Vinyl Revival

Social and Technological Change in the Field of Music Retail

BY

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THESIS

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This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Jill Hendricks, without whom it would never have been accomplished.
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JMH
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<td>AIMS</td>
<td>Association of Independent Media Stores</td>
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<td>CIMS</td>
<td>Coalition of Independent Music Stores</td>
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<td>MMN</td>
<td>Music Monitor Network</td>
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SUMMARY

This work broadly considers how markets “between” products and consumers affect the way we value goods and services. As consumers are exposed in person and online to an increasing variety of choices and opinions regarding those choices, the multiple registers of assessment embedded in goods and services become more evident. Through a longitudinal, multimethod analysis of industry and media archives, I use the case of independent record stores to explore the relationship between a changing music industry, retailers working to survive, and consumers confronted with more choices that mean different things in a new market reality. In the three-paper dissertation that follows, I investigate how these specialist retailers have been able to act strategically despite drastic technological change, what actions mean for a public notion of a record store identity, and how the store actors negotiate the sometimes conflicting realities they are faced with on a day to day basis. The music retail industry has changed significantly over the past twenty years. But with major technological advancements has also come a contemporary thirst for authentic experiences. The relationship that independent record stores maintain with the vinyl record surge of the past ten years situates these stores as cultural authorities and locates a viable niche for survival in an otherwise depressed market.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Changing Space of Markets and Meaning

In a 2012 study on sustainable citizenship, Micheletti and Stolle illustrate how the often aggressive campaigns of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) have generated an increased public awareness about animal mistreatment despite controversial tactical approaches. For example, PETA’s sexy vegetarian angle has drawn criticism for its derogatory emphasis on female bodies and sexuality. Fourcade (2011) recounts the Exxon Valdez oil spill and the development of “passive use” damage valuation (52) in her work on commensuration to isolate the processes whereby economic reparations were achieved through symbolic mobilization. And, in Ross’s (2003) study of new media companies during the dot com explosion, he details the rise and fall of 360hiphop.com; a multimedia website looking to tap into the economic and political “potential of the hip-hop generation” (194). The site’s ultimate failure brings to light the complexity of fusing technological and cultural idealism in commercial spaces where financial viability is paramount. While diverse in their aims and scope, these studies bring to our attention the relationship between culture and markets and the role of symbolic resources in establishing criteria, making assessments, and reinforcing market value.
At the time of writing this introductory chapter, knowledge and service sectors occupy 61.3% percent of the US gross domestic product. For some time, our economy has become less reliant upon making things. Instead, the value we’ve placed on the knowledge and service sectors suggests we have become a country adept at making markets. These sectors often entail some form of specialization, coordination, risk reduction, or quality assurance whereby intermediary actors build new markets and create new value for a given target audience. What is more, the explosion of internet commerce has expanded opportunities for intermediation and reshaped many of our market relationships. This work broadly considers how our understanding of these markets “between” products and consumers affect the way we value goods and services. As consumers are exposed in person and online to an increasing variety of choices and opinions regarding those choices, the multiple registers of assessment embedded in goods and services become more evident. Beckert (2011) identifies a general distinction between physical, social, and imaginative values that situate the worth of goods and services among audiences. As the names of these three factors imply, the physical use of a good or service is but one aspect of the value it brings to the consumer. Similarly, the case I present will make occasional reference to such physical value but uncovers important features of value rooted in history, status, ideology, location, and relationships that a good or service might embody.

For decades, brick-and-mortar music retailers have occupied an intermediary role in the music industry through the purchase of products for resale to consumers and the coordination of more discerning buyers interested in collectible products. Intermediary actors have been studied in terms of financial markets (Zuckerman 1999, Smith 2011), legal services (Suchman and Cahill 1996), labor (Gress and Bagchi-Sen 2007), and technology (Lichtenthaler and Ernst 2009, Methlie and Pederson 2003) yet relatively little consideration has been given to the role of resale agents in making markets and influencing product value (Miller 2006, Velthuis 2007). The ability to locate and consume a great deal of music via the internet has irrevocably disrupted the exchange
relationships between producers, retailers, and consumers and actively challenged the very necessity of physical products such as compact discs, cassettes, or vinyl records. And as the music industry has stumbled through the development of digitally mediated markets, the brick-and-mortar music retailer has suffered a 69% decrease in physical sales. As of 2014, total unit sales in music retail have contracted by $581 million and music-only retailers sell less than one third of all music.

The massive influence of internet technologies on market interactions presents new challenges to all types of intermediary firms. As Zaloom (2006) has argued, aligning technology and market practice removes the social connections and culture from markets. Advantages often associated with resale agents such as product availability, immediacy, and risk reduction have all but disappeared in music retail. What is more, specialized web technologies continue to craft previously decentralized exchange into personalized online consumer experiences. According to Bakos (2001), firms utilizing these personalized web experiences represent the “reintermediation” of markets based on the new needs of digitized retail and consumption. However, brick-and-mortar retailers may still retain some advantage in their ability to coordinate relationships and guarantee quality. Velthuis (2007) shows how art dealers use pricing and space as signals of quality and reputation and Zuckerman (1999) as well as Anand and Peterson (2000) show how signaling of industry-specific cues prove vital to the success or failure of firms. These cases give credence to the remaining power of intermediaries as agents of quality control. As Spulber (1996) explains, when quality is unknown consumers are less willing to pay a premium price. When an intermediary can certify the quality of a product, they can streamline selection and supervise production supply for consumers while building a reputation based off these decisions. Thus the intermediary firm can become an authority on quality and status of goods.

As internet and mobile technologies continue to change the trajectory of the music retail market, we see some independent record stores have proven to be quite resilient and able to
cultivate some market advantage. Popular non-fiction accounts have suggested these surviving independent record stores cling to a collector consumer in unglamorous, boutique ventures that exist purely for the love of music (Calamar and Gallo 2010). Other accounts argue a variety of independent record store types have surfaced in response to new market realities; some that have survived based on traditional collector markets, others that offer a more complex notion of music consumption and experience (Pettit 2008). I find two factors have contributed to these conflicting assessments of contemporary survivors. First, since 2000, an unprecedented 693% explosion in vinyl record sales has brought a great deal of attention to surviving retailers as industry estimates find that two-thirds of these vinyl records are being purchased at independent record stores (Digital Music News 2012, Nielsen Soundscan 2012). Second, the advent of national Record Store Day in 2008 has produced an annual holiday to celebrate the idiosyncratic allure of these retailers. Record Store Day celebrates those “who make up the world of the record store” and draws attention to “the unique culture of a record store and the special role these independently owned stores play in their communities” (recordstoreday.com 2012). Together, these factors render consumer evaluations of collectability, place, music culture, and community meaningful and situate the contemporary independent record store at the nexus of multiple registers of assessment.

In the three-paper dissertation that follows, I will explore the actions of these intermediary firms in a period of rapid technological change. Maintaining a focus on independent music retailers as the primary relevant social group, I consider the extent to which new technological developments in listening and owning music have changed both the meanings and structures associated with the music retail field. My investigation will be guided by three primary questions: (1) how might organizations in challenger positions exert influence in changing markets, (2) to what extent has the organizational identity of surviving music retail firms changed in the wake of technological innovation and have changes among individual independent record stores follow
any pattern across the evolving music retail market, and (3) how do these firms negotiate dissonance between industry trends and market realities? Through a longitudinal, multimethod content analysis of media and industry documents, I investigate patterns of organization and meaning in the field arguing that store survival has required innovative action on the part of invested actors. Through collaborative meaning-making, contemporary perspectives on music consumption situate many independent record stores as curators of music culture. At the same time, stores have found a need to manipulate the traditional record store form to adapt to new market realities. Throughout the study, I illustrates how reciprocity among invested local actors and target audiences have collectively reconstructed niche value to adapt to new market realities.

In this introductory chapter, I will first offer some general theoretical considerations that loosely connect the three substantive papers of the dissertation. I argue that a field perspective provides the theoretical leverage to contribute to the analysis of organizations in economic sociology, new institutionalism, and population ecology literatures. Next, I discuss the general methodological approach including a few major concepts that occur throughout the work. Specifically, this section will introduce procedures and discuss my interpretation of meanings, structures, and technologies. While chapter two situates much of the work historically, the third component of the introduction will consider the case of the independent record store through a few themes of value. I will provide a brief discussion of market value over time, the debate over music formats, and the value of place to provide more context to the analyses that follow. It is through the changing perceptions of market, product, and place respectively, that we might more fully understand the actions of those invested in music retail field as they surface in the chapters to come. I conclude with a summary of the three papers and their individual contributions that lead to a final chapter regarding the nature of the association between the meanings and structures that define independent record stores and those that define vinyl records.

1.2 The Issue of Embeddedness
At the heart of this research is a concern with the longstanding structure-agency debate that defines much of the work done by both new institutional and field theorists (Garud et al. 2007). By privileging structure in one’s analysis, aspects of our social world become reified thus removing our ability to act creatively. In its most extreme, people are treated as autonomous, rationalist units, objectively maximizing her or his utility rather than interpreters of ambiguous ideas, objects, and occurrences. Conversely, privileging agency often results in “great man” models of action that ignore the historical developments that have led to the context in which action takes place. Yet at the core of understanding how and why certain meanings, practices, or organizational forms come into existence and become legitimized over time is a useful friction for unpacking processes of continuity and change. In my assessment, the most fruitful responses to this paradox of embeddedness have addressed this friction by identifying micro- and meso-level processes where invested actors navigate meaning systems.

For some time, the concept of institutional logics has played a central role in the process of applying meaning to social structures and therefore, stabilizing relationships among field actors through a collective understanding of how strategies are formulated and relationships are comprised (DiMaggio 1997). They are symbolically meaningful, structured through organizations, politicized, and historically contingent based on technological or material limitations (Friedland and Alford 1991). Thornton and Ocasio (2008) argue that logics integrate the structural, normative, and symbolic dimensions necessary for institutional analysis by locating social and institutional context which both standardizes behavior and provides opportunity for agency and change. Researchers have used the institutional logics framework to illustrate a transition from one meaning system to another (Haveman et al. 2007, Rao et al. 2003, Thornton 2002, Thornton 2004), the presence of multiple meaning systems throughout a period of organizational or social change (Meyer and Hammerschmid 2006, Mohr and Guerra-Pearson 2010) or in stable fields that operate at the intersection of multiple logics (Dunn and Jones 2010). However, critics argue the
institutional logics framework tends toward a totalizing perspective of field change (Fligstein and McAdam 2012) reliant on ‘key’ entrepreneurs (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005, Wijen and Ansari 2006) that is largely void of the immediacy of action (Boltanski 2011).

In response, scholars of institutions have offered multiple approaches that look to overcome this totalizing perspective of change. Battilana and colleagues (2009) consider the social position of a potential institutional entrepreneur within and among fields as a central determinant of change. These institutional entrepreneurs are “actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones” (Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence 2004, 657). Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) exemplify this combination of field characteristics and actor position finding that senior executives at large accounting firms that outgrow old logics are those most embedded in networks where alternative ideas and new logics are most active. The institutional work perspective identifies both the entrepreneurs and support actors that facilitate broad-based change (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006). Colyvas and Powell (2006) illustrate this work as shifts from fundamental debates over appropriateness become codified into procedures and definitions in uneven processes of legitimation. Still others have embraced the notion of institutions as “inhabited” by actors which accentuates the human agency in organizational dynamics through the interpretation of logics in day-to-day interactions (Hallett and Ventresca 2006, Binder 2007). Hallett and Ventresca (2006) use institutional and symbolic interaction theories to draw connections between actors’ histories, the present situation, and the strategies and perceptions of what new organizational relationships should look like.

The substantive chapters that follow will largely take on this structure-agency debate from a field perspective (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Bourdieu 2005, Fligstein 2001, Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Analyzing organizations from a field approach has become increasingly useful due to common interactions among actors that may or may not reside within the confines of a
single industry (Anand and Jones 2008). Where market interests often centralize those organizations in direct, “local” competition with one another, a field approach draws our attention to those contexts in which the interests of diffuse actors may overlap, new challengers enter fields, regulatory bodies interject, and so on (Fligstein 2001, Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012). In turn, fields of action incorporate micro- and meso- perspectives where actors articulate common understandings and perceived position among recognized others. Thus fields are both interrelated with and nested in other fields as actors often draw upon a variety of familiar meanings and structures to make sense of a given context. As some have argued, a field approach avoids the totalizing tendency of structure by acknowledging a “routine, rolling turbulence in modern society” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 19) with interests of diffuse actors across various industries. At the same time, field actors regularly tend toward a “local” stability where dominant cognitive elements and established social relations promote organizational survival (Carroll 1985, Fligstein 2001, White 1981). Where changes is a constant, this tendency toward stability avoids an ahistorical analysis of meanings and structures among invested actors.

A meso-level focus on incumbent and challenger firms in a given field also enables consideration of commonalities between institutional and ecological studies of organizations (Haveman and David 2008, Mohr and Guerra-Pearson 2010). For example, Mohr and Guerra-Pearson (2010) bring attention to the shared understandings about types of organizations and the niches they occupy as a component of a field’s dominant logic. In many fields, the largest organizational forms offer standardized products that satisfy a wide range of conditions for a diverse consumer base (Carroll 1985, Carroll and Swaminathan 2000). This approach allows these generalist firms to produce economies of scale based on the accumulation and retention of varieties of excess capacity (Hannan and Freeman 1977). At the same time, as large firms concentrate their efforts on standardized products, small firms can succeed utilizing various “fringe” resources without engaging in direct competition with generalists (Carroll 1985). These
peripheral resources are niche or sub-markets that a specialist can service more efficiently than its generalist counterpart(s). The result is what Carroll (1985) calls a market in equilibrium where generalist and specialist firms find a "local" stability attending to different audiences.

The field of music retail has maintained a high level of generalist concentration over the past twenty years yet the composition and diversity of firms has changed significantly due to sharp technological change (Hsu and Hannan 2005). And while no firm is impervious to change, generally, the ecological approach would suggest that large firms have some excess capacities in reserve and will be more able to adapt to different environmental outcomes (Hannan and Freeman 1977). Put another way, where specialists can outperform generalists in their area of expertise, their increased focus on smaller resource spaces makes the specialist firm more vulnerable to various types of drastic change. However, evidence suggests that reliance on standardized product in a crashing market made many of the generalist forms far more vulnerable than smaller firms. Indeed, the introduction and proliferation of web technologies has complicated the roles of generalist and specialist music retailers. Despite an increasing concentration among generalists, overall market decline and a growing digital economy have made niche resource spaces once ignored by generalists much more attainable and attractive. The resulting "hypercompetition" (D'Aveni 1998) where technological advancements allow firms to exploit temporary market advantages runs contrary to market equilibrium assumptions (Carroll 1985) and suggests new social understandings in what is a new organizational environment.

The empirical work that follows complicates tenets of both population ecology and new institutionalism and enhances a theoretical project aimed at combining principals of these perspectives (Haveman and David 2008). By approaching the relationship of music retail markets, online and mobile innovations, and the music production industry as both interrelated and nested fields, the politics of field change surface as both strategic practices and understandings of how these processes are formulated. On one hand, new technological developments in listening to
and owning music have irreversibly changed the relationships between large and small organizations that comprise the field. The “reach” of internet technologies has threatened the products and practices synonymous with both generalist and specialists in the field. On the other hand, an isomorphic shift toward these new, dominant field perspectives and practices was often impractical or simply not possible. This market disruption not only forced many firms to reassess their role, but opened the market up to a variety of potentially valid field understandings of the industry.

1.3 General Methodology

Identifying a range of common practices and evaluations across music retail markets presents several methodological challenges. First, a descriptive study of innovation and change among local businesses on a national scale requires a multipronged sampling approach in order to accurately represent the organizational population (Bail 2012). Second, capturing a precise history of industry understandings requires a research design that avoids potential inaccuracies of memory or bias from respondents in the sample. Finally, the extent to which different organizations communicate values perceived as central to their market requires consideration of the context in which stores perceive other actors and events as important. In response to these issues, a systematic purposive sample of three archived sources provides the foundational data throughout the study. In this section I will discuss my use of an ethnographic content analysis (ECA) approach to incorporate qualitative and quantitative procedures and produce more depth in response to the questions posed. While all of the papers originated from the same open coding and analysis procedures detailed below, each substantive paper asks new questions of these data, drawing on different time periods and different voices to consider each research question in the most appropriate manner.

