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Artists versus arts council: A longitudinal analysis of brand legitimacy

Ruth Rentschler, Ian Fillis and Boram Lee

Abstract

In the arts, brand has often been seen as a ‘dirty word.’ This paper critically analyzes the shaky relationship between artists and an arts council by examining a unique data set of annual reports from the Australia Council for the Arts, over a period of thirty-one years (1982-2013). This longitudinal study charts how and why brand legitimacy in the arts council was lost through the use of institutional, legitimacy and branding theories. With a focus on brand images, text, and media coverage, we demonstrate the souring of relations with artists over three decades. The data reveal three phases of brand development: artist-centric to artistic rebellion to corporatization, at which time the arts council lost artists’ support of the brand. The shift over three phases illustrates changes in types of legitimacy that dominate. The changes are from cognitive and moral legitimacy to pragmatic legitimacy. This change is synonymous with changes in the global art field to McDonaldization. An arts council circulates brands in an artistic and corporate milieu, seeking to achieve legitimacy with actors in both fields. The use of a one-sided branding strategy provokes opposition from artists as it occurs at their expense, creating winners and losers in legitimacy terms.

Key words: brand legitimacy, arts councils, artists, longitudinal content analysis, institutional and legitimacy theories

Introduction

This paper examines the dissonance between the brand image of an arts council that affected its legitimacy, as perceived by artists, over thirty-one years (1982-2013). It examines what the arts council claimed it was doing against what it actually did through its branding practices as it became corporatized. We ground our study in an interpretive sociological perspective that enables us to acknowledge societal impacts, and the meanings generated in our findings when examining brand image. We use historical reflection to consider how brand image, as perceived by artists, affects change in both legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) and identity. The arts council examined is the Australia Council for the Arts (ACA), for which we adopted a hegemonic approach (Gramsci, 1971). As the cultural landscape changed over this period, we argue the ACA remained stagnant and ‘fell victim to industry capture’ (Eltham, 2010). The focus of our argument is on brand image, and artists as audiences, not as passive, uncritical cultural dopes but as active participants (Curran, 1990) in brand creation.

Branding is defined as enhancing perception of an organization, product or individual through the use of marketing techniques which raise the level of recognition by consumers and other stakeholders. Brand image is ‘the totality of images and ideas which represent the organisation in the minds of customers and other stakeholders’ (Hill et al., 2018 p. 121). Branding as organizational identity acts as the foundation of sustainable differentiation and competitive advantage (Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Voss & Gabriel, 2014). Everyone inside and outside the organization must trust the brand narrative in order to shape organizational positioning in the marketplace.

As a form of communication, branding helps to create new juxtapositions and meanings (Williams, 1982), as well as institutional legitimacy of a pragmatic, moral, or cognitive kind (Suchman, 1995). Legitimacy provides a buffer against institutional failure (Di Maggio & Powell, 1991), it is a means of obtaining support of stakeholders, such as artists

(Lee, Fraser & Fillis, 2018; Lee, Fillis & Lehman, 2018; Rentschler, Lee & Subramaniam, 2021), and boosts recognition of the brand in the wider community (Alexander, 2021; Bourdieu, 1993). If an organization and its customers are aligned and share the same values, then it is possible for branding actions to revitalize the organization, its products and services (Lash & Urry, 1994). Without alignment, trouble brews, as illustrated by the findings discussed in this paper.

ACA's notion of brand as a signifier of legitimacy, juxtaposed against its failure to fully acknowledge the connectedness between its brand and stakeholder relationships serves as a warning. This oversight left the arts council's brand image with the potential to be poorly received by the community, including the artists it supports (Freeman, 2010). After analyzing annual and media reports, we demonstrate how ACA sought to boost its legitimacy through brand development but did not succeed. While previous studies have examined the artist as a brand (Kucharska & Mikolajzak, 2018; O'Reilly, 2005; Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014; Schroeder, 2005; Sjöholm & Pasquinelli, 2014), there is no known literature that examines the interaction between arts council and artists as the brand image becomes corporatized (Schroeder, 2006; Kerrigan et al., 2011).

The study begins in 1982 when the first ACA brand image was developed and concludes in 2013 when the federal Labor government ended its term in office. At this time, the ACA adopted a new Act of Parliament; approved a new governance structure with 'no requirement that an artist sits on the governing boards' (Westwood, 2013); introduced new streams of funding; dissolved a separate art form board (Westwood, 2012); and the corporatization of brand image was at its height, thereby providing a suitable terminus to capture clashes between artists and institution over branding. This paper builds on Bourdieu (1984b), Fillis (2011), Kerrigan et al. (2011), and Schroeder (2002, 2005, 2006), by acknowledging what arts councils can learn from artists on branding. Specifically, we use

Sethi's (1979) framework of change under varying temporal and socio-cultural conditions to examine the legitimacy gap that developed in the arts council. By examining this interplay, we argue that arts councils can learn the importance of foregrounding social capital over a quest for economic capital that appeals to a key stakeholder group, as well as sustain organizational legitimacy over time. This is increasingly important today as multiple supporters and detractors of branding (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014) contribute to brand meaning and narratives. Such an approach is vital given social media conversations also communicate the brand story, rather than it being controlled from a top-down organizational perspective alone.

The contribution of this study is four-fold. First, it identifies the association of branding (Pieters & Wedel, 2004) with pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy. The core explanation behind the critique of branding transformations is the clash between pragmatic and moral legitimacy. Second, the nature and extent of brand images represented in annual reports has varied in development since inception, particularly compared to its narratives (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015). Third, we identify three phases of brand development due to government policy and institutional change over time, with the third phase, corporatization, relating more broadly to developments in the art world (e.g., see McAllister, 2020; Thomas, 2019) and politics through the top-down approach of the government. Corporatization, however, has been destructive to artists, to the point where artists want to counter corporatization in order to maintain legitimacy, as found by Thomas (2019) in relation to Disney. Finally, this paper responds to calls for studies on legitimacy and how individuals respond to it (Hakala et al., 2017), and it elucidates how an arts council's actions in seeking brand legitimacy impact on artists.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: first, we explore the link between legitimacy and branding theories, before discussing in detail brand and legitimacy

connections, as well as the artist and brand image relationship. The approach and setting of the study are highlighted prior to the presentation of the findings, followed by the discussion and conclusion.

1. Neo-institutionalism, legitimacy, and branding theories

Institutions survive through perceived legitimacy by stakeholders, embedded in the broader theory of neo-institutionalism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The chasm between the heteronomous field of creative industries and the autonomous field of artists (Bourdieu's field theory, 1984b) is documented by this study through its longitudinal findings. Bourdieu's (1993) field of cultural production can be viewed as social spaces within which actors agitate for their position to be recognized (Alexander, 2021). The animosity held by artists to organizational branding is well-known (see Kucharska & Mikołajczak, 2018, Rodner & Kerrigan, 2015), especially given Bourdieu's (1984b) pivotal work on artistic autonomy versus heteronomy. Each artistic field has two poles: autonomous, where artists are free to behave as they wish, and heteronomous, where arts merge with other actors, for example, commercial interests and the marketplace. Actors possess different resources, including social and economic capital, yet the field of power is located at the top. Artistic mediators attempt to establish legitimacy constructions, as well as related symbolic and economic value. However, value aspects are problematic due to the lack of objective measures in artistic merit. Neo-institutionalism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) assists institutions to understand change, social issues and activism that transform them through the provision of legitimacy and delivers a means of 'manipulat[ing] and deploy[ing] evocative symbols in order to obtain societal support' (Suchman, 1995 p. 572). It is a theory that views institutions as contextually embedded, providing them with pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy.

