaces offered a rich repository of qualitative data for the study.

The primary data source comprises 40 recorded interviews conducted among independent cymbal smiths between 2020 and 2024, retrieved from publicly available platforms such as YouTube and Apple Podcasts and subsequently transcribed. These interviews, typically lasting between 60 to 120 minutes, provide in-depth insights into the experiences, identity-building processes, and market strategies of the smiths. A significant portion of these interviews were conducted by prominent smiths themselves, reflecting an insider-led documentation of their evolving community. In particular:

- Timothy Roberts, through his channel *The Reverie Podcast*, has conducted 16 interviews with fellow smiths, exploring topics such as craftsmanship, market entry, and the role of drumming heritage in shaping their approach.
- Dave Collingwood, through *The Cymbal Podcast*, has conducted 7 interviews, often focusing on technical aspects of cymbal making and the transition from drumming to smithing.

These interviews together amount to 799 single-spaced pages of transcription, providing a detailed and comprehensive account of the personal and collective narratives of the independent smiths. Unlike structured interviews, these conversations unfold in an informal, peer-to-peer manner, facilitating a deeper exploration of the lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations of the smiths without the constraints of researcher-imposed protocols. This format enhances authenticity and immediacy, mitigating retrospective bias while capturing contemporaneous reflections (Nelson et al., 2023; Anthony et al., 2016).

Beyond these publicly shared interviews, I collected and transcribed interviews conducted by drumming journalists during major industry events, such as the 32nd Chicago Drum Show (2023), a key exhibition for the independent market. During this event:

- *Steve Maxwell Drums* conducted 9 interviews, notably marking the first time the interviewer referred to the movement as "*The Smiths*".
- *Drumming News Network* conducted 5 interviews.
- *B's Music Shop* conducted 3 interviews.

These event-based interviews, lasting between 30 minutes to 1 hour, offer critical insights into how independent smiths position themselves within the broader cymbal-making industry, how they articulate their distinctiveness, and how the market has responded to their presence. Taken together, these sources provide a rich and multi-dimensional perspective on the collective identity and legitimation processes of this emerging producer community (Fiol and Romanelli, 2012).

To contextualize the rise of independent cymbal smiths within the broader industry landscape, I also compiled supplementary data from various sources. These include:

- 25 industry magazine articles (e.g., *Modern Drummer, Drum!)* that document the evolution of the handmade cymbal market and increasing recognition of independent smiths.
- Books and historical texts (e.g., Pinksterboer, 1992; Brennan, 2020) offer broader social context of drumming, providing a foundational background for understanding the mechanisms identified in the study.
- Drumming forums (e.g., *Drumforum.org*), where discussions about independent cymbal smiths and their products have increased in frequency, reflecting growing consumer awareness and interest.

I draw on both insider-generated narratives and external market discourse to examine how independent cymbal smiths navigate the tensions of legitimizing their collective identity within the handmade cymbal market.

Analysis

I employed an inductive approach grounded in qualitative research best practices, particularly drawing on grounded theory methodology (Corbin and Strauss, 2014; Gioia et al., 2012). The analysis unfolded as an iterative process of data exploration, open coding, category development, and theoretical refinement. Instead of applying predefined theoretical categories, I allowed themes to emerge directly from the data, ensuring that the findings remained anchored in the narratives of the smiths. I constructed a data structure table (Table 3.1), which documents the progression from first-order codes (closely reflecting participants' language) to second-order codes and broader thematic categories (strategies).

Insert Table 3.1 about here.

Step 1: Data familiarization and open coding: The analysis began with close readings of the interview transcripts, allowing for an initial understanding of the narratives and recurring themes. During this phase, I conducted open coding (Corbin and Straus, 2014), systematically labeling key segments of text to capture emerging patterns, tensions, and meaning structures within the smiths' accounts. The goal at this stage was to remain close to the interviewees' language, ensuring that the themes developed were grounded in their own framing of their experiences.

Through this open coding process, broad descriptive codes began to emerge, reflecting key aspects of the smiths' experiences, such as navigating legitimacy as independent smiths, the role of drumming identity, and the tension between traditional

craftsmanship, innovation and creativity. Early on, it became evident that while prior research on collective identity legitimation (e.g., Navis and Glynn, 2010) focuses primarily on the balance between individual distinctiveness and collective coherence, the smiths' narratives revealed a more complex set of dynamics. Their discussions were not only about identity formation but also about ongoing struggles to justify their presence within a historically rigid market, requiring constant engagement in narrative legitimation strategies.

Step 2: Focused coding and thematic refinement: As the analysis progressed, I moved from open coding to focused coding, refining and grouping initial codes into broader thematic categories. At this stage, the focus sharpened around legitimation narratives, as the smiths consistently emphasized how they differentiate themselves and justify their practices within the handmade cymbal market. Through this process, the first-order codes began to cluster into second-order themes, which aligned with two core dimensions of collective identity (Wry et al., 2011): Identity content ("Who we are") and identity practice ("What we do").

A key insight emerged when I observed that the smiths were not merely differentiating themselves from mass producers and handmade cymbal producers but were actively linking their past identities as drummers with their new roles as smiths. This led to the identification of two overarching thematic categories that structured their legitimation efforts: 'identity bridging' and 'practice bridging'. A particularly striking pattern was the widespread use of drumming analogies in the smiths' narratives. This suggested that their past as drummers was not just an influence but a fundamental structuring mechanism for how they framed the independent market. The identity bridging process was not merely about aligning with the community—it was about redefining what it means to be a cymbal smith, positioning themselves as player-smiths rather than traditional craftsman. Likewise, practice bridging was not just about adaptation of skills and practices—it was about strategically

blending old and new techniques to reinforce authenticity while distinguishing their craft from both industrial and traditionalist producers.

Step 3: Theoretical refinement and validation: To ensure analytical rigor, I refined the emerging themes through an iterative process of revisiting transcripts, testing categories against additional data, and engaging in peer discussions. I systematically reassessed the interviews to confirm consistency, applied the identity bridging and practice bridging frameworks to unexamined transcripts for validation, and sought feedback from colleagues to refine conceptual distinctions and eliminate potential biases. Through this process, I strengthened the interconnections between identity bridging and practice bridging, reinforcing their central role in the smiths' legitimation strategies. The analysis reached theoretical saturation when no fundamentally new insights emerged, confirming that the framework effectively captured the core dynamics at play.

FINDINGS

I identified two interrelated narrative strategies—identity bridging and practice bridging—that independent cymbal smiths employ to establish legitimacy within the handmade cymbal market. I present these findings in detail below.

Strategy 1: Identity Bridging

The first narrative strategy that the smiths employ is identity bridging, which aligns their personal values, goals, and experiences with those of the new community. By bridging their drumming heritage with their craftsmanship, they differentiate and legitimize their core attributes and ethos in relation to established handmade producers while positioning themselves in opposition to mass production. The three components of this strategy are outlined below, with Table 3.2 providing more illustrative evidence.

Insert Table 3.2 about here.

Priming individual distinctiveness leveraging expression and complementarity: At the core of the individual identity-building process, independent cymbal smiths craft distinctive identities that foster personal expression, effectively "imbuing the product with self" (Boghossian and David, 2021). Rooted in their prior core activity of drumming, these smiths reflect their transition from drummers to producers of unique cymbals that naturally allow for non-verbal self-expression. Furthermore, they promote complementarity among each other's products, fostering a balanced market position for each smith while supporting a cohesive collective identity.

The common background of these smiths lies in their entry into cymbal smithing as a means of creating instruments that sound the way they desire in their playing. For some, the journey to building a unique identity as a cymbal smith began during a phase in their drumming careers when they were searching for their unique voice. As Lauritsen explains:

> I felt comfortable with my playing, with my touch, with all that kind of stuff, and I just wanted to realize those sounds, and the only way it seemed that I could do that was by making cymbals myself. (Reverie Podcast 10)

Among this group, becoming a cymbal smith represents an act of non-conformity. These smiths create and produce cymbals that function as "sound sculptures," such as Hubback's "Elf Leaf" and "Dragon," inspired by his dream of a drummer playing a dragon's wing as a ride cymbal. As Brensilver (2015, p. 51) describes: "His playable 'Dragon' sculpture was inspired by a dream he had in the 1990s about a drummer on a mountain in Norway, playing on a dragon's wing instead of a ride cymbal."

For others, and more commonly, the journey began with searching for and imitating iconic cymbal sounds, such as the legendary "old K" cymbals produced by Zildjian in Istanbul during the 1970s. While these smiths often created "their own version" (Mike Mongiello, The Reverie Podcast 2), their tribute production served as a step toward finding

their unique voice. Eventually, each prominent smith carved out a distinctive position in this niche market, following a process that closely mirrors that of becoming a skilled drummer. Roberts explains:

> To me, it really does mirror the journey of being a musician because in the beginning, we're just trying to replicate what we love. And then after that, there's a transitional process of only replicating what we love to actually be having some sort of identity as an individual. (Reverie Podcast 10)

Through this process, the smiths appealed to different segments of the market for handmade cymbals, described as "a niche within a niche within a niche" (Brensilver, 2015, p. 50). Some specialize in stainless-steel cymbals (e.g., Mike Mongiello), while others focus on experimentation and one-of-a-kind creations (e.g., Steve Hubback). Some produce tribute series inspired by historical cymbals (e.g., Lasse Funch), while others modify existing cymbals to create new soundscapes (e.g., Michael Paiste). This diversity—deviating from the prototypical standards that traditionally define handmade cymbal production—could have hindered their recognition as a coherent organizational form (McKendrick and Hannan, 2014). To address this challenge, the smiths adopt a unique strategy: fostering complementarity among their distinctiveness as producers. Rather than targeting specific segments of drummers, the smiths' narratives emphasize promoting their cymbals as part of a collective "color palette" for all creative drummers who mix and match cymbals from different smiths to create a cohesive set. This perspective, informed by their own drumming experiences, reflects a collective strategy to balance extreme distinctiveness with a shared identity. As Roberts articulates the common perspective of the community:

> I want to help foster an environment where we think of it, like the color palette and we want different colors for our kit. And so we think, okay, Timothy Roberts has this certain vibe and I would like one of those colors and I want one of Paul's because his has got a certain vibe and Mongiello and Collingwood and everybody that all of my buddies. I want us to think of it like that because it's like artistry and like music, you know, no two drummers are going to play the swing beat." (The Reverie Podcast 6)

Such a strategy, again shaped by their prior experiences as drummers in search of distinctive cymbal sets, allows smiths to balance individual distinctiveness with collective coherence. By

fostering complementarity, they create a unified yet diverse identity that positions the collective as a harmonious community of artisans, each contributing to a unique and complete product for drummers.

Building a cooperative community through shared generosity: Based on complementary distinctiveness, the smiths foster a cooperative environment that enhances their collective market value. By supporting each other's coexistence and sharing knowledge, they strengthen each other's distinctiveness and coherence at the collective level. Rooted in the spirit of generosity from the drumming tradition, these strategies sustain a narrative of persistent cooperation that seem to extend beyond market emergence (Mathias et al., 2018), reinforcing the independent market's identity as a distinct alternative to mass production.

From the outset of the independent market, an intrinsic ethos of mutual support and coexistence has shaped interactions among cymbal smiths. While established handmade cymbal producers have traditionally competed on quality due to their similarities, independent cymbal smiths have planted a sense of persistent cooperation in the market (Sonenshein et al., 2017; Mathias et al., 2018), rooted in complementary distinctiveness. Rather than creating conflict, individual distinctiveness reinforces mutual support, allowing each smith to carve out a unique niche while collectively contributing to a shared identity. Stine, the only female smith in the market, captures this sentiment: "We have something in common that isn't very common," forming "something of a tight-knit community" (Brensilver, 2015, p. 50). Similarly, Bettis notes that the market is "not especially competitive" because "each cymbal maker has a unique style that, by nature, speaks to a different segment of the marketplace" (Brensilver, 2015, p. 50).

This mutual respect and support are deeply rooted in the drumming culture, particularly the traditions of jazz drumming, which many smiths share. In jazz, while a shared understanding of principles provides a common foundation, leading drummers are celebrated

for their unique interpretations of these traditions, inspiring others while maintaining a sense of communal respect (Brennan, 2020). This ethos appears to have been seamlessly integrated into the independent market, where the handmade and distinct nature of each smith's production reinforces the non-competitive culture and mutual recognition of each other's contributions. Anderson, the founder of Cymbalholic, elaborates on this dynamic:

> If you look at Max Roach and Roy Haynes and Art Blakey, let's just take those three… And those three had a different sound, they use different stuff, but they all had a conception that came from a bigger language, but it was still unique to them... I love that the uniqueness is there. Tim is making cymbals kind of even in his different lines, or Mike's different lines, or Nikki's different lines, whatever they're, where things are similar, where things are different. I think as a buyer and a player, it's a wild time to be able to do that. And I'm glad for it, because man, it hopefully helps y'all out and that you're not having to compete because you're making the same thing." (Chad Anderson, The Cymbal Podcast 1)

The smiths also support each other to enhance the value of their products in the market, drawing once again on the collaborative spirit rooted in drumming culture. This background shapes individual actions in ways that collectively elevate the market's value, reinforcing both the reputation of smiths and the broader legitimacy of their products. Their shared drumming experience fosters a culture of respect and appreciation that transcends competition, allowing individual contributions to amplify collective success. They do this in part through public expressions of appreciation, particularly from the younger generation to the veteran smiths who paved the way. Such gestures reflect a drummer's deep understanding of the role mentors play in creative development. Roberts exemplifies this when he speaks to Matt Nolan, a veteran smith in the market:

> You're a hero of mine and someone I've followed for many years, looked up to, and I haven't had a chance to play any of your cymbals, but you are a legend in this industry that seems to be kind of exploding right now. (The Reverie Podcast 9).

These public interactions also signal the quality of the products of individual smiths to customers, as seen in Roberts' introduction of another guest: "Never a cymbal that I was asked to modify because I don't think any of them need modification. I just loved all the work that I've seen of yours." (The Reverie Podcast 4)

Promoting each other's work at industry fairs and events is another manifestation of this supportive dynamic. Rather than competing for individual attention, smiths highlight each other's contributions, positioning the market as a Renaissance of craftsmanship. Collingwood's reflections on Paul Francis capture this sentiment:

> Paul was just like talking and going, make sure you check out all these other guys. Cause this is a Renaissance happening here". And he's constantly reaching out to me going, 'Your work looks great!'. And I know he does to all the other guys and it's like kind of my heart kind of feels a bit going, this is actually a genuine guy in a genuine scene of genuine people doing a thing. They genuinely love it and no one has to be that way, but yeah, that's a bit of Paul Francis love there." (The Cymbal Podcast 1)

The shared drumming heritage also equips smiths with technical knowledge that enhances online marketing—a key strength in the independent cymbal market. Leveraging their expertise in sound recording and production, learned through years of drumming practice, they help one another showcase their products in ways that resonate with customers. This support, often exchanged for knowledge of cymbal making, reflects a culture of reciprocity and collective growth. Nolan's account of helping Steve Hubback highlights this interplay between marketing assistance and learning cymbal making:

> Steve was trying to sell some of his works… on the Cymbalholic forum, but kind of without photographs, without sound files, just with like a description, you know, the size and what he thought they sounded like. And so he wasn't selling that many. And I bought one from him a while ago when he was in Iceland and been sort of stunned by it. It was this super visual work of art thing, like, you know, way beyond anything I'd ever seen or done before. Which is, I guess, another part of my inspiration in starting doing this myself. So yeah, he was trying to sell these things. And I thought, 'well, look, I've got the gears. I've got portable recording gear, camera and everything. I can come out, visit you, photograph these things, record them. They will sell a lot better and people can consume them properly. And while we're at it, can you show me a little bit about how to hammer a cymbal?' (The Reverie Podcast 9)

Thus, beyond boosting visibility and sales, such exchanges foster an environment of mutual learning and inspiration. Openness and the willingness to share knowledge are key factors in fostering coherence within the cymbal-making community. However, this culture of knowledge-sharing contrasts with the traditional secrecy among established Turkish producers. Pioneering producers such as Istanbul Agop and Istanbul Mehmet have long mystified the handmade process, keeping it within the organization as a strategy to maintain

uniqueness and market value (see Chapter 1). In contrast, cymbal smiths have introduced knowledge-sharing within the market, aligning with broader trends in the "maker movement" (Browder et al., 2019). They legitimized knowledge sharing as a valuable practice by emphasizing its purpose: instead of leading to uniformity, it fosters individual distinctiveness among smiths, much like improvisation does in jazz drumming. In this context, learning the foundational craft of cymbal making does not lead to conformity but instead empowers individual smiths to creatively innovate and develop products that stand out. As Francisco Domene articulates: "I always give information. The more information you have, the more unique you become." (Steve Maxwell Drums, 2023)

This logic is also reflected in the approach of smiths who actively provide training, both online and in person, such as Nicky Moon and Dave Collingwood. While they teach foundational elements of cymbal making—hammering, shaping, lathing, and more—the goal is not mere replication. Instead, students are encouraged to experiment and develop their own creative interpretations. Collingwood captures this balance between foundational learning and individual creativity:

> One thing I tried to teach is to have your own voice. And that's all well and good. When you say like, 'here's a tutorial on how to do a thing'. But at the same time, I'm like, 'take this method, find your own way. How about this method? Think about it'. (The Cymbal Podcast 1)

Balancing market demands with creative integrity. The smiths' narratives frame their commercial activities as distinct from those of established handmade cymbal producers, emphasizing the pursuit of both creative integrity and commercial viability. They achieve this through two key strategies. First, being transparent or supportive of the individual commercialization goals in a sense to translating craft work into economic value, while being dedicated to creative aspect of the craft. Second, being open about how to navigate the practical realities as working craftsmen. Both strategies are enabled by the shared

understanding of the challenges embedded within drumming practice, which fosters a collective appreciation for balancing artistry with practicality.