I employed three sources to produce a data set of 1,600 relevant documents that represent music retail discourse from 1993-2012. The search phrases “independent record store”
or “music retail” (82% precision) were used after a series of open searches purposefully designed to capture those stories connected to the research questions while minimizing the “noise” associated with internet searches (Stryker 2006). I first used the designed phrases in a LexisNexis search of major US newspapers to gather articles about US music retail markets across the country (Bail 2012). All of the US newspapers used are among the top one hundred according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (2014). Because of my specific concern with industry understandings, I collected a second sample of industry media sources. These industry sources incorporate an emphasis on insider information and issues deemed most relevant to industry actors (Hoffman 1999).

I included a third sample of alternative weekly newspapers to provide additional localized perspectives and guarantee a greater balance of voices from throughout the target population. Alternative weeklies offer an exciting thread to the fabric of the sample because of their “strong focus on local news, culture and the arts” as well as their “eagerness to report on issues and communities that many mainstream media outlets ignore” (Association of Alternative News Media 2012). The alternative weeklies included were selected systematically based on a composite score that considered circulation, region, independent record stores per-capita, and national recognition of local record stores based on multiple “best of” lists. Following data collection, each document was vetted for validity in terms of the research question resulting in a wide range of industry voices from both local and national perspectives. Table I lists the US newspapers, industry media, and alternative weeklies that comprise the finalized data set.

The use of archived sources and industry-specific documents have proven effective for tracing field changes and organizational understandings (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005, Mohr and Guerra-Pearson 2010) as well as actor critiques and justifications of salient situations (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999, Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Further, individuals have become increasingly accustomed to interpreting and presenting messages and perspectives through
Table I

CONTENT ANALYSIS DATA SOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Newspapers</th>
<th>Industry Media</th>
<th>Alternative Weeklies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (GA)</td>
<td>Billboard Magazine</td>
<td>The Austin Chronicle (TX)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Buffalo News (NY)</td>
<td>Crain's Business</td>
<td>Chicago Reader (IL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily News (CA)</td>
<td>Daily Variety/ Variety</td>
<td>City Pages (MN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Denver Post (CO)</td>
<td>Hollywood Reporter</td>
<td>Creative Loafing Atlanta (GA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Detroit News (MI)</td>
<td>Little White Ear Buds</td>
<td>Dallas Observer (TX)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Observer (NC)</td>
<td>Recording Industry</td>
<td>Philadelphia Weekly (PA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times (NY)</td>
<td>Association of America</td>
<td>LA Weekly (CA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Philadelphia Inquirer (PA)</td>
<td>Media Archive</td>
<td>The Stranger (WA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)</td>
<td>Rolling Stone</td>
<td>The Village Voice (NY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Salt Lake Tribune (UT)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Paul Pioneer Press (MN)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose Mercury News (CA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Star Tribune (MN)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tampa Bay Times (FL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Tampa Tribune (FL)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post (DC)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
media formats (Gamson et al. 1992, Altheide 1996, Altheide and Schneider 2013). As Altheide and Schneider argue, the use of various forms of media documentation is “very relevant for audiences’ views, themes, and narratives – or common stories – of the world and for the language and symbolic meanings and images that are associated with certain problems and issues” (2013:17).

Throughout the analysis and coding of these data, this ECA approach offers the quantitative emphasis of structured data collection in association with descriptive data segments that inform the context in which meanings emerge. The purposive sample of industry and media sources is consistent with the ECA technique as all documents were included based on their relevance to the niche survival of independent record stores. Each profile piece, news feature, spot feature, trend story, live-in, editorial, and advertisement in the sample includes discussions of various music retailers and what they were doing to generate business. Understanding patterns over time requires coding of a variety of actor types where the primary unit of analysis is the accounts of the field these actors make. These accounts come in the form of data segments where actors justify their role, critique others, strategize, and advertise. Through these data segments, I organize what constitutes the building blocks of both broader field understandings and organizational structures.

Data segments were first coded by the date in which the account was made, the general geographic region in which the account surfaced, actor type, and technologies incorporated. Table II details the resulting twelve actor types and forty-four technologies identified throughout the analysis. My conceptualization of technologies draws heavily on its common use in the performativity, social construction of technology (SCOT), and actor-network-theory (ANT) literatures. Thus the technologies included are identified as those practical strategies, objects, practices, and knowledges that legitimate markets and maintain structures over time (Latour 1988, Callon and Muniesa 2005, Callon 2006, Mackenzie 2008, Bikjer 2010). Through Atlas.ti
### Table II

**CODED CATEGORIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Music Producer</td>
<td>Date of Publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Consumer</td>
<td>Region (North, South, East, West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Online Retailer</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Music Superstore</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Chain Retailer</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Mass Retailer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Independent Record Store</td>
<td>Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Artists</td>
<td>T23. Video rental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Private and Academic Research</td>
<td>T27. Advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T28. Music production and/or promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T29. Large catalog/Inventory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T30. Renovation/Moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T31. Ambiance (Color, Posters, Lights, Space)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T32. Arcade/Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T33. Children’s area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T34. Free sample/Promotional items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T35. Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T36. Fanzines/Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T37. Sheet music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T38. Concert tickets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T39. Stock</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T40. Record Store Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T41. Pop-up stores</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T42. Street fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T43. Shipping product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T44. Copyright contention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Justifications                  |                                             |
| 1. Inspired                     |                                              |
| 2. Domestic                     |                                              |
| 3. Civic                        |                                              |
| 4. Opinion                      |                                              |
| 5. Market                       |                                              |
| 6. Industrial                   |                                              |
| 7. Project-Oriented             |                                              |
| Critiques                       |                                              |
| 1. Inspired                     |                                              |
| 2. Domestic                     |                                              |
| 3. Civic                        |                                              |
| 4. Opinion                      |                                              |
| 5. Market                       |                                              |
| 6. Industrial                   |                                              |
| 7. Project-Oriented             |                                              |
qualitative data analysis software, I was able to organize these coded data to compare and contrast different types of retailers, regional markets, and time periods. Through an iterative processes of analysis and memoing I became increasingly familiar with general industry topics such as market conditions, consumer activity, digital and analog technologies, and media framing of events. By exploring and refining these general industry topics and the corresponding actors, frames, and technologies, primary qualities of the field and the perspectives of those involved emerged from the data.

In order to use these data to consider the questions I pose, I found it necessary to organize some analyses by specific time periods. This allowed for comparison before and after major events and of particularly important time periods. In paper three (chapter four), I compare the public discourse of independent record store actors from 1994 through 1996 (period 1: CD dominance) and from 2010 through 2012 (period 2: relative stability following the crash of brick-and-mortar retail). By focusing the analysis on the independent retailer perspective in these two time periods, I not only show how small firms can negotiate dissonance between industry trends and day-to-day market realities but also establish the nature of broad change empirically. Similarly, paper two (chapter three) focuses on four distinct time periods to provide a clear series of snapshots as innovation destabilizes the market over time. Prior to this partitioning of the data set, paper one (chapter two) offers a field perspective and underscores the logic behind the choices that follow. Thus after detailing broad field change, the analysis transitions to a focus on public identity and narrows further to a consideration of the strategies that facilitate the daily performance of such an identity. In a field where many developments occur through verbal agreements and detailed procedural histories of music retailers across the country are unavailable, I argue that the coding and analysis of public discourse produces an accurate representation common meanings and organizational actions necessary for an historical investigation of field change.
At this point, it is quite evident that my analysis relies upon a few central constructs that weave together the chapters into a more cogent whole. First, the music retail field will be represented by the actors engaged in the public discourse of music retail. Actors will change over time and may perceive a more or less stable field based on their position within it. Yet all engaged actors express their sense of the order or pattern of fields through language (Berger and Luckmann 1967, Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). Thus the ongoing process of establishing common orders or patterns in discourse can be understood as processed of field institutionalization (Jepperson 1991). I identify these processes by detailing the meanings and structures actors draw upon when offering their account of the field. The hierarchies, bureaucracy, laws, regulations, strategies, contracts, products, and practices that organize this market reality are what I refer to as structures. These structures take on a primary role in paper two (chapter three) when I organize them in systems based on their associations with particular retailer identities. However, these understood patterns are often most effective when paired with subjective abstractions that explain why a firm organizes in such a way. These abstractions are the individual and group meanings that run throughout the substantive chapters.

A third important component throughout the study will be the conceptualization of technology and its development over time. Generally, technological developments will refer to internet technology and the explosion of downloading and streaming retail services that have disrupted older market technologies. However, as mentioned above, I draw on performativity, social construction of technology (SCOT), and actor-network-theory (ANT) literatures that point to an actor’s practical strategies, techniques, descriptions, and so on as technologies or calculative devices that legitimate markets over time. From this perspective we would also consider the predatory pricing by mass retailers, curation practices by independent record stores, and the litany of localized projects retailers take on to cater to target audiences as technological changes and, in some cases, technological innovations. Finally, an ongoing discussion of
independent record stores as a relevant social group requires a definition to separate them from other similar retailers. When needed, I look to definition offered by the organizers of National Record Store Day, the largest initiative in recent years to champion the cause of independent record stores, as a primary criteria in defining these firms:

"a stand alone brick and mortar retailer whose main primary business focuses on a physical store location, whose product line consists of at least 50% music retail, whose company is not publicly traded and whose ownership is at least 70% located in the state of operation" (recordstoreday.com 2012).

1.4 A Few Important Themes of Value

In order to understand the relationship among producers, intermediaries, and target audiences in the field of music retail, I felt it necessary to take a moment to consider some general themes of value that will continue throughout the substantive papers to come. Where some of these themes may not be explicitly discussed and others may only surface occasionally, their inclusion here serves as a reminder of the multiple registers in which these intermediary firms might operate based on a given context.

1.4.1 Value in the Market

Each paper that follows identifies the 1990s as a decade of compact discs (CDs) for the music retail industry. Yet despite their steady sales increases throughout the 1990s, leading to unprecedented industry profits, the high wholesale price and low profit margin for CDs forced many small retailers to reassess their business model. Competition from large chains and mass retailers compelled some independent and small chain retailers to decrease the quantity of music they carried in favor of movies or lifestyle items such as clothing and band merchandise. In addition, the resale of used CDs, cassettes, and vinyl records gained momentum as a legitimate practice, keeping many retailers afloat. This push to incorporate new products and services only increased with the challenges that digital music downloading introduced. The introduction of
Napster’s peer-to-peer (P2P) digital music sharing in 1999 launched a revolution in music consumption that increased by over 300 percent in the first few years of the new millennium. The year 2003 marked the beginning of lawsuits against individuals downloading unregulated music and the launching of the Apple iTunes store. The allure of downloading free or inexpensive music instantly to one’s personal computer not only rocked the music retail industry but forever altered the market relationship between industry leaders and consumers.

Overall, sales and licensing revenues decreased by over four billion dollars from 1999 to 2008 forcing many music superstores, like Tower Music and Virgin Megastore, out of business. At this same time, over 25 percent of independent stores nationally were forced to close their doors (Pettit 2008). Interestingly, this apparent death of physical product at the hands of digital downloading was accompanied by a revival in vinyl record sales. While Apple became the second largest retailer of digital music in the United States by 2008, vinyl record sales jumped 36.6% in 2007 and 77% in 2008 as illustrated in Figure 1. One might notice that this is a second surge in vinyl record sales. In the late 1990s, aspiring disk jockeys helped revive vinyl sales temporarily but this dance music fad appears to have transitioned to digital technologies such as laptops, DJ software, and mp3 files. The newest surge is largely rooted in contemporary and classic rock bands. The reissued Beatles record, “Abbey Road,” has been in the top five selling vinyl albums for four of the last five years. Over the same time period, contemporary rock music acts such as Arctic Monkeys, Black Keys, and Mumford & Sons have occupied almost 70% of the top ten selling vinyl albums. Interestingly, pop music stars like Adele and Taylor Swift have begun to dominate vinyl record sales in the past two years likely indicating a recognition of the revenue source by the major record labels of pop music stars.
FIGURE 1. Vinyl record sales by year (in millions)

By the end of data collection in 2013, it became clear that during the nineteen years in question, the field of music retail had shifted significantly. According to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), “the digital music industry grew more than 1,000 percent between 2004 and 2010” (Highbeam 2012) with Apple’s iTunes leading the way with over 10 billion songs downloaded by 2010. However, revenues from recorded music fell more than 30 percent over that same time period. As Figure 2 indicates, the transition in product dominance has shifted from the mid-1990s to today as has the firms that dominate the market. Mass retailers like Wal-Mart sold more physical music than music-only stores, which had become less than a third of all music retailers. Still, by the end of 2011, vinyl sales had exploded to almost $4 million
and continue to rise annually. While still small, vinyl records are a very important share of the music retail market as they are the only category of physical product showing growth. Industry analysts have estimated that as much as two-thirds of vinyl records are being sold at independent record stores (Digital Music News 2012) and store owners have been quick to point out that industry data is based only on those sales tracked by Nielsen Soundscan. Thus the 12% of the market that vinyl records occupy today remains a conservative estimate at best due to smaller record label vinyl releases and used sales that are commonly considered vital to the day-to-day survival of independent record stores.

Figure 3. Percentage of year-end unit sales by organization 1995-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chain Music Retailers</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Retailer</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Record Stores</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Traditional Retail*</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Retail</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-traditional retail sources are those retailers not associated exclusively with music retail. These stores would include lifestyle stores like Hot Topic, drug stores like Walgreens, or online retailers like Overstock.com

*Source: Nielsen Entertainment*
1.4.2 The Value of a Format

At the heart of any music product discussion has always been some debate over the criteria that makes a format valuable. As John Kunz, owner of Waterloo Records in Austin, TX, asserts in *Record Store Days*, "We have these wonderful analog listening devices on the sides of our heads that don’t want to hear zeroes and ones. They want sound waves, a human-size arc.” Indeed, the reproduction of sound waves etched on a vinyl slab as opposed to the digital replication of musical sound in digital recording remains a reoccurring issue with much debate regarding what counts as a valuable feature. Vinyl reproduction is often credited with providing a level of dimension and realism to music, missing in digital replication due to the rate at which the sampling takes place and the types of compression applied to the sounds. This intimacy and warmth is regularly extended to the discussion of imperfections caused by dust or damage over time that produce hisses and pops especially evident in silent or quiet moments on a vinyl record.

While an aural analysis of vinyl recordings and their digital counterparts is beyond the scope of this work, it is important to note that these issues of preference and sound quality are clearly rooted in subjective evaluation. In terms of the creation of sounds, many recording engineers prefer the CD format because of the accuracy in which it can replicate the original. In fact, in some cases, the warmth attributed to vinyl records is a slight distortion of the bass due to signal processing in the recording phase and the quality of the turntable being used. Moreover, due to digital recording hardware and software that is largely standard today, many new vinyl records are little more than a copy of a high quality CD. Advancements in digital recording have been significant since CDs surfaced in 1983, yet audiophiles remain convinced that with the proper sound system only vinyl records can create the illusion of live instrumentation. This suggests that despite components of these sound quality evaluations directed at the production processes, the value of the format may be much more embedded in its consumption.
Accordingly, in a great deal of music format evaluations, one’s rationale eventually leads to the practice of vinyl record consumption. Many argue that in the shift to digital products, music lost some of its romance or appeal. People simply have not interacted with CDs the way they have with vinyl records. Much of the intimacy discussed above can be attributed to the ritual of putting on a new record, vetting the musical statement of the artist(s), and exploring the object itself. As artist Sammy James Jr. of the rock band Mooney Suzuki once stated, “rock ‘n’ roll needs to be seen, touched, smelled, and tasted just as much as heard. I want to unroll the poster, open the gatefold, explore the cover art and the liner notes.” This practice exemplifies what Beckert (2010) describes as an imaginative bridge to the transcendental. The intersection of sound, imagery, and feel in the vinyl record ritual produces a social and contextual link to the artist(s). Such an imaginative link allows the consumer to “participate” in the artist’s style, statement, protest, humor, creativity, and so on.