These constructs are now briefly defined and discussed. Pragmatic legitimacy is based on self-interested calculations of an organization's most immediate audiences. It is an

exchange-related form of legitimacy, linked to an organization's capacity to persuade key stakeholders of its usefulness (Elms & Phillips, 2009). Moral legitimacy refers to behaviorally consistent, pro-social actions that provide a means by which consumers assess institutional actions (Kates, 2004 p. 456; Suchman, 1995), in line with moral norms and values. Cognitive legitimacy is the assessment that organizational activities are desirable, proper, or appropriate because they match pre-constructed beliefs about ways of organizing work and generating social value (Suchman, 1995).

More recently, legitimacy has been linked to branding (e.g., Guo et al., 2017; Hakala, Niemi & Kohtamäki, 2017; Kates, 2004), as well as extending to moral legitimacy the need for institutional and stakeholder reciprocity (Elms & Phillips, 2009). Reciprocity entails respecting the other party, while recognizing that key actions on issues such as branding affect not only the institution but also its stakeholders. This implies that in establishing and maintaining moral legitimacy, both institution and stakeholders have reciprocal obligations for openness and sharing of information as the right thing to do. Some brands are seen to demonstrate legitimacy, i.e., a fit with the institution, its stakeholders and or shared societal norms. Thus, brand legitimacy can be defined as a general perception that institutional actions are considered by their key stakeholders appropriate, desirable, and proper from a pragmatic, moral, and cognitive perspective (Kates, 2004; King, 2006; Suchman, 1995). Subsequent brand legitimacy then helps to secure the longer-term success of the organization (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Consequently, higher levels of pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy by artists as key stakeholders may facilitate acceptance of the brand. Accordingly, an arts council and its brand are a part of the social, economic, and institutional context (Guo et al., 2017) with brand legitimacy still classified in line with Suchman (1995), but with an extended role of reciprocal obligations for moral legitimacy (Elms & Phillips, 2009).

Thus, legitimacy can be an asset or resource possessed by an institution, brand or individual, with further research required on institutional and individual levels, given scant understanding of how they are construed (Hakala et al., 2017). Brands provide a platform for advertisers to capitalize and exploit relationships with any inherent cultural associations (Featherstone, 1990) through branding practices. Brand can also be important for national identity; for example, Anderson (1991), discusses the nation as an imagined community based on distinction and mythology, in addition to being shaped by heroism and sacrifice. Furthermore, branding can examine a distinct cultural space (Welsch, 1998), which arts council branding ought to embrace. Brand attachment in organizations acts as a marker of class, particularly in respect to higher cultural practices (Bourdieu, 1984a) and can also be reflected through the brand denoting national identity (Featherstone, 2011). Stakeholders can bolster or belittle legitimacy claims in brand image via public communications (e.g., online blogs; print media; images) within institutional spheres of influence (Suchman, 1995).

1.1. Corporatization and the brand

Corporatization is defined as a response to a commercial imperative that places pressure on institutions to professionalize. For artists, corporatization is perceived to be a 'selling out' of their artistic values (Bridson et al., 2017; Peterson & Berger, 1975). While original brand ownership is clearly in the realm of the institution in terms of its logo, slogan and symbols, an understanding of the brand is more complex due to subjective stakeholder interpretation and changing expectations in the art world. One of these assumptions is that the brand should be experienced and shaped in the relevant community in order to achieve recognition (Brown et al., 2003).

There is little, if any, literature on corporatization, arts council branding, and the artist relationship, making it necessary to unpack the meanings and processes that ensure a brand's legitimacy in this setting. However, research does exist on corporatization in the arts world

(e.g., Thomas, 2019), arts organization branding (e.g., Baumgarth & O'Reilly, 2014; Jyrämä et al., 2015), audience enrichment and branding (Walmsley, 2016) and artist brands (e.g., Bridson et al., 2017; Fillis, 2015; Muñiz, Norris & Fine, 2014).

Corporatization is a common characteristic of neo-liberal government agencies (Harvey, 2007; Peterson & Berger, 1975). Within the arts, it is arguably similar to the inherent principles of Disneyization (Bryman, 1999) and McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2013), as efficiency, calculability, and control are embraced across the arts ecology. Disneyfication promotes one best way of operating, imposed without awareness of idiosyncrasies, values, and beliefs of those working in the sector, or the external stakeholders they represent. McDisneyization of institutions is also possible, where characteristics of both McDonaldization and Disneyization (Ritzer & Lisk, 1997) are exhibited. This form of control can be successful in management processes, but, within the artistic creation process, where focus lies on output shaped by intrinsic motivations, it may fall short. McDonaldization can be simultaneously enabling through its focus on efficiency and constraining as it prevents individuals from behaving in their preferred ways. McDonaldization and Disneyization share some similar characteristics, however, their grounding differs. The former connects with Weber's rationalization (Ritzer, 1975) and the latter with consumerism (Baudrillard, 1970/1988; Featherstone, 1991), where individuals react to products and services, and how they are exploited by institutions. There remains a notable gap in the literature in theorizing processes of brand image within this context, where arts councils are deemed to be small institutions (Fillis, 2003).

A brand moves beyond providing product or service information and becomes part of it through conveying an image of legitimate aesthetic expression (Belk, 1988; Salzer-Morling & Strannegard, 2004; Schroeder, 2002). Brands can have prominent or peripheral roles, depending on the context and strategic intent of the organization (Stride & Lee, 2007;

Terlutter & Capella, 2013). With an arts council brand, this needs to be prominent. A successful brand is also able to provide an experience (Salzer-Morling & Strannegard, 2004), not just from the organization's perspective, but also from the stakeholder point of view, and can also be influenced by third parties, such as the media (Wang & Muehling, 2012). Brand efficacy (the brand's ability to produce the desired result) can be diluted by a lack in understanding the influence of third-party brand endorsers and in a belief in the brand itself, and therefore, the case for legitimacy is weakened (Low & Lamb, 2000).

Brand image is the visual interpretation of identity through consistent use of communication channels such as print, online and broadcast advertising (Voss & Gabel, 2014). A strong visual brand identity is key to recognition and positive word of mouth communication, while also accentuating marketplace differentiation and heightened interest (Bjorkman, 2002). Within any brandscape, there is also a semioscape that involves 'the globalizing circulation of symbols, sign-systems, and meaning-making practices' and contributes to a growing influence on visual communication (Thurlow & Aiello, 2007). There are also wider connections between branding, legitimacy, and corporate identity in institutions, where the focus is on reputation.

To secure recognition in a cluttered communication marketplace and develop enduring legitimacy within existing and developing network relationships (Zorloni, 2005), a brand image must make use of its strong visual identity and narratives. Balmer (2001) breaks down brand image into levels of corporate, organizational, and visual identity. It is therefore important to differentiate between branding and corporate visual identity when we examine the longitudinal development of arts council brand legitimacy. At the umbrella level, according to the American Marketing Association (2021):

a brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.

Branding therefore enhances perception of the arts council through the use of marketing techniques. Corporate Visual Identity (CVI), on the other hand:

consists of a name, a symbol and/or logo, typography, colour, a slogan and—very often—additional graphical elements (van den Bosch et al., 2005 p.108).