In the cymbal industry, a common strategy for expanding market share is the production of cymbal series—collections designed with consistent features such as size, weight, alloy composition, and sound characteristics—mirroring the production methods of mass manufacturers. Turkish cymbal producers also rely on series as their core product but differentiate them by allowing for variability in sound within the same series, adding a touch of uniqueness to each cymbal (see Chapter 1). The smiths, however, have taken a stance against serial production of any kind, prioritizing unique, customized cymbals or modifications. As Moon describes: "Now guys like myself are like, 'Wait a second, let's serve the piece one by one and see how far we can really take sound.'" (Steve Maxwell Drums, 2023).

Although this commitment to one-of-a-kind craftsmanship remains central for many smiths, there has been a narrative concurrence of commercialization goals driven by pragmatic reasons, primarily focusing on commercial viability. To maintain their distinction from Turkish producers, smiths frame cymbal series as secondary rather than core product. By offering series selectively, they aim to secure the resources needed to dedicate more time to experimentation and the creation of truly unique cymbals. Bryne reflects the shared opinion of smiths on this point:

> "As a craftsman-driven business, ... the honest truth is it's not a full-time job. It's a passion business, and… I'd like to start steering the business in a way where I'm going to start making less because I want to start focusing more on individual cymbals, taking more time with them, which I already do, but I just want to do that more and have a greater focus. I got really into series, to be honest, because of marketing purposes, to help players, customers understand, "Okay, this is a vintage series, this is a heritage series, this is whatever." I'd like to get to a point where I'm giving myself more freedom to just try different things without having to roll it out and name it and market it with some kind of name. It's just like, "This is a cymbal. If you like it, here it is," kind of thing. (Steve Maxwell Drums, 2023)

The smiths also openly address the challenge of navigating practical realities, a delicate balancing act between fulfilling financial obligations and maintaining creative integrity. The

bespoke and artisanal nature of their craft often places them under significant economic pressures, such as meeting daily living costs or supporting families. Even some of the most well-regarded smiths, like Matt Nolan, have candidly described their financial situations, with Nolan reflecting on the precarious nature of the business as “bouncing along the bottom really most of the time” (The Reverie Podcast 15). Such transparency underscores a shared understanding among smiths of the trade-offs required to sustain their craft while navigating the realities of a financially volatile market.

In response to these pressures, smiths may engage in practices that deviate from their idealized visions of creative autonomy. For instance, some smiths reluctantly produce Old K tribute cymbals, recreations of iconic cymbal sounds, as a practical concession to market demands. Nolan, who initially approached cymbal making with a mindset of exploring novel sonic and visual possibilities, admitted that he “gave in” to producing familiar sounds when financial pressures mounted (Reverie Podcast 9). Similarly, other smiths can sometimes accept orders for reproductions of existing cymbal sounds at a lower price or limit their time spent on creative experimentation in favor of serial production. These compromises reflect a pragmatic effort to sustain their businesses without abandoning their core artisanal values entirely. Quijano offers an impressive example of this balancing act:

> At the beginning, making cymbals, I spent so much time obsessing over making it exactly like I wanted it to be. And then as I grew, I started realizing there's a beauty in kind of letting go... This idea of you've got a company where you're trying to produce and sell, get the stuff out of the door, and then you've got this artisanal side. And I'm in a place where I'm trying to balance those two... because I can't spend 20 hours on one cymbal because I will lose money when I sell it. (Reverie Podcast 7)

This perspective illustrates the constant negotiation between the demands of efficiency and the artistic commitment that defines their craft.

Such adaptations are not just individual strategies but part of a broader, collectively understood narrative within the smith community. The necessity of engaging in non-ideal business practices is framed as a means of ensuring the commercial viability of their

businesses, much like the compromises made by working drummers who take on cover gigs or less creatively fulfilling work to sustain their livelihoods. Roberts aptly captures this parallel: “It’s like being a musician, like a gigging musician. You don’t have salary… You don’t have health benefits. You don’t have all these things that make life a little bit easier to manage” (Reverie Podcast 15). This shared experience, rooted in their backgrounds as drummers, fosters a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding within the smith community.

Furthermore, this collective comprehension provides a degree of flexibility within the community’s ethos, allowing room for deviations from the passion-driven ideal without compromising the smiths’ legitimacy. The shared identity as former working drummers turned craftsmen contextualizes these compromises as necessary adaptations rather than betrayals of their artistic values. Collingwood encapsulates the tension inherent in this dual role:

> I love cymbals. I love music. I love creativity, but it's also my business. So, I'm having to make the things and present them and sell them and do social media and all this kind of stuff that starts feeling a bit dirty. (The Cymbal Podcast 2)

This sentiment reflects the ongoing negotiation between artistic passion and the pragmatic realities of sustaining a craft-based business, demonstrating how the smiths navigate these tensions without losing sight of their creative roots.

Strategy 2: Practice Bridging

The second strategy employed by the smiths is practice bridging, which involves the transfer and adaptation of skills, knowledge, and practices from their prior experiences to their new roles as cymbal smiths. This approach fosters innovation and enhances collective practices within the community. Drawing on their expertise as drummers and long-time cymbal users, the smiths collectively justify their cymbal making competences, production and marketing practices to distinguish the community’s products from those of established handmade

producers. The three interconnected components of this strategy are detailed below, with Table 3.3 providing more illustrative evidence.

Insert Table 3.3 about here.

Framing non-expert practice with passionate dedication. The smiths engage in narrative strategies that legitimize the non-expert nature of their craft within the community. Specifically, they adopt two key approaches to foster collective expertise: (1) embracing humility and continuous learning and (2) expressing fulfillment and purpose through practice. These strategies are as well deeply rooted in their shared drumming heritage, which emphasizes openness to growth and a respect for the learning process.

Within the collective, smiths possess varied levels of expertise. While some, like Paul Francis, bring decades of professional experience from incumbents such as Zildjian, others, like Mariano Quijano and Mike Mongiello, have only a few years of informal training or sporadic experience with other smiths. The reliance on informal and tacit knowledge-sharing underscores the challenges of mastering this highly specialized craft, which is often described as "a show, don't tell kind of thing" (Stine in Brensilver, 2015, p. 50). Handmade cymbal-making is recognized as a highly specialized craft, traditionally requiring years of apprenticeship with masters to acquire its tacit knowledge (Cattani et al., 2013; see also Chapter 1). With no formal training programs available in the industry, skill acquisition primarily depends on personal experimentation and informal knowledge exchange rather than structured learning. While prominent smiths like Dave Collingwood and Nicky Moon occasionally offer unstructured training and mentorship, the community has not formalized processes to establish lay expertise (e.g., Croidieu and Kim, 2018; Wiedner et al., 2024).

Instead, the smiths rely on shared narratives that embrace humility and celebrate continuous learning, regardless of their individual expertise levels. Novice smiths, like Mongiello, openly disclaim professional status, stating, “I'm definitely not a cymbal smith because I do not possess the skills that I think someone who can call themselves that should have” (The Cymbal Podcast 3). Similarly, more experienced smiths, such as Daugherty, downplay their individual status within the craft, humbly claiming to be “nobody in this whole thing” (The Reverie Podcast 5). These shared expressions of humility reflect a deliberate effort to shift attention from individual limitations to collective strength.

This humility is further reinforced by the framing of cymbal-making as a field of endless learning, where mastery is seen as an evolving process rather than a fixed endpoint. Such narratives echo the ethos of drumming, where humility and continuous self-improvement are deeply ingrained values. By aligning cymbal-making with these shared principles, smiths cultivate a sense of collective expertise that transcends individual achievements. These approaches allow the community to reconcile varied levels of skills and experience while fostering a supportive environment where both novices and veterans can thrive together, contributing to the ongoing evolution of the independent cymbal-making market.

Additionally, the smiths often articulate how handmade cymbal making provides a profound sense of fulfillment and purpose, signaling a shared craft ethos of dedication and passion (Kroezen et al., 2021). These expressions of commitment are an essential component of how the smiths justify the non-expert practices within the community. For many, cymbal making is more than a profession; it becomes an all-encompassing pursuit. Mongiello, for instance, describes his craft as consuming every waking moment, stating, I still think about it from the minute I wake up until the minute I go to sleep and while I'm sleeping and, while

I'm doing anything else, you know?" (The Reverie Podcast 2). Similarly, Francis captures this sense of relentless dedication, saying,

> I'm just making cymbals and I'm going to do it until nobody gives a shit that I make cymbals anymore. It really comes down to that. If somebody said, 'you can't play drums anymore' or 'you can't listen to music,' forget it. I'd shoot myself. You know why do I do it? Because I like it. (The Reverie Podcast 6)

Their shared background in drumming influences this narrative of dedication but in a dissociative way. Many smiths express that their passion for cymbal making eclipses their previous love for drumming. This shift is often justified by their inability to find the same level of curiosity and satisfaction in making music as they do in crafting cymbals. Roberts reflects on this transformation, stating,

> When I discovered cymbal smithing, I realized that what I was lacking as a musician was really the curiosity that I had as a cymbal smith, you know, like the sense of just thinking about it all the time. You just have to know what would happen if you tried this. And I was realizing like, man, if I'd had that sense of curiosity as a musician, that was the missing ingredient, I guess, to maybe realizing my full potential in that area, you know" (The Reverie Podcast 11).

This introspection demonstrates how cymbal making fulfills their creative drive in a way that drumming could not.

In many cases, smiths further justify this transition by disclaiming professional status in drumming and emphasizing their natural tendency towards "making things". Quijano encapsulates this sentiment:

> This inclination of making things, it's absolutely the right one for me. I think I'm a musician. I think I can say very clearly, I am a musician without a doubt in my heart. If I'm a professional musician or not, that is something that can be up for debate. I have been in my past. I am not one now" (The Reverie Podcast 7).

These narrative positions cymbal making as not just a creative outlet but as a superior career path aligned with their skills and passions.

By framing cymbal making as a deeply fulfilling and purpose-driven endeavor, the smiths shift the focus from their non-expert status toward their emotional and creative investment. This legitimization strategy, grounded in their shared background in drumming

practice, emphasizes their commitment to the craft in a way that differentiates them from the established producers while also redefining their identity beyond traditional expectations associated with their prior roles as drummers.

Harmonizing complexity in practice using embodied expertise. To bring new tastes to the market, the smiths adopt production methods that stretch the boundaries of traditional handmade cymbal-making practices. They justify these variations by leveraging adaptive craftsmanship, and blending established structures with an improvisational ethos rooted in jazz drumming culture. This balance allows them to navigate the interplay between tradition, modernity and creativity while maintaining the legitimacy of their craft.

Handmade cymbal-making is a long-established practice defined by specific materials, tools, and techniques. The traditional materials, and techniques of hammering, lathing, and finishing impose practical and normative limitations, which smiths often describe as "guardrails" (Paul Francis, The Reverie Podcast 6). Many smiths discover these limits through experimentation, often "pushing against them" (Francisco Domene, The Reverie Podcast 13). Their methods stretch these boundaries, integrating modern production techniques long criticized in the handmade market for enabling serial production (see Chapter 1). A central justification for these methods lies in harmonizing multiple perspectives—those of the drummer, audience, band members, and producers. This multifaceted approach prioritizes how the cymbal "translates and how it serves the music" (Timothy Roberts, The Reverie Podcast 16). The smiths argue that their shared musician background provides them with unique insight into these perspectives, as Skretas explains: "At some level, we're all gear heads. We're all musicians at the end of the day. So that's what separates us… in our industry where you can do that kind of thing" (The Reverie Podcast 12). By framing their techniques as rooted in musicianship, they further legitimize their practices as essential to the craft.

Interestingly, the smiths openly support the use of technologies such as power hammers that are employed to perform initial rough shaping of the cymbal blanks. Mass-producers often avoid showcasing such technologies, fearing backlash from customers who associate their use with standardized products. To counter this perception, smiths focus on how these tools can enhance creativity and maintain the distinctive quality of their products. For instance, many smiths use power hammers to perform the heavy, physically demanding tasks, preserving their energy and precision for the finer nuances, such as precise hammering, tuning and finishing. Mongiello captures this perspective: “I have no problem with power hammers. I wouldn't care if you made all your cymbals start to finish with a power hammer and never swing a hammer at it. That doesn't change the fact that you're a cymbal smith or an artisan.” (The Reverie Podcast 2).

This acceptance of technology reflects a broader cultural attitude rooted in musicianship, where tools are seen as enablers of better performance. As Francis illustrates, “A carpenter doesn't skimp on the tools he needs to build stuff... cause it makes the job easier” (The Reverie Podcast 6). Similarly, smiths adapt modern technology to align with their craft, reframing the meaning of “handmade” to accommodate tools that enhance their work without compromising the artistry. Such an adaptability allows them to maintain their identity as craftsmen while responding to the evolving demands of the cymbal making, embodying a pragmatic yet creative approach to the craftsmanship.

Additionally, the smiths often alter the traditional cymbal production process, similar to Turkish producers. However, while Turkish producers emphasize the inherent variability and unpredictability of the craft, smiths introduce elements of improvisation, using experimentation with new materials, tools, and techniques as a key aspect of their approach. It embodies spontaneity, intuition, and artistic expression, aligning with their vision of craftsmanship as a dynamic and exploratory practice. For the smiths, incorporating

improvisation into their process is integral to mastering the cymbal making craft. Over time, as their expertise deepens, they tend to simplify and refine their practices, moving toward a structure-oriented approach reminiscent of the improvisational culture in jazz—a tradition many smiths draw inspiration from.

Through experience, smiths often realize that the best outcomes emerge from achieving freedom within the boundaries of established structures. Collingwood captures this sentiment, reflecting a shared belief among smiths:

> I kind of think that complete expressive freedom sometimes is a bit of a red herring because there's nothing wrong with limits and barriers because then you just have to learn to work with greater resolution within those and become creative. And, you know, I'll put limits and barriers on what I'm doing on purpose... So that idea of kind of working within barriers can actually be the most freeing way of working kind of conversely. So, I don't know, maybe I've smoked too much again, but there's a freedom within a framework." (The Cymbal Podcast 3)

This understanding of the interplay between freedom and structure evolves over time. Roberts reflects on this progression, noting that with experience, his focus will shift toward simplicity, recognizing it as a mark of mastery:

> "I do a lot with patinas now as just kind of like little tiny flavor adjustments at the very end, you know, but I really do respect and identify that. That's maybe where I'm going in the future is that real simplistic—not simplistic, but like simplified version of like the mastery and the craft." (The Reverie Podcast 11)

Similarly, for seasoned smiths like Jesse Simpson, the essence of their craft lies in the simplicity of fundamental techniques; "It's all just the skill is within the simplicity of hammering and lathing." (Jesse Simpson, The Reverie Podcast 11). The tendency to return to the roots through refined mastery underscores the smiths' role as custodians who preserve the traditional practices while creatively reinventing them (Wiedner et al., 2024).