As Mark Richardson, Editor-in-Chief of Pitchfork online music magazine, wrote in a 2013 Op-Ed piece, over time the disdain for poor mp3 sound quality has been translated into a generalized opinion about digital audio that isn’t entirely accurate. In fact, when CDs hit the market in 1983, their main selling points were not much different than when vinyl LPs replaced shellac records; they offered longer playing time and better sound quality. CDs are seventy-four minutes long thus surpassing original LPs by around 30 minutes. This eliminated the need to “flip sides” and offered new, novel control through skipping or randomizing the tracks on the disk. Perhaps more importantly, CDs offered a range of 96 decibels while LPs were only 70 which provided more volume from recordings. In addition, digital replication made silence completely silent; an impressive dynamic for music consumers use to the hiss and pops of vinyl records. According to Travis Elborough (2009) in his book, *The Vinyl Countdown*, by the end of the 1980s, widespread consensus was that the striking, rigid precision of digital replication did, in fact, sound better.
While Elborough argues that this extreme clarity came with an overall lack of warmth to the sound where “everything appeared a little clinical”, it is important to note that many early CDs were recordings made for vinyl. Thus rather than remastering these works for a digital medium, record companies chose to release products that fell short of the full potential of the format. Regardless, for vinyl record collectors and fans, the physical presentation of CDs would never match the appeal of the LP sleeve. While the artwork was the same, the CD reduced the visual to the size of a postcard and the plastic cases they were housed in cracked and scratched easily. What is more, the digital format made the artist’s work one continuous whole thus rendering the consumer’s engagement with the original sequence of a piece less meaningful. As record companies began to include bonus tracks or “b-sides” to add value to products consumers may have already had on vinyl, the integrity of the artists’ expression was further devalued. In many respects, the value of CDs is lessen by those that prefer the vinyl format because of the new form of music consumption ushered in by the digital convenience of the CD. They not only carried on a tradition of convenience rooted in the cassette revolution of the late 1970s and early 1980s but also established a new level of luxury and modernity appealing to conspicuous consumption.

Around the time most companies stopped the production of vinyl records altogether, there was an increasing commercial interest in compressing media files for various purposes like sending digital sound files over phone lines or fitting video files on CD-ROM disks. In 1988, the Moving Picture Experts Group (MPEG) was commissioned to evaluate various digitization procedures and standardize industry coding practices. Through a series of tests performed with professional engineers, audio companies, and radio stations, the MPEG team standardized a digital audio format that conformed quite well to the music industry standards of the time. The result of this work was the MPEG Audio Layer III (mp3). By 1993, the MPEG team introduced the “.mp3” file extension in commercial applications that coded and decoded audio for internet transfer.
As Johnathan Stern (2012) details in his book, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*, the work of MPEG set in motion a series of critiques that have contributed significantly to the debate over formats we find today. First, a major innovation in their work was layering the digital sounds based on a psycho-acoustic approach that exploits the limitations of human hearing. Often referred to as masking, this approach gave the MPEG team the flexibility to discard sounds people don’t hear and embellish those they do. Thus by further compression of what were now smaller data files, the mp3 standard enabled efficient file sharing via the internet despite significant decrease in the overall sonic quality. Second, these new coding practices were tested on popular music by industry experts. Or, as Stern argues, a small group of audio engineers have ultimately determined what a good recording should sound like. Thus in addition to issues of sound quality, these audio data files were diluted further by catering to specific popular styles of music recording and mastering.

Despite their limitations and clear lack of sound quality, the brief history of the MP3 has proven that in many respects, the majority of people simply do not care. In some sense, the rise of the MP3 is yet another pivotal moment in a history peppered with conflict over the commodification of an art form. Since the early 1920’s, the music industry has been in an ongoing battle with radio, illegal distributors, bootleggers, pirates, and so on over property rights and profit. Technological advancements such as the cassette tape decks, CD burning drives, and file sharing applications continue to make it easier and easier to share music. When the free (or inexpensive) mp3 became readily available through websites like Napster and later iTunes, it is no surprise that consumers chose this format over an $18 CD. In addition, the MP3 and its associated tools have provided unprecedented convenience and closeness to music. Since the advent of the Walkman in 1979, the social demand for having our music with us has exploded. While this closeness may not resemble the intimacy some find in a vinyl record listening ritual, it can certainly
improve a dreadful commute. And while a renewed passion for vinyl records continues to rise, perhaps the debate over format is ultimately an issue of personal consumption practices.

1.4.3 **The Value of Place**

We must also consider the survival of the independent record store as an urban phenomenon where culture and consumption intersect in such a way that allows these small retailers to survive through establishing specialized spaces. In addition to the financial demands of developing and maintaining a successful small business, urban and cultural sociologists have offered a variety of ways to consider how people associate value with the places they come into contact with. As early as 1954, urban scholars were writing about city residents and the valuable relationships they would develop with clerks and other personnel at the places they shop (Stone 1954). In some cases, the strong attachments residents make compel them to talk about these places as “their” store. The associations we make to particular places serve as a source of both individual and cultural identity in order to orient ourselves to the urban landscape in which we operate (Lofland 1998).

We might consider this orientation in two ways. First, urban sociologists have noted the routinized range of activities the urban dweller often voluntarily enforces on her or his daily life. Within this range, repeated exposure to “familiar strangers” or physical objects that make up these daily paths become valuable to us. Where the revitalization of metropolitan real estate has increased property value and standardized the types of places we come across, those surviving small retailers, like independent record stores, bring character to otherwise homogenized retail areas. While this relationship may or may not involve any market interaction, the presence of an independent record store can be a valuable part of the community landscape. Moreover, when local businesses like these retailers close their doors, we may feel a very real sense of loss because of a perceived value added to the community. Second, the character these idiosyncratic places offer can translate into a central hangout or home territory where people feel free to
express themselves. As an outpost for collectors, fans, musicians, artists, tastemakers, and so on, the record store takes on a territorial stake similar to the community connections one might have with a neighbor. In these cases we not only value the place for it simply being there but we value who it brings us in contact with if only in a very informal way.

Urban scholars refer to this person-to-place association as our connection with third places. Oldenburg (1989) originated the concept of the third place to isolate the variety of public places that regularly offer an enjoyable gathering space for people outside of home and work. While his intention was clearly directed at coffee houses, bars, and other public spaces where conversation is a central activity, the independent record store certainly conforms to many attributes of a third place. Specifically, he suggests the value of a third place is in the escape it offers its patrons. We desire a level of stimulation often lacking in our daily lives and these third places offer activity and uncertainty. Independent record stores provide a place where one is surrounded by the familiar and the unknown; where a celebration of history intersects with artists you’ve never seen or heard before. Such novelty and escape also encourages new perspectives afforded by “the collective wisdom of its members” (Oldenburg 1998:50). This collective wisdom derives from fans, “lifers”, collectors, employees, musicians, and so on. Moreover, many store owners and employees regard this wisdom as a more pure, intimate relationship with discovered music that hasn’t been censored or diluted by major record labels and large media corporations.

The extent to which the independent record store serves as a social leveler may be less evident than the other attributes of a third place. Indeed, for every popular reference to the community and bond created with the store and the people, there are always a few references to the surly record store employee “with the patience of a DMV clerk and the ego of a Harvard professor.” And while the casual appeal of the record store space indicates an accessibility less confined by status, the story of the independent record store is not without its pretentious characters. Some have suggested this pretentiousness surfaced in response to changes in the
music industry at the end of the 20th century and is now little more than a relic of traditional or collector stores. Others have conceptualized the attitude projected by specialty stores of this type as an appeal to a “lifestyle” of particular status-seeking demographics (Pettinger 2004, 2010, Williams and Connell 2010). In terms of third places, where membership requirements may be quite modest, a cultural knowledge becomes central to the transition from “newcomer” to “regular” and essential to sustained vitality of the third place.

The 2000 cult film, High Fidelity, exemplifies the harsh treatment many consumers expected from surly clerks at the local independent record store. And while poor customer service and sharp criticism over music selections are common recollections in many accounts of music retail history, some attribute this common characterization to the commercialization of music in the 1990s. Indeed, the succession of corporate interest in the explosion of CD sales seemed to coincide with a narrative about independent record stores consistent with the pretentious attitude. The chain music retailer of the time offered a clean and modern look familiar to the middle-class, mall-going consumer. Inventory included the popular hits of the time as well as DVDs, trinkets, accessories, and band merchandise. As sales increased, so too did the size of chain music retailers resulting in music superstores; a place where you can find everything in a “comfortable, safe and inoffensive” environment (Denver Post 1994). By the end of 1999, most independent record stores were doing just about anything to stay afloat among an overabundance of mass retailers, chain lifestyle stores, and music superstores. The result is best described in this excerpt from Record Store Days:

“Every retailer active in the 1990s says the margins on new products were too small to survive alone on those sales; used CDs, records, and cassettes provided a buffer that allowed chains and independents to keep their doors open. And once the Spice Girls, boy bands, and teen idols hit the charts toward the end of the decade, record stores were suddenly thrust into an arena that was decidedly uncool. It forced independents to not only create an identity, but a separate reality that largely ignored the boom in pop business” (Calamar and Gallo 2009:153)
The separate reality the authors suggest elevated the 1970s quirky, alternative retailer image of stores like Rhino Records in Los Angeles into the familiar, pretentious stereotype depicted in *High Fidelity* and elsewhere. Interestingly, where this “uncool” niche may have forced many independent record stores out of business, it may have saved others. According to Billboard Magazine industry insiders, by the turn of the century, the retail market had become oversaturated with retailers and product without the consumer base to carry the glut. The growth of internet CD sales and file sharing through person-to-person software further complicated the profit potential of digital music formats in the 21st century. By keeping stores relatively small, serving the niche interests of loyal customers, and diversifying products and services when necessary, some stores may have survived the collapse of the brick-and-mortar music retail market because of this outsider position and less-than-desirable image.

The way individual clerks contribute to the meaning of these places and their corresponding products has been emphasized by work scholars through the distinction between aesthetics “of” and the aesthetics “in” an organization (Witz, Warhurst, and Nixon 2003). Where the aesthetics of the organization represent the marketing and design of a firm, aesthetics in the organization refer to how people and spaces contribute to the value consumers place on products (Pettinger 2010). Consumption scholars have argued that such aesthetic, symbolic value situates some retail spaces as sites of identity development (Miller 2006, Zukin 2004, Zukin and Smith Maguire 2004). For example, a firm may enhance its value by connecting somewhat homogenized products, easily attainable at other types of stores or through the internet, to larger cultural meanings that appeal to particular consumer groups (Pettinger 2004, 2010, Williams and Connell 2010).

While most of the research on workplace aesthetics has been done in fashion retail and hospitality industries, its application to music retail is no stretch by any means. Literature on cultural production is replete with reference to the aesthetic requirements for inclusion within a
given subculture (du Gay 1996, Bielby and Bielby 2004, Peterson and Anand 2004, Lena 2012). The music retail environment supports these requirements on two fronts. First, as a connection to the music, these sales jobs are often occupied by aspiring musicians as a source of financial support (Sargent 2009, Lena 2012). Second, the interaction between workers and customers offer a space for sharing, negotiating, and disputing ones status as insiders to a music culture (Grazian 2005, Sargent 2009). In this sense, the independent record store provides opportunity to enhance the consumption of music by connecting the consumer with valuable symbolic meanings (Hennion 2007, Beckert 2011). The ritual practices and social relationships these retailers embody centralize a politics of value within the broader music industry. Indeed their ability to maintain local legitimacy through symbolic work may be the difference between survival and closure in the current market composition.

1.5 Summary of Chapters

This three paper dissertation will begin with a historical analysis of the field of music retail. Paper one (chapter two) starts by recognizing the overall decline of the music retail market. In any market experiencing drastic technological change, we would expect firms beholden to practices or products in decline to eventually fail. The music retail market offers an exciting opportunity to consider the curious survival of independent record stores despite common factors that suggest their extinction some time ago. I argue that these specialist firms have survived due to collaborative efforts within and across networked fields of invested actors. Where these firms were once the standard in the market, major destabilizing events such as mass retailing and technological innovation have thrust the independent record store into a challenger role. Where a difference in capital resources may prohibit the independent record store from direct competitive action against physical and digital mass retailers, the pool of resources that are available to challenger firms draw our attention to collaborative and ideological means of influencing change.
The case presented here details an innovative execution of culturally valuable meanings that explain how independent record store outcomes differ from other failed equivalents.

In paper one (chapter two), I build on strategic action field theory (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012) through an analysis of the actions and perspectives of invested individuals, groups, and organizations within and across networked fields. By conceptualizing the music retail market as a strategic action field, I am able to identify inter-field relationships as central to the legitimation of core cultural symbols and practices across a hierarchy of fields. In a market environment, characterized by competition, it is in these collaborative efforts both within and across fields that legitimate challenges emerge and valuable niches are developed. The cultural relevance of independent record store coalition efforts emerges as central to these legitimation efforts. Therefore, I offer a general typology of strategic action and cultural influence where a more robust cultural concept organizes the social skill of actors in the production and/or reproduction of field dynamics. By centralizing a cultural concept and providing insight into the important role of inter-field alliances in developing legitimacy, I extend strategic action field theory by considering who survives contentious change and why.

Paper two (chapter three) considers the nature of changing organizational identity in light of the collective change uncovered in paper one. Organizations research has shown that the expansion of an organization’s functions or attributes will regularly produce deleterious effects on its social identity. These effects often surface from audience sanctions due to a perceived violation of the core logic of the niche a firm occupies (Mohr and Guerra-Pearson 2010) or disinterest due to low contrast in comparison to other firms (Hannan 2010). Interestingly, independent record stores appear to have maintained who they are despite changes to what they do. Technological and social shifts have forced surviving brick-and-mortar retailers to reassess their market position resulting in a range of strategic efforts from product diversification to new services offered. Yet these new product and service arrangements appear to have little effect on the consistency and
salience of the public notion of an independent record store identity. Rao, Davis, and Ward (2000) attribute an organization’s social identity to the “industry to which they belong, the organizational form they use, and through membership in accrediting bodies” (270). The case of independent record stores problematizes the persistence of robust organizational identity as the industry has changed significantly, product and service strategies appear less focused, and accrediting bodies are in short supply.

I analyze the extent to which the organizational identity of surviving music retail firms has changed in the wake of technological innovation through an examination of how record store identity is articulated in public discourse. Through a multimethod content analysis of industry and media documents, I record the speech acts of a) organizational agents and b) media and industry actors resulting in an articulation of a specific form an organization takes through a reciprocal legitimation of a given social identity. By tracking this discourse over time, I am able to visualize technological change that coincides with new spaces of identity innovation where organizational practices expand. Contrary to our expectations, no perceived violation of what it means to be an independent record store is evident. A coexistence of contemporary authentic domains further supports identity expansion which, I argue, is possible through the bridging role vinyl records have played for surviving retailers. Though the contemporary independent record store differs in important ways from its historical reference, vinyl records broker material and symbolic features of authenticity, focusing the dimensions by which the organizational identity is assessed.

The third paper (chapter four) seeks to explain how independent record store actors understand this collective shift toward a distinctly contemporary organizational identity. In doing so, I offer insight into how firms of all types negotiate dissonance between industry trends and day-to-day market realities. As an intermediary firm, the independent record store takes on the task of maintaining value “between” industry and consumer trends. I argue successful market relevance hinges upon both the cultural aesthetic these intermediary firms embody and the
strategic use of culturally relevant meanings within their field. Together, actors articulate a specific vision of the field to various audiences and, in turn, aim to ascribe value to their firms. By comparing the prevalence of various independent record store understandings in two distinct time periods, I establish changes in the way the field is presented to audiences. Consistent with the change identified in the previous two papers, I introduce the concept of curating value to capture the contemporary approach of independent record stores in a drastically changed market where product and service arrangements have given new meaning to outmoded technologies.

In addition to isolating the store perspective in a project that has, to this point, incorporated a wide range of voices from the public discourse of industry change, this paper draws on economic sociology to analyze how that perspective has negotiated market shifts. I draw specifically from studies of valuation that regularly focus on producers and their processes of differentiation to establish valuable niches corresponding to firm identities (White 1981) and make firms different in the eyes of consumers (Aspers 2010, Boltanski and Thevenot 1991). Valuation studies allow for the potential of innovation in situations of uncertainty like this one. Where some surviving independent record stores may be seen as hearty holdouts, clinging to traditional collector markets, others offer a contemporary, localized vision of their value that re-emphasizes the importance of symbolic criteria in music consumption. Thus a valuation approach incorporates both the dominant cultural meanings that make markets as well as those local and regional visions that can modify markets as they spread through a multiplicity of contexts.