Each new iteration of CVI often necessitates an investment to redesign various organizational identity elements. A key aim is to construct positive images and leverage reputation in the marketplace. Corporate branding is becoming more important regarding its economic value in managing and developing the brand (Knox & Bickerton, 2003), and requires careful management due to complexities at the corporate level, rather than product, for example, due to the large number of stakeholders. CVI redevelopment ‘reveals the organization’s current corporate identity, its historical roots, culture, strategy and structure’ (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, p.109). Reputation is then influenced by a corporate identity mix of behavior, communications, and symbolism. The relationship between brand image and legitimacy is strengthened via internal and external brand visibility, organizational distinctiveness amongst stakeholders, organizational identity authenticity (helped by the CVI narrative), as well as organization transparency and consistency perceived by all stakeholders (Beverland et al., 2008).

Each stakeholder group needs to believe in the brand narrative to ensure consistency of message and its interpretation, and therefore, ensure legitimacy. Associated with this view is the ability to accentuate organizational image and identity to maintain marketplace presence (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Balmer & Greyser, 2003). This pathway is not always smooth and can result in conflict between stakeholders to develop the brand if agreement by all parties is not reached (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015; Azmat & Rentschler, 2017; Rankin,

2018). Our wish is to help narrow the gap between heteronomy versus autonomy in the arts field as represented by arts councils and artists (Bourdieu, 1984b). Hence, we construct the following research question:

How does legitimacy theory explicate a critique of brand image transformations with respect to arts councils?

2. Approach and Setting

2.1. Case Description

The Australia Council for the Arts, founded in 1972, is a statutory authority, modelled on the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Canada Council (Johanson & Rentschler, 2002). It is funded totally by the federal government but sits at arm's length from it in terms of its decision-making, and, during the period studied, governed by the Australia Council Act 1975. In seeking to build legitimacy, ACA has faced considerable stakeholder criticism, e.g., from artists, in relation to its dual objectives of funding excellence in the arts and supporting emerging, innovative arts, artists and art forms (ACA Annual Report, 1973; Rankin, 2018; Throsby, 2001). The core purpose of the ACA is to serve the arts, artists, arts organizations, and the arts community in equal measure, as stated in its 1975 legislation. It outlines that ACA's purpose is for:

'the Promotion of the Arts, and to make Provision for related Matters,' with relevant functions being, 2: 'encourage[ment of] the provision of, opportunities for persons to practise the art;', 5: 'foster the expression of a national identity by means of the arts;' and 6: 'uphold and promote the right of persons to freedom in the practise of the arts.'

The relevant clause for members of the ACA board is:

'the majority [of persons on the board] shall consist of persons who practise the arts or are otherwise associated with the arts.'

Nonetheless, the ACA Chair of the Board, called the Council, reports to the elected Minister for the Arts, illustrating a political dimension to the arts council.

From its inception, the ACA's mission was not only to promote excellence in Australian arts but to also help develop a 'distinctly Australian' artistic identity (ACA 1973). ACA's role was seen as paramount in building legitimacy with its artists, supported by branding to make ACA more visible, lauded and appreciated. Yet there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of how ACA has viewed and communicated their legitimacy through brand development.

2.1.1. Framework

This study applies an adapted framework to analyze and evaluate organizational patterns to developing a brand image (Sethi, 1979), in different temporal, socio-cultural and political conditions. The classificatory framework facilitates comparisons of organizational responses to social pressures under varying conditions, when they are difficult to analyze in precise, quantitative terms due to environmental complexity. One way to evaluate organizational performance is to use the notion of legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), which seeks to narrow the gap between organizational performance and societal expectations.

2.1.2. Annual reports

Thirty-one years of annual reports were the primary data source for this study, enabling a longitudinal evaluation using images and text (Potter & Rentschler, 1996; Rentschler, Lee & Subramaniam 2021). We began by qualitatively analyzing the cover and internal images of the annual reports, including brand images and logos, and their development over time, and illustrations of changes in design influenced by branding and related images, in addition to associated text. Three researchers independently identified the brand development over time.

Irrelevant material was filtered out in advance of our systematic thematic analysis (Krippendorff, 2013) of the brand narratives in the search for insight (Boyatzis, 1998). Images and text were coded, enabling themes to emerge from the data in the context of the annual report as it changed over time. We undertook additional steps to ensure consistency in coding (Lincoln, 1995), to check discrepancies in interpretation, boosting data trustworthiness. For example, a pilot cross-checking workshop was undertaken using the 1982-1983 annual report where data were examined several times by two coders (Guthrie et al., 2003).

We also delved deeply into the organizational and financial data from ACA annual reports, focusing on strategies and practices. We gathered historical institutional data, such as changes in number of staff, the number of individual artists and arts organizations benefiting from the ACA grants, as well as the number and dollar value of grants given to individual artists and arts organizations, and overall institutional budget.

2.1.3. Media reports

We qualitatively analyzed newspaper media reports relating to arts council branding legitimacy in order to triangulate our findings (Krippendorff, 2013). Using an online database, we conducted a Google search using the year and the term ‘Australia Council for the Arts’ in major national newspapers such as *The Australian* and *The Australian Financial Review* and state-based newspapers such as *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Key words were identified by two researchers (i.e., ‘arts,’ ‘art forms,’ ‘artists,’ ‘branding’ and ‘marketing’ with ‘Australia Council’ to detect discourse that explained the images, taking several steps to ensure reliability. We identified 208 articles from print and online media. One hundred and nineteen were usable from print media. We discounted the online media articles as they provided no new data.

2.2. Content analysis process

Following Langley (1999), we investigated the case using data composed of events to understand how and why branding practices evolve over time. Temporal bracketing—a means of structuring the description of events—provided a way of ordering the findings thematically. In each phase, there was a ‘certain continuity of activities’ and discontinuities at the frontiers of each new phase (Langley, 1999, p. 703). Bracketing refers to Giddens’s (1984) shaping of data sequentially, aiding identification of how one phase led to another and changing interactions in the institutional context and its environment over time. Each phase became a unit of analysis for examining emerging theory.

Using Langley’s (1999) strategy, ‘a shapeless mass of process data’ is transformed into themes through coding. Coding themes emerged from the text (Boyatzis, 1998), which were grouped, and two coders met regularly to check on concurrence of meanings and to resolve any interpretation discrepancies. Although there is no standard for inter-rater agreement (Armstrong et al., 1997), when disagreement occurred, any differences were discussed until agreement was reached. This then ensured inter-rater reliability (Compton, Love & Sell, 2012) and was done in light of the positioning of the brand in relation to market logics. It entailed long discussions among research team members on the different actors and their role in brand development, enabling us to identify the main challenges and tensions the brand faced.




3. Findings



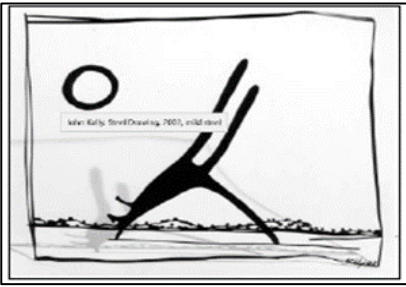



In order to better understand the use of legitimacy theory in critiquing brand image transformations in an arts council, and thus being able to predict performance in relation to it, an adapted version of Sethi’s (1979) analytical framework is applied in discussing the

findings. These are positioned around a series of time periods and associated themes (Boyatzis, 1998). The framework informs the analysis of legitimacy involving the ACA and artists through our historical accounts of brand development at the ACA vis-à-vis artists' support and views over three phases which emerged from the data (Table 1). The first period, *Pre-problem: Developing a Brand Identity 1982/83-1994/95*, starts when the first ACA brand logo was developed, set against the background of political reforms. The second period, *Problem Identification: Artist Rebellion 1995/96-2005/06*, starts with a new conservative government seeking to establish itself and make its mark leading up to the 2000 Sydney Olympics. The third period, *Damage: Corporate Consolidation 2006/07-2012/13*, expounds the story of corporatization of the ACA that caused the artistic community to lose faith in the ACA brand. The processes leading to brand development coincide with changing relations with key artists in a relatively autonomous artistic field, with emergent vocal opinions on the role of an arts council and its brand.