Shaping product perception through mastery of usership. The smiths employ narrative strategies to cultivate a nuanced understanding and valuation of their products in the handmade cymbal market. Central to this effort are three interconnected practices: (1) embedding their hands-on drumming experience into the assessment of product quality, (2) reframing product variability as intentional imperfection that enhances artistic and functional

value, and (3) guiding customer expectations through their creative vision and expertise. Together, these approaches aim to collectively establish a framework for distinguishing the assessment of their products in the market, leveraging their deep expertise using as long-time users.

The quality of cymbals in the cymbal industry has traditionally been defined by the consistency of their sound character, a standard shaped by the industrial processes established by mass-producers. During the 1980s, the assessment of handmade cymbals underwent a notable shift, with uniqueness emerging as the defining attribute of quality. This change, however, often excluded the perspective of musicians, which was integral to the end-user experience (see Chapter 1). Drawing from their extensive experience as long-time users of diverse cymbals, the smiths have introduced a new dimension to quality assessment—a cymbal's feel through playing.

The smiths incorporate their hands-on experience as drummers to determine when a cymbal is finished and assess its quality by testing it in live gigs or varied musical settings. This approach allows them to anticipate the emotional and auditory experience the cymbal will provide its future players. Legendary cymbal smith Spizzichino, a key inspiration for the smith community, articulates this philosophy with profound intimacy:

> When I'm here I finish a cymbal, but to really understand the quality of the cymbal, I have to use it, I have to know it, I have to play with it, I have to stay with him, with it. I say him because I feel like a person. I can talk with him in a way. Ask him what can I do for you to find a way to perfect you?" (Healey, 2008)

This personalized approach to quality assessment logic departs from that of the established handmade producers, who prioritize objectivity. Instead, it embraces a deeply emotional and intuitive process, which smiths openly acknowledge can sometimes be mentally and emotionally taxing. Taking a step back to gain clarity is often essential for healthier assessments. Collingwood reflects on these challenges, saying, "I've been tearing myself to pieces internally over this piece of metal essentially. And it's actually not, not all that bad.

Life isn't that bad" (The Cymbal Podcast 3). Similarly, Moon describes the frustration that can arise during this process, "It's not working. It's not working. This is messed up!" (The Cymbal Podcast 4).

These struggles are shared transparently within the community, serving as a collective acknowledgment of the emotional investment required in the craft. This openness also plays a role in justifying the premium prices attached to handmade cymbals. The smiths assert that their products are superior not only because of the craftsmanship involved but also due to the time, care, and emotional effort invested in bringing them to market. Their musicianship background further amplifies this perceived value. Daugherty emphasizes the dual role of artisan and musician in their work:

> I would advocate that our product is better, fundamentally better because we are artisans, makers that are listening to the product. You know, our cymbal making is twofold. It's shape and sound at the same time. It's not just that we're getting a certain shape and shipping it out. We also have to deal with the sound aspect, which means that… there's also other factors that we infuse into the process. And a lot of us are drummers, musicians ourselves, we play. (the Reverie Podcast 5)

The smiths draw on their musicianship background also to justify the quality of their cymbals, particularly in light of the variability often associated with handmade production process. Unlike incumbents, who historically framed such variability as inevitable and unintentional, aiming for as much consistency as a handmade process allows (see Chapter 1), the smiths offer a different narrative. They emphasize an *intentional imperfection* - a deliberate incorporation of variations, irregularities, and nuances that reflect a philosophy rooted in drumming, where deviations from perfection add expressiveness and emotional depth. In cymbal smithing, this philosophy often takes the form of what smiths describe as "controlled chaos", where intentional flaws create unique sonic characteristics. Roberts articulates this intentionality in his approach to cymbal making:

> I'm in a place now where I'm trying to make cymbals that have a sense of controlled chaos. And I, well, I guess what I mean by that is whenever I play a Spizzichino ride, I see that he intentionally made his cymbals kind of chaotic, to sound chaotic. He wasn't trying to make clean, pristine sounds. (The Reverie Podcast 13)

This philosophy reflects a shift from striving for uniformity to embracing individuality in sound, which resonates deeply with drummers who seek instruments that complement their personal playing style. The smiths recognize that such unique cymbals may require longer time to sell, as each piece waits for its "the player out there" (Burke Daugherty, The Reverie Podcast 5). However, their profound understanding of musicians' diverse expectations helps bridge this gap, differentiating their market approach from that of established producers. Gauthier Boudreau captures this nuanced understanding:

> I realized that people have different ways of playing cymbals, but hearing them, they don't want the same things from their cymbals and from their instruments. The further I go in and I try to make cymbals, I realized it's not so important that I personally really like them. It's more like a matter of making sure they're musical and they're fun to play more than like liking all the, I don't know, the harmonics of the cymbal and the complexity of it, because I know maybe the next drummer walks in, he'll hate it, but the second one after him will love it. (The Reverie Podcast 4)

The smiths' approach to customer expectations also diverges significantly from that of incumbents, particularly when it comes to personalized production. While these producers aim to fulfill custom orders precisely as described, the smiths prioritize guiding drummers toward discovering their unique voice through their instruments rather than replicating the sounds or styles of others. This approach reflects their belief in fostering individuality and creativity in drumming. Thus, rather than merely accommodating customer requests, the smiths use their expertise and musical intuition to steer drummers toward more suitable options, even if it means challenging the customer's initial expectations. Moon exemplifies this approach, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and trust in the custom production process:

> I want to get all that information upfront so that when I'm making a custom piece for somebody... Even if it's not what they think they want, it's my job to be the expert and tell them, 'No, you don't want that, you want this, trust me.' And then they email me two weeks later like, 'Yeah, you were right.' (Steve Maxwell Drums, 2023)

Ultimately, the smiths underscore their deep commitment and emotional investment in crafting unique cymbals, a dedication they believe significantly enhances their value to

customers. The focus on individuality is central to their artistic philosophy, with each cymbal embodying a distinct personal expression. As Francis aptly puts it, their "personalities come through them" (Steve Maxwell Drums, 2023). This perspective highlights the intimate connection between the maker and their products, framing the cymbals as more than mere instruments—they become vessels of artistic and emotional labor. Mongiello captures this ethos:

> Especially with the handmade cymbals now, every single cymbal that one of us makes, we're emoting into it. We're putting our energy and ourselves into it in order for it to be a special canvas for someone else to put what they have into it, which is then leaving the cymbal and giving something to the audience. Every single one is different, and you're going to get something out of that. (Steve Maxwell Drums, 2023)

DISCUSSION

This study examined the legitimation strategies of independent cymbal smiths, an emergent producer collective operating within the traditionalist handmade cymbal market. By analyzing the public narratives of leading members, the study identifies two narrative strategies that enable them to navigate the challenges of situating their collective identity within a traditionalist market. The findings contribute to three key areas of research: (1) the legitimation of collective identities, (2) legitimation within traditionalist markets, and (3) how new producer collectives reshape craft traditions and product singularization. These contributions and their broader theoretical implications are discussed below.

Legitimation of Collective Identities: The Role of Bridging Strategies

Prior research on collective identity legitimation has largely examined how new producer groups differentiate themselves from incumbents by defining distinct attributes and practices (Navis and Glynn, 2011; Wry et al., 2011). Narrative strategies play a central role in this process by framing novel attributes in ways that resonate with market audiences, making unfamiliar practices more intelligible and acceptable (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Durand and Khaire, 2017). Much of this literature assumes that legitimation occurs primarily through

the formation of new market categories, where producer groups seek to carve out an entirely novel space within an industry (Navis and Glynn, 2010; Weber et al., 2008). However, the question of how new collectives gain legitimacy within existing market structures has received comparatively less attention.

This study extends this literature by demonstrating that new producer collectives can achieve legitimacy in established markets through reinterpretation rather than radical differentiation. The findings reveal that independent cymbal smiths leverage prior role identities—in this case, their past as professional drummers—to bridge the gap between the established market and their emerging collective. Through identity bridging, they redefine core values and ethos by transferring the credibility and expertise associated with their previous role as musicians into their craft as cymbal makers. At the same time, practice bridging allows them to innovate and justify their production methods by adapting drumming-related skills and sensibilities to the practice of making cymbals. These strategies enable them to navigate a rigidly defined market without directly challenging its fundamental principles.

Unlike prior studies that emphasize the creation of entirely novel identities for new collectives (Navis and Glynn, 2010; Weber et al., 2008), my findings suggest that new producer groups in established markets engage in re-anchoring processes—linking their new role to preexisting identities and expertise rather than constructing a radically distinct position. Independent cymbal smiths do not attempt to replace traditional handmade cymbal makers or mass manufacturers outright; instead, they frame their work as a natural extension of their musical expertise. By doing so, they reinforce their legitimacy not through categorical novelty but through the continuity of craft knowledge and artistic sensibility.

A key insight from existing research on the legitimation of collective identities is the balance between individual distinctiveness and collective coherence (Wry et al., 2011; Navis

and Glynn, 2011). Typically, new producer groups are expected to first establish a coherent identity to gain market recognition before emphasizing individual differentiation to advance their strategic interests (Navis and Glynn, 2010; Hiatt and Carlos, 2016). However, this study suggests a different pattern: from the moment of their emergence to their eventual recognition, independent cymbal smiths have actively promoted their distinctive identities as an integral part of their identity bridging strategy. While such plurality aligns with prior research on creative industries, where differentiation fosters innovation—such as in the synthesizer market (Anthony et al., 2016)—what makes the smiths unique within a highly codified, established market is the way they frame their distinctiveness as complementary rather than competitive. Rather than striving for uniformity, they present their cymbals as part of a collective "color palette" that drummers can mix and match to create a cohesive yet personalized set. This strategic positioning enables them to simultaneously maintain their individuality while reinforcing their legitimacy as a collective, offering a novel approach to navigating the tension between differentiation and coherence in established markets.

This study also extends the literature on cooperation in producer collectives. Prior studies suggest that cooperation is often driven by external threats—such as a shared enemy or resource scarcity (Sonenshein et al., 2017; Mathias et al., 2018) that binds members together under a shared fate (Hiatt and Park, 2022). However, my findings reveal that cooperation among independent cymbal smiths is not merely reactive but an enduring strategy that serves multiple functions. While opposition to mass producers remains a unifying force, their cooperation is also instrumental in collectively navigating the market constraints. By maintaining complementary differentiation, they reinforce their legitimacy as a collective while preserving their individual creative identities, illustrating how cooperation can be a sustained mechanism for adaptation and legitimation within long-established markets. More research is needed to examine the conditions that enable such cooperation to

remain stable over time, as well as whether similar complementarity-based differentiation strategies are emerging in other market settings facing the influx of new producer collectives.

Legitimation within Traditionalist Markets: Challenging and Softening Boundaries

Research on traditionalist markets has primarily examined the emergence of specialist organizational forms that position themselves in opposition to industrialized incumbents by establishing authenticity markers (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Weber et al., 2008; McKendrick and Hannan, 2014). While these studies emphasize the formation of clear boundaries between traditionalist and industrialized markets, follow-up research has predominantly analyzed these markets through a lens of maintenance rather than transformation (e.g., Mathias et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2017). This focus on stability arises from the assumption that, once established by the incumbents, the core attributes and practices of traditionalist markets become deeply entrenched, leaving little room for reinterpretation by new entrants (Negro et al., 2011). However, my findings challenge this perspective by demonstrating how new producer collectives engage in market adaptation, softening rigid conventions through identity and practice negotiation rather than outright opposition.

A key insight from my findings is that, while traditionalist markets impose rigid boundaries of legitimacy, these boundaries are not impermeable—they can be adapted through specific mechanisms of legitimation. The independent cymbal smiths illustrate how new entrants introduce reinterpretations of traditional practices by framing their adaptations in ways that resonate with market audiences. For instance, through practice bridging, they integrate modern production techniques—such as power hammers traditionally associated with mass production—while maintaining core craft values. In other oppositional markets, modern technology has often been outright rejected by both audiences and fellow producers, yet smiths have successfully legitimized their adaptations by framing them as enhancing creativity and sustainability without compromising authenticity. They emphasize that modern

tools enable greater artistic expression and alleviate physically demanding tasks like hammering, allowing them to sustain craftsmanship. These findings suggest that successful boundary negotiation in traditionalist markets depends not on rejecting or replacing existing practices but on embedding novel approaches within preexisting cultural narratives. Future research can build on this by examining how such identity work enables markets to evolve while maintaining their traditionalist ethos.

Beyond independent cymbal smiths, other emerging producer collectives in traditionalist markets exhibit similar dynamics, such as micro eco-farms within organic farming (Sikavica and Pozner, 2013) and microwineries within the wine industry (Swaminathan, 1995; Fisher, 1993). While research has yet to fully explain how these collectives achieve legitimation, existing evidence suggests that they often position themselves in opposition to both traditionalist and modernist incumbents with larger-scale, effectively repartitioning the market (Sikavica and Pozner, 2013). However, my findings reveal a more subtle strategy among the cymbal smiths: rather than directly competing with established handmade cymbal producers, they adapt market conventions through ongoing identity and practice negotiation. Several conditions may explain this non-oppositional stance. First, although Turkish cymbal manufacturers have scaled significantly, they have maintained their commitment to traditional production methods, particularly for their core product lines. This continued adherence to craft traditions limits the extent to which the independent smiths can differentiate themselves as a radically distinct category. Second, established producers serve as key resource providers, supplying the raw cymbal blanks that smiths rely on, creating a structural dependence that discourages direct opposition.

These findings raise broader questions about the structural conditions that shape how new producer collectives emerge and achieve legitimacy within traditionalist markets. Would independent cymbal smiths adopt a more oppositional narrative if they were not dependent on

existing handmade producers for materials? Would their positioning shift if large-scale traditionalist producers embraced more modernist production techniques? These questions highlight the need for further research into the market structures that enable or constrain new collectives from adopting either cooperative or oppositional legitimation strategies within traditionalist markets.

The Evolution of Traditionalist Markets: Reinterpreting Craft and Singular Production

Beyond legitimation strategies, this study offers insights into how new producer collectives contribute to the evolution of craft traditions (Kroezen et al., 2021) and the reconfiguration of product singularization within traditionalist markets (Karpik, 2010; Reckwitz, 2020). Rather than merely preserving heritage, these entrants blend historical craftsmanship with creative reinterpretations, expanding the boundaries of what constitutes craft within entrenched market structures. In doing so, they illustrate how traditionalist markets evolve not only through opposition to industrialization but also through internal diversification, where different producer groups redefine authenticity and singularity in novel ways.

Prior research has depicted traditionalist markets as anchored in specific configurations of craftwork, primarily distinguishing between "pure craft," which emphasizes "anti-industrial purity in making," and "creative craft," which is centered around "creative stimulation through making" (Kroezen et al., 2021, p. 513). This study reveals that these configurations can coexist within the same market, adopted by different producer collectives. In my setting, while legacy producers uphold the ethos of pure craft, independent smiths introduce creative reinterpretations that expand the market's understanding of craft. Rather than displacing tradition, these entrants act as catalysts for innovation, embedding new perspectives while maintaining the foundational principles of craftsmanship. Similar patterns can be observed in other settings, such as vinyl record manufacturing (Wiedner et al., 2024) and Dutch craft brewing (Kroezen and Heugens, 2019), where legacy craft practices have

been revitalized through contemporary adaptations. In the case of independent cymbal smiths, their recognition as the "Future of Cymbal Making" (Metz, 2023) suggests that it is not necessarily legacy producers but new entrants adopting creative craft approaches who may ensure the continuity of declining traditionalist markets.

This study also connects to the entrepreneurship literature on the maker movement (Browder et al., 2019) and user entrepreneurship (Shah and Tripsas, 2007). Unlike incumbents who tightly control production knowledge (Cattani et al., 2013), independent smiths operate through open knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and peer validation. This challenges conventional assumptions about expertise transmission in craft industries, suggesting that distributed knowledge systems can facilitate legitimacy-building in artisanal markets (Croidieu and Kim, 2018). Moreover, unlike traditional market entrants who rely on commercial narratives, smiths position themselves as "player-smiths," leveraging their shared experience as drummers to establish credibility. This extends previous research on legitimation in user-driven markets (Shah and Tripsas, 2007) by illustrating how pre-existing social capital within an audience-based community (in this case, drummers) can serve as a bridge to a new producer identity.