I conclude this project in a final chapter where I revisit general themes of value through the lens of culture and markets to discuss broader issues of organizational embeddedness. To do so brings issues of place, people, and product together through processes of commensuration and evaluative claims of transcendent value. The chapter includes a summary of empirical findings that specifies how strategic collective action and resonant organizational identity claims facilitated a new curation niche in what is now a new music retail market reality. I follow this
summary with a discussion of important theoretical contributions that surface from these findings. The chapter concludes with my thoughts on the implications of both empirical and theoretical contributions and future directions for the study.
2. SURVIVING DECLINE: A FIELD ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGER EMERGENCE AND LEGITIMACY IN CHANGING MARKETS

2.1 Introduction

Music retail is a market in rapid decline. Over the past two decades, total sales have dropped an astonishing 69.3% due to internet technologies and their effect on how people consume music. When significant technological change in any market alters consumer preferences, there isn't much a firm can do. Economists suggest increasing a firm's share of the dwindling market, locating cheaper global markets where the firm may still garner some product or service demand, finding ways to reduce costs, or simply withdrawing before too much money is lost. Unfortunately for those on the wrong side of change, new technologies reorient our understanding of and relationship with older technologies rendering outmoded practices and products unprofitable. Thus in markets experiencing drastic technological change, we expect those firms beholden to practices or products in decline to eventually fail.
In these markets, the largest firms, armed with the necessary material resources, may be able to withstand failure but seldom retain their stature in the market (Hannan and Freeman 1977, Hsu and Hannan 2005). Smaller firms are expected to fail more rapidly due to limited resources, market uncertainty, and decreased demand (Hannan and Freeman 1977). New entrants will come to dominate the relationship with consumers now based on new technologies. For example, the home video retail market grew throughout the 1990s peaking in 2001 at $9.5 billion (Noam 2009). Blockbuster video occupied almost half of the market with its 8,700 stores nationally while small, independent retailers accounted for just more than 35%. Starting in the mid-1990s, internet companies began offering rental services by mail and transitioned to purely digital services by the early 2000s. By 2014, the new market leader, Netflix, reached $5.5 billion in revenues while Blockbuster closed its remaining 300 stores. With major retailers gone and video-on-demand the primary source of home video retail today, some estimate as few as 150 independent video stores left in the US serving extremely specialized, niche markets.

Similarly, the transition to internet technologies in the music retail field has coincided with thousands of music store closures. Brick-and-mortar retailers that comprised as much as 75% of market sales in the mid and late 1990s now represent less than one third of all music retail. For many, the closure of Tower Records in December of 2006 marked a decisive shift in not only the composition of the retail field but, perhaps more importantly, the popular understanding of the music retail market. Indeed, many media accounts of the Tower Records bankruptcy and closure often insisted that this wasn't the end of Tower only, “but the record store culture that Tower embodied.” Mass retailers like Wal-Mart now sell more music than music-only stores though they continue to decrease shelf space dedicated to physical music product. Like the collapse of the home video retail market, changes in technologies and tastes should produce a new market reality relatively void of old products and services.
Instead, the current composition of the music retail market is characteristic of what Carroll and Hannan (2000) have described as a late-stage renaissance, where an increasing prevalence of specialized firms service a multitude of niche tastes while standardized consumption is the domain of a few remaining generalists (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000, Dowd 2004). Unlike the fate of home video retail firms, specialized music retailers have increased their market share while other traditional store types are declining by double digits annually. Thus the smallest and therefore most vulnerable of firms are surviving drastic technological change where we would expect total market failure only slowed by the resilience and resources of larger firms. Some of the specialist survival can be explained by the unprecedented 1250% increase in vinyl record sales since Tower Record’s closure. As much as two-thirds of the sales accounted for during this increase have been credited to independent record stores (Christman 2013). We might also consider the success of initiatives like national Record Store Day where music fans, collectors, and artists celebrate “the unique culture of a record store” while also producing unprecedented sales for participating stores. What is certain is that independent record stores have retained a level of relevance other music retailers could not, defying expectations in a declining market.

In the work that follows, I use the case of independent record stores to consider how challenger firms might exert influence in changing markets. I build on strategic action field theory (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012) by studying the actions and perspectives of invested individuals, groups, and organizations within and across networked fields and detailing how legitimate challenges to the status quo emerge. Where a difference in capital resources may prohibit direct competitive action against dominant field actors, the pool of resources that are available to challenger firms draw our attention to collaborative and ideological means of influencing change through meaning projects. The case presented here details an innovative execution of culturally valuable meanings that explain how independent record store outcomes differ from the independent video store or other failed equivalents. Where increasing vinyl record sales may suggest shifting tastes that smaller specialists have been able to exploit, a field analysis
identifies the active use of meaning that contributes to a contemporary fusion of products, practices, and spaces. In addition, by offering a more systematic explanation of the relationship between strategic action and cultural conditions, my work extends strategic action field theory by identifying how challengers might become legitimized and, therefore, come to command the organizational resources necessary to mobilize and sustain action across related fields.

2.1 Strategic Action Fields

Analyzing an organization or group of organizations from a field approach has become increasingly useful due to common interactions among actors that may or may not reside within the confines of a single market or industry (Anand and Jones 2008). Fields have been conceptualized as the general product of structuration (Giddens 1979), interaction that homogenizes organizational activity (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), competitive systems of social positions where resources are at stake (Bourdieu 1990, 2005), as well as fluid, meso-level social orders dependent upon the definition of relevant, routine situations (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012). Yet across field perspectives, position-based action amid broad social understandings serves as a common link between individual agency and our sense of social stability. Actors express their understanding of a field in question through language (Berger and Luckmann 1967) thus achieving settlement within a field is based on a reciprocal negotiation of the meaning associated with some combination of instrumental and symbolic resources (Berger and Luckmann 1967, Friedland and Alford 1991, Fligstein and McAdam 2012). In markets, where field understandings are oriented toward competitors (White 1981, Fligstein 2001), a field approach can identify how the interests of diffuse actors may overlap, new challengers enter fields, regulatory bodies interject, and so on (Fligstein 2001, Fligstein and McAdam 2012) thus avoiding overly rationalized perspectives of market change.

Fligstein and McAdam’s work to bridge these field approaches through the use of strategic action fields is central to the analysis below. These networks of meso-level social orders are both
connected to and embedded in other fields of varying distance and dependence. Thus the study of strategic action fields over time may uncover changes in trajectory, cycles, or movement back and forth between legitimized meanings based on the types of relationships developed, dismantled, or maintained. Relationships are comprised of various incumbents, challengers, and governance units within or across strategic action fields. Briefly, incumbents are those who maintain some power over other participants and therefore find their interests heavily reflected in the organization of the field. Challengers occupy smaller niches in the field and therefore hold little to no power over its operation. Where challengers interact in the field based on shared understandings, this is not to say that these understandings are consensual. Many times, challengers conform temporarily with an eye for new opportunities to improve their position. Governance units are internal organizations charged with overseeing order within the field. Groups such as trade associations ensure continual reproduction of the field often reinforcing the perspective of incumbents to maintain the status quo. Thus exerting ones power to maintain or achieve a preferential position coincides with the extent to which an individual or group can control not just material resources, but also issues of meaning.

The emphasis on routine interaction that defines strategic action fields narrows their approach compared to previous iterations. Regular interaction and/or acknowledgment that surfaces from common practices separates out actors from proximate fields that are less of a factor in the day-to-day. Yet by centralizing both competition and cooperation as essential to a field analysis, strategic action fields extend the scope of a Bourdieusian approach. This balance is intended to avoid reducing people to positions in a structure through the daily projects of meaning-making. In addition, the strategic capacity (Ganz 2000) of invested incumbents and challengers can empower new meanings that draw on interconnected internal and external contexts. This dynamic between social position and individual strategic ability suggests a myriad of responses to both settled and unsettled periods based on an actor’s access material, symbolic, or some combination of resources (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, McAdam and Scott 2005,
Moreover, the interconnection of fields implies that society is defined by constant, reverberating change where any given actor is involved in a variety of meaning-making projects and identified as incumbent or challenger in different contexts. How actors legitimize events as threat or opportunity among a pool of associated translations and resources will enhance or inhibit their ability to react meaningfully within a strategic action field.

Despite the clear interdisciplinary strength of this methodological and theoretical program at the nexus of organizational, social movement, network, and Bourdieusian approaches, strategic action field theory is not without its critics. Some argue that the social skill Fligstein and McAdam identify as central to strategic action, remains underdeveloped and therefore fails to bridge individual, engaged interactions with broader, often times more complex field concerns (King 2014, Minkoff 2014). A robust cultural concept in the analysis of fields would capture the shared and contested models of and for action that shape and are shaped by discourses and practices (Hess 2012). Similar to earlier critiques of framing (a concept central to the theory during episodes of contention), this line of criticism calls for a greater understanding of how actors articulate action (Jasper 1997) and the multitude of accounts from which this action may derive (Scheff 2005). A second line of critique calls for greater attention to potential variation among incumbent or challenger groups. Specifically, the condition of internal field relations might be more clearly stated through deeper consideration of inter-field alliances and their role in reshaping the incumbent/challenger dynamic (Hess 2012, King 2014). In other words, the role of any actor as incumbent or challenger within a strategic action field requires situating this individual or group in terms of other points of reference (Bourdieu 1993). These points of reference are both other actors and governance units within the strategic action field in question and also actors and events from relevant other fields that constitute the changing context in which legitimate actions emerge.

In response to the former, Fligstein and McAdam rely on social skill to serve as the central link between individual agency and structural change. Drawing heavily on Giddens (1979), the
use of social skill depends upon the ability to recognize one's social position, make sense of the
dynamics of that position, and produce shared meanings. Thus how skilled actors can set the
parameters of discourse so that an account of shared meaning and collective identity, or meaning
project, mobilizes invested others maps how individual agency can produce and/or reproduce
social structures. Social skill is present in the discourse and practice of all invested actors, in even
the most institutionalized of settings. Yet when field rules are particularly uncertain, a wider range
of actors may be more receptive to new meaning projects that offer alternatives to the status quo.
Thus the ability of a socially skilled actor to translate their individual interpretation of field events
into a resonant account of field conditions is central to meso-level mobilization. McInerney argues
that “actors battle within fields to conventionalize their accounts, in the process shaping what
other powerful actors consider legitimate action and the criteria by which legitimacy is judged”
(2008, 1095). These processes often require the explication of error within dominant rules or
traditional practices (Benford and Snow 2000, McAdam and Scott 2005, Polletta 2006). In both
settled and unsettled fields, identifying meaning projects of individuals and groups structures the
social interactions both within and across strategic action fields.

Both incumbents and challengers can organize and reorganize strategies and tactics as they hone
their meaning projects through a pool of available actor interpretations. This includes
developing new identities for themselves and others to move the field in new directions. Yet actors
generally tend toward a “local” stability where dominant cognitive elements and social relations
allow those invested to reproduce what advantages they have (Carroll 1985, Fligstein 2001). Thus
the usual impetus for contentious action stems “less from the competition within the field and more
from how the terms of that competition are altered by events or actors outside the strategic action
field” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 85). These exogenous shocks can alter the relationship
between or among incumbents and challengers by infusing new resources and/or ideas that
improve the strategic position of challengers or by destabilizing the entirety of the field causing
both incumbents and challengers to reconsider their position and assess threat.
It is in this mobilization process that the latter line of critique falls and greater consideration for the relationships across strategic action fields can be accounted. Attention to the relationships that constitute field-level interdependencies can offer a systematic analysis of inter-field relationships. Specifically, consideration of the competitive or cooperative relationships developed across strategic action fields of varying distance and/or dependence can inform how destabilizing events come to jeopardize or enhance actor positions. This is of great importance to all invested actors but may be particularly relevant for our understanding of how challengers become challengers. Social movement scholars have identified the central role collaborative knowledge-sharing can play in legitimizing and innovating across organizations (Hensmans 2003, Edwards and McCarthy 2004, Soule 2012). In this sense, the analysis of collaborative work within and across fields may provide insight into the emergence and legitimation of a challenger position.

I argue the case presented here provides an excellent opportunity to consider the empirical puzzle at hand while building on the theory of strategic action fields in important ways. As detailed in previous works (Blanc and Huault 2014, Hendricks 2015), the music industry is particularly attractive for understanding the role of change and culture due to the nature of value that seems somewhat separate from its physical form and clearly socially constructed (Aspers and Beckert 2011). Moreover, in the changing music retail market, the role of culture in discourse and action plays a much more prominent role as previously settled understandings give way to competing meaning projects that contend for new social positions in an uncertain environment (Swidler 1986). In addition, the network of various strategic action fields within the music industry provides an opportunity to consider inter-field relationships more specifically. Fligstein and McAdam (2012) acknowledge the crucial role of external field relations yet realize the challenge of detailing the dynamics of multiple strategic action fields. I focus on the role of challengers within the music retail strategic action field, aware of the mix of exogenous shocks and internal processes that precipitate crises. My approach brings culture in context into a strategic action field analysis through the emergence and legitimation of challenger meanings.
To this point, the theory of strategic action fields has been received as overly concerned with the historical development of field-level interdependencies and therefore, somewhat void of the strategic action intended to link agency and structure. From this perspective, the new market reality in music retail would be characterized as the aftermath of a drastic technological shift that destabilized the entirety of the field. Like the home video retailers earlier, both incumbents and challengers are forced to reconsider their position in a rapidly declining market. Such an account fails to answer crucial questions regarding who survives and why. The material resources available to many larger music retail chains should suggest a greater ability to adapt in the wake of change (Hannan and Freeman 1977, Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Yet the social skill that facilitates independent record store coalition development and, ultimately, collaborative efforts across dependent strategic action fields does not rest solely on instrumental means. Instead, vital cultural meanings connect structurally equivalent actors once they are strategically framed in such a way as to fit pre-existing, shared beliefs (Soule 2004). I argue that the analytical narrative of destabilization and response that follows extends the theoretical project Fligstein and McAdam have set by illustrating how cultural factors and inter-field relationships allow independent record store coalitions to emerge as a legitimate challenger and survive in a declining market.

2.3 Data and Methods

The single most daunting challenge of constructing an analytical narrative of the music retail industry as a strategic action field was identifying and accumulating data that a) offered insight into the factors and processes that precipitated crises, b) gave a voice to challengers whose interests are often overlooked in historical accounts, and c) draws on multiple sources in order to “triangulate” different perspectives on the interactions that lead to settlement (Lustick 1996, Tarrow 1995). With these issues in mind, the work that follows utilizes a systematic, purposive sample of media and industry news archives. Through an accumulation of news reports, subjective criticism, and industry analysis, realistic accounts of field dynamics in context
surface. These accounts avoid the potential inaccuracies of memory or bias as they are the historical record of the media; the dominant American taste-making and identity-forming institution (Mantsios 2014). Yet they also illustrate the power of discourse where popular meanings and practices fortify themselves over time but are also modified through ongoing debate (Latour 1987).

In this section, I will detail the acquisition of the data set, coding, and follow-up work I did to identify both field-level interdependencies and strategic collaborative action rooted in the social skill of invested actors.

A descriptive study of change among related local, regional, and national organizations on a national scale requires a multipronged sampling approach in order to minimize error and accurately represent the organizational population (Bail 2012). I therefore employed three sources to produce a data set of 1,553 relevant documents that represent the US discourse of the music retail strategic action field from 1993-2008. I chose this fifteen-year period for multiple reasons. First, after examining the conventional account of music retail, I determined that an accurate analysis of field crisis required greater consideration for the destabilizing events and internal processes that predate the inaugural Record Store Day (April 2008). Second, after careful consideration, I determined that the conditions that led to early attributions of threat and subsequent innovative action were well established by the mid-1990s. Finally, as Fligstein and McAdam (2012) assert, fields are characterized by “constant low-level contention and incremental change” (12) rather than the massive shocks that set entirely new courses. While the image of drastic change requiring immediate action is a familiar media trope, in order to detail the factors that contributed to some retailer’s survival, I needed to trace specific inter-field relationships back to the rise of mass retail music sales. I used the search phrase “independent record store or music retail” (82% precision) after a series of open searches purposefully designed to capture those stories most relevant to the research question while minimizing the “noise” associated with internet searches (Stryker 2006).
I first used the designed search phrase in a LexisNexis search of major US newspapers to gather articles about US music retail markets across the country (Bail 2012). All of the US newspapers used are among the top one hundred according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (2014). Because of my specific concern with industry understandings, I collected a second sample of industry media sources. These industry sources incorporate an emphasis on insider information and issues deemed most relevant to industry actors (Hoffman 1999). I included a third sample of alternative weekly newspapers to provide additional localized perspectives and guarantee a greater balance between incumbent and challenger voices throughout the target population. Alternative weeklies offer an exciting thread to the fabric of the sample because of their “strong focus on local news, culture and the arts” as well as their “eagerness to report on issues and communities that many mainstream media outlets ignore” (Association of Alternative News Media 2012). The alternative weeklies included were selected systematically based on a composite score that considered circulation, region, independent record stores per-capita, and national recognition of local record stores based on multiple “best of” lists. Following data collection, each document was vetted for validity in terms of the research question resulting in a wide range of industry voices from both local and national perspectives.