Table 1 provides illustrations of brand images representing each phase, identifying political parties in power which may have influenced the thrust of annual reports due to changes in government policy focus. Each phase is now discussed.

Table 1: Three phases of brand image 1982-2013

Phases	Selected Brand Images		
Phase 1- Developing branding identity (1982/83- 1994/95)			
	<p align="center">Image 1 1982-83 AR Cover and bespoke logo</p>	<p align="center">Image 2 1983-84 ACA logo</p>	<p align="center">Image 3 1990-91 ACA logo</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first ACA brand logo was developed by Lyndon Whaite • Cognitive brand legitimacy 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor forms a government under Prime Minister Bob Hawke (1983 – 1992); Labor forms a government under Prime Minister Paul Keating (1993 – 1996)
<p>Phase 2- Artistic rebellion (1995/96- 2005/06)</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Image 4 1982-83 AR Cover</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Image 5 2002-03 ACA logo</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Image 6 2002 John Kelly Steel Drawing</p> </div> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral to pragmatic brand legitimacy • Government coalition under Prime Minister John Howard (1996 – 2006) • Australian artist John Kelly parodied the ACA logo.
<p>Phase 3 – Corporate consolidation (2006/07- 2012/13)</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Image 7 2006-07 AR Cover</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Image 8 2008-09 AR Cover</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Image 9 2011-12 ACA logo</p> </div> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pragmatic brand legitimacy • Six years of dramatic red ACA Annual Report covers • Labor forms government under Prime Ministers Kevin Rudd, then Julia Gillard (2007-2013)

3.1. *Phase 1 Pre-problem: Developing branding identity 1982/83-1994/95*

Following Sethi's (1979) framework, Phase 1, the pre-problem phase, was characterized by ACA social responsiveness to varying stakeholder groups, including artists. According to historical documents, the new ACA brand image was encapsulated in its logo, designed by South Australian artist and designer, Lyndon Whaite, in 1982-83 (Image 1 Table 1). It appeared on the front cover of the annual report for that year, using an Aboriginal and Asian influenced kangaroo logo, linking modernity with millennia of Aboriginal influence and the multicultural peoples who populate Australia. With brand a 'dirty word' among artists at this time (Rentschler, 2007), the decision to choose an Australian artist of note symbolically legitimized the ACA in its choices. The logo blended national symbols of identity (e.g., the kangaroo), interwoven with Asian and Aboriginal art motifs, such as open hands in bright colors, providing moral legitimacy.

Interestingly, ACA asked Whaite to reflect both the ACA relationship with the arts and the broader community. The brief was succinct and prescriptive: hard-edged or 'corporate' imagery was to be avoided, taking a moral legitimacy stand (Re:collection, n.d.). It was to be unmistakably Australian. Openness and accessibility were prioritized over elitism and exclusivity. Whaite's initial concepts were reduced to a loose sketch encompassing a kangaroo, a sun and enveloping arc. He viewed the kangaroo as being pre-eminent nationally and internationally. The characteristic arc motif in some sketches was placed above the kangaroo and inverted to suggest protection or cover. In the final design, it was placed underneath the kangaroo to suggest support or assistance (Re:collection, n.d.). Such cognitive legitimacy is aligned with ACA's purpose of supporting artists.

The text reported that ACA 'introduced a new logo', due to the challenge of the ACA 'not being readily recognised for what it is' (ACA, 1982-83 p.20). Whaite's logo as:

a finished product reflects the Australianness of the Council's work as well as characteristics of the Australian landscape, and of both Aboriginal and Asian art. It also has a feeling of openness and accessibility which is appropriate to the national arts funding organisation (p.20).

The use of Aboriginal and Asian imagery provided ACA with cognitive legitimacy from an artist perspective, with Aboriginal culture being the oldest continuous living civilization in the world (Wilson et al., 2020). The multicultural nature of Australian society was reflected in government mandates of the time (Gardiner-Garden, 1994). Hence, the logo reinforced ACA presence for the artists whom it supported and the wider community whose support of the ACA was essential as a source of cognitive legitimacy.

ACA saw the need to 'stimulate the direction of support for arts activities to certain sections of the community' (1984-85 p.31), legitimizing its role. ACA supported research on branding and arts marketing, introducing grants to create greater understanding of it, increasing its acceptance (e.g., Rentschler, 1999). It introduced a Design Arts Committee to boost its importance; and restructured the institution to include branding and marketing among its functions. Hence, the ACA 'look[ed] outwards' (ACA, 1982-83) as to how it was perceived and recognized by stakeholders, acknowledged by an 'upsurge of interest' in the arts (1988-89 p.21). It sought to maintain legitimacy by creating an impression of 'mutual understanding' (ACA, 1990-91 p.3), and artistic achievement, reflected in its new logo which shows minor changes over time (see Images 2 and 3 in Table 1).

The Australian cultural industry was defined in 1988 (Cultural Ministers' Council, 1991) as part of the development of the notion of industry (Gardiner-Garden, 1994), paralleling the gradual shift to a corporate ACA focus. The shift emerged by consolidating corporate focus over time, with more photographs depicting artists appearing in international arts events and arenas, building cognitive legitimacy; for example, in the two-page 1991-92 Chair's report, the corporate theme emerging saw the arts as 'stimulat[ing] an economic

sector' bringing in \$6.2 billion, bigger than 'beer or clothing' (ACA, 1991-92 p.2). In 1992-93 (ACA, p.7), artists were stated as playing a 'vital role' in national identity-building leading up to the 2000 Sydney Olympics. By the mid-1990s, the tone of the text changed to more frequent corporate discussions of artistic success on the world stage. Hence, reform surrounding branding took the form of 'reviews,' internal reorganization and pushing the boundaries in branding the arts, part of institutional reform due to government policy (Gardiner-Garden, 1994).

Sethi's (1979) framework draws out the development of the pre-problem stage. At that time, each stakeholder group held the attention of the ACA. The creative efforts involved in constructing a morally legitimate brand, including its logo, paid dividends in connecting each stakeholder group across other communities. Historical socio-cultural and political grounding and a shared understanding are clearly illustrated. However, gradual corporatization effects are clearly identified subsequent to this position.

3.2. Phase 2 Problem Identification: Artistic rebellion 1995/96-2005/06

In line with Sethi (1979), patterns of responses from the ACA shifted from social responsiveness to social responsibility, where ACA sought to mitigate negative impacts on its brand by adopting strategies to engage corporate stakeholders, although curiously not artists. As characterized by the neo-liberal tradition, the creation of a defined arts industry implied a greater emphasis on hard data and images to achieve cognitive ACA legitimacy. The ACA logo continued to evolve as the 1995-96 illustrations indicate (see Image 4 in Table 1): it became a longer kangaroo, with a larger stylized sun behind it, sparer in style than earlier and more abstract. In doing so the logo lost its overt links to Aboriginal Australia and Asia. It began to appear repeatedly on the bottom right of the page, reinforcing its corporate evolution as ACA evolved as a corporate institution of the state.