The prior role identities of new producer collectives also serve as a strategic resource in shaping the valuation of traditionalist products, particularly in how they frame singularity (Karpik, 2010). Through practice bridging, independent smiths embed their musicianship background into product quality assessments and justifications. Unlike incumbents who view product variability in handcrafted cymbals as a byproduct of an unintended consequence of handcrafted production process, smiths frame this variability as an intentional imperfection—an artistic decision that enhances the expressiveness and depth of the product. This approach to singularity reflects broader shifts in how unique products are positioned in late modernity, where the culture of innovation and creativity increasingly shapes how singularities are

valorized and marketed (Reckwitz, 2020). More broadly, it suggests that traditionalist markets evolve not simply through preservation or opposition to standardization but through the creative embedding of contemporary logics into traditional craft-based production. Developing a more conceptual understanding of these mechanisms is necessary to deepen our understanding of how traditionalist markets adapt and transform over time.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides novel insights into how new producer collectives legitimize themselves within traditionalist markets, it also presents limitations that open avenues for future research.

First, this study highlights how new producer collectives navigate legitimation within established market structures rather than in direct opposition to them. However, the extent to which identity and practice bridging strategies apply across different traditionalist markets remains an open question. Future research could examine whether similar mechanisms emerge in other industries experiencing an influx of enthusiast-turned-producers, such as independent watchmaking (Raffaelli, 2019) or analog synthesizer production (Nelson et al., 2023). Comparative studies could clarify whether bridging strategies are unique to markets where prior user expertise can be leveraged as a source of legitimacy or if they represent a broader pattern in the evolution of traditionalist markets.

Second, this study primarily focuses on producer-led legitimation strategies, yet the role of other market audiences in shaping collective legitimacy remains underexplored. Future research could investigate how drummers, retailers, industry critics, and other audiences contribute to or challenge the legitimation process. Do audiences reinforce the narratives constructed by independent smiths, or do they introduce alternative interpretations that reshape collective identity? Understanding how legitimacy is co-constructed between

producers and audiences could offer deeper insights into how new collectives establish and sustain recognition in rigid market environments.

Third, this study raises important questions about the role of market incumbents in shaping the trajectory of traditionalist markets. While prior research often frames incumbents as either gatekeepers who resist change or passive bystanders (Negro et al., 2011; Mathias et al., 2020), further investigation is needed to understand whether established producers actively engage with emergent collectives. Do incumbents seek to integrate or co-opt these new entrants, or do they maintain strict boundaries between legacy production and newer interpretations of craft? Studying these interactions could refine our understanding of how traditionalist markets evolve in response to new producer groups.

Finally, the role of digital platforms in facilitating collective legitimacy-building warrants further exploration. This study finds that independent smiths rely heavily on online forums, peer-to-peer interactions, and digital communities to diffuse their narratives and establish credibility. Future research could examine how digital infrastructures shape the legitimation trajectories of producer collectives in traditionalist markets.

By addressing these open questions, future research can further develop our understanding of how traditionalist markets adapt to the emergence of new producer collectives, ultimately adding new insights on the mechanisms through which legacy practices are preserved, reinterpreted, or transformed over time.

Conclusion

This study advances our understanding of how new producer collectives establish legitimacy within traditionalist markets by employing identity bridging and practice bridging as core legitimation strategies. By blending craft traditions with creative reinterpretation, these producers challenge rigid market conventions while introducing novel ways of delivering singular products. In doing so, they contribute to the broader evolution of traditionalist

markets, softening categorical boundaries and reshaping the meaning of authenticity. These insights contribute to research on market legitimation and traditionalist market evolution, offering a foundation for future studies into the intersection of tradition, creativity, and collective identity in market transformations.

Table 3.1. Data structure

First-order codes	Second-order codes	Themes (strategies)
Crafting identity through personal expressive alignment Promoting complementarity among distinctive producers	Priming individual distinctiveness leveraging expression and complementarity	Identity bridging
Supporting coexistence through complementary distinctiveness Enhancing collective value through mutual support Fostering openness and knowledge sharing	Building a cooperative community through shared generosity	
Promoting/respecting commercialization while preserving creative dedication Navigating practical realities	Balancing market demands with creative integrity	
Embracing humility and continuous learning Expressing fulfillment and purpose through practice	Framing non-expert practice with passionate dedication	Practice bridging
Leveraging adaptive craftsmanship Balancing structure and improvisation in production process	Harmonizing complexity in practice using embodied expertise	
Embedding hands-on experience into product quality assessment Justifying product quality using intentional imperfection Guiding customer expectations through creative vision	Shaping product perception through mastery of usership	

Table 3.2. Illustrative Evidence for Identity Bridging

Illustrative quotations	First-order codes	Second-order codes
I just find a lot of correlation between music and cymbal making. And so that this idea of balance between oversaturated and open, finding something in the middle is, that's oftentimes where I'm trying to land with my cymbals as well. (Timothy Roberts, The Reverie Podcast 4)	Crafting identity through personal expressive alignment	Priming individual distinctiveness leveraging expression and complementarity
I think just you find your niche and your specific types of qualities that you like the most and then run with it. And what you really like hearing and really like playing, and then really just try to develop that. It's the same as playing the instrument. (Jesse Simpson, The Reverie Podcast 11)		
I don't want to make everybody only by Timothy Roberts. There are a couple of guys that have just outfitted their whole kits with my cymbals and I'm super grateful for that. Obviously, that helps pay the bills, but I kind of see it a little differently because every one of us has our own voice with our instruments. (Timothy Roberts, The Reverie Podcast 5)	Promoting complementarity among distinctive producers	
I'm not going to play the lick exactly how you played it. The notation will be the same, it'll be in time, but my personality comes through that, you know, the cymbals that you're making are your personality. The cymbals that I make, they're my personality. And that's what makes things great. (Paul Francis, The Reverie Podcast 6)		
We each do our own thing. It's not like we're stepping on each other's toes or competing, you know. It's more like we're all working together in a way, but separately. (Matt Nolan, The Reverie Podcast 9)	Supporting coexistence through complementary distinctiveness	Building a cooperative community through shared generosity
There can be this idea that, your pieces are going to have a character that is unique to you that no other maker can replicate. And the same with all of us. And that can be translated into our artistic voice as musicians. And we can think, okay, I want to capture this vibe. So I think I need a Dave Collingwood for that. And I need a Matt Nolan for this other vibe. And then I can kind of create my color palettes. And, if anything, we're taking away from big cymbal producers, which I feel fine to do that. So we can compete with them. (Timothy Roberts, The Reverie Podcast 9)		
We met and I went to his house to play a little bit, he's like, “I have this Craig Lauritsen. And I don't like it too much. Do you think you could modify it a bit?” And I immediately told him like, “No, I'm not going to do it. It's not going to	Enhancing collective value through mutual support	

happen. I don't touch that cymbal." I was surprised that he didn't like it. Not because he didn't like it, but because every drummer that went through that room, according to him, said they didn't like the cymbal. And I was so very curious and I started playing it and I was like, it's an incredible cymbal... I was dealing with him to sell him my cymbal. And I was like, "By the way, if you want to get rid of the Lauritsen, maybe we could trade or I could offer you a deal." And he was doubting about it... And out of nowhere, he sends me a text like, "No, no, no, I want to keep the Lauritsen." (Mariano Quijano, The Reverie Podcast 7)	
One great thing about this show, which is the first time I've been here, is that this is a renaissance in percussion manufacturing, especially cymbal making. There are so many great choices, so please check out all the cymbal makers and play their products. Support them because being a cymbal maker for the rest of your life isn't an easy job. (Paul Francis, Steve Maxwell Drums, 2023)	
Paul Francis sent me a video saying like here, you can get a really nice clean shot of the ride cymbal in this video at this timestamp. I can never really take too much of the credit when making these kinds of things. Like I always have so much help even when I don't really even ask for it. That's what I love about our community, you know, it's very tight knit. (Manny Skretas, The Reverie Podcast 12)	
I only know what I know from what I was taught and stuff that I got to develop where I worked. It doesn't mean that's the only way to do it. And I think this giving freely comes from growing up playing the drums. I mean, drummers are very, very giving to each other. They're like, "Hey, I like that lick that you played. Come over here. Let me, and I'll slow it down. Let me write it out."(Paul Francis, The Reverie Podcast 6)	
He (Mike Skiba) would modify a cymbal and take pictures of it and document it step-by-step and send it to me... It was like an audio file of what the cymbal sounded like before and after. And it was like a huge deal, man. And then he would auction the cymbal and donate that money to the site. Who does that? (Chad Anderson, The Cymbal Podcast 1)	Fostering openness and knowledge sharing
I don't hide any information because my conception is you are an artist. I'm an artist here. I have a lot of artists working. So, if you want a Timothy Roberts ride, don't ask me to do it. If you want a Picasso, don't ask Van Gogh to do that analogy. (Francisco Domene, The Reverie Podcast 13)	

My favorite way to make a cymbal is to get a piece of metal, and when it's done, it's done. That's my favorite way to work. But for monetary purposes, I have released series. (Mike Mongiello, Steve Maxwell Drums, 2023)		
The challenge is… you need to keep a spreadsheet and it has to be profitable. It needs to make sense for you. It needs to make sense for your family. But you still want it to be fun and something that is an expression of creativity. (Ray Byrne, The Reverie Podcast 8)	Promoting/respecting commercialization while preserving creative dedication	
We're trying to live between this world of total pure inspiration and a company that is making a product and wanting someone comes to us and says, “hey, I got this idea, I want to do this, this and this. Can you do that?” (Mariano Quijano, The Reverie Podcast 7)		
We all have realities, you know, debts and mortgages and families and things like you've got to do what you need to do. It's like being a musician, if you've got to do cover gigs, you've got to do cover gigs, you know, I don't bemoan anyone that's a working musician, you've got to do that stuff to pay the bills, like that's just part of it, right? (Craig Lauritsen, The Reverie Podcast 10)		Balancing market demands with creative integrity
The pressure to produce and do the thing that you know will work. I know a lot of musicians that have fallen into this trap. It's like you follow this creative spirit and they put out music and it just blows up because there's something about it that's so real... The heart of it for that musician was really just to create. And then on the back of that, they go, okay, now I got to make album number two. What is that? Because you're like, okay, I can just do the thing I did that everybody loved. That's a really common thing, obviously, with musicians. But for us, when that weight fully hits us and we're going, okay, so how am I going to feed my family or how am I going to pay rent? It can be a trap, I think. It's tough to stay focused on the goal because you have had some amazing drummers pick up your cymbals lately and you're getting recognition right now. (Timothy Roberts, The Reverie Podcast 14)	Navigating practical realities	

Table 3.3. Illustrative Evidence for Practice Bridging

Illustrative quotations	First-order codes	Second-order codes
I think it works when you come at it from an honest place. I've never claimed to be the best or make the best stuff because I think that's a stupid question. It's like someone claiming to be the best drummer. It's like, what does that even mean for you to be the best drummer? There are thousands of drummers throughout history that have focused on different areas of music. And so it's a spectrum. (Mariano Quijano, The Reverie Podcast 7)	Embracing humility and continuous learning	
I find that I'm like constantly in evolution of learning with this craft. Like there really isn't ever going to be like an end point where I'm like, I am the ultimate cymbal master. I know how to make every cymbal every way I know how to, that's never going to be the case. Just like being a musician. it's never going to be the case. (Jesse Simpson, The Reverie Podcast 11)		
I love making cymbals more than playing music. I love to play music because playing the drums was my first girlfriend. I say a joke about that, you know, my first love. And then I morphed into this thing and it's really great because I've always been like a tinkerer. I like to take things apart and know how they work, and cymbals were like, well, there's no, no assembly required. So why does this sound the way that it sounds? How can it be repeatable? I mean, it just seems like a mystery. So I fell into it because I'm naturally curious. (Paul Francis, The Reverie Podcast 6)		Framing non-expert practice with passionate dedication
And there was just something that like didn't grab me about giving it my all, I guess, like really giving it everything I had. If someone was to ask me that question, do you love music? I would have said yes, but maybe there would be a part of me that's like, I don't actually love it the way I would need to love it were it to become the thing that I gave my life to. And it's weird to be like in a place where what I love is related, like tangentially related to music. Obviously, we're making instruments, but there's a whole another dynamic aspect of it... Do you think that we give a go at the music thing and it's just kind of like a part on the journey that leads us maybe to where we're supposed to be? (Timothy Roberts, The Reverie Podcast 7)	Expressing fulfillment and purpose through practice	
I love it not only because I am proud and happy when I do it. And because it makes me feel joy. And because it makes me feel accomplished as well, which is something that I've been looking for, going back to the musician thing. I never felt		

like an accomplished musician. I would not say bad or good or whatever. I always felt like I was always trailing behind that bunny, trying to catch it. And that bunny was getting farther away the longer that I was alive. (Mariano Quijano, The Reverie Podcast 7)		
I feel like it's one of the most important things to being a cymbal smith is like you have a perspective and you're making this thing to be heard from 50 different perspectives. Like you've got the audience perspective. You've got the engineer perspective. You've got the other band members, their perspective. You've got the drummer perspective. And you're trying to balance all of these to create an instrument that's inspiring for the player that works in the music. (Mariano Quijano, The Reverie Podcast 7)		
I kind of combine two things here in my work. Like there's an artistic musical sense and a very analytical engineering sense. And usually those two things, you don't get them strongly like in the same person. There are examples, many examples, but usually you're one way or the other... I guess I have a reasonable amount of both and I can, they talk to each other and I can apply them to what I'm doing. (Matt Nolan, The Reverie Podcast 9)	Leveraging adaptive craftsmanship	
Matt experimented with bringing in some power hammers. He has a couple of old Little Giant machines, which he used to get some really cool effects. I know “power hammer” is like a dirty word, but it's just another tool that we use to get different results. Everything is always touched with the hand to get it just right. You never just use a machine. That's crazy to me. He was a big influence because he kind of brought that hybrid approach to it, and I saw the power in that. (Nicky Moon, Maxwell Drums, 2023)		Harmonizing complexity in practice using embodied expertise
I've always been in that kind of space, creative space and making instruments and being like working with machines and stuff. And the first thing that got me towards cymbals is, because I felt like there was no limit to what I could do. I think I wasn't restricted by the industry standards, like you need to respect certain sizes to fit the heads and fit the hardware and stuff like that... But over time, I kind of limited myself to what I knew, what I knew would sell, what I knew sounded good already. So, you know, I could have just stick with that. (Philippe Gauthier Boudreau, The Reverie Podcast 4)	Balancing structure and improvisation in production process	
This is why I love improvised music too, because like there's got to be an element of risk. And I kind of try and do that when I make cymbals now, I always introduce a little bit of an element of risk when I make it because somehow going there		

exploring, it's like the Dave King thing, it's being a little bit childlike, you know, a little bit naive, but still having obviously enough technique that you're not going to totally ruin something. But somehow you want to try and get some of that essence into the thing that you're making as well. (Craig Lauritsen, The Reverie Podcast 10)		
There's like a balance here. Cause obviously I am swinging the hammer with some intention, but if I come at it with this really rigid, like "I'm going to make this, this blank, a 20 inch that weighs 1,801 grams, and it's going to have this type of shape and it's going to sound exactly like this..." If I do that from the very beginning, then it just ruins the entire process. Cause you, you discover things even in the midst of hammering one blank that takes you in different directions than you're originally intending. And so you kind of have your intention, but then you have this looseness and this go with the flow nature to kind of change at the drop of a hat. Cause you might swing the hammer once and then see the metal kind of respond in a way that was unexpected. And so you kind of have to go with that and see... It's a conversation. So in a way it is a lot like music and improvised music. (Timothy Roberts, The Reverie Podcast 16)		
I like playing my cymbals on my gigs and I've actually created a couple gigs locally in town, just not so that I can play myself, but almost that I can like try out all the new cymbals I'm making week to week. And that kind of perspective ends up helping me a lot when it comes to knowing when a cymbal is finished. (Timothy Roberts, The Reverie Podcast 2)		
The thing that people don't know about making cymbals, at least for me, I guess for many others as well, it's not only the process of hammering it out, giving the shape, lathing it, giving a finish, deciding if you want patina or not patina, deciding whatever you want. It's also the countless hours of playing it until you feel like, yes, that is how it should be sounding. And at least for me, whatever I have here, whatever people are going to take, if they take, they'll know I've been playing them for a good four months already just to, I guess, understand them and be content with them and happy and proud of what I've done. (Mariano Quijano, The Reverie Podcast 7)	Embedding hands-on experience into product quality assessment	Shaping product perception through mastery of usership
As drummers, when we check out drums or cymbals, we find something that sounds and feels good to us. I say that it's about finding something that "vibrates us the right way." Cymbals and drums allow us to express ourselves non-verbally, and when something feels good to us, that instrument will make the other musicians and audience feel good. (Paul Francis, Steve Maxwell Drums, 2023)		

And I think is the benefit of a maker that is also a musician or at least has that musical ear because a lot of the bigger manufacturers, they started with people that maybe weren't even musicians or drummers, but they saw the market for it, okay, we can make cymbals, you know, there's a market share we could grab. If you're in that camp, you're not going to understand why a dip in the bell or dip before the bell would be a good thing. You're going to say, that's a problem or that cymbal doesn't sit right. But when you have people like us sitting down talking about how we make cymbals, designing in flaws or letting flaws exist, there's an intentionality to it that ultimately all ends at the music. (Timothy Roberts, The Reverie Podcast 5)	Justifying product quality using intentional imperfection
Same with playing, right? To me, the players I love, it's almost like there's a consistency in their inconsistency. They're not perfect, but that's the thing I love, right? But there's still almost a perfection about the imperfectness. It's like the playing between the cracks and doing all that kind of stuff. (Craig Lauritsen, The Reverie Podcast 10)	
Somebody a couple of weeks ago, those diligent flat-hats that just came out, like, "I really dig this sound. It's really speaking to me, can you make cymbals like that?" And I'm like, "go buy one". "You're not going to be happy with the one I make you because no matter what the sound that you see on the video, you're probably not even going to like the ones that you actually get from Zildjian because you are obsessed with the sound that's in that video. You like that sound compression they use in that video." (Mike Mongiello, The Reverie Podcast 2)	Guiding customer expectations through creative vision
Any other cymbal smiths watching this, and there seems to be quite a few of us now, will completely agree the amount we get approached saying, can you make me sound like whoever? It's like, no, the answer basically is no... I can't make you sound like anyone else. I can give you a piece of metal that you will then have to get to know and will become part of your expression and your palette. (Dave Collingwood, The Cymbal Podcast 2)	
That's a key here for anyone listening… I feel like if you go to, cause any of us independent makers, we're all artists. And so, you know, we all have very fragile egos and strong egos and we're very particular and all these things. if you come to us and you say, can you make something abstract, can you make it sound like the wind on a winter night? That's like a challenge that touches right on the artistic side of what we're doing. (Timothy Roberts, The Reverie Podcast 2)	

CHAPTER 4.