The use of archived sources and industry-specific documents have proven effective for tracing field changes and organizational understandings (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005, Mohr and Guerra-Pearson 2010) as well as actor critiques and justifications of salient situations (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999, Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Further, individuals have become increasingly accustomed to interpreting and presenting messages and perspectives through media formats (Gamson et al. 1992, Altheide 1996, Altheide and Schneider 2013). That being said, the media tendency to emphasize individual heroics in moments of crisis (Bulman 2013) compelled me to follow up with some of the actors identified in the data in order to corroborate stories and offer additional information. The resulting eight informants were contacted via email and offered additional information through email, telephone interview, or additional documents.
they believed would be of use to me. Telephone interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour and emailed questions were regularly returned within one week. Follow-up questions were asked via email out of respect for the schedules of those involved. The questions each informant was asked varied based on their role in the field and all responses were compared to the document analysis, additional internet searches, and the responses form other relevant informants. Table III lists the informant that, with the datat sources listed in Table I, comprise the finalized database for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFORMANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Bunnell: Director, Coalition of Independent Music Stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Burkett: Owner, The Sound Garden. Baltimore, MD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Currier: Owner, Music Millennium. Portland, OR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Kunz: Owner, Waterloo Records. Austin, TX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Kurtz: Director, Record Store Day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Levin: Owner, Criminal Records. Atlanta, GA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don Rosenberg: Founder, Music Monitor Network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I utilized an ethnographic content analysis approach (ECA) when coding the document data. Such an approach offers the quantitative emphasis of structured data collection in association with descriptive information which informs the context in which meanings emerge (Altheide and Schneider 2013). Using Atlas.ti, data segments were coded by time period, geographic region, actor type, and first order topics like those indicated in Table IV. I utilized an
iterative coding and memoing approach with the informant’s emails and phone interviews (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, Lofland and Lofland 1995) drawing on the early set of codes from the ECA. As interactive dynamics surfaced from the compiled data, I wrote theoretical and empirical memos to further develop ideas. These memos led to the organization and development of major first order topics into second order themes. I carefully refined these groupings and related themes by returning to the data as new questions arose and sharpening the contours of subsequent memos. As a result, a detailed analysis of strategic action field dimensions illustrates how challenger survival required innovative action across a network of invested actors. The subsequent processes of legitimating these culturally meaningful actions to the broader industry brings diffuse interests across various strategic action fields into the analysis.

2.4 Field Development

My conceptualization of strategic action fields in the case of the music industry relies on market interactions to determine who is and who is not a member. Thus my primary strategic action field of interest will be the music retail market that includes independent record stores, regional and national chain stores, mass retailers, online retailers, and non-traditional music retailers. While the changing cast of firms that occupy these categories will be detailed throughout the analysis, it is the way that firms routinely take each other into account and the consumer sales at stake that define the field. Other proximate strategic action fields that will be regularly discussed include music distributors, recording artists, and record labels. These fields vary in their level of dependence with one another based on the social position of a given actor within their primary field. Many distributors and smaller, independent record labels operate in a cooperative, reciprocal fashion with music retailers and in some cases are quite dependent upon the product orders of the larger music retailers. Yet for the most part, these proximate fields are embedded within a hierarchical field structure, dependent upon the major record labels who control many major recording artists, mass distribution, large-scale manufacturing, and so on.
TABLE IV

DATA STRUCTURE: EMERGENCE OF FIELD DIMENSIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Order Topics</th>
<th>2nd Order Themes</th>
<th>Strategic Action Field Dimensions*</th>
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<tr>
<td>A. Development of the music superstore</td>
<td>1. Market Saturation</td>
<td>Destabilization: Price Wars</td>
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<td>B. Aggressive Expansion</td>
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<td>C. Mass retailers enter the field</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Pricing</td>
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<td>A. CD markup resulted in lower gross margins</td>
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<td>B. Predatory pricing</td>
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<td>C. MAP policies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. The Value of Music</td>
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<td>A. Resale programs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Distributors cut advertising dollars</td>
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<td>C. FTC investigation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. Emergence</td>
<td>Response: Coalition Formation</td>
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<td>A. Letter Circulation</td>
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<td>B. Garth Brooks Barbeque for Retail Freedom</td>
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<td>C. The Music Monitor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Legitimacy</td>
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<td>A. CIMS: Fusing advocacy and marketing</td>
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<td>B. MMN: Deploying promotions across chain stores</td>
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<td>C. AIMS: In tune with newest trends</td>
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<td>1. Restrictions</td>
<td>Destabilization: Internet Revolution</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Digital Millennium Copyright Act</td>
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<td>B. Secure Digital Music Initiative</td>
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<td>C. RIAA lawsuits</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Technological Innovation</td>
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<td>A. Napster and P2P file exchange</td>
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<td>B. iPod</td>
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<td>C. iTunes store</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Value of Ownership</td>
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<td>A. CD burning and sharing</td>
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<td>B. An informal MP3 economy</td>
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<td>C. Demand for new internet and single-song options</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. Restatement of interests and issues</td>
<td>Response: Exclusive Content</td>
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<td>A. Deluxe edition CDs devalued “standard” product</td>
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<td>B. Adjusting to changing industry</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Joint annual conventions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Inter-field Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. “Weird” campaigns</td>
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<td>B. Junketboy</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Exclusive EP releases</td>
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<tr>
<td>D. WEA digital download stores</td>
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*These stages connect to the four stages highlighted in Figure 3
At the onset of the analysis below, there were six major record labels and by 2008, there were four. The competition and collaboration among these firms makes up an entirely different field of strategic action yet these changes contribute to the routine, rolling turbulence of music retail and other proximate fields. In addition, their dominance atop a broader hierarchy of fields (i.e. the music industry) is often seen in the actions of governance units that work to reinforce the status quo through lobbying state fields, investing in new technology fields, and indicting challengers. While most often conceptualized as a resource (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000), consumers can also play a role in balancing the influence of dominant market actors and governance units through consumption. Thus incumbents and challengers compete only inasmuch as finding and sustaining their field position requires, given the environment of discerning buyers. The work that follows aims to isolate particularly salient actions by major record labels and other high order fields that play a significant role in the material and symbolic shocks to the music retail field. Figure 3 provides an overview of destabilizing periods (price wars and the internet revolution) that initiate a series of response dynamics (coalition formation and exclusive content respectfully). The figure also includes select market indicators to offer a sense of independent record store field position. By initiating the analysis 15 years before the current organization of the field, I can more clearly explain the origin of field changes as well as the social skill that facilitated innovative execution of culturally valuable actions culminating in Record Store Day.

2.4.1 Destabilizing Changes

The primary implication of the interdependent fields described above is that the actions in one field regularly produce some effect on all proximate fields. And while most actions that produce turbulence in other fields do not destabilize them, some events are of great significance throughout a network of fields and endanger stability. Thus the nature of the incumbent/challenger relationship suggests that most issues between these groups will not threaten the superior
position of incumbents even if challengers are able to achieve some minimal improvement. To this end, the descriptions of both destabilizing periods here will cover not only those salient events that set off highly contingent processes of mobilization but also various attributions of threat and opportunity. These attributions initiate a series of evaluations where competing meaning projects vie for coherence in the field. During these unsettled times, those who align material and symbolic resources most skillfully are able to control action in the short-term (Swidler 1986). As I will detail below, these efforts at field control illustrate the power of new relationships across fields and the dynamic nature of the incumbent/challenger relationship within fields.

2.4.1.1 D1: The Price Wars

For the music retail industry, the 1990s was a decade of compact discs (CDs). Released in the United States in the mid-1980s, CDs originally sold for as much as $22 per disc but quickly fell to around $14. With a $10 wholesale price, music retailers had been use to higher gross margins with vinyl records and cassettes but the growing popularity of the format made the transition a profitable one. As sales continued to rise at over 10 percent per year through much of the 1990s, chains like Musicland, Tower Records, and others looked to capitalize through aggressive expansion vaulting a class of “music superstores” into a dominant position in the field. Recognizing the seemingly endless demand for CDs, discount warehouses and national consumer electronics chains (“mass retailers”), like Wal-Mart and Circuit City respectively, used their massive buying power to enter the market and purchase CDs in bulk. But unlike music retailers, who relied almost exclusively on the profits from music, mass retailers profited from other, more expensive items like electronics and home appliances. And because of the bulk purchases made from major record label distributors, mass retailers were able to mark CDs as much as two or three dollars below standard retail prices. By selling CDs for little or no profit, or in some cases accepting a loss on the entire product line, mass retailers were able utilize the high consumer demand for CDs to lure consumers into their stores.
Figure 3. U.S. music retail field and select market indicators: 1993-2015
This strategy, known as “loss leader” or “predatory” pricing, made competition virtually impossible and relegated most all types of music retailers to a challenger position in the field. Both large and small music retailers called on major record labels to decrease the manufacturing markup that left some titles as expensive as $18-20 at retail. Mass retailers offered consumers newly released albums as low as $8.99. These huge discrepancies across titles not only increase consumer frustration but raised new issues over the value of music. Major record label distributors responded to a war over pricing through an enforcement policy called minimum advertised pricing provisions (MAPs). These provisions declared that stores that undercut a given price would no longer receive regular advertising support from distributors. Because these advertising dollars often supplemented the loss mass retailers were taking, the price war subsided temporarily. However, rumored backdoor dealings and policy loopholes that allowed mass retailers to continue much of the same practices soon surfaced. As a result, the relationship between many music retailers and major record label distribution eroded significantly. The threat posed by the rapid ascent of mass retailers in the music retail field threatened all types of music-only retailers and forced many regional chains and independent stores to look for other revenue streams.

Many began decreasing the quantity of music they carried in favor of movies or lifestyle items such as clothing and artist merchandise. Some regional chain retailers took a page from the independent record stores and instituted resale programs to bolster sales. While selling used CDs had been a fairly common practice in smaller stores, when Massachusetts-based Strawberries, Texas-based Hastings, and California-based Wherehouse music chains decided to implement resale programs, the major label distributors began to notice. Distributors argued that the retailers were diminishing the value of music yet retailers stood firm. Conflicting meaning projects regarding the value of a CD, what constitutes ownership, and consumer tastes culminated in three of the major distribution firms cutting off advertising dollars to any store that sold used CDs. The conflict hit a fevered pitch when country music star Garth Brooks announced that his new album would not be sold at retailers who sold used CDs.
Because many of the distributors and retailers were represented nationally by the same professional association, the National Association of Retail Merchandisers, retailer responses to distributor actions took new forms. Initially, Wherehouse music filed a federal lawsuit charging the major labels with conspiracy and unfair trade practices. Shortly after, the newly formed Independent Music Retailers Association, representing 200 smaller stores, followed with a multimillion-dollar class-action suit. The distributors would back off their position but not before the conflict caught the attention of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and resulted in what would be the first of a series of investigations into the policies and practices involved in music distribution and sale. At the conclusion of a 1997 FTC investigation, MAPs were linked to artificially inflated wholesale prices that caused consumer to spend an additional $480 million on CDs (Elahi 2001). While both distributors and retailers denied any wrongdoing, federal charges were settled out of court and the predatory pricing strategies that had initiated these policies years earlier continued, without a legitimate challenge, into the new millennium.

2.4.1.2 D2: The Internet Revolution

Despite some major label executives and industry representatives publicly acknowledging the rapid momentum of internet technology, early consensus was that the personal computer was little more than a tool of convenience. Many saw recordable compact discs (CD-R) and CD burning hardware as a new revenue stream, similar to cassette recorders, that would "lead to a second coming for the CD format and expand the universe of CD's sold" and industry leaders primarily focused on legislating the use of new digital technologies. In 1998 the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) was passed by Congress to emphasize royalties and accountability from satellite and internet radio and the Secure Digital Music Initiative (SDMI) was founded to secure the distribution and storage of digital music. As the century closed, home computers and internet technologies were improving rapidly yet incumbents from the highest level strategic action fields
within the music industry appeared determined to restrict the ability of consumers to fully realize their power.

In 1998, a 19-year-old Boston University college student launched Napster, the first person-to-person (P2P) MP3 file exchange program. While the MP3 music file format and the ability to download music via the internet had been available for some time, many of these systems were inefficient. Napster streamlined storage and selection issues by allowing users to locate and access music files through a network of other users' hard drives. And as the Napster network grew so too did availability. Rapid popularity of Napster quickly drew the attention of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) resulting in the first of a variety of copyright infringement lawsuits starting in December, 1999. Unlike other cases of copyright infringement, the Napster model further complicated the meaning of ownership. Because the Napster servers didn't hold any of the music shared, the firm claimed no wrongdoing; they simply connected people with common music interests. Moreover, because MP3 copies of legally purchased CDs could easily be made on most home computers, Napster and its supporters argued that sharing on the internet wasn't a crime at all.

By late 2000, the heavy metal band Metallica hired a consulting firm that identified 335,435 people who were offering Metallica music on Napster. In Accordance with the DMCA, those in violation of copyright laws were banned from the service and while approximately 30,000 users did appeal, most people likely moved on to other web technologies. As the Sanford C. Bernstein & Co. Investment Research Group accurately predicted at the time, the little traction gained through lawsuits against Napster and others would not stop an onslaught of newer services with even more efficient music-sharing technologies. Moreover, litigation against individual music consumers only alienated musicians and record labels from their fans. While some artists, like singer/pianist Tori Amos and hip-hop artists Public Enemy, attempted to embrace the internet and released albums for sale online, the poor returns on these strategies suggested that downloading
was not a viable business strategy. However, some industry analysts criticized the major record labels for ignoring what legal downloading was happening and waiting on the adoption of anti-piracy standards before releasing their entire catalogs and providing the impetus for charts. By failing to take control of downloading early on, the major record labels and their associated governance units facilitated the continued development of an informal MP3 economy.

Napster’s effect on music retail was irreversible and brought a variety of interconnected issues to light (McCourt and Burkhart 2003). Most importantly, the mass of titles available through services like Napster proved that consumers were interested in seeking out and downloading music online. Of course, it was free and that was certainly a major allure but the massive variety also facilitated discovery. Napster eliminated the high shipping costs, limited selection, and technological limitations that once dissuaded consumers from discovering new music online. Additionally, Napster proved that consumers often wanted single song options as illustrated in the fan comments below:

“The music industry forces [consumers] to buy $15 to $20 CDs for one or two decent songs. I like the internet not because I want to steal music but because I want to download singles. The day I can download the songs I want from a website for a few dollars while giving the artists and record company their share of the cut is the day I’ll wipe Napster from my hard drive.”

Yet despite a consumer demand for new internet and single-song options, industry responses only increased the proclivity of illegal downloading practices. For example, SDMI-inspired technologies limited the transferability of some files which meant that some of the music sold online could not be copied to a CD-R and therefore could only be listened to on the computer in which it was downloaded. This loss of portability became a major sticking point with consumers as questions surfaced regarding the value of individual files in a restricted form.

In 2001, Apple computers introduced a new portable music player that would further define the destabilization of the period. The original iPod was superbly designed but very expensive;
considered an amazing piece of hardware but only for Macintosh users. Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple, dismissed any concerns over the limited market arguing that as consumers were exposed to the iPod’s technological innovations (larger storage, longer battery life, and so on), they would buy Macintosh computers in order to use the device. Indeed, the market for the iPod grew much more quickly than industry experts had predicted however the windows-friendly second generation contributed to its rapid growth. But perhaps most importantly, the iPod utilized the MP3 file format preferred by consumers. Despite concerns from major record labels, Apple argued that the iPod would not be used for illegally transferring files to other computers because it only uploaded music from the user’s personal computer. By taking this position, Apple deflected industry concerns with internet file sharing while avoiding the consumer backlash of SDMI technologies.

By 2003, “the number of web pages and peer-to-peer applications devoted to file sharing had increased 300 percent from 2001 levels” (Highbeam 2012). At the same time, RIAA lawsuits became increasingly focused on individual consumers. While drawing on the success of the iPod, the launch of the iTunes store in 2003 benefitted greatly from consumer perceptions of threat brought on by the RIAA. Where most music downloading sites had failed, Apple succeeded by incorporating a retail interface into the cataloging software for the iPod. In other words, all of the consumers using iPods were already using iTunes to upload music to the device. The store feature gave consumers a simple, legal solution for downloading music integrated into their existing music technology. iTunes recorded over 20 million legal downloads in its first eight months of operation and by 2006, had gained 88% of the U.S. legal downloading market share. Like the mass retailers discussed earlier, Apple’s success was not reliant upon music sales as a primary profit source. The success of the iPod and rapid growth of the iTunes store forced reluctant major record labels to tolerate the MP3 format and a 99-cents-per-song business model.