The election of the federal conservative Howard government in 1996 may have reinforced the neo-liberal thrust evident in ACA annual reports. Brand image heralded significant change for the ACA during the second phase where arts developed a ‘two-faced reality’ (Bourdieu, 1984b) of artistic and corporate dualities. ACA Annual Reports brand images in this period had a corporate thrust, consistent with new public management policies pushed by the conservative federal government (Gardiner-Garden, 1994). Other arts organizations were going through similar institutional changes. For example, McAllister (2020) reflects on artistic director Ross Stretton’s appointment in 1997 which coincides with an ‘institutional change’ and a ‘major rebranding’ of the Australian Ballet ‘seeking a more modern outfit,’ with ‘stronger sponsorship and publicity’ (McAllister, 2020 p. 150-151).

At the same time, tensions with artists were growing. Media reports illustrated that not all artists supported the ACA, with artist dissatisfaction with the ‘corporatization of the Australia Council’ (Macklin, 1995). For example, in 1995, 260 artists signed a petition ‘slamming’ the ACA, noting that the ‘number of practising artists on the Australia Council has fallen from nine out of 14 two years ago to four now,’ thus ‘marginalis[ing]’ the ‘pivotal role played by artists [in the ACA] ... over the last two decades.’ The petition warns that the ACA was becoming a ‘powerful bureaucratic structure’ which engaged ‘fewer and fewer artists’ (Turner, 1995 p. 15). Furthermore, artists were called ‘clients’ by the ACA, incurring the wrath of journalists (Martin, 2005). The striking differences in the worlds of the artist and the government agency were amplified, as ACA seemed to move further away from one of its key stakeholder groups: the artist. The important point here is understanding branding from a social capital perspective (Bourdieu, 1984b), as well as making economic assessments of the direction of brand as a commercial signifier. This point is evidenced in Table 2, which shows reduced numbers of both arts organizations and individual artists who received ACA grants in Phase 2 compared to Phase 1, despite the average total ACA budget having doubled.

Table 2: Summary of ACA organizational and financial data 1982-2013

	Phase 1 (1982/83 – 1994/95)	Phase 2 (1995/96 – 2005/06)	Phase 3 (2006/07 – 2012/13)
Number of years	13	11	7
Average total budget	\$53,043,385	\$102,758,364 (+94%)	\$182,491,714 (+78%)
Average budget for arts organizations	\$40,015,698	\$84,983,275 (+112%)	Information not available
Average N. of grants given to arts organizations	1,634	1,222 (-25%)	1,149 (-6%)
Average budget for individual artists	\$5,660,199	\$9,088,526 (+61%)	Information not available
Average N. of grants given to individual artists	623	577 (-7%)	721 (+25%)
Average budget for arts organizations and individual artist grants	\$45,641,051	\$94,071,884 (+106%)	\$163,685,714 (+74%)
Average admin. costs	\$7,402,334	\$8,686,479 (+17%)	\$18,777,429 (+116%)
Average N. of staff	118	123	123

During Phase 2, the lowest number of individual artists were supported within our sample period. The beginning of this phase also saw the shift to a focus on audiences rather than artists, with the establishment of the Audience Development and Advocacy Division on 8 April 1996, aiming to ‘strengthen and expand audiences’ (ACA, 1995-96 p. 19). This illustrated a refocusing of the ACA from the supply side to the demand side, affecting how artists perceived the growing ACA corporatization. The interplay with artists and arts organizations, as branding is foregrounded and backgrounded in the quest for economic capital over social capital, did not appeal to practicing artists and damaged ACA moral legitimacy. Indeed, moral legitimacy was important to ACA, despite the growing role of social media conversations overtaking corporate top-down one-way development of brands (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014).

There was a pivot to Aboriginal peoples with *Corroboree 2000*, the first ACA Aboriginal Arts Policy in 1998-99 (ACA, p. 30), and an unsuccessful referendum for an Australian republic in 1999 as the nation sought to position itself as independent from British sovereignty. However, this pivot was not reflected in the evolving brand image. So, change did not follow a linear path. Pragmatic legitimacy was expanded through industry stakeholders, especially corporate and government supporters. Important as the ACA was, it was constantly open to criticism, particularly with artists questioning a continuing emphasis on branding and marketing. This illustrated the tensions between ACA's need for corporate support which provided pragmatic legitimacy and the need for artist support which brought moral legitimacy. Engagement with audiences and communities remained important, actioned through the Audience and Market Development Division. ACA commissioned Saatchi & Saatchi Australia to undertake research on the value of the arts (ACA, 1998-99). The subsequent report, *Australians and the Arts: What do the arts mean to Australians?* attracted 'national and international attention' (ACA, 1999-2000 p. 41). The report, however, was an action which incensed the artistic community, further widening the moral legitimacy gap between ACA and artists. Despite its best intentions to commit significant funds to the campaign, it actually reinforced the top-down, monolithic approach to corporate branding with a government agency view dominating.

The approach may have been necessary in both developing arts organizations' understanding of marketing and the audience, and in seeking to silence critics in the field. The Saatchi & Saatchi report also paralleled the establishment of the first ACA arts marketing department, with shifts to artists in the field, despite ACA goodwill in seeking to promote positive change:

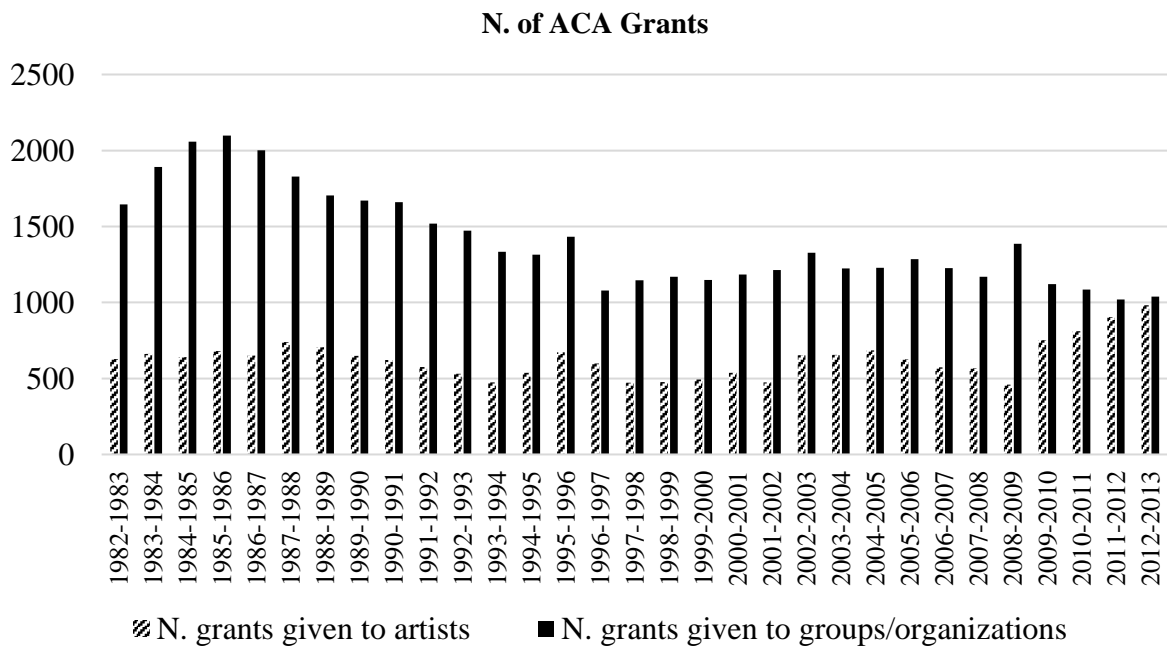
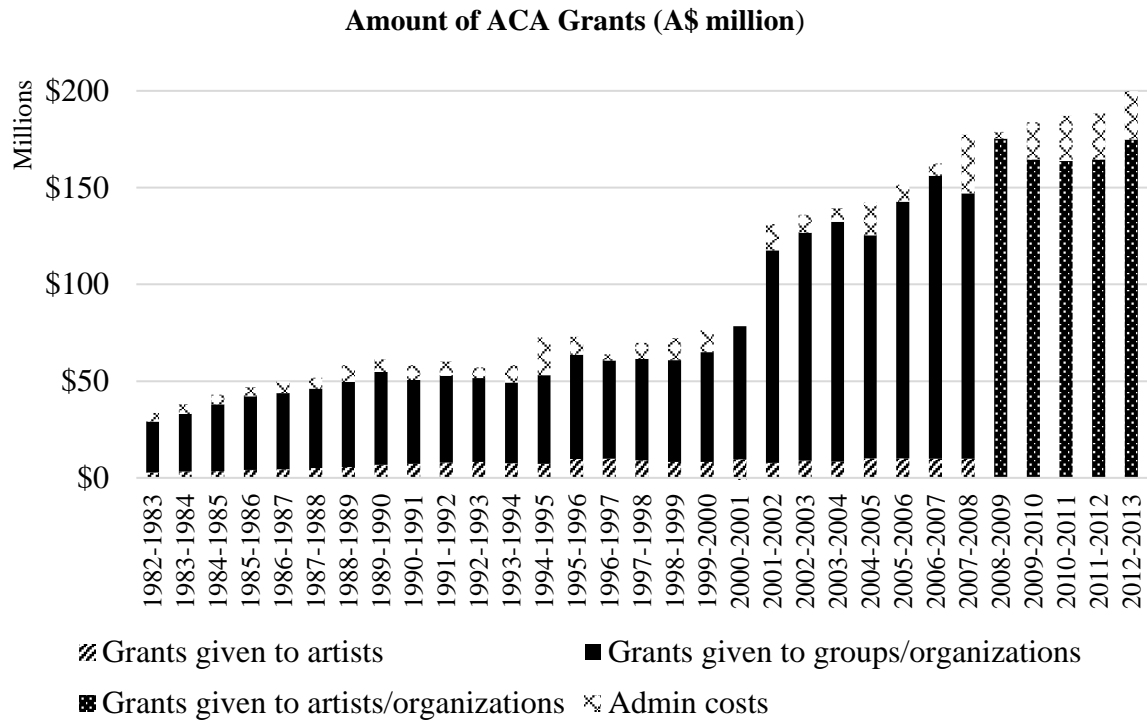
Council's Audience and Market Development's New Audiences Program assists artists and arts organisations to promote the value of their work to wide and new

audiences. The composite of this initiative broadens Australians' connections to the work of artists in their communities (ACA, 1999-2000 p. 41).

According to historical accounts, Australian artist John Kelly was incensed at the ACA commissioning Saatchi & Saatchi to produce a branding report. He wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister arguing that ACA branding was about 'homogeneity and conformity ... instead of [being used for] dreaming to innovate.' Kelly saw the brand as 'bland' and in danger of 'commodification' (Kelly, 2003), an impassioned criticism of ACA corporatization. He was not the only critic of the ACA. Media articles noted that spending on marketing and promoting the value of the arts, such as the Saatchi & Saatchi report, attracted 'some bitter criticism' from artists, countered by retorts from the ACA that the report was more effective in 'garnering support' than 'we-know-best arguments' from artists.' So, while the intent was to put artists on the front page rather than the ACA, it was not entirely successful, as this media report illustrated (Martin, 2002 p. 13).

Furthermore, in this phase images are limited in the annual reports of the first decade of the 2000s but are large and impactful in locations that reinforce the pragmatic legitimacy of the corporate ACA brand. There is narrative silence in the annual reports other than through the Chair's short report. The limited images are powerful symbols of the corporate shift that lost ACA moral legitimacy with artists during this period. This was reinforced by the establishment of the working group on Branding the Arts. At the same time, there was a dramatic increase in the total funding available for arts organizations while showing no change in the total budget available to support individual artists (see Figure 1), with the annual report stating that ACA was 'changed fundamentally' by these groups that were 'critical' in 'guiding and implementing a range of strategic programs and initiatives' (ACA, 2001-02 p. 24).

Figure 1: ACA grants to individual artists versus arts organizations 1982-2013



Although artists may be seen to embody an ‘anti-branding’ stance, they do seek social and economic capital in their own artistic lives (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014). While artist Kelly was constantly critical of the ACA brand, he used his celebrity status to emphasize on social media the importance of having a critical conversation about brand images. The ACA logo (see Image 5 in Table 1) had become ubiquitous to the point that Kelly ‘printed his rage’ in numerous parodies of the ACA kangaroo and solar ring. For him, the gulf separating the dialectic of emerging corporate and waning artistic views, were captured in his parody prints of the ACA logo. The Australian Galleries website where Kelly exhibits his work states that: ‘Kelly boldly challenges the politics of the art world and pays homage to iconic Australian works of art in his masterfully crafted prints’ (Australian Galleries, 2018). Altering the size, shape, and weight of the elements of the kangaroo image is part of Kelly’s cynical, playful but provocative appropriation of the ACA image (Image 6 in Table 1). Placing elements of the logo into ironic contexts, he parodies ACA branding. Parodying the brand also contributed to loss of artist support by the ACA. The images have since been utilized on craft beer labels by David Walsh, the owner of the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Tasmania, who also likes parody and anti-art sentiment. Ironically, this suggests that Kelly himself is using branding to promote his art. Thus, paradoxically, Kelly’s parody of the ACA logo risks becoming a brand in its own right due to the interest created in his now iconic image.

In 2003, all government departments and agencies were directed to uniformly display the government’s coat of arms, abandoning individual logos. This was met with ‘howls of complaint’ as the ‘Big M of central government’ was to dominate brand image, as the media reported (Fitzgerald, 2003 p. 25), further compromising ACA moral legitimacy. The focus on marketing attracted ‘bitter criticism’ in the media, reinforcing the view that the ACA was too ‘risk averse’ and ‘marketing the arts is a complete wank’ (Martin, 2002). Nonetheless, ACA

celebrated 20 years of ‘Throsby research’ on the artist (ACA, 2003-04). This included: *The Artist in Australia Today* (Throsby, 1983) through to *When are you going to get a real job?* (Throsby & Mills, 1989), *But what do you do for a living?* (Throsby & Thompson, 1994) and *Don’t Give Up Your Day Job* (Throsby & Hollister, 2003). ACA sought to identify ‘make or break issues’ for artists and their incomes through these studies. Further, they contracted the Australian Bureau of Statistics to examine artist-related employment data from the census, in order to underpin them (ACA, 2003-04). The size of the organization and the relative administrative costs increase during Phases 2 and 3. Given media reports on the gulf between ‘financially well-off arts bureaucrats’ and ‘struggling artists,’ sensitivity to the needs of the artists that ACA supports is essential. This is not always evident, reflecting a ‘creeping’ corporatization of ACA (Strickland, 2005) towards the end of this phase.