LIMINAL MARKETS: STRUCTURING CONTRADICTION BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

ABSTRACT

This paper develops the concept of *liminal markets*—a distinct form of market organization in which symbolic contradictions, such as those between tradition and modernity, are not resolved but intentionally sustained. While organization theory often distinguishes between traditionalist and modernist markets, this binary framing fails to account for a growing set of empirical contexts in which heritage and innovation are simultaneously mobilized. To conceptualize this under-theorized space, the paper introduces a comparative framework of market configurations that examines how symbolic, material, temporal, spatial, and relational elements align across traditionalist, modernist, and liminal markets. It also theorizes how liminal markets achieve stability through the structured performance of contradiction, showing that symbolic heterogeneity can serve as a durable source of value, legitimacy, and differentiation. In doing so, the paper contributes a theoretical vocabulary for analyzing symbolically rich markets and brings conceptual coherence to a dispersed set of empirical phenomena spanning creative and craft-based industries.

INTRODUCTION

Markets are increasingly viewed not simply as arenas of economic exchange, but as culturally and symbolically structured fields in which products acquire meaning through shared understandings and interpretive frameworks which shape how actors evaluate products, confer legitimacy, and coordinate exchange (Bourdieu, 1984; Weber et al., 2008; White, 2002). Within this perspective, and especially in markets where symbolic and cultural value are central, organization scholars have often drawn a binary distinction between two dominant market forms—socially recognized arrangements that align symbolic and material elements across actors (Aspers and Beckert, 2011; Fligstein and Dauter, 2007). These include traditionalist markets, grounded in heritage and artisanal production, and modernist markets, organized around technical performance and innovation (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Carroll et al., 2002; Greve et al., 2006).

This binary framing has proven analytically powerful, especially in explicating oppositional market logics across domains such as food (Sikavica and Pozner, 2013; Weber et al., 2008), beer (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Verhaal et al., 2015), wine (Swaminathan, 2001). However, it increasingly fails to capture the growing number of market formations that do not conform neatly to either end of the spectrum. Across diverse empirical contexts—such as analog equipment (Wiedner et al., 2024; Nelson et al., 2023; Hampel et al, 2020), instrument making (Blundel and Smith, 2018; Dudley, 2014; see also Chapter 2) and various artisanal and maker industries (Browder et al., 2019)—market actors selectively draw on both traditionalist and modernist repertoires. Producers, in particular, play a central role in shaping market differentiation: they embed modern techniques into craft production, blend vintage aesthetics with experimental design, and appeal simultaneously to tastemakers who value both nostalgia and technical performance. These practices—often reinforced by intermediaries and embraced by consumers—destabilize the rigid market boundaries assumed by the

traditionalist–modernist binary to be necessary for stability. Yet because these emergent cases are typically examined through disparate theoretical lenses, their shared dynamics remain analytically fragmented and underdeveloped.

To theorize market forms that lie between the traditionalist–modernist binary, this paper develops the concept of *liminal markets*: markets not defined by categorical coherence, but by the institutionalization of tension between opposed symbolic orders. Drawing on the anthropological concept of liminality (Turner, 1995) and building on its organizational extensions (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011; Garud et al., 2020), I conceptualize liminal markets as structured arenas in which contradictions between tradition and modernity are not resolved, but continually enacted, materialized, and narratively framed. While paradox theory has shown that organizations can manage competing logics internally (Smith and Lewis, 2011), this paper extends that insight to the market level, showing how symbolic oppositions can be stabilized across production, coordination, and valuation.

To systematically explicate these dynamics, I develop a comparative framework of market configurations, grounded in a configurational perspective (Cornelissen, 2017; Delbridge and Fiss, 2013). Rather than treating market features as independent or additively combined attributes, the framework conceptualizes markets as interdependent constellations of symbolic, material, temporal, spatial, and relational elements—where it is their specific alignment and interaction that give rise to distinct market forms. It distinguishes among three analytically coherent market configurations: (1) *traditionalist markets,* which prioritize heritage, embedded symbolic value, and cultural continuity; (2) *modernist markets*, which emphasize innovation, efficiency, and future-oriented value creation; and (3) *liminal markets*, which operate through the structured coexistence of symbolic contradiction.

The framework developed in this paper draws on a synthesis of insights from the sociology of markets (Fligstein and Dauter, 2007; Aspers and Beckert, 2011; Karpik, 2010),

theories of organization and craft (Carroll, 2002; Bell et al., 2021; Sennet, 2008), as well as a focused vignette of independent cymbal smiths—a case that exemplifies how symbolic tensions are embedded, performed, and stabilized through material practices and narrative strategies.

By developing distinct configurations of market forms, the paper offers both a structural vocabulary for theorizing symbolically rich markets and a relational perspective on market organization. It introduces the concept of liminal markets as a distinct and durable form—one that helps integrate emerging empirical studies highlighting the coexistence of heritage and innovation, often overlooked outside the craft domain (e.g., Kroezen et al., 2021; Ravasi et al., 2025; Ganzin et al., 2024). In doing so, the paper contributes a novel account of how markets may be organized and maintained not through the coherence of conventions (Wry et al., 2011; Fligstein and Dauter, 2007), but through the durable performance of symbolic contradiction—a process theorized here as *dynamic stabilization*.

The paper is structured in three main sections. First, the existing literature on traditionalist and modernist markets is reviewed, highlighting the analytical limits of this binary framing and introducing the concept of liminal markets as a distinct alternative. Second, a comparative framework of market configurations is presented, in which the selected dimensions are detailed and illustrated with empirical examples. This section concludes with an analysis of how liminal markets are stabilized through the organized performance of symbolic contradiction. Third, the paper's theoretical contributions and directions for future research are outlined.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Foundations of Traditionalist and Modernist Markets

Market sociology has long emphasized that markets are not neutral or natural arenas of exchange, but socially constructed spaces structured through interpretive schemes, valuation

practices, and coordination mechanisms (White, 2000; Fourcade, 2007; Fligstein and Dioun, 2015; Lamont, 2012). Actors do not evaluate products in isolation but within historically sedimented frameworks that define what constitutes legitimacy, authenticity, and value. Producers and consumers rely on shared symbolic repertoires to make sense of what a product is, how it should be evaluated, and what it communicates about the social identity or status of its users (Bourdieu, 1984; Zelizer, 2005).

These symbolic frameworks not only shape how value is constructed but also structure the relational dynamics that organize market activity, including exchange between producers and consumers and competition among producers (Fligstein and Dauter, 2007; Aspers and Beckert, 2011). Among these dynamics, competition plays a particularly critical role in shaping market structure, as producers continually jockey for position relative to one another (White, 1981). One of the key mechanisms through which this competitive ordering unfolds is product differentiation—the process by which producers construct distinctive identities and value propositions to claim space in specific market segments and sustain their relevance over time.

Importantly, in markets where symbolic value or cultural meaning are central to how products are evaluated, differentiation is not only functional, but expressive and identity-laden (Karpik, 2010; Aspers, 2009). In such markets, producers compete not just on performance or price, but on how effectively they can signal authenticity. Resource partitioning theory (Carroll, 1985; Carroll et al., 2002) helps explain how small, specialist producers thrive under these conditions: by targeting niche segments that are unattractive or inaccessible to mass producers, these firms avoid direct competition and instead appeal to consumers seeking alternative or culturally resonant forms of value.

A seminal example of this process is Carroll and Swaminathan's (2000) study of microbreweries, which showed how small-scale producers carved out new market space by

opposing the values of standardization and scale, instead emphasizing authenticity and hand-crafted production. This form of positioning gave rise to new market conventions that increasingly rendered mass-produced and craft-produced products non-substitutable (Verhaal et al., 2015). In hindsight, this empirical pattern reflects what we now recognize as a traditionalist market form[2], distinguished from the modernist markets associated with industrialized and scalable production methods.

These symbolic opposition dynamics have become increasingly pronounced in recent decades as markets have undergone what scholars describe as a process of re-enchantment—a reaction to the disembedding and rationalization of economic life (Suddaby et al., 2017; Reckwitz, 2020). As industrialized and professionalized production models continue to expand, they are increasingly met with oppositional market formations that seek to reclaim craft, tradition and cultural meaning. The result is a deepened dichotomy between traditionalist and modernist markets, which now serves as a dominant interpretive frame across many empirical domains, including wineries (Swaminathan, 2001; 1995), food (Sikavica and Pozner, 2013; Weber et al., 2008), radio stations (Greve et al., 2006), and whisky distillery markets (McKendrick and Hannan, 2014). In each case, producers leverage symbolic repertoires of tradition and authenticity to differentiate themselves from competitors aligned with modernist production and distribution models—often in response to audience demands and intermediated judgments that continually revalorize cultural meaning in the marketplace.

[2] Following the sociological view of markets (Fligstein and Dauter, 2007; Beckert, 2009; Fourcade, 2007), market form is defined here as stabilized fields of exchange where producers, consumers, and intermediaries coordinate around shared understandings of value, legitimacy, and appropriate practice. In this view, traditionalist and modernist markets are not merely analytical labels, but ideal-typical formations shaped and sustained by actors' symbolic and material commitments. These categories are actively reproduced in market discourse and practice—for example, through the invocation of "authentic," "craft-produced," or "standardized" as markers of value—guiding differentiation, coordination, and legitimation strategies across the field (see Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Verhaal et al., 2015).

Empirical studies across various market forms reveal the tension between tradition and modernity as it is expressed through market conventions—often coherently structured along symbolic, material, temporal, spatial, and relational dimensions that are central to market processes. These dimensions will be systematically developed in the comparative framework section. In a broader sense, traditionalist markets are oriented toward symbolic value and cultural continuity, often grounded in handcrafted production, place-based expertise, and aesthetics that embrace imperfection and expressive materiality (Bell et al., 2021; Sennett, 2008; Kroezen et al., 2021). They rely on community-based coordination mechanisms and derive legitimacy from narratives of heritage, authenticity, and lineage-based transmission (Karpik, 2010; Boltanski and Esquerre, 2020).

In contrast, modernist markets emphasize functional utility, innovation, and scale (Fligstein and Dauter, 2007). Their production is mechanized and codified (Negro et al., 2011), their aesthetics minimalist and rational (Verganti, 2008), and their coordination systems formalized through branding, certification, and algorithmic platforms (Karpik, 2010; Fourcade and Healy, 2017). Legitimacy is typically anchored in technical expertise, professional authority, and performance metrics (Espeland and Stevens, 2008; Lamont, 2012). These configurations are more than abstract types; they are recurrently reproduced through concrete production practices, aesthetic forms, and coordination logics.

The Limits of Binary Framing

Despite its analytical utility, the opposition between traditionalism and modernism imposes important limitations on how organization theory explains contemporary market dynamics. Much of the literature continues to rely on a binary lens that distinguishes market forms based on symbolic commitments to either heritage or innovation, artisanal purity or scalability. While this framework has helped classify stylized forms of differentiation, it increasingly fails to account for the complexity observed in many emerging markets.

Across a growing number of empirical settings, we observe the selective integration of novelty into traditional practices, resulting in market forms that draw simultaneously on craft, authenticity, and innovation. Actors in these markets neither fully conform to traditionalist logics nor embrace modernist ideals. Instead, they engage with the deliberate tension between symbolic opposites, creating value not by resolving contradiction, but by actively sustaining and performing it. This paper conceptualizes these as liminal markets.

Recent studies highlight how such markets challenge what Bell et al. (2021, p. 13) describe as "the conventional oppositional dualisms of hand/machine making and digital technologies/craft." Rather than abandoning artisanal foundations, producers strategically incorporate modern methods, materials, or platforms to ensure the relevance and endurance of heritage practices (Ravasi et al., 2025; Fetzer, 2025). For example, markets once in decline due to modernist encroachment—such as watchmaking, analog photography, or artisanal brewing—have been revitalized by embedding innovation within traditionalist frames (Kroezen and Heugens, 2021; Wiedner et al., 2024; Hampel et al., 2020).

This pattern is further evident in research on the broader maker movement (Browder et al., 2019; Luckman, 2015), where producers revive traditional techniques while simultaneously adopting advanced tools and algorithmic platforms. These actors aestheticize imperfection while embedding precision, and invoke nostalgia while signaling novelty—blurring categorical boundaries that binary logic often presumes to be fixed. As a result, existing theoretical lenses fail to put these markets in dialogue with each other, leaving their shared dynamics analytically underdeveloped.

To overcome this limitation, we require a framework that moves beyond binary classification and conceptualizes markets as configurations—that is, as patterned alignments of symbolic, material, temporal, spatial, and relational elements that together organize how products are produced, valued, coordinated, and exchanged. Within this configurational

approach, it becomes possible to identify liminal markets as a distinct and durable formation, one that generates value through the tension between tradition and modernity. It also allows us to theorize how such markets stabilize despite the absence of coherent conventions, offering an alternative to conventional views of market order as dependent on symbolic consistency.

In the following section, I draw on the concept of liminality to introduce the idea of liminal markets, and begin developing a comparative framework of market configurations that includes traditionalist, modernist, and liminal forms.

Defining Liminal Markets

The concept of liminality offers a productive lens for rethinking how markets could be structured not through categorical coherence, but through the active maintenance of symbolic contradiction. Originally developed in anthropology, liminality refers to a transitional state "betwixt and between" fixed roles or categories (Turner, 1995). In such states, conventional meanings are suspended, inverted, or reconfigured, creating openings for transformation and redefinition. Organizational scholars have since drawn on the notion of liminality to examine a variety of transitional and boundary-crossing phenomena—such as cultural change within organizations (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011), shifting professional roles (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003), and the emergence of ventures in dynamic market contexts (Garud et al., 2020). In each case, liminality helps capture how actors operate under indeterminate conditions and navigate between established domains.

Building on this foundation, I extend the concept of liminality from its traditional association with episodic or spatial transitions to encompass stabilized, enduring formations at the level of entire market configurations. In this view, liminal markets are not transitional hybrids or unstable forms. Rather, they are structured arenas in which symbolic and material contradictions are intentionally sustained as a core source of distinctiveness and value. In these markets, the tension between tradition and modernity is not resolved; instead, the tension is

performed, constructing product meanings, producer identities, and consumer experiences through deliberate contradiction.