2.4.1.3 A Crisis of Value
In many ways, the entrance of mass retailers into the music retail strategic action field set off a crisis of value. The CD ushered in a new era of convenience rooted in the cassette revolution of the late 1970s but in a distinctly modern format. The format’s popularity knew no market limit as proven time and again by price increases and a saturation of music retail firms. The ability of mass retailers to buy in bulk and sell under cost permanently destabilized field relationships and quickly elevated these new entrants into an incumbent position in the music retail field. While major record labels enjoyed unprecedented market value, the overcrowded retail market forced firms to reassess their position and restate their value in a changing field. The ensuing contention compelled distributors to restrict resources to retail field challengers ultimately prompting legal action from newly-formed challenger alliances and frustration from consumers. Indeed, following the FTC settlement referenced above, forty-two states and three US territories filed suit against the distributors and a number of retailers claiming injuries caused by MAP anti-competition tactics (Elahi 2001).

Aside from the changing forms of consumption that define technological shifts of the new millennium, the advancement of personal computing allowed consumers to reject market definitions of music value. Attributions of threat by record label incumbents led to a reinforcement of legal definitions that had been complicated by new cultural understandings of ownership. Litigation and investment in restrictive digital music technologies further alienated consumers and devalued online products. The emergence and success of Apple’s iTunes is a testament to such a conclusion. By offering a reasonably priced, single-download model in the popular MP3 format, Apple avoided the consumer backlash from SDMI technologies as well as recording industry lawsuits. Though these destabilizing periods appear to be at opposite ends of a market spectrum, the cumulative effect of these unsettled issues of value rendered new ideas and courses of action imperative. Where some firms continue to approach the music retail field in terms of price competition, the socially skilled challengers identified below quickly recognize alternatives. New
definitions of value emerge that capitalize on the cultural relevance of the independent music retailer and resonate with interdependent others in proximate fields.

2.4.2 Innovative Collective Action

Implicit throughout the previous section is the central role of actor responses in setting change in motion. Had it not been for the profit motive of major record labels or innovative approach of Apple computers, the outcomes of mass retail and technological advancement would certainly have developed differently. Yet these destabilizing initiatives leave the impression that price competition is the only relevant criteria by which actors evaluated the field. The small, specialist retailers, least able to compete on price, occupy approximately 12% of current physical music product sales suggesting an emergence of alternative criteria in response to destabilizing changes. Below, I detail challenger attributions of threat and opportunity that shaped new meanings among independent record store owners in common circumstances. As a result of new coalition formation, independent record stores appropriated new meanings and tactics collectively and redefined the value of their stores in innovative ways. Over time, sporadic collaboration across major coalitions increased interaction and communication which further articulated this foundation of common interests. These collaborative efforts reinforced the value of independent record stores among many artists, record labels, and distributors which all but ensured the adoption of national Record Store Day. Where price competition and claims-making to governance units and proximate fields offered no respite from market collapse, their collective articulation of alternative criteria called on the discerning consumer to re-establish the niche value of these culturally relevant actors.

2.4.2.1 R1: Coalition Formation

At the onset of the price wars of the mid 1990s, many small chain and independent music retailers found their interests were not being voiced in the market. While some professional associations were in place that lobbied for music retail interests and offered general benefits to
members, the price wars brought their role as governance units to light. As discussed above, some retailers formed new advocacy groups to take legal action in the resale controversy. Terry Currier, owner of Portland’s Music Millennium, chose to engage the major record labels and trade publications directly by publishing a three-page letter that advocated for the rights of all stores to sell what they wanted without interference from the industry. According to Currier, discussions with industry incumbents were not progressing but his letter was circulating and resonated strongly with independent retailers nationally. He put together an event called the “Garth Brooks Barbeque for Retail Freedom” that brought the concerns of independent retailers to the attention of local media by barbequing Garth Brooks products in his store’s parking lot. The success of the event spawned a west coast record store tour complete with merchandise and media coverage of the barbeques. According to Currier, the tour opened his eyes to the extent that his interpretation of threat was shared across independent record store owners.

Following the tour, Currier wrote another letter; this time to Mark Cope, the retail editor for the trade magazine *Album Network*. Considering *Album Network*’s regular interaction with stores across the country, Currier outlined the formation of a support group for independent record stores. Based on Cope’s recommendations, they invited about thirty stores to San Francisco in 1995 to discuss whether there was enough common ground to establish such a group. The resulting Coalition of Independent Music Stores (CIMS) sought to both share best practices and develop innovative marketing strategies for member retailers. On one hand, existing professional organizations focused on advocacy but had been exposed as enforcers of the status quo. On the other hand, distributors often relied on the taste-making reputation of independent record stores to market new artists. CIMS is largely recognized as the first of a new brand of hybrid coalitions to fuse advocacy and marketing. They have been credited with helping stores improve their negotiating with landlords, fighting for better terms with distributors, lobbying record labels for access to exclusive products, and enhancing store relationships with their local music scene. They also improved the marketing efforts of member stores through a national pricing and
positioning program that saved record labels the time and effort of coordinating with each store separately.

The work of CIMS was immediately appealing to many independent record stores across the country. But many CIMS members were concerned that growing too large, too quickly would compromise the coalition’s effectiveness. They began to favor the more “established,” “full-service” stores that provide a wide array of music and were most likely to have pre-existing ties to larger distributors. In response to these criteria, a group of small, regional chains launched a second coalition called the Music Monitor Network (MMN) later in 1995. The relationship between these chains started in 1990 with a popular flier that listed new releases for a Record Exchange chain in North Carolina. Owner, Don Rosenberg, quickly expanded the flier into a regional magazine through a combination of record label advertising dollars and a growing subscription service that soon became its own revenue stream. Like the “Garth Brooks Barbeque for Retail Freedom,” the magazine, called the Music Monitor, connected independent retailers over common interests and struggles. But unlike CIMS, Rosenberg focused on small chain stores as the foundation of the MMN which allowed the organization of tour support, in-store performances, and other initiatives by coordinating with the heads of each chain. Thus by approaching the record labels as a unified coalition, the MMN could make quick decisions to deploy promotions across a network of chain stores.

In 2003, Eric Levin, owner of Criminal Records in Atlanta, started a third notable coalition called the Alliance of Independent Media Stores (AIMS). According to Levin, AIMS was started to support a class of retailer that did not fit the “small chain” model of the MMN or established enough to join CIMS. Launching similar marketing and promotion programs through their network of “indiest-of-indie” stores, AIMS has been credited with being much more in tune with the newest trends and early exposure to the potential of a vinyl record resurgence. Together, these three coalitions exemplify the networking and knowledge-sharing benefits of organizational
collaboration identified by Soule (2012) and others. By developing cooperative marketing programs, the coalitions have been able to secure and distribute advertising resources to their members in a way that also benefits participating record labels and artists. Much of this work has utilized traditional independent record store tactics that have been in place for decades, yet the capacity of coalition programs reinforced their cultural legitimacy as taste-makers with artists, music managers, and record labels.

2.4.2.2 R2: Exclusive Content

The music industry experienced a slowdown in the early 2000s as the initial CD boom closed and new technologies gained momentum. Many industry experts would later reflect on this time as the opportune moment for the major record labels to fix the broken relationship with the retail field. Instead, a series of questionable decisions left “a lot of unhappy customers, who blamed retailers… for the dearth of singles and the high prices.” For some time, the major record labels had been phasing out the single as a format and critics point out that many of the pop music stars of the late 1990s and early 2000s based their success on single songs. Together, these factors forced fans of a single song to purchase the full-length CD. The single was also a product where b-side or live recordings might find their way into a music fan’s collection. Eliminating this product line coincided with the introduction of deluxe edition CDs that included these extra recordings along with DVDs and new artwork at a healthy markup. Promoted as something special for fans, the independent record store coalitions argued that these new editions required consumers to buy a product that mostly contained music they already had. In addition, major record labels began regularly releasing these special editions by major artists exclusively through the incumbent mass retailers. CIMS argued these practices further devalued the “standard” product and lobbied to get bonus recordings and DVDs released separately. Other retailers argued these decisions pushed more and more music consumers to CD burning and P2P technologies.
As new technologies began to dominate music consumption, the leaders of the coalitions urged their members to “adjust to the changing music industry” by finding “niches... the internet can’t threaten.” One such adjustment came out of a battle to keep the national chain, Borders Books and Music out of the Austin, Texas area. The response by local businesses (including CIMS member Waterloo Records) to the city’s attempt to subsidize construction resulted in the “Keep Austin Weird” campaign; a program designed to increase awareness and support for local businesses. Waterloo Records owner, John Kunz, shared this strategy with CIMS members resulting in a series of “Weird” campaigns that reinforced the importance of local business; including the neighborhood record shop. A second tactic surfaced in direct response to the exclusive release of special edition products at mass retailers. CIMS launched Junketboy (now called Think Indie) distribution in 1999 to develop their own releases for sale through independent record stores only. The distribution arm initially sold product to CIMS and MMN members and later AIMS members but eventually opened up to all independent record stores. In addition, Think Indie put CIMS in direct, regular contact with many more artists, music managers, and smaller records labels.

Two years after the launch of Think Indie, the MMN confronted Interscope Records after an exclusive Best Buy pre-release of a live DVD from the rock band U2 and demanded their own exclusive release. Interscope agreed to ask the rock band, Weezer, for a collection of b-side recordings. To the delight of the MMN, Weezer chose to create a new live recording with new artwork and packaging that would be limited to 25,000 copies as a response “to the labels doing EPs with other artists that are only available at say Best Buy or Kmart, Wal Mart, etc.” To ensure the success of Weezer’s, Lion and the Witch EP, Michael Kurtz, then president of the MMN, opened the sale to both MMN and CIMS. Not only was the release a huge success for the coalitions, other non-coalition stores expressed interest in participating in future initiatives. In 2005, the coalitions involved other independent retailers in the sale of Regina Spektor’s Live at Bull Moose EP which was promoted as a special “thank you” to fans. Like Think Indie, this tactic
not only turned special edition exclusives against the mass retailers but it also embraced traditional strengths of the independent record store model; the underground collectability of limited releases, the live performance, and the focus on fans.

Near the end of this exclusive content response period, a third collaborative response came in the form of joint annual conventions. The coalitions had regularly held conventions to share ideas, talk music, and acknowledge the social camaraderie among independent record stores; an event to refine and reinforce record store culture. John Kunz of Waterloo Records, a founding CIMS member, recalled that at the New York Gift Show in 2005, the coalitions began to discuss the practical benefits of holding joint annual conventions; “It was just a way to be more efficient with everybody's time, traveling, budgets, et cetera, all that sort of thing… and again some of the projects where [record labels] were probably looking to do both [conferences] and yet to work with both coalitions, or three coalitions” (Kunz 2015). According to Kurtz, in both 2006 and 2007, joint annual conventions were held. The second of these joint efforts was the Noise in the Basement Convention where representatives from all three major coalitions worked out the initial strategy for the inaugural Record Store Day. In what would turn out to be the ideal cultural vehicle, the strategy for Record Store day drew on media, artist, purist, and “real fan” understandings of music collection rituals and the community that record stores had embodied for years.

2.4.2.3 Emergence, Legitimacy, and Inter-field Relationships

The emergence and development of independent record store coalitions in response to a series of destabilizing events illustrates the central role knowledge-sharing can play in legitimizing and innovating across organizations (Edwards and McCarthy 2004, Soule 2012). In response period one, legitimate strategic action emerges from the social skill of individual actors who recognize threat/opportunity in response to destabilization and make sense of the independent record store position through their interactions with similar others. Where the entrance of mass
retailers into the field had already compromised traditional relationships, the conflict over used media sales made many small retailers much more receptive to new ideas and courses of action. In both cases, the sharing of stories, experiences, beliefs, and so on served as the impetus for shared meaning projects. The initial meeting that would result in the creation of CIMS drew heavily on the ideological position of independent record stores as expert, customer-oriented, taste-making organizations. This cultural framework established new strategic action (Swidler 1986) through marketing campaigns that utilized the strengths of independent record stores on a scale that appealed to record labels, distributors, music managers, and artists. The cultural relevance of the record store not only facilitated the translation of individual interpretations into a resonant account of field conditions but also enabled connected organizations to operate in concert therefore increasing the inter-field legitimacy of their claims through their programming.

By response period two, changing technologies prompted a restatement of interests and issues (Anand and Jones 2008) that would establish a broader network of tactics and resources rooted in shared meaning projects across coalitions. This was not a linear process as the initial development of the coalitions produced some competitive friction between CIMS and MMN. Perhaps because of the exclusionary practices of CIMS, some MMN participants initially saw the CIMS coalition as untrustworthy. CIMS participants often made distinctions between the taste-maker persona of their stores and the mainstream market persona of MMN stores. Despite early distrust, two factors would play a significant role in the shift to inter-coalition collaboration. First, in both response phases, coalitions regularly frame the relationship between major record labels and mass retailers as more deleterious than the destabilization brought on by computer technologies. This relationship reorganized the structure of the music retail strategic action field eventually forcing all music-only retailers into a challenger position. The ongoing effect of this relationship would reverberate across proximate fields, prompting new discourse regarding the value of music.
Second, the common cultural ground independent record stores occupy made inter-coalition collaboration not only somewhat inevitable but also focused on traditional strengths. Consider that one year before the first Record Store Day, the three coalitions worked with Warner Elektra-Atlantic (WEA), the distributor for Warner Music, on the creation of a digital download store that would service the member stores of all three coalitions. Early in the negotiations, the proposed “one-size-fits-all” digital storefront proved incompatible with the local distinctiveness of independent record stores. Despite its failure, this attempt reinforced the success of the “weird” campaigns, Think Indie distribution, and annual conventions where the uniqueness of each record store is central to the framing of the initiative. When the national Record Store Day brainstorming session occurred, the culture and local idiosyncrasy of the independent record store was central to the framing of the event. In other words, the inter-coalition collaboration that resulted in the development of Record Store Day was built on a strong ideological position that both resonated across challenger retailers and fit pre-existing beliefs shared with many record labels, distributors, and artists. The position similarly resonated with discerning consumers, tired of the profit motive of major record labels but hungry for a connection with the artists they supported. This message re-established a cultural community that understood the value in independent record stores doing what independent stores have always done.

2.5 **The Role of Culture in Strategic Action Fields**

In markets experiencing drastic technological change, we expect firms beholden to practices or products in decline to eventually fail. Like the independent video store before them, independent record stores should fail due to limited resources, market uncertainty, and decreased demand. Instead, this case uncovers the vital role of collaboration in destabilizing periods. I show how a particular configuration of challenger firms has exerted influence within a changing market through the innovative execution of culturally valuable meanings. The resonance of a record store culture informed how actors articulated action among a multitude of accounts from which
attributions of opportunity and/or threat may derive. The art, history, ritual practices, artifacts, and common stories that constitute a record store culture provided a discursive platform for a legitimized justification of action. Where market uncertainty had left a wider range of actors more receptive to new ideas that offer alternatives to the status quo, the challenger identity enabled innovative strategic action that resisted the perceived commodification of music, musicians, and music culture. Where many structurally equivalent actors, across proximate fields, believed that the music industry no longer had their interests in mind, these new modes of action fit pre-existing, shared beliefs. But rather than bring this anti-industry rhetoric to a formal legal/institutional settlement, this network of retailers, distributors, record labels, and artists brought their collective strategic capacity to bear on a discerning consumer base that would legitimize their actions through growing support.

We might expect those organizations with access to a greater pool of material resources to withstand major market disruptions or develop new, innovative action. After all, they are the firms that have the resources to maintain a competitive advantage in the field. Yet the meaning projects and associated actions of these resilient challengers draw our attention to alternative resources that facilitate access, establish value, and motivate action (Ganz 2000). Certainly, the case offered here is but one scenario in which the repertoire of responses is effected by the salience of culture within a strategic action field. Table V offers a general typology of strategic action and culture that situates the conditions found here among other works where a generalized cultural element factors into an actor's ability to influence field outcomes. By utilizing Swidler's (1985) conceptualization of settled and unsettled cultural periods, I draw on works from social movement, economic sociology, and new institutional literatures to incorporate a cultural concept into a highly contingent process of innovative change. In Swidler's work, actors in settled cultural periods rely upon common sense understandings of often poorly defined traditions and habits to both refine and reinforce social practices. Actors in unsettled cultural periods use coherent ideological claims to compete with other cultural views and vie for control over modes of action.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Action</th>
<th>Models of Cultural Influence</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Settled Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Incumbents or associated governance units refine meanings and interests in a mature field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Booker Prize for Fiction (Anand and Jones 2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediating</td>
<td>Regulation and policy implementation enforce compliance under the law.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial</td>
<td>Embedded actors initiate divergent changes in response to perceived threat or opportunity in field conditions.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Big Five Accounting Firms (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>A common sense approach to social expertise provides collective resources for constructing strategies of action.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Grass-Roots Environmentalists (Lichterman 1995)</td>
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In the four dimensions of action I offer, actors use their social skill, rooted in social position, access to resources, and available networks, to author new forms of action that resonate with invested others.