The application of Sethi’s (1979) identification stage highlights the move to social obligation of ACA in engaging many, but not all, stakeholders. Artist-focused strategies were ignored. We have evidenced this through our analysis of ACA grant funding and the accompanying growth of pragmatic legitimacy from moral legitimacy and top-down branding practices. Growing tensions manifested through artist-focused moral legitimacy concerns, accompanied by John Kelly’s commodification worries, heightened through growing corporatization effects.

3.3. Phase 3 Damage: Corporate Consolidation 2006/07-2012/13

This phase examines corporatization as a form of damage created by social obligation (Sethi, 1979), where ACA seems to have adopted the posture of determining its brand position without heeding artists’ militancy, heralding their severe dissatisfaction with the top-down, neo-liberal approach to branding. As ACA had matured after 34 years of operation, it committed resources to a branding campaign, but created a wider moral legitimacy gap with artists. As the media reports, by the end of this phase, ‘artists [are] out:’ out of the

boardroom; out of the ACA staff corridors (Westwood, 2013), 'taken over by a managerial culture' (Perkin, 2006).

This seven-year phase illustrates that ACA annual reports had become 'red washed' through the dominance of the red color of the corporate brand on their covers and in their interiors for seven years (from 2006/07 to 2012/13), reinforcing corporate progression in image and text (Images 7, 8 and 9 in Table 1). According to historical records, in Phase 1, marketing staff were not mentioned in the annual reports; however, it can be assumed that they were part of a small Strategic Development unit. By Phase 2, they were a discrete Audience Development and Advocacy unit, renamed Marketing and Communication, growing from seven to eighteen staff, continuing into Phase 3. Media reports in this period continually criticize the 'top-heavy management structure' which 'stymied of creative thinking' dominated by managers with a corporate 'marketing background,' such as ACA CEO Kathy Keele, who had held senior marketing roles in mining and telecommunications. Keele was criticized in the media by artists for holding 'frequent discussions' with ACA marketing about how to more clearly articulate the ACA 'brand' (Perkin, 2007). She worked in partnership with ACA Chair, also a corporate 'serial board chairman,' James Strong, both appointed in 2007.

Curiously, in 2006-07 (ACA, p. 4), Strong positioned Australian artists as 'great storytellers' from the 'legends of the Dreaming [stories of Aboriginal origins] to rollicking goldfields ballads' explicating 'narratives about ourselves'. Moral legitimacy was destroyed as the brand images negated that view, as the hard-edge red covers illustrate. Pragmatic legitimacy had won out. As academic critic Ben Eltham argued, the Australia Council 'has fallen victim to industry capture and institutional inertia,' no longer supporting artists, but rather 'vested [corporatized] interests':

The Australia Council has lost its way... It has failed to meaningfully engage with the arts practices of everyday Australian artists and no longer enjoys the support of many of those who create art in this country. The time has arrived to seriously re-assess the role of the country's chief cultural policy body (Eltham, 2010).

Furthermore, for example, while the ACA sought to balance its support to artists and arts organizations, as shown in Figure 1, the bulk of the money was being given to fewer arts organizations, while administration costs substantially increased (see Table 2). The total dollar amount of grants increased substantially in Phase 3, but the number of arts organizations funded reduced, a typical neo-liberal response.

The media wailed that 'there is no unified voice for artists,' disempowering them in the funding stakes (Travers, 2013). The number of arts organizations funded was the lowest, two over three phases, demonstrating the shift to a more corporate approach supporting only selected major arts organizations which promote excellence in the arts and respond to ACA practices (Rentschler, Lee & Subramaniam, 2021). However, the number of artists funded increased in Phase 3, potentially due to the organizations in which they worked being defunded, requiring artists to fund themselves.

From 2008-09, ACA was secure in its pragmatic legitimacy, potentially seeing less of a need to argue the case with artists for its brand. It merged reporting of support for artists with support for arts organizations, and reduced levels of disclosure. The original quirky logo designed by Whaite had evolved into an image for corporate purposes but had failed to extend the ACA's vision to its artist stakeholders. By 2013, the media reported that the ACA was to be revamped with no artist required to sit on its governing board, completing the corporatization process long complained about by artists (Westwood, 2013).

The corporate consolidation stage clearly ignores the wishes of artists in seeking to heighten ACA brand positioning. In doing so, pragmatic legitimacy became the dominant discourse, accompanied by managerialism over creative priorities. As a result, pragmatic legitimacy concerns came to dominate proceedings.

In assessing how Arts Council brand image has transformed over time, we have identified how this has moved from being an inclusive signifier of legitimacy (where all relevant parties were represented) to one of a corporatized identity where once dominant voices have receded and been replaced by a formalized single identity which lacks representation of its collective community. In terms of arts council brand development, this has not occurred in a collective, shared way. There are challenges relating to a lack of shared brand ownership, and the original intended brand efficacy has been lost. The once-clear brand signifiers contained in the original brand image have also been lost. Brand image as a signifier has been diluted, along with brand meaning.

4. Discussion

A brand can be viewed as a cultural resource (Holt, 2002; Arvidsson, 2005), becoming iconic through its symbolic value (Holt, 2003; 2004). It can also be destructive due to its lack of alignment with the cultural environment, with the organization paying more attention to internal requirements rather than artists, as demonstrated in the context of ACA. While the study setting is Australian, there are implications for arts councils in other countries since artist representation must be embedded in any branding practice. In attempting to add to brand value in widening its impact, organizational actions can cause dissonance with artists. Simultaneously, artists and other stakeholders can challenge this by leveraging their collective cultural and creative knowledge.

As a consequence of our brand legitimacy study, we extend discussion on branding to include its wider embedding in society, including consumer culture. Drawing insight from the vast numbers of images and information in postmodern society means it is difficult to achieve stable fixed notions of social divisions (Featherstone, 1987). Cultural products and services have both functional and symbolic value in a marketplace (Baudrillard, 1975; 1981), meaning that culture has become signified in reaching out to society ‘in a self-referential system of signifiers’ (Featherstone, 1987 p. 57).

Table 3: Evaluation of legitimacy and ACA response patterns for each phase

	Pre-problem Developing branding identity 1982/83-1994/95	Problem identification Artistic rebellion 1995/96-2005/06	Damage Corporate consolidation 2006/07-2012/13
Legitimacy	Cognitive legitimacy ACA acts as a brand representing artists ACA commissioned research on artists’ careers ⁱ South Australian artist, Lyndon Waite, designs brand logo using inclusive imagery	Moral to pragmatic legitimacy Top-down branding approach Saatchi & Saatchi brand report First marketing department ACA commissioned research on artists’ careers ⁱⁱ ACA gives fewer grants to individual artists	Pragmatic legitimacy ACA acts as a brand representing large arts and cultural institutions rather than artists ACA commissioned research on artists’ careers ⁱⁱⁱ ACA gives grants to fewer organizations, consolidating its corporate approach
Response patterns	Social responsiveness (promote positive change)	Social responsibility (mitigate negative outcomes)	Social obligation (do what’s required)

Source: modified from Langley (1999), Sethi (1979) & Suchman (1995)

Table 3 illustrates the complex and interdependent interplay at attempts at securing pragmatic, moral and cognitive legitimacy. The three types of legitimacy are not of equal importance and can come into conflict with each other (O’Dwyer, Owen & Unerman, 2011), as this case study has shown. In our case it was curious that cognitive legitimacy—that ACA worked hard to obtain in the first instance—failed to endure, potentially undermining the

preservation of other types of legitimacy, in this case moral and pragmatic. Cognitive legitimacy *was* taken for granted (Phase 1), with the result that this most powerful source of legitimacy that is rarely attained was thrown away in subsequent phases.