This process resonates with insights from paradox theory, which examines how organizations manage competing, interdependent logics without eliminating the tension between them (e.g., Smith and Lewis, 2011; Raffaelli et al., 2022). In liminal markets, this paradox is not only managed at the organizational level, but is materialized and institutionalized at the field level, shaping how legitimacy and value are produced across producers, intermediaries, and consumers. Thus, where paradox theory tends to focus on intra-organizational dynamics, the concept of liminal markets theorizes how entire markets are structured and stabilized around contradiction.

Research on innovation and creativity—often framed as a continual pursuit of the new (Amabile and Pratt, 2016; Anderson et al., 2014)—offers valuable insights into how novelty can be integrated with tradition, particularly through product and process innovations within organizations. However, in market contexts, novelty frequently manifests across a broader set of dimensions, including the ways value is constructed, legitimacy is claimed, and exchange is coordinated. Prior research has also examined the tensions that arise between established conventions and the pursuit of novelty within organizational innovation processes (e.g., Islam et al., 2016). Although the form of tension explored in this paper—between tradition and modernity—is distinct in both scope and structure, as it transcends specific innovations or organizations, these studies remain insightful in showing how such tensions can be reconfigured—rather than eliminated—allowing novelty to emerge while retaining links to existing conventions.

Consider the example of independent cymbal makers, who combine modern hammering tools with centuries-old hand-hammering methods. Rather than resolving the contradiction, they maintain both practices side-by-side, reinforcing artisanal legitimacy while

appealing to contemporary sonic preferences (see Chapter 2). Similarly, the craft beer movement, as shown by Kroezen et al. (2019), draws on historic brewing practices not to return to the past, but to reinterpret and reincarnate tradition as a renewable symbolic resource that gives rise to new criteria for quality, legitimacy and consumer engagement in the beer market. In both cases, tradition is not fixed, and modernity is not definitive—they are in continuous interplay, reactivated and reframed in each iteration. This means that the tension between traditionalist and modernist elements is not a problem to be solved, but a productive contradiction to be managed and re-performed. As long as producers and audiences remain open to reinterpreting both symbolic orders, the market remains viable—not through coherence or resolution, but through a recursive interplay of future and past.

Notably, liminal markets are distinct from other adjacent concepts often used in organization theory. First, they differ from niche markets, as conceptualized in resource partitioning theory (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Carroll et al., 2002), which serve small, targeted segments and are typically defined by the centrality of single dominant value logic — whether traditionalist or modernist. Liminal markets, by contrast, are defined by coexistence and interplay of multiple logics, sustaining multiple value regimes within a single market configuration.

This form of heterogeneity also diverges from category-spanning processes examined in prior research (e.g., Rao et al., 2005; Negro et al., 2011), where producers selectively borrow from rival categories to introduce novelty or create distinction. In such cases, hybridity is generally transitional—a temporary disruption that eventually stabilizes into a redrawn category boundary or consolidates under a dominant logic. By contrast, liminal markets do not represent a phase or disruption. Their heterogeneity is structural and sustained, not episodic. While some forms of hybridity can become structural and enduring, they remain distinct from the form of liminality developed here. For example, social enterprises institutionalize hybrid

logics that combine commercial and social missions (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Ebrahim et al., 2014). This form of hybridity is stabilized through organizational design and performance systems that integrate competing goals into a synthesized third logic. Liminality, by contrast, involves the sustained coexistence of unresolved symbolic contradictions—such as between tradition and modernity—without requiring synthesis, even though elements of synthesis may be materially embedded within the product (Fetzer, 2025). More broadly, stabilization in liminal markets occurs not through the resolution of competing logics but their ongoing performance across material, narrative, and organizational dimensions.

In a similar vein, the notion of liminality used in this paper differs from interstitial spaces as theorized by Furnari (2014). While interstitial spaces refer to temporary organizational micro-settings between institutional fields—where actors from different domains interact and potentially generate new institutional forms—liminal markets are defined by their persistent symbolic contradiction. Liminality here is not merely a condition experienced during interaction, but a defining feature of the setting itself. It shapes how participants engage with, interpret, and stabilize contradictory value systems over time.

In sum, liminal markets are not marginal, transitional, or hybrid. They are intentional, structured, and enduring market configurations that operate through the institutionalization of paradox—a dynamic that aligns with insights from paradox theory. Their distinctiveness lies not in resolving symbolic difference, but in maintaining it as a core mechanism of meaning-making, legitimacy, and differentiation. In the next section, I develop a comparative framework that systematizes the distinctions among three market configurations—traditionalist, modernist, and liminal—through a configurational lens.

COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK OF MARKET CONFIGURATIONS

Drawing on typological theorizing (Cornelissen, 2017; Delbridge and Fiss, 2013), I develop a configurational typology that enables the comparison of market forms by specifying how they

are structured across multiple dimensions. While market forms capture broader symbolic and cultural frameworks (e.g., traditionalist, modernist, liminal), market configurations refer to the patterned alignment of core elements that give those forms their concrete expression. These elements—such as value basis, production mode, coordination mechanism, temporal orientation, aesthetic logic, consumer subjectivity, and sources of legitimation—jointly shape how value is produced, organized, and sustained. In this view, each market form is enacted through a distinctive configuration of these dimensions, making configuration the structural realization of a form's underlying logic.

The selection of these dimensions is theoretically grounded and empirically consequential. They illuminate how markets generate, stabilize, and contest meaning and value, drawing on higher-order social mechanisms that shape economic life (Fligstein and Dioun, 2015; Fourcade, 2007). The framework integrates insights from sociology of markets (Fligstein and Dauter, 2007; White, 2000; 2002), valuation studies (Aspers and Beckert, 2011; Lamont, 2012; Karpik, 2010), cultural production (Bourdieu, 1984; Sennett, 2008; Reckwitz, 2020), and organization theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Hannan et al., 2007; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001) to reflect the symbolic, material, temporal, spatial, and relational components of market organization.

For instance, value basis, production mode, and legitimation mechanism capture the foundational processes through which worth is constructed, justified, and stabilized in markets (Beckert and Aspers, 2011). These dimensions speak not only to the material or symbolic attributes of products, but to the broader evaluative frameworks through which they are made commensurable and meaningful within a given market. Whether value is derived from technical performance, artisanal authenticity, or the strategic enactment of contradiction, these dimensions reveal how markets anchor valuation in socially recognizable forms.

The identity of producers, consumer subjectivity, and coordination mechanisms reflect how actors are positioned and enabled to act within the market. These dimensions highlight the dynamics of role formation, expertise, and social recognition (Fourcade and Healy, 2017; Navis and Glynn, 2011; Holt, 1995). They account for the kinds of authority producers can claim (e.g., artisan, innovator, cultural entrepreneur), the ways consumers engage with products (e.g., connoisseur, rational adopter, tastemaker), and the institutional or technological infrastructures that mediate exchange (e.g., community networks, certifications, digital platforms). Together, these elements illuminate the relational architecture of the market and how legitimacy and value are negotiated across different audiences.

Finally, product aesthetics, temporal orientation, and spatial anchoring position markets within cultural landscapes that define how meaning is expressed and experienced. These dimensions capture how markets invoke relationships to the past or future (Bell et al., 2021), how products embody and perform design sensibilities (Cattani et al., 2017), and how they draw on spatial embeddedness or cosmopolitan reach to construct authenticity and distinction. They are essential for understanding how markets are not only sites of economic transaction but also symbolic systems, where cultural forms and narratives become integral to how products are produced, circulated, and interpreted.

In sum, these dimensions collectively reveal how markets are organized not only functionally, but also symbolically, materially, and relationally. Rather than treating them as isolated attributes, the framework adopts a configurational approach—understanding each market formation as a distinct alignment of interdependent elements. This is distinct from prior models that conceptualize market organization predominantly through formal decision-making structures (e.g., Ahrne et al., 2014). By foregrounding the patterned and cultural structuring of markets, the framework enables a more nuanced comparison of traditionalist, modernist, and

liminal configurations—highlighting not only what is valued, but how value is produced, sustained, and legitimized across multiple dimensions.

The table below summarizes these core dimensions as they manifest in traditionalist, modernist, and liminal market configurations. The section that follows elaborates on each configuration, illustrated with empirical examples from diverse organizational and market-level research.

Insert Table 4.1 about here.

Traditionalist Market Configuration

The traditionalist market configuration is characterized by a tightly interwoven set of elements that collectively reinforce the primacy of past-oriented and heritage-based value (Bell et al., 2021). The value basis is predominantly symbolic: products are esteemed not for their novelty or technical performance, but for the meaning they carry within their social environment. In this context, an object's significance is not intrinsic but is collectively constructed by the community and emerges through shared practices and rituals (Beckert et al., 2014; Aspers and Beckert, 2011). Such value is deeply rooted in histories and artisanal legacies that stretch across generations (Ravasi et al., 2011).

This symbolic worth is both enabled and legitimated by a mode of production that privileges manual, craft-based techniques and often explicitly rejects modern methods, generating an oppositional stance against modernist logic (Negro et al., 2011; Verhaal et al., 2015). This production ethos also shapes the collective identity of producers, who emphasize smallness over scale and express an "anti-mass production" sentiment (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000). Producers position themselves as artisans and masters, responsible for carrying tradition forward within tightly knit local communities (Dacin et al., 2019). For them,

the act of making is not simply instrumental; it is a cultural practice through which tradition is materialized, performed, and reproduced in its "pure" form (Weber et al., 2008).

These production practices are inseparable from the aesthetic logic that governs traditionalist markets. Here, imperfection, raw materiality, and visible traces of handwork are celebrated as hallmarks of authenticity and singularity (Sennett, 2008). The presence of uncontrollable variation and unpredictability in the production process further elevates these products, qualifying their creation as an art rather than a science (Hall and Johnson, 2009). Consequently, products in traditionalist markets are subject to distinctive valuation processes: they cannot be measured or assessed by the same criteria as standardized goods. Instead, their worth is reinforced through compelling narratives of uniqueness and craft, which highlight their singularity and rootedness in artisanal tradition (Weber et al., 2008; Cattani et al., 2017; see also Chapter 1).

Spatial anchoring is also central to the valuation of traditionalist products. Producers typically draw on local resources and distinctive regional techniques, reinforcing both the specificity and legitimacy of their offerings (Boghossian and David, 2021; Beckert et al., 2014). This is often conceptualized through the notion of "terroir"—a field-specific quality marker that emphasizes the distinctiveness and sense of place embodied in each product (Karpik, 2010). Through terroir and regional embeddedness, traditionalist markets enhance the symbolic capital of their products, tightly coupling material form, place, and cultural meaning. This spatial dimension does more than add value—it also delineates market boundaries, helping to define who belongs within the market and reinforcing social cohesion.

Coordination mechanisms are typically community-based, operating through networks of trust, reputation, and word-of-mouth rather than formal rules or digital platforms. Market audiences—including producers, intermediaries, and consumers—often form tightly knit communities where roles and expectations are shaped by long-standing traditions (Delmestri

and Greenwood, 2016; Sasaki et al., 2019). Exchange is governed by a sense of responsibility and shared moral codes (Weber et al., 2008), with trust maintained through informal communication, personal recommendations (Karpik, 2010), and ritualized events such as local festivals or practices of "museification," which allow participants to connect, experience, and collectively validate authenticity (Boltanski and Esquerre, 2020; see also Chapter 1). These community dynamics also shape how expertise is transferred and regulated: knowledge transmission is typically restricted and ritualized, taking place through master-apprentice relationships (Cattani et al., 2013) and often regulated by specialized institutions such as guilds, which enforce standards and control entry to preserve tradition and quality (Kroezen et al., 2021).

Within this configuration, consumers are not passive recipients; rather, they act as arbiters of value and authenticity, engaging deeply through participation in events, demonstrations, and endorsements—much like wine connoisseurs whose appreciation is grounded in an understanding of historical, material, and social embeddedness (Raffaelli, 2019; see also Chapter 1).

Temporal orientation is predominantly past-facing and cyclical, as both producers and consumers engage in and seek out recurring practices that evoke a sense of continuity with earlier generations (Bell et al., 2021). Rituals, seasonal events, and the faithful reproduction of time-honored methods serve not merely to preserve tradition, but to actively reaffirm links to a shared historical legacy. This cyclical temporal logic tends to reinforce market boundaries, privileging long-term participants whose knowledge and legitimacy are rooted in sustained engagement and collective memory (Sasaki et al., 2019). As a result, traditionalist markets maintain a temporal structure that both anchors the present to the past and regulates inclusion, thereby shaping the character and membership of the market over time.

This persistent link to the past also underpins the mechanisms by which legitimacy is established. In traditionalist markets, legitimation is fundamentally anchored in narrative enrichment and collective storytelling, enacted by producers and enthusiast consumers. Rather than relying on external standards or technical benchmarking, legitimacy is constructed through the invocation of ancestral continuity and the ongoing affirmation of shared cultural narratives (Boltanski and Esquerre, 2020; see also Chapter 1). Through generational knowledge transmission, ritualized practice, and active participation in community traditions, market actors continually reaffirm the social and cultural value of both products and production methods. In this way, the very process of legitimation becomes a dynamic, participatory act that not only sustains value but also reinforces the coherence and resilience of the traditionalist configuration.

Modernist Market Configuration

The modernist market configuration is anchored in a logic of functional utility and innovation-driven performance. Unlike traditionalist markets, value here is derived primarily from the physical performance and measurable capabilities of the product (Aspers and Beckert, 2011; Beckert, 2011). Drawing on insights from resource partitioning theory, modernist markets are often populated "generalist" organizational forms, where worth is attributed to efficiency, scalability, and novelty—qualities benchmarked against industry standards and technological frontiers, rather than symbolic resonance or tradition (as seen in Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Sikavica and Pozner, 2013; Verhaal et al., 2017).

Production modes in modernist markets are characterized by mechanization and automation, enabling the production of standardized and replicable outputs (Dupin and Wezel, 2023; as for modernist bakeries). This is achieved through advanced technologies, process engineering, and the codification of technical practices and skills. Such technological infrastructure not only ensures efficiency, but also shapes the identity of producers: designers,

engineers, and technical experts are valued for their ability to optimize systems, innovate rapidly, and manage complex, distributed production networks. However, the codification and abstraction of expertise can sometimes result in a form of deskilling, distancing producers from direct engagement with materials and techniques—a dynamic that stands in stark contrast to the embodied, tacit knowledge prized in traditionalist settings (Kroezen et al., 2021). Furthermore, this emphasis on individual achievement and proprietary knowledge fosters low communality among producers; they operate in an environment where competition, secrecy, and continual improvement are prioritized over collectivity, collaboration or lineage (Kroezen et al., 2021).

The aesthetic logic in modernist markets reflects these priorities. Products are typically designed to be streamlined, minimalist, and highly functional, embodying the producer's aim for "technical excellence" or "consistency" (e.g., machine-made cymbals in Chapter 1). Such products project an image of precision, rationality, and progress, distinguishing themselves from traditionalist products through a visible commitment to innovation and control (e.g., quartz watches; Raffaelli, 2019). In this context, design choices deliberately eliminate unnecessary ornamentation, emphasizing instead user experience, ergonomic efficiency, and the seamless integration of form and function. The result is an aesthetic that not only signals technological sophistication but also reinforces the market's broader logic of optimization and continual advancement.

Coordination mechanisms in modernist markets are predominantly formal and institutionally mediated. Branding and mass advertising play a central role in structuring how products reach consumers and are differentiated from competitors. This not only supports market positioning but also provides a competitive advantage over traditionalist producers, as modernist firms can project robust identities—sometimes even appropriating identity characteristics from traditionalist organizations (Swaminathan, 2001).

Increasingly, algorithmic coordination—using computer-programmed procedures enabled by digital platforms and data-driven metrics—facilitates efficient product matching and market allocation at scale (Kellogg et al., 2020). Trust is further maintained through formal certification systems, which codify product standards and offer third-party validation of quality and safety. Such certifications provide consumers with objective, standardized criteria for purchasing decisions, reducing uncertainty and signaling adherence to recognized benchmarks (Lee et al., 2017). The consumer role is likewise shaped by this rational, performance-oriented ethos. They are positioned as rational adopters and performance-seekers, prioritizing objective features such as price, durability, technological advantage, and ease of use—qualities exemplified by the adoption of new dominant technologies (e.g., digital synthesizers; Nelson et al., 2023).