The first two dimensions of innovative response are inspired by the observations of Lampel and Meyer (2008) who note that the conditions of field change are not only spaces of innovation but also products of the field in which they operate. Thus many significant changes in field trajectory possess a strong field mandate when they are initiated from incumbents or associated governance units. The authoritative dimension isolates cases where incumbent actors initiate change. In a settled cultural space, the vision of incumbent actors manifest in new policies or practices that, in turn, refine meanings and interests. In the work by Anand and Jones (2008) on the Booker Prize for Fiction as a tournament ritual, we see dominant field actors utilize their social position in a settled field to create an award for postcolonial fiction that has changed the trajectory of English literature. In an unsettled cultural space, incumbent actors may identify opportunity in a conflict of ideology that destabilizes earlier traditions. Zelizer’s (1985) seminal work on the worth of children illustrates the way insurance companies were able to capitalize on the friction over the value of a child within the social understanding of the family structure. Where both examples illustrate the control incumbents or associated governance units might exert on desired outcomes, the role of culture draws attention to the dynamic of shared meaning where change might alter the trajectory of an existing social structure to some degree or develop entirely new markets.

In authoritative responses, internal governance units may be called upon to do the “dirty work” of enforcement. Consider the role of the RIAA above. However, as Fligstein and McAdam (2012) assert, the state plays a unique governance role in shaping “the prospects for change and stability in virtually all nonstate strategic action fields” (67). Thus the mediating dimension captures the role of external state influence on the development of innovative change. Edelman’s
(1992) work on organizational compliance within the law offers a compelling example of coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) under settled cultural conditions. Hardy and MacGuire (2010) show how the legitimacy of the United Nations as an international governing body can produce mandates for complex global issues through the competing discourses of its members and affiliates. In both settled and unsettled cultural spaces, state fields enforce some form of dynamic change through regulatory power. However, the relationship between cultural understandings and policy intent will certainly result in a variation of change outcomes.

The final two dimensions embrace those instances where a challenger meaning project is legitimized within a strategic action field. In the entrepreneurial dimension, the actor may or may not occupy a challenger position but the strategic action they author challenges existing, or creates new institutional arrangements (DiMaggio 1988). In a settled cultural period, entrepreneurship is rooted in the ability of embedded actors to identify threat or opportunity in stable field conditions and initiate divergent changes. The work of Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) embraces the motivation to create change in a highly institutionalize setting. McInerney (2008, 2014) details the entrepreneurial dimension in an unsettled cultural space when invested actors reinterpret the movement mission of the circuit riders through market principles to conventionalize their accounts among powerful actors within their field. Here, the cultural motivation is unsettled thus opening a field for a variety of potentially innovative actions. In both cases, the initiation and participation in divergent change are central to an opportunistic, entrepreneurial response (Battilana et al. 2009).

The collaborative dimension embraces both the work I’ve presented here as well as moments of cooperative change where culture is highly salient prior to action. In other words, where the collaborative examples I offer both maintain a strong sense of cultural identity, I argue the distinction is in the implementation of culture as a common sense foundation or meaning project. As Swidler argues, in a settled period cultural resources are diverse and therefore, called
upon selectively to produce a variety of potential outcomes. Lichterman (1995) shows how two taken-for-granted approaches to grass-roots community building result in divergent strategies of collective action. Where both of the groups he studies look to act strategically based on compatible ideological positions, opposing understandings of meaning reinforce difference between the groups. Consistent with both Swidler and Fligstein and McAdam, perhaps these initiatives are best described as those that “continue to hew to proper channels and established rules for pressing their claims” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 21). Unsettled cultural periods present an opportunity for strong ideological positions that offer new modes of action and the potential for long-term structural change. The inter-coalition collaboration of independent record stores based their strategic action on the explicit use of a tacit record store culture. This meaning project coordinated symbolic value that initially facilitated the development of independent record store coalitions and ultimately legitimized claims across proximate fields and resulted in Record Store Day; an event that has reconfigured the music retail strategic action field.

This typology aims to situate a cultural concept in a field description of socially skilled actors producing and/or reproducing field dynamics. These are ideal-typical dimensions as attributions of threat and/or opportunity that contribute to competition and/or cooperation are highly contingent processes that may overlap, interact, or transition from one to another. For example, one may interpret the collaborative action I outline in this study as established by early entrepreneurial action of field actors like Terry Currier, owner of Portland’s Music Millennium. Yet to realize the substantive change that differentiates the music retail industry from other similar markets in decline requires a transition away from early entrepreneurial efforts to the lasting influence of inter-coalition collaborative action. In many ways, centralizing a cultural concept within the strategic action field framework draws our attention to the myriad of strategies available to field actors that shape and are shaped by discourses and practices.
In addition, this work offers insight into the important role of inter-field alliances in developing legitimacy. Early on, we see the entrance of mass retailers into the music retail field facilitated not only by their material resources but also by the relationship forged with major record labels who expressed a profit motive over other metrics of value. The result of this inter-field alliance reshaped the incumbent/challenger dynamic in the music retail field by both subjecting all music-only, brick-and-mortar stores to new field rules but also legitimizing an attribution of threat among independent retailers. Later, the strategic action of independent record store coalitions gradually drew the attention of a range of smaller record labels, distributors, managers, and artists attracted to the meaning projects that motivated the coalition work. In both cases, inter-field alliances are positively correlated with the development and maintenance of legitimacy projects within the field. What is more, both cases rely on a cultural reciprocity to enable inter-field alliances isolating the vital role of shared meaning projects across a hierarchy of fields in reinforcing legitimacy of actions within target fields. Where more work is necessary in this regard, these shared meanings, across fields, offer one compelling approach to further investigation of actor variation and legitimacy.

Finally, the consumer plays an important role throughout this field change. Initially, massive consumer demand is largely assumed by the growing population of retailers. It is not until the internet revolution that consumers find the tools to engage in the rules of the field and compromise its stability in unprecedented ways. This massive social shift in music consumption has imposed a fatal blow to the physical retail market where the cost of locating and purchasing physical product far outweighs the cost of downloading, streaming, or stealing it. The collaborative action of independent retailers has called for discerning buyers to again engage in the rules of the field through consumption practices. Initiatives like national Record Store Day look to transform the most passive of cultural consumer into an engaged supporter of the art, history, ritual practices, artifacts, and common stories that constitute a record store culture. The effect of such inter-coalition collaboration is evident in the modest yet real survival of independent record
stores, the popularity of national Record Store Day, and the massive increase in vinyl record consumption.

In addition to building on strategic action field theory, I see my work having several implications for other subfields. Most notably, these findings may contribute to the emerging field configuring event (FCE) literature by specifying field processes that often times enable actors to initiate requisite spaces of innovation. Unlike home video retailers, independent record stores have been able to leverage culturally valuable meanings into new strategic actions that gained momentum among similar retailers, then with proximate field actors, and eventually led to an event of significant field configuration in national Record Store Day. In addition, this work contributes to an ongoing discussion at the nexus of organizational and social movement scholarship (Carroll and Swaminatham 2000, Hensmuns 2003, Ingram and Rao 2004, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, Ocejo 2014, Rao et al 2003, Davis et al. 2005, Soule 2012) by incorporating action and change among actors of different social position, across interconnected fields. In a market environment, characterized by competition, it is in the collaborative efforts of these specialist retailers that new value is established and it is through the cultural relevance of these efforts that interconnected others legitimize these acts on a national scale.

\[1\] In the words of Michael Kurtz, former president of the MMN and current head of Record Store Day, record stores now “take all shapes and sizes” which makes it difficult to accurately track a rate of firm survival in any meaningful way. Nielsen only tracks those stores that report soundscan data and IBIS World and government data sources generally track "establishments" which includes the remaining chains that are not permitted to participate in independent record store coalitions or Record Store Day. To offer some sense of the effect these challenger efforts have had, I include three relevant market indicators. First, I show the independent record store share of tracked units sold since 1995 (red dashed line). These data come from Nielsen and do not include record labels or independent record stores that do not participate in soundscan data collection or used sales that have been a hallmark of independent record stores for decades. Thus while these numbers are certainly conservative, we still get some indication of the saturation, fall, and recovery of these niche retailers. This trend coincides with the second indicator, the skyrocketing vinyl record sales data (solid blue line). I argue that vinyl sales indicate not only a resource space available to independent record stores able to take advantage but also the growing support of discerning consumers. Again, as a Nielsen measurement, this trend does not include those who do not participate or used sales. Finally, I include vinyl record sales for the week of record store day since just before its inception (dotted black/green line). While also a Nielsen measurement, this still shows the massive and immediate impact the event has produced for its participants giving further support for the integral role the coalitions have played in the survival and contemporary success of many independent record stores.
3. Notions of Identity: Brokering Distinct Audience Claims under Conditions of Drastic Technological Change

3.1 Introduction

In December of 2012, one of Detroit’s longest operating independent record stores closed its doors while literally down the street, a new store was preparing for its grand opening. On one hand, Warren Westfall, the owner of the closing store, cites changing technology; “[w]e’re in a digital age and I’m selling hard copy.” He regards the unprecedented 1250% increase in vinyl record sales in the past decade as little more than a fad arguing that young people listen to vinyl on substandard machines and buy reissues that were recorded digitally in the first place. On the other hand, the owner of the opening store, Dean Yeotis, emphasizes how hard he and his co-managers have “worked at making this place not just a retail store but a place where people can come in to talk about music.” In a market where sales have declined an astonishing 78.7% over the past two decades, the independent record store has re-establish a niche value despite industry trends toward digital technologies. Do the contrasting evaluations of the two owners suggest that record store survival has required change in practices and meanings that constitute the identity of these organizations? Contrasting interpretations of identity generally increase firm vulnerability in uncertain markets. The juxtaposition of these owner accounts speaks to the central importance of organizational identity under conditions of change.
As technologically advanced forms of capitalism have rendered many services more available and products more homogenized, organizational identity has become central to distinction among similar others in a market. The identity of any organization shows both an expression of what the firm understands as its primary functions and the features that target audiences consider central (Albert et al. 2000). Thus an identity that aligns the strategy of the firm with the expectations of target audiences can enhance value while identity discrepancies can compromise the firm as well as the legitimacy of the category in question. In changing markets, minimizing the dimensions by which an organizational identity is assessed is central to maintaining legitimacy among uncertain audiences (Hsu 2003). Market uncertainty that, in this case, results from technological innovation suggests that these contrasting interpretations of identity have resulted from either a transition away from traditional functions and features or an expansion of previous notions of the independent record store identity.

In the event of transition, we expect many of the central attributes of the traditional identity to be rejected by the new, highly resonant identity resulting in a reconfiguration that stands in sharp contrast to its previous reference (Baron 2004). Drastic technological changes in the way people consume music have resulted in new forms of online retailers that, indeed, stand in sharp contrast to the historical reference. However, previous research suggests that brick-and-mortar retailers often benefit from historical and cultural meanings that resonate with discerning audiences (Witz, Warhurst and Nickson 2003, Williams and Connell 2010, Hendricks 2015). In regard to the latter scenario, organizations research expects that the expansion of functions or attributes will have deleterious effects on the social identity of the organization. These effects often surface from audience sanctions due to a perceived violation of the core logic of the niche a firm occupies (Mohr and Guerra-Pearson 2010) or disinterest due to low contrast in comparison to other firms (Hannan 2010). Even for identities that are less sharply opposed, audience evaluation presents a potential barrier to participation across categories (Hsu et al 2009) or, at
least, imposes a limit to the uncertainty tolerated within an identity referencing discourse (Czarniawska, 1997).

This technological and social shift has forced surviving brick-and-mortar retailers to reassess their market position resulting in a range of strategic efforts from product diversification to new services offered. Yet these new products and services appear to have little effect on the consistency and salience of the public notion of an independent record store identity. Captured in popular books and movies (Pettit 2008, Toller 2010, Calamar and Gallo 2012, Piper 2012, Spitz 2015, Jonkmans 2016) and glorified through the popularity of national Record Store Day, the independent record store remains a resonant embodiment of music culture. Rao, Davis, and Ward (2000) attribute an organization’s social identity to the “industry to which they belong, the organizational form they use, and through membership in accrediting bodies” (270). The case of independent record stores problematizes the persistence of robust organizational identity as the industry has changed significantly, product and service strategies appear less focused, and accrediting bodies are in short supply.

In the work that follows, I ask to what extent the organizational identity of surviving music retail firms has changed in the wake of technological innovation and whether changes among individual independent record stores follow any pattern across the evolving music retail market. I do this through an examination of how record store identity is articulated in public discourse. The two owners above offer their own perspective on what constitutes the functions of an independent record store and the media outlet reinforces the legitimacy of certain features through its reporting. Through a multimethod content analysis of industry and media documents, I record the speech acts of a) organizational agents who associate their firm with specific products and services and b) media and industry actors who, like reviewers or critics, categorize and assign identities by shaping what counts as legitimate through their reporting (Hsu 2006, Muetzel 2015). The result is an articulation of a specific form an organization takes through a reciprocal legitimation of a
given social identity. By tracking discourse over time, I aim to uncover patterns of identity transition, expansion, contraction, and decline. I find that technological change coincides with new spaces of identity innovation where organizational practices expand yet no perceived violation of what it means to be an independent record store is evident. A coexistence of contemporary authentic domains further supports identity expansion which, I argue, is possible through the bridging role vinyl records have played for surviving retailers. Though the contemporary independent record store differs in important ways from its historical reference, vinyl records broker material and symbolic features of authenticity, focusing the dimensions by which the organizational identity is assessed.

### 3.2 Organizational Identity and Form

A vital foundation of the identity any organization successfully embodies is the form in which the organization takes (Carroll and Wheaton 2009, Hsu and Hannan 2005). In their work on the population ecology of organizations, Hannan and Freeman (1977) define organizational form as “a blueprint for organizational action, for transforming inputs into outputs” (935). From this foundation, they illustrate how large generalist firms utilize an abundance of resources to maintain economies of scale while small, specialist firms focus fewer resources on sustaining niche markets. Other than their recognition of a “normative order” that defines the legitimacy of some forms among “relevant sectors”, little consideration is given to the relationship between what a firm does and what a firm is. Recent discussions of organizational form call for the centralization of social identities (Hsu and Hannan 2005, Polos et al. 2002) among the attributes or strategies of an organization. From this perspective, an organizational form must adhere to established rules that articulate those features a firm is expected to possess. Thus Hsu and Hannan (2005) have defined organizational form as “a named category to which an audience applies membership standards” (478). Here, a category or type, identified by the structures and practices of an organization, takes on the status of a form once “the category becomes legitimated in the eyes of
relevant audiences as a taken-for-granted type of organization with jurisdiction over a particular domain” (478).

This is not to say that organizations blindly conform to all aspects that specify a given form. In some cases, a firm’s ability to improvise or adapt can lead to diversification and new audiences (Lamertz and Heugens 2009). Yet the potential for growth must be balanced against the value a firm draws from existing circumstances; what Girard and Stark (2003) call the challenge of exploration versus exploitation. If an innovation is successful, the non-conformist firm may surpass conformists (Bishop Smith 2011) or advance new perceptions of identity among target audiences (Kim and Jensen 2011). If a firm fails to target each category it looks to occupy (Hsu et al. 2009) or overcome comparisons with similar others (Dobrev et al. 2006), audience uncertainty will likely characterize the firm negatively, leading to sanctions. That being said, there are indications that some target audiences may react less strongly to changes that are perceived as consistent with the domain in which the firm operates (Kovács and Hannan 2010).

Such a conceptualization of organizational form brings two important aspects to bear on the identity construction of firms. First, issues of identity are negotiated among those relatively homogenous groups of actors referred to as “audiences” (Dobrev et al. 2006, Hsu and Hannan 2005, Hsu et al. 2009) and the organization itself. Where some aspects of identity may be more durable than others, audiences may have different, even conflicting, expectations regarding appropriateness or legitimacy of organizational features. Therefore, as Hsu and Hannan (2005) state, “identity is not simply a list of observable properties; and it cannot be detected solely through the constancy of some set of features within an organization” (476; emphasis added). Rather, a legitimized organizational form rests on an institutional foundation where the reciprocal exchange of ideas among relevant social actors gives meaning and value to material resources (Scott and Davis 2007). I draw on public discourse through news media as a reflection of dominant American taste-making and identity formation (Mantsios 2014). In combination with industry sources, these
data illustrate the power of discourse where popular meanings, practices, and products fortify themselves over time but are also modified through ongoing debate (Latour 1987).