The brand legitimacy controversy highlighted the importance of widening decision-making to include artists, as they are core to the ACA's *raison d'être*. The study provides insight into the importance of collective understanding as to what builds moral and cognitive legitimacy for government agencies. The inter-relationships between different types of capital are apparent here, where brand logos accrue cultural and symbolic worth via the art world. Table 3 conceptualizes the socio-cultural and political dimensions of brand image conflict, with dominant response patterns between ACA and artists, as the controversy evolves from pre-problem to identification to corporatization.

In seeking to answer the research question—How does legitimacy theory explicate a critique of brand image transformations with respect to arts councils?—our discussion contributes to greater understanding of institutional and legitimacy theories by detailing the reciprocity necessary in moral and cognitive legitimacy (Elms & Phillips, 2009), as well as the need for accountability and transparency in decision-making on key issues. In relation to brand image seeking legitimacy by serving the needs of artists as a key arts council stakeholder, ACA's strategy was to emphasize its role in the creation and maintenance of pragmatic legitimacy. Here, brand images have been modified, conforming to changing institutional and contextual imperatives regarding corporatization, but also resulting in repurposing and parody (Petty, 2009). This affected ACA cognitive and moral legitimacy as an institution, due to overlooking its reciprocal obligations (Elms & Phillips, 2009), leading to artist push-back.

It has been demonstrated that brand image was developed in parallel with the corporatization of the ACA as an institution, accompanied by the diminution of a focus on the needs of artists. This has parallels to other corporatization efforts in the global art world, from arts councils to non-profits and commercial entertainment organizations, such as the Australian Ballet and Disney (e.g., McAllister, 2020; Thomas, 2019). We argue that knowledge-sharing and openness around branding intentions underlie establishing and maintaining relationships with independent artists as key arts council stakeholders. The relationship entails reciprocity and yet generally there is a power imbalance between them and the arts council due to their low salaries, independent operation and (frequently) location outside major cities where art world decisions tend to be made.

Artistic unrest and dissatisfaction with brand image are a warning to arts councils in general, those working in the cultural and creative industries, and in other small institutions about the necessity of co-development of brand image (Schroeder, 2006). Dualistic dilemmas that try to balance the pull of artistic versus corporate interests can tarnish not only the brand, if not handled carefully, but also relationships with artists whom an arts council represents. If more attention had been paid to acknowledgement of the benefits of a shared belief system and a meaningful brand community (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003; Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015), then the ongoing dissonance would perhaps have been minimized (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015).

So, artist-related complexities underlie the shift to corporate branding in raising awareness of the institution (Stride & Lee, 2007), which ACA overlooked. Brands are not static symbols. Brand controversies, such as those between ACA and artists, negatively influenced the perceived moral legitimacy of the brand (compare with Bridson et al., 2017). Thus, the emotional elements of the brand created tensions that turned artists against the ACA, supporting the classic corporatization argument (Peterson & Berger, 1975). Given the

visual nature of brand image (Preece & Kerrigan, 2015), symbolically, branding practice projected the perceived organizational self that was not aligned with the actual self (Belk, 1988), diminishing brand value amongst artists (Chu & Keh, 2006). This conflicts with the purpose of brand legitimacy in that it should create value for all stakeholders (Deepphouse & Suchman, 2008).

Far from being a simple aggregate of isolated actors in the field (Bourdieu, 1983), a set of interlocking systems competed and conflicted, depending on whether the view of the arts council corporate brand or the artist dominated. These contests are consistent with internal struggles within the ACA, as well as artistic outpourings of impassioned grief at ACA direction. They are also characteristic of neo-liberal shifts in governance, influenced by the socio-cultural and political environment. In seeking to develop legitimacy for the ACA, evident in the images and narratives that position brand image; its codified logo is perceived, by some at least, to have become bland, sterile, and corporate: the antithesis of what it was originally intended to do. The ACA brand came to be more of a corporate strategic tool than symbolic capital with cultural value that binds stakeholders.

5. Conclusion

This study supports the contention by Di Maggio and Powell (1991) that neo-institutional theory can aid understanding of legitimacy struggles through ‘historical transitions’ (Suchman, 1995). Using Sethi’s (1979) framework, we drew on examples from an arts council highlighting the importance of foregrounding social capital (Bourdieu, 1984b) over economic imperatives, if the artistic community is to support brand image initiatives. The shift from cognitive and moral legitimacy to pragmatic legitimacy based on brand efficacy is a shift from non-corporatized (autonomous) art field to a McDonaldized art field (Ritzer, 2013). Thus, the developments observed in this study of the ACA brand, are proof of a far more comprehensive change in the art world that is global rather than local or limited to the

setting of one nation. Nonetheless, we do not argue that corporatization has been ‘bad’ in a business sense for ACA. However, this pathway has been detrimental to the artists they claim to support. Indeed, following Suchman (1995), it may well be that the ACA, in corporatizing, accords legitimacy to more immediate organizations perceived to be more valuable or worthy of support (e.g., funders) than to its artists. Our analysis also unpacks how artists intentionally challenge government agencies and seek to mold public debate and media conversations, thus amassing social capital for themselves, but also damaging the moral legitimacy of the arts council. Through the example of John Kelly, a successful artist socially and economically, we witnessed how artists do understand the importance of cognitive, moral and pragmatic legitimacy for an arts council, while also arguing for a wider and more consultative conversation in a key domain of which they are deeply suspicious.

This study has implications for theory and practice and future research. The study has implications for arts councils elsewhere and arts marketers, as it provides a blueprint for co-creation with, and engagement of artists, throughout the branding process (Vallaster & Von Wallpach, 2013). Future research could, for example, examine whether the positioning and identity of the image among external stakeholders (e.g., artists, art consumers, cultural institutions) has changed, why they think it has changed and their reactions towards it. Such research could be undertaken by online survey in the current COVID-19 environment and in face-to-face in-depth interviews under normal environmental conditions, in order to probe deeper into corporate branding relationships. For practitioners, it is a cautionary tale about how branding can negatively impact moral and cognitive legitimacy of the organization if core stakeholder relations are not maintained. Hence, there is a need to widely canvas practitioners before, during and after branding changes are made. It would be illuminating if related comparative studies were carried out in other countries and other stakeholders of the cultural and creative industries, including different types of government agencies (e.g., film

and digital media) to see if the neo-liberal approach holds true elsewhere. A potential future research question here might center around the level of impact and recognition which the creative industries have in each country investigated and the perceived need for branding of creative institutions. In terms of the research methodology utilized in this study, it is clear that a longitudinal approach has been beneficial in uncovering key critical instances of change in brand approach. This extended time dimension is also encouraged in future related, comparative studies.

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ⁱ See Throsby & Mills (1989)

ⁱⁱ See Throsby & Thompson (1994)

ⁱⁱⁱ See Throsby & Hollister (2003)