Legitimation mechanisms in modernist markets rely primarily on metrics, innovation, and technical expertise. Here, legitimacy is secured through the demonstration of superior performance—validated by data, industry standards, and third-party certifications—rather than through cultural narratives (e.g., Lee et al., 2017; Sikavica and Pozner, 2013). As a result, innovations that outperform existing alternatives in terms of functionality tend to diffuse rapidly, reinforcing a future-oriented and accelerated temporal logic (Rogers, 2003). There is little emphasis on tradition or historical continuity; instead, the future becomes the central source of value and differentiation.

Consistent with this orientation, modernist markets are also characterized by placelessness: they are largely untethered from specific geographies, with production and consumption frequently spanning continents. Spatial anchoring is minimized, as products and brands are intentionally designed to be accessible worldwide and flexible in their supply chains, often losing any sense of locality through the effects of globalization (e.g., Indian fashion; Khaire and Hall, 2016). This mobility enables modernist producers to scale rapidly

and adapt to shifting consumer demands, further reinforcing the configuration's emphasis on innovation, efficiency, and global reach.

Liminal Market Configuration

Liminal markets are defined by the structured coexistence of contradictory symbolic orders—most notably, elements of both traditionalism and modernism (Gandini and Gerosa, 2025; Fetzer, 2025). The value basis in these markets is dual: products simultaneously draw on notions of authenticity and technical performance. For instance, new analog synthesizers (Nelson et al., 2023) and analog photography equipment (Hampel et al., 2020) often incorporate digital-inspired features, blending nostalgic form with contemporary functionality. A similar dynamic can be seen in musical instruments designed for sonic precision yet styled to evoke historical aesthetics (Dudley, 2014; Blundel and Smith, 2018; see also Chapter 2). In such cases, value emerges through narrative recombination, as products are accompanied by stories that embody and express the tension between heritage and innovation.

Production modes in liminal markets reflect the tension between tradition and modernity through the integration of craft and technology. Producers blend artisanal techniques with selective use of modern tools, not to homogenize or automate, but to strategically reconcile heritage with contemporary demands. The literature identifies three key rationales behind this approach.

First, modern tools are adopted to delegate repetitive manual tasks, freeing up time for creative exploration and craftsmanship. Independent cymbal smiths, for example, use power hammers for rough shaping but preserve manual techniques for fine tuning and acoustic nuance (see Chapter 2). Similarly, shared spaces allow makers to focus on creative expression while relying on digital tools for routine production (Browder et al., 2019). Second, producers turn to technology to improve precision and consistency, particularly when crafting technically demanding products like vinyl records (Wiedner et al., 2024) or French horns (Blundel and

Smith, 2018). Finally, hybrid production methods can support scalable yet sustainable growth, enabling craft-based producers to expand without abandoning their foundations (Holt and Wiedner, 2025; Dobrev and Verhaal, 2025). Notably, these arrangements do not reflect uncritical hybridization. Instead, producers intentionally preserve visible traces of craft, enacting the "tension between "past" and "present" ways of operating" (Dudley, 2014, p. 66). Through this interplay, they maintain the symbolic appeal while also meeting consumer expectations for functionality and innovation.

The identity of producers in liminal markets is likewise dual and negotiated, shaped by the constant balancing of tradition and reinvention. These individuals often act as cultural entrepreneurs (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Wry et al., 2011), preserving craft traditions while reinterpreting them through novel forms, materials, and technologies. Many enter production as enthusiasts—deeply engaged users or connoisseurs of the product category—who draw on personal expertise to inform their making practices (Wiedner et al., 2024; Kroezen and Heugens, 2019). Through this user-informed approach, they also take on a role that bridges consumption and creation as hybrid practitioners: makers who embody both consumer sensibility and producer skill.

While their ethos is often individualistic—crafting highly personalized products and cultivating distinct creative voices—they are also embedded in glocalized networks that combine local belonging with global reach. The tension between autonomy and community is visible in temporary microinteraction settings such as maker spaces or hobbyist clubs, where artisans work independently while sharing tools, feedback, and inspiration (Fitzmaurice et al., 2020; Furnari, 2014). Even as each producer pursues a unique niche, they contribute to a broader collective identity. Their products, being deeply expressive and non-substitutable, rarely compete directly—fostering mutual support within a competitive field (Mathias et al., 2023; see also Chapter 2). In this way, the producer's identity is shaped through a shared

commitment to pluralism, experimentation, and symbolic tension, rather than clear alignment with a single logic.

The aesthetic logic of liminal markets emphasizes organized contrast. Producers embed visible tensions into their products—juxtaposing handcrafted elements with technological precision or combining rustic materials with sleek, contemporary forms. In some cases, this is expressed through "intentional imperfection," where producers deliberately incorporate variations or irregularities to add expressiveness and emotional depth. For example, independent cymbal smiths intentionally introduce slight flaws to create unique acoustic signatures (see Chapter 2). In other cases, particularly with technically complex products like new-generation analog-instant cameras, producers blend vintage aesthetics with precision-engineered performance (Hampel et al., 2020). This "aesthetic of staged contradiction" becomes a hallmark of distinction, signaling that the product simultaneously aligns with and departs from both traditionalist and modernist worlds (Boltanski and Esquerre, 2020).

Coordination mechanisms in liminal markets are composite, combining traditional and digital modes. Platforms such as Etsy or Instagram allow independent producers to reach global audiences without being confined to regional markets (Kuhn and Galloway, 2015; Fitzmaurice et al., 2020; see also Chapter 2). At the same time, producers continue to rely on word-of-mouth and community endorsements, combining these with algorithmic targeting and platform-based visibility. For instance, local food truck vendors use Twitter to reach geographically dispersed but culturally aligned consumers (Schifeling and Demetry, 2021). Unlike the purely community-based or mass-coordination logics of traditionalist and modernist markets, coordination in liminal markets depends on the strategic layering of interpersonal trust and technological reach.

Consumers in liminal markets also navigate these dualities. They are not merely seeking performance or authenticity in isolation, but are drawn to products that tell complex,

layered stories. They act as tastemakers, endorsing these products as part of their self-expression, which blends rationality with improvisation—much like creative musicians who balance technical mastery with creative performance (Nelson et al., 2023; see also Chapter 2). Consumers may also take on the role of evangelists, promoting novel reinterpretations of traditional practices to broader audiences (Massa et al., 2017). Across both roles, they actively valorize contradiction, seeking products that connect them to cultural depth while signaling contemporary relevance.

Legitimation mechanisms in liminal markets rely on the construction of compelling narratives that integrate elements of both tradition and innovation, enabling authenticity to emerge through the interplay of these contrasting sources of value. Dutch microbrewery founders, for instance, often position their work as honoring lost brewing traditions while pushing technical boundaries (Kroezen et al., 2019). Credibility is further reinforced when producers can draw on their prior identities as enthusiasts or long-time users, leveraging personal experience to bridge the gap between tradition and novelty (Shah and Tripsas, 2007; see also Chapter 2). Unlike in traditionalist or modernist markets, legitimacy here is not derived solely from lineage or formal certifications but from the credible enactment of symbolic tension.

The temporal orientation of liminal markets is neither purely past-facing nor exclusively future-oriented. Instead, exhibiting a dual temporal logic, market audiences invoke nostalgia while projecting forward-looking creativity. New watchmakers, for example, draw on historical design traditions while incorporating cutting-edge materials and bold aesthetic innovations (Raffaelli, 2019). Similarly, contemporary vinyl producers use automated production techniques to meet modern quality standards without undermining the vintage experience of listening to records (Wiedner et al., 2024). These practices reflect what Gandini

(2020) describes as "progressive nostalgia"—a forward-looking reinterpretation of the past that evolves without severing its historical roots.

Finally, spatial anchoring in liminal markets is inherently glocal: products often represent local techniques and cultural markers while being explicitly crafted for global appeal. Thus, global and local elements are juxtaposed to result in unique outcomes (Voronov et al., 2013). This creates a sense of situated cosmopolitanism, where place-based authenticity is maintained even as producers and consumers operate within transnational circuits.

Organization and Stabilization of Contradiction in Liminal Markets

Stability in markets depends on the coherence of formal and informal rules and conventions that organize relationships among producers, intermediaries, and consumers (Fligstein and Dioun, 2015; Fligstein and Dauter, 2007). In traditionalist markets, this coherence is achieved through the reaffirmation of historical continuity and artisanal legacies, while modernist markets stabilize through technical performance, scalability, and future-facing innovation. Liminal markets challenge this conventional view. They do not stabilize by resolving the contradiction between tradition and modernity, but by sustaining it as a productive and visible tension. This is referred here as *dynamic stabilization*—a market-wide process in which producers, intermediaries, and consumers together materialize and narrate symbolic tensions, making contradiction both legible and valuable across the market. This stabilization emerges through three interdependent processes, as illustrated in the case of independent cymbal smiths (see Chapter 2).

First, producers embed contradiction in the materiality of their products and practices, visibly blending artisanal and technological elements without seeking resolution. Importantly, they do so deliberately, framing these tensions as central to their identity and market positioning. For example, independent cymbal smiths combine digital learning sources, such as YouTube tutorials and online forums, with manual craftsmanship and selective use of

mechanized tools. Rather than striving for uniform perfection—even when they have access to all the technical information—they intentionally embed and highlight imperfection as a valued feature, treating variation and irregularity as marks of authenticity and craft expertise. As Timothy Roberts puts it, his work is about "letting flaws exist" (The Reverie Podcast 5), while Craig Lauritsen describes his approach as pursuing "perfection about the imperfectness" (The Reverie Podcast 10). These narratives are not abstract marketing slogans; they are embodied in the material qualities of the cymbals themselves, reinforcing the dual identity of these producers as both artisans and innovators.

Second, intermediaries such as journalists and retailers play a crucial role in amplifying and legitimizing the tension through narrative framing. These narratives present contradiction not as inconsistency, but as a mark of distinction and cultural relevance. For example, *Drum!* Magazine editor John Nyman describes cymbal smith Matt Bettis as someone who:

> "embodies the paradox of modern artistry. He learned cymbal-smithing from the Internet and his own sweaty investment. He can live on a remote site thanks to the presence of an Internet connection, selling his artisan wares online and bringing them to town for shipping. And thanks to this, Bettis is pursuing ancient craft arts passed on via modern, worldwide digital technology — and he's killing it." (Drum!, March 2018)

Such endorsements frame Bettis not as choosing between tradition and modernity, but as performing both simultaneously—making the contradiction legible and desirable to market audiences.

Third, consumers actively participate in stabilizing this contradiction by appreciating, endorsing, and performing its value. Far from being passive recipients, the consumers engage with storytelling, community validation, and personal aspiration. Their appreciation extends beyond the product's functionality or authenticity to include the narrative of the producer's lifestyle and creative journey. For example, a drummer following Bettis's work expresses admiration not just for the cymbals, but for the philosophy of the maker:

> "In every case, the cymbals were works of fine art, and the stories of the craftspeople were fascinating — especially Matt Bettis. I want to be like him: traveling around the

> country in a camper and stopping wherever I please to hammer cymbals on mountaintops and deserts. Somebody needs to do a movie about that guy!" (Freeman, Drum!, February 2016)

Such consumer engagement extends the performance of contradiction into broader cultural narratives, reinforcing its value as a shared market resource.

Through these interconnected processes, liminal markets achieve a stable yet dynamic equilibrium. Rather than resolving symbolic oppositions into a hybrid synthesis or allowing tensions to fragment the market, actors collectively institutionalize contradiction as an organizing principle. Products, producers, intermediaries and consumers are all embedded in a system where the enduring presence of tension becomes a stable source of value, legitimacy, and differentiation.

DISCUSSION

This paper theorizes how markets can be durably organized not through internal coherence, but through the structured performance of symbolic contradiction. Drawing from a comparative analysis of traditionalist, modernist, and liminal market configurations, it introduces a multidimensional framework that demonstrates how symbolic, material, temporal, spatial, and relational elements align to structure how products are produced, valued, coordinated, and legitimized—especially in markets where cultural meaning and symbolic value are central. In particular, the paper conceptualizes liminal markets as configurations that institutionalize the tension between tradition and modernity, offering a novel account of how symbolic heterogeneity can serve as a stable and enduring source of value, identity, and legitimacy. By integrating empirical insights from both prior literature and the case of independent cymbal smiths, the framework contributes to ongoing conversations in organization theory, market sociology, and valuation studies about the structuring and stabilization of markets.

This study makes three main contributions.

A Configurational Perspective on Market Forms

First, the paper advances a configurational lens to market organization, offering a comparative framework that systematically captures the interdependencies between core dimensions of market life. Prior research has often examined isolated mechanisms of differentiation—such as production mode in oppositional markets (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Verhaal et al., 2015), product aesthetics (Cattani et al., 2017; Raffaelli, 2019), or consumer subjectivity (Nelson et al., 2023; Massa et al., 2017)—but has not developed a relational approach that links these mechanisms into coherent market forms. Where studies examine the influence of production practices on identity (e.g., Mathias et al., 2020), they tend to stop short of analyzing how those identities are embedded within broader coordination systems or value structures (for an exception, see Weber et al., 2008). This framework addresses that gap by treating markets as configurations of interrelated symbolic and organizational dimensions, enabling systematic comparison between traditionalist, modernist, and liminal forms. In doing so, it offers a vocabulary for theorizing these types of markets not only by their underlying value orientations, but also by the ways in which value is organized, stabilized, and legitimized through interconnected elements.

This approach to markets and market organization offers a distinct analytical perspective within market studies. While much of the literature conceptualizes markets as structured through formal organization and decision-making arrangements—such as rules, roles, memberships, and sanctioning mechanisms (Ahrne et al., 2014)—this paper foregrounds the cultural constitution of market order. Rather than viewing market structure as the product of institutional design or coordination infrastructure, it is understood here as an emergent outcome of alignment among symbolic and relational dimensions—such as value repertoires, aesthetic and temporal orientations, and identity positions. This cultural lens extends the social constructionist tradition in market studies (White, 2000; Fourcade, 2007; Fligstein and Dauter,

2007), which emphasizes that markets are not only arenas of economic exchange but also cultural fields where meaning, legitimacy, and identity are continuously negotiated.

Conceptualizing Liminal Markets

Second, the paper introduces and theorizes liminal markets as a distinct and underexplored market configuration. While traditionalist and modernist forms have been extensively theorized—especially through resource partitioning and oppositional market logics (Carroll et al., 2002; Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Verhaal et al., 2015)—markets that operate through the active tension between these poles have received less systematic attention. Empirical studies across domains—ranging from analog photography (Hampel et al., 2020), craft beer (Kroezen and Heugens, 2019), and musical instruments (Nelson et al., 2023; Blundel and Smith, 2018), to street performance (Mathias et al., 2023) and local food trucks (Schifeling and Demetry, 2021)—have captured aspects of this dynamic. However, they are typically treated as standalone cases or explained through disparate lenses. Recent work on craft organization (e.g., Kroezen et al., 2021; Ravasi et al., 2025; Ganzin et al., 2024) has begun to articulate how tradition and novelty can coexist, but the consequences of such contradiction at the market level remain undertheorized. This study brings these cases into dialogue through the conceptualization liminal markets, highlighting how contradiction between tradition and modernity is not only present but sustained through interdependent material and narrative practices. In doing so, it offers a generalizable theoretical category that integrates dispersed empirical insights from studies of heritage, innovation, and symbolic tension.

Building on this foundation, the paper reconceptualizes liminality beyond its conventional treatment in organization studies as a transitory or episodic condition (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003; Howard-Grenville et al., 2011; Garud et al., 2020). While prior research has fruitfully explored liminal dynamics within organizational change and identity transitions, the perspective developed here theorizes liminality as a durable condition

of market organization—one that structures ongoing contradictions between tradition and modernity. In doing so, the paper extends research on the tradition–novelty paradox, which has typically been addressed at the organizational level (Raffaelli et al., 2021) or through practice-based lenses (Fetzer, 2025), by elevating it to the market level, where it becomes embedded in field-wide configurations of value, coordination, and legitimacy.

Moreover, this work contributes to recent research that repositions tradition not as a constraint but as a dynamic resource for innovation and renewal (Dacin et al., 2019; Cancellieri et al., 2022). This line of inquiry is extended by demonstrating that such dynamism is not confined to organizational repertoires but unfolds through the interplay among multiple market actors—including producers, consumers, and intermediaries—who engage with tradition and modernity as fluid, co-constitutive elements. Rather than treating tradition as fixed or modernity as a linear endpoint, the liminal market perspective reveals how both are selectively reactivated, reframed, and reassembled in response to evolving cultural, technological, and institutional pressures. For example, the case of independent cymbal smiths illustrates how emerging market actors reinterpret inherited craft traditions through contemporary tools and aesthetic sensibilities. While digital visibility currently plays a central role in reshaping market trajectories, future shifts—whether technological or cultural—will likewise demand new reinterpretations. This highlights that the viability and stability of liminal markets depend on sustained, iterative, and collective meaning work.

Stabilizing Contradiction Through Market Organization

Third, the paper contributes to research on narratives and materiality in market and field-level processes. Whereas previous work has emphasized the importance of narrative and material coherence for achieving legitimacy and stability (Wry et al., 2011; Rindova et al., 2011; Krabbe and Grodal, 2023), this study advances an alternative pathway. It theorizes a mechanism of dynamic stabilization through contradiction, in which legitimacy and continuity

are achieved not by resolving competing logics, but by embedding and performing them across levels of market organization. Producers, intermediaries, and consumers each participate in this process—through design, storytelling, and endorsement—creating a durable interpretive order in which symbolic tension is not a liability, but a generative resource.

This insight also contributes to the sociology of markets, which has traditionally emphasized coherence in market conventions that guide market processes as central to stability (White, 2002; Fligstein and Dauter, 2007). Liminal markets demonstrate that strategically organized incoherence—when materially and symbolically sustained—can itself become a stabilizing force. This also contributes to valuation studies by demonstrating how plural—and even paradoxical—valuation principles can persist over time, not merely as emergent or transitory phenomena, but as enduring features of market organization (e.g., Lamont, 2012). This aligns with recent calls to treat complexity not as anomaly but as constitutive of how markets operate (Aspers and Beckert, 2011).

Future Research Directions

This framework opens up new directions for future research. One key question concerns the temporal dynamics of liminal markets: under what conditions do they persist, transform, or collapse into more coherent form over time? Although this study shows how contradiction can be stabilized, it assumes that market actors remain committed to reinterpreting tradition and modernity as evolving resources. Future studies could explore how different market participants contest or reinterpret these logics over time—especially in response to platformization, regulatory shifts, or crises of authenticity. Comparative research across geographies, industries, or digital platforms could also illuminate how liminal market configurations vary across institutional settings. More broadly, this framework invites scholars to rethink the role of contradiction not as a threat to order, but as a constitutive feature of how markets are organized, stabilized, and made meaningful.

Table 4.1. Market Configurations

	Traditionalist Market	Liminal Market	Modernist Market
Value basis	Embedded symbolic worth (heritage, lineage)	Co-existence of symbolic and functional value	Functional utility, performance through innovation
Production mode	Craft-based, small-scale	Artisanal–tech hybrids, semi-mechanized	Mechanized, automated, scalable
Identity of producers	Artisans, masters, tradition-bearers	Cultural entrepreneurs, hybrid practitioners	Designers, engineers, technical experts
Product aesthetics	Raw, imperfect, expressive	Contrasting old/new; intentional imperfection	Streamlined, efficient, functional
Market coordination mechanism	Community norms, lineage, word-of-mouth	Platforms, community endorsement	Mass advertising, algorithmic technologies
Temporal orientation	Past-oriented, cyclical time	Layered: nostalgic yet speculative	Future-oriented, accelerated
Spatial anchoring	Strong local roots, terroir	Glocal; local feel with global reach	Placeless, distributed, mobile
Consumer role	Connoisseur, ritual participant	Tastemaker, evangelist	Rational adopter, performance-seeker
Legitimation mechanism	Ancestral continuity, narrative enrichment	Eclectic mix: blending cultural capital with creativity and technical skill	Metrics, innovation, technical expertise
Examples	Handmade Turkish cymbals (Chapter 1); grass-fed meat (Weber et al., 2008), craft beer (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Verhaal et al., 2015); organic farming (Sikavica and Pozner, 2013); farm wineries (Swaminathan, 1995)	Independent cymbal makers (Chapter 2); vinyl records (Wiedner et al., 2024); analog photography (Hampel et al., 2020); gourmet food trucks (Schifeling and Demetry, 2021); street performers (Mathias et al., 2023)	Machine-made Turkish cymbals (Chapter 1), industrialized meat (Weber et al., 2008), mass-produced beer (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Verhaal et al., 2015); industrial farming (Sikavica and Pozner, 2013); mass-production wineries (Swaminathan, 1995)

CHAPTER 5.

CONCLUSIONS

Main Findings

This dissertation explores how traditionalist markets— those grounded in cultural heritage and craft-based practices—endure and evolve under the persistent pressures of modernist imperatives such as standardization, efficiency, and scalability, while also responding to the culturalization of economic life, wherein symbolic, aesthetic, and experiential values increasingly shape markets processes. It does so by examining market transformation within single, long-standing industry—the handmade cymbal industry—where tensions between tradition and modernity have been continually negotiated over decades. The dissertation offers a detailed account of this transformation through diverse actor strategies and at different levels of market organization. Drawing on archival records, in-depth interviews, and field observations, the three papers that comprise this dissertation collectively trace the product, identity, and structural dimensions through which tradition is reworked and sustained within contemporary markets.

The first paper (**Chapter 2**) focuses on valuation processes and how traditionalist products can withstand commoditizing pressures. Examining the 1980s challenge posed by machine-hammered cymbals to hand-hammered ones, the study demonstrates how producers, intermediaries, and consumers collectively reconstructed a valuation regime centered on product singularity. Through a process of singularization, desingularization, and resingularization, traditionalist actors reframed product inconsistency not as a flaw, but as a valued expression of authenticity and individuality. This chapter highlights how coordinated valuation work across actor groups can sustain resistance to modernist logics of consistency and standardization.

The second paper (**Chapter 3**) turns to the identity work of new producer collectives—specifically, independent cymbal smiths who emerged in the early 2000s without formal lineage to legacy producers. Rather than overtly challenging market boundaries, these entrants used narrative strategies—what the study calls identity and practice bridging—to align their musician background with the cultural ethos of the traditionalist market. This chapter illustrates how legitimacy can be gained not through a rupture with the market but through reinterpretation and creative continuity, enabling new entrants to participate in and expand traditionalist markets. It also shows how plural producer identities and cooperative differentiation can contribute to market resilience and innovation.

The third paper (**Chapter 4)** broadens the analytical lens to theorize liminal markets: market configurations that do not resolve the contradiction between tradition and modernity but instead institutionalize it. Drawing from a comparative framework, the chapter identifies how symbolic, material, temporal, spatial, and relational dimensions align to stabilize markets organized around symbolic tension. In liminal markets, actors do not eliminate contradiction—they perform and embed it as a durable feature of value creation and coordination. This chapter shows that symbolic heterogeneity, far from being destabilizing, can serve as the very basis for long-term market stability.

Collectively, these three studies provide a comprehensive picture of how traditionalist markets endure. Rather than simply resisting or adapting to modernist logics, embedded actors selectively reinterpret them—integrating modern elements into craft-based practices and transforming symbolic contradictions into sources of generative and stabilizing force. Across levels of product, identity, and market structure, the dissertation shows how the endurance of tradition is not a return to the past, but a dynamic and negotiated reassembly of meanings, practices, and values in the present.

Contributions

This dissertation contributes to organization theory and market sociology by advancing a relational and temporal perspective on how traditionalist markets evolve under modernist pressures. It challenges prevailing assumptions that such markets either remain static through oppositional closure or are inevitably eroded by rationalizing forces. Instead, it shows how tradition is not merely preserved or lost, but actively reconfigured through market processes of valuation, legitimation, and coordination—processes that unfold through the interdependent actions of producers, intermediaries, and consumers.

More broadly, the dissertation builds on and extends the culturalization thesis in economic sociology (Reckwitz, 2020; Karpik, 2010; Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020) by bringing it into dialogue with organization theory. The culturalization thesis posits a shift in capitalist societies from mass standardization to economies structured around uniqueness, authenticity, and symbolic value. In this view, rationalization and culturalization are not opposing trajectories but successive phases of modernity—wherein the very tools of rationalization (e.g., advanced production technologies) become instrumental in generating cultural value. This shift unfolds not through macrostructural forces alone but through the situated, relational, and temporal practices of market actors who reinterpret tradition and embed novelty within it.

Yet, despite increasing recognition of the cultural turn in capitalism, organization theory has been slow to theorize how these dynamics reshape traditionalist markets. In particular, it has paid insufficient attention to the relational processes that link different market actors or to collective processes among actor groups in shaping the boundary between tradition and novelty. This dissertation extends research by foregrounding how meaning structures—shared understandings of what is legitimate, authentic, or valuable—are produced, renegotiated and stabilized through collective processes among and across actor groups. These meaning structures are not pre-given but socially assembled through the overlapping

interpretive work of producers (via identity claims and craft narratives), intermediaries (via evaluation and calibration), and consumers (via valuation and performative use). Together, these practices determine how tradition is reimagined or transformed at the boundary with modernity.

Importantly, this dissertation advances our understanding of market transformation by highlighting the temporal dynamics through which traditionalist markets evolve. Prior research has largely centered on how traditional producers respond to the rationalizing forces of modernity—most often by cultivating oppositional identities and asserting markers of authenticity in contrast to mass production. While these studies illuminate the early stages of resistance, they often overlook what happens next: how markets continue to adapt in the wake of ongoing cultural shifts. As culturalization accelerates, conventions originally forged as defensive responses are gradually softened or reinterpreted to align with evolving cultural expectations. This dynamic helps explain how many craft-based industries endure and thrive, not by rejecting modernity outright, but by embedding it into tradition in novel ways—a phenomenon well documented in recent studies on reemergence, preservation, and transformation in cultural and artisanal markets.

This dissertation contributes to this growing body of work by offering a temporally layered account of market change, grounded in a single empirical setting but analyzed across multiple levels of market organization. Each paper captures a different phase of transformation—product, producer, and market logics—revealing how meaning structures are progressively reconfigured over time. Together, these studies show that tradition is not a fixed inheritance but a fluid construct—reworked through situated practices and relational dynamics that unfold across actor groups and temporal horizons. In doing so, the dissertation offers a more nuanced and dynamic theory of market evolution at the intersection of tradition and modernity.

Finally, the dissertation introduces a set of tools for theorizing markets as culturally saturated and symbolically negotiated fields. These include *the process model of product singularization*, which explains how uniqueness is not intrinsic but produced and stabilized through iterative and multi-actor efforts; *the dual bridging strategy for legitimation*, which captures how new entrants establish credibility not by breaking from tradition but by selectively aligning new roles and practices with inherited ones; and *the concept of liminal markets*, which symbolic contradiction between tradition and modernity is institutionalized as a durable form of market order.

These tools are intended for scholars of markets, organizations, and valuation who seek to understand how meaning, identity, and coordination emerge not through consensus or coherence, but through ongoing negotiation among interdependent market actors. They help clarify the processes by which symbolic value is generated and sustained in contexts where tradition and novelty coexist uneasily—contexts that conventional models of oppositional markets or categorical purity struggle to explain. By making these tensions analytically tractable, the tools developed here offer new ways to study how markets evolve in late modernity— not solely as linear transitions or acts of resistance, but as situated, iterative reassemblies of heritage and innovation.

In sum, this dissertation contributes to broader debates about market evolution by recentering temporal and relational dynamics. It shows that in long-standing industries, tradition persists not as a fixed essence, but as an adaptive, contested, and collectively reassembled construct—reshaped by those who make, interpret, and use products alike. This perspective opens new directions for research on how symbolic value is produced, challenged, and sustained in contemporary economies.

Scope Conditions

The findings of this dissertation are grounded in the case of the handmade cymbal industry, a legacy craft sector that combines deep artisanal heritage with contemporary cultural production. As such, the generalizability of the dissertation's arguments should be understood within the specific contours of symbolically rich, identity-salient, and culturally saturated markets.

First, the theoretical mechanisms elaborated in this dissertation—such as product singularization, bridging strategies for identity legitimation, and the institutionalization of symbolic contradiction—are most applicable in markets where products carry aesthetic, historical, or cultural significance beyond their utilitarian function (Hirsch, 1972). These include other domains like artisanal food and drink (e.g., craft beer, gourmet food), analog and mechanical technologies (e.g., synthesizers, watches), and performative or expressive goods (e.g., fashion, musical instruments). In such settings, the meaning of tradition is continually negotiated, and product value is embedded in shared cultural frameworks and narratives.

Second, the dissertation assumes a relatively open and decentralized market structure—one in which new entrants are not systematically excluded from participating in valuation and coordination processes. Mechanisms that enable the justification and shaping of quality perceptions rely on a degree of institutional permeability, even if informally granted. In more tightly regulated fields—where both production methods and product meanings are formally codified, as in luxury fashion (Aspers, 2010) or certified organic food markets (Lee et al., 2017)—the conditions for such interpretive flexibility, and for the emergence of liminal markets, are likely to be significantly more constrained.

Third, the findings are most generalizable to market contexts where organizational boundaries are porous and where product meaning, identity, and practice evolve through cross-community interactions. The rise of independent cymbal smiths—and their legitimation through dispersed online communities of drummers—illustrates how distributed, participatory,

and audience-engaged forms of value construction drive market transformation. In contrast, fields characterized by vertical integration or centralized governance may afford fewer opportunities for bottom-up reinterpretation.

Importantly, the dissertation assumes that independent cymbal smiths ultimately form a liminal market—one that stabilizes through a distinctive coordination and valuation logic, without fully displacing conventions in the origin market. Over time, this separation has been reinforced through embedded practices and symbolic distinctions. However, in other empirical settings, this process may unfold differently. New producer collectives may instead transform the origin market from within, without giving rise to a separate liminal configuration (e.g., Ierfino-Blanchford and David, 2024).

In sum, while this dissertation offers insights into the endurance and evolution of traditionalist markets under modernist pressures, these insights are most applicable to symbolically dense, institutionally open, and culturally dynamic market contexts. Future research can further explore the transferability of these mechanisms across fields with varying degrees of symbolic salience, regulative and organizational flexibility.

Limitations and Future Research

While this dissertation provides a detailed account of how traditionalist markets evolve under modernist pressures, it also carries certain limitations. First, the handmade cymbal industry represents a particularly vivid setting in which the tension between tradition and novelty is materially and sensorially evident—for example, through the audible and visible differences in cymbal sound and craftsmanship. This clarity of contrast may not be as readily observable in other legacy markets where the effects of production methods are less perceptible to end users, such as in wine (Negro and Leung, 2013) or craft beer (Frake, 2017). Future research could thus investigate whether the mechanisms identified here—such as singularization, legitimation strategies, and the stabilization of contradiction—extend to such

settings, thereby testing the broader applicability and theoretical reach of the models developed in this study.

Second, this dissertation focuses primarily on the symbolic and cultural dimensions of market evolution. While these are central to understanding the dynamics of traditionalist markets, future research could extend this analysis by considering how regulatory and economic infrastructures shape—or constrain—the mechanisms identified here. For example, the emergence of independent cymbal smiths has been enabled in part by the continued availability of raw materials, particularly blank cymbals sourced from Turkish producers. Had international trade restrictions limited this access, the formation of a new market around these producers might have been significantly hindered. Moreover, the growing role of digital platforms—particularly in enabling visibility, coordination, and audience engagement—has played a crucial role in supporting the legitimacy of independent smiths. Future studies might explore how such dynamics unfold in other industries or national contexts where regulatory environments are more restrictive or where platformization has had less influence. Doing so would shed light on the institutional conditions under which diverse mechanisms of differentiation and market formation can emerge and stabilize.

Finally, this dissertation primarily adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach to market transformation, guided by the nature of the handmade cymbal industry—a relatively small, craft-based field with limited availability of structured data. This approach enables rich, contextual insight into symbolic and processual dynamics but does not allow for generalization across broader populations. Future research could employ quantitative or mixed-method designs to test the mechanisms proposed here—such as product singularization, identity and practice bridging, and the institutionalization of symbolic contradiction—at greater scale. For instance, studies could examine how these mechanisms influence measurable outcomes like pricing patterns, expert ratings, or consumer preferences in larger or more data-rich industries.

Doing so would complement the theory-building efforts of this dissertation and help assess the transferability of its findings across diverse contexts.

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