Second, this legitimization process involves the dominant features that firms and relevant others expect to find. My approach to identifying these features draws heavily on pragmatist definitions of technologies as practical strategies, objects, practices, and knowledges that legitimate markets and maintain structures over time (Latour 1988, Callon and Muniesa 2005, Callon 2006, Mackenzie 2008, Bikjer 2010). Approaching organizational features through a “science of associations” considers not only the links between relevant actors but also among actors and technologies (Stark 2009). Moreover, associations are dynamic where the introduction and proliferation of new technologies will invariably alter the legitimization and maintenance of earlier ones. Firms enter and operate in markets through a utilization of available technologies while constructing an internal identity based on their own associations as well as those of other firms in the field (see White 1981). By reacting to or anticipating market change, firms look to project an identity that satisfies the criteria or expectations of a codified organizational form. Detailing relationships across products, services, actors, and events over time isolates Hannan and Freeman’s blueprints of organizational action through the social relevance of associations. Put another way, the nature of association among dominant technologies constitute the properties of a given category from which identities are legitimated.

3.2.1 Dimensions of Identity

Baron (2004) has identified three dimensions of identity that are particularly useful when considering a discourse of associations over time. His first dimension, sharpness/resonance, refers to how distinct a given identity is within a field of similar firms but also the extent to which this identity is salient among relevant actors. A sharp/resonant identity is characterized by the tightness of the relationship among dominant features that constitute a given category as well as its distance from other categories in a field. In addition, Baron suggests that while not essential,
the ability to distinguish an exemplar among firms adhering to the identity in question plays an important role in legitimating the form within the field. When identities are less sharply opposed, the presence of an exemplar can be particularly important in the salience of a given identity.

The extent to which a firm can make a focused claim about identity serves as a second dimension. A successful focus serves the interests of a subset of customers interested in distinctive features and/or practices but varies based on the resonance and sharpness of existing market identities. The more resonant field identities and categories are, the more difficult for a firm to occupy multiple resource spaces and maintain a singular identity. In stable fields, the juxtaposition of sharp identities may actually fuel efforts at fusing multiple resource spaces in an attempt to innovate. When both resonance and sharpness are strong, taking on a complex form may be too dangerous. Instead, firms are more likely to pursue an extremely focused and specialized identity in an attempt to partition the market in question. This relationship between sharpness/resonance and focus supports the contemporary emphasis on reciprocity in the development and maintenance of an organizational identity.

Similarly, the third dimension also centralizes the fashion in which an organization relates to its target audiences. Authenticity requires a discernable appeal to broader social and moral expectations for how things should operate (Baron 2004, Carroll and Wheaton 2009, Hsu and Hannan 2005). Carroll and Wheaton (2009) identify three components of an organization’s identity that facilitate the projection of an authentic form: “(1) an identity claim must be visibly projected; (2) the purported identity must be credible; and (3) the identity must be perceived as reflecting the meaning of authenticity in question” (273). They find that authenticity has generally taken one of two domains, “type” or “moral” authenticity, where conformity to criteria or social meaning are emphasized respectively. In response to social change, these forms have generated new, contemporary domains. “Craft” authenticity refers to an often visible display of genuine production processes, tools, or ingredients while “idiosyncratic” authenticity uses identifiable artifacts in
conjunction with stories to provide an expressive interpretation of an organization's uniqueness (Carroll and Wheaton 2009, 273). While Carroll and Wheaton’s framework of authenticity is largely ideal typical, the evolution from traditional to contemporary domains recognizes how authenticity plays out differently over time and in contexts. Moreover, like Baron’s explanation, Carroll and Wheaton’s framework emphasizes the importance of organizational structures in negotiating identity among invested actors.

Prior approaches to understanding organizations focused on a largely fixed form where the structures and practices of a firm dictated social position in the field. From this perspective, large firms can adapt in moments of crisis due to the accumulation and retention of varieties of excess capacity (Hannan and Freeman 1977) as well as consumer acceptance of their standardized products that satisfy a wide range of conditions (Carroll 1985, Carroll and Swaminathan 2000). Small, specialist firms, focused on a subset of customers interested in distinctive features, practices, or products, are less able to withstand major change due to their realized niche identity that often falls short of all the environmental conditions under which they can survive (Popielarz and Neal 2007). In the case of music retailers, the niche success of independent record stores appears much more akin to a “late-stage renaissance” (Carroll and Hannan 2000) where an increasing amount of specialized firms service a multitude of niche tastes while standardized consumption is the domain of a few remaining generalists (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000, Dowd 2004). Contrary to the early ecological approaches, I expect to identify a wide variety of independent record store types servicing a range of customer tastes while the large generalists become more conservative with their product lines to maintain economies of scale.

Additionally, this renaissance indicates a hollowing of the field where mid-sized generalists cannot compete with the largest firms but cannot adapt like some smaller firms (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000). I argue such a process offers several implications for the identity of surviving
firms in the wake of technological innovation. First, like all cultural industries, I expect the social identity of the firm to remain significant to the public discourse over time. A high level of sharpness/resonance in field identities should serve as a compelling indicator of distinct firm types over time. Second, where mid-sized firms should cease to operate under the conditions of a late-stage renaissance, I expect the focus of firms to become less vital to identity over time. Where the juxtaposition of sharp identities may fuel efforts at fusing multiple resource spaces in an attempt to innovate, I believe the hollowed market will represent an important moment for specialist opportunity to diversify in new ways. Finally, I argue this form complexity is possible because of the placeholder function specific technologies can play in periods of high uncertainty. Short of suggesting that dominant, observable features serve as a complete assessment of identity, I argue that certain enduring products or practices take on a transcendent value (Beckert 2011) signaling commitment to a “philosophy behind the enterprise” (Carroll and Wheaton 2009, 276). Like those that call for a socially constructed notion of form, I expect the associations that orbit particular dominant technologies to indicate systems of identity which can explain both changes in authenticity as well as organizational form.

3.3 Data and Methods

As the previous research suggests, an analysis of a changing organizational identity will require a longitudinal approach to the discourse regarding dominant features among firms in the field. Below, I detail my use of ethnographic content analysis to examine public discourse in industry and media coverage of music retailers. Through a wide range of local and national perspectives, I argue coverage of the changing music retail industry captures the requisite exchange of ideas among relevant social actors that gives meaning and value to organizational features (Scott and Davis 2007). In order to analyze the relationship among organizational features that surface from the discourse, I visualize the ties among music retailers and associated technologies through the use of network mapping software. By utilizing standard network layout
and overview metrics, I analyze the presence of clusters within the larger network structure in terms of sharpness, resonance, and focus. Informed by the descriptive data collected throughout the multimethod coding process, I unpack the discourse surrounding the dominant features of relevant clusters. This additional qualitative work further validates previous dimensions of identity and facilitates an examination of the organizational projection of authenticity in context.

I employed three sources to produce a data set of 1,600 relevant documents that represent music retail discourse from 1994-2012. The search phrase “independent record store OR music retail” (82% precision) were used after a series of open searches purposefully designed to capture those stories connected to the research question while minimizing the “noise” associated with internet searches (Stryker et al. 2006). I first used the designed phrases in a LexisNexis search of major US newspapers to gather articles about US music retail markets across the country (Bail 2012). All of the US newspapers used are among the top one hundred according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (2014). Because of my specific concern with industry understandings, I collected a second sample of industry media sources. These industry sources incorporate an emphasis on insider information and issues deemed most relevant to industry actors (Hoffman 1999).

I included a third sample of alternative weekly newspapers to provide additional localized perspectives and guarantee a greater balance of voices from throughout the target population. Alternative weeklies offer an exciting thread to the fabric of the sample because of their “strong focus on local news, culture and the arts” as well as their “eagerness to report on issues and communities that many mainstream media outlets ignore” (Association of Alternative News Media 2012). The alternative weeklies included were selected systematically based on a composite score that considered circulation, region, independent record stores per-capita, and national recognition of local record stores based on multiple “best of” lists. Following data collection, each document was vetted for validity in terms of the research question resulting in a range of local
and national perspectives regarding music retail change. Note that Table I, from Chapter 1, lists the US newspapers, industry media, and alternative weeklies that comprise the finalized data set.

The use of archived sources and industry-specific documents have proven effective for tracing organizational field change (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005, Mohr and Guerra-Pearson 2010) as invested actors have become increasingly accustomed to interpreting and presenting messages and perspectives through media formats (Gamson et al. 1992, Altheide 1996, Altheide and Schneider 2013). As Altheide and Schneider argue, the use of various forms of media documentation is “very relevant for audiences’ views, themes, and narratives – or common stories – of the world and for the language and symbolic meanings and images that are associated with certain problems and issues” (2013:17). Open coding of these documents followed Altheide’s (1996, 2012) ethnographic content analysis approach where both qualitative and quantitative data are gathered. In the work that follows, I have isolated the technologies of all types of music retailers discussed. In each profile piece, news feature, spot feature, trend story, live-in, editorial, and advertisement, I coded every discussion of practical strategies, objects, or practices that music retailers incorporated to generate business. Note that Table II, from Chapter 1, includes the resulting 42 technologies identified and utilized in this study.

I used the coded data to build a binary edge list for network analysis comprised of one column of retailers and another column of associated technologies. I chose a simple binary format as it is much more amenable to large data sets and focuses on the ties rather than nodes to determine the importance of a given data object (Opsahl 2009). Each row represents a single dyad consisting of a retailer mentioned and their associated technology. The more this relationship is discussed over time, the more dyads that are recorded and thus the stronger the tie between these two entities becomes. I imported the network data into Gephi, an open source visualization and exploration platform. Gephi not only provides a graphical visualization of the interrelations between retailers and technologies, it enables further analysis through various
Following the work of Baron (2004) and Carroll and Wheaton (2009), I use these statistical metrics as indicators of identity sharpness/resonance, focus, and authenticity. Table VI outlines representative coding examples.

Baron (2004) determines sharpness/resonance based on how distinct a given identity is within a field of similar firms but also the extent to which this identity is salient among relevant actors. I chose to separate these concepts to consider them more fully in the analysis. To determine sharpness, I use a standard network spacialization algorithm which draws linked nodes toward one another and pushes non-linked nodes apart (Mathieu et al. 2014). In addition, I size the nodes and ties based on degree centrality to identify those technologies and connections most referenced throughout the discourse. The combination of network spacialization and degree centrality shows both how sharp a cluster is within the network of music retailers and the predominance of a particular technology in a given time period. The technologies and clusters produced are considered in lieu of common retail forms of the time to isolate exemplars or prototypes that legitimate the resonance of a given identity.

The focus of an identity refers to the relationship of distinctive features and/or practices requiring an additional measure of connectivity between technologies. Modularity algorithms are regularly used to detect community structures by partitioning nodes into optimal, densely connected groupings with nodes of other groupings being only sparsely connected. The particular algorithm used here utilizes a two-phase, iterative process where (1) each node is compared to its neighbors and partitions are eliminated until modularity measures are optimized and (2) a new network whose nodes are the optimized partitions from phase one is weighted based on the strength of the ties to corresponding partitions. The result is a hierarchical structure of partitions that can be analyzed at different levels based on the resolution indicated (Blondel et al. 2008). I chose the standard resolution of 1.0 after a series of trials indicated smaller communities were unnecessary and larger communities offered little to no analytic value. In terms of identity focus,
## TABLE VI
### REPRESENTATIVE CODING EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Data Segment</th>
<th>Network Codes</th>
<th>Primary Concepts</th>
<th>Authentic Domains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994. Billboard. “Harlem Reggae Outlet is ‘Small but Strong’.”</td>
<td>Aside from the selection, the store’s biggest selling point may be owner Michael Watson’s extensive knowledge of reggae. Watson is in the store full time to answer customers’ questions and to offer impromptu history lessons on the evolution of reggae… Along with 250 vinyl album titles, numerous 12-inch and 7-inch singles, CDs, and cassettes, Talawah offers reggae-themed clothing, buttons, pins, earrings, African jewelry, sweatshirts, sashes, incense, room spray, blank audio- and videotapes, and other accessories</td>
<td>Talawah Records: T01, T02, T05, T06, T08, T18, T26</td>
<td>Extensive knowledge of genre</td>
<td>Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000. City Pages (MN). “Fifth Element: Best Place to Buy Vinyl.”</td>
<td>“… the Fifth Element is to hip hop—i.e., it stores more music than you could possibly listen to, much less want, lovingly stocked way past the knowledge level of even the most avid record consumer. Want to buy every Common album on vinyl (when you can’t find even his last one on CD)? Come here.”</td>
<td>Fifth Element Records: T02, T18, T29, T39</td>
<td>High level of genre focus</td>
<td>Moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007. Buffalo News (NY). “Indies on the edge: As the Recording industry enters its final stages of decline, local independent record stores take stock of the future.”</td>
<td>“Record Theatre recently began stocking hipster T-shirts. In-store listening stations, digital downloading areas that allow custom-burned discs to be created by customers on-site, the stocking of used discs and vinyl record albums, a deep line of catalog items, the ability to special order any product in print -- all of these are avenues the indie record stores in our area have been exploring in an effort to prove their necessity to the community.</td>
<td>Record Theatre: T01, T02, T04, T06, T16, T18, T26</td>
<td>Wide range of product and service offerings</td>
<td>Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010. The Stranger (WA). “Are We in a Music Retailspin?”</td>
<td>“Dave Voorhees, owner of Bop Street Records—a two-level sanctuary of mostly old, oft-collectible vinyl (reputedly 750,000 records, though we didn’t count ‘em) in many genres— who’s been in the biz since 1974, says, &quot;The last two or three years, I’ve never sold as many records in my life, and I’ve always sold records.”</td>
<td>Bop Street Records: T02, T04, T11, T29</td>
<td>Significance of the place.</td>
<td>Idiosyncratic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


modularity will uncover what clusters of features and/or practices are most significant and, in turn, add additional depth to interpretations of sharpness and resonance.

Drawing on the criteria offered by Carroll and Wheaton (2009), an authentic identity requires a visible claim to identity that is both credible and consistent with the standards set in the field. The degree centrality metric referenced above can give a strong indication of visibility but promotion of a given technology does not always create the desired identity. Authenticity relies upon a “normative order” that informs the legitimacy of identity claims. I unpack issues of credibility that correspond to dominant technologies by analyzing the qualitative data collected for each data point. The organization of primary concepts into authentic domains (Carroll and Wheaton 2009) injects a necessary credibility and perception component into the presence of dominant features facilitated by the degree centrality metric. In addition, the modularity measures inform how clusters of technologies orbit dominant features and contribute to the nature of the authentic identity in question. This inductive approach to identity incorporates how relationships and associated discourses change over time offering insight into the evolution of network structures and the form of authenticity firms take. Table VII outlines my operationalization of each dimension of identity.

The analysis of identity dimensions that follows focuses on four distinct time periods. By presenting these data in analytically meaningful segments, I provide a series of snapshots that clarify incremental change over time. I have identified four time periods that capture the major trajectory of the music retail field since 1994. Broadly, period 1 (1994-1996) represents the peak of compact disc sales, period 2 (2000-2002) involves the rise of unregulated person-to-person internet technologies like Napster, period 3 (2005-2007) captures the dominance of online services like iTunes and the bankruptcy of Tower Records, and period 4 (2010-2012) represents the relative stability of the contracted market following the crash of most brick-and-mortar music retail. For the most part, the analysis will follow independent record stores because a) they are
## TABLE VII

OPERATIONALIZATION OF IDENTITY MEASURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Dimension</th>
<th>Data Metric</th>
<th>Construct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharpness</td>
<td>Spacialization Algorithm</td>
<td>Sharpness as clusters of nodes that separate from the larger structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How distinct a given identity is within a field of similar firms (Baron 2004)</td>
<td>Draws linked nodes toward one another and pushes non-linked nodes apart.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resonance</td>
<td>Degree Centrality</td>
<td>Resonance as nodes with a large number of ties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which this identity is salient among relevant actors (Baron 2004)</td>
<td>Emphasizes the number of ties a node has.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplars</td>
<td></td>
<td>Resonance as a specific retailer comprised of the dominant nodes in question and/or unique clusters of linked nodes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Modularity</td>
<td>Focus as clusters of partitioned nodes with additional consideration for the primary nodes within a given cluster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctive features and/or practices that serve the interests of a subset of customers. (Baron 2004)</td>
<td>Detects community structures by partitioning nodes into optimal, densely connected groupings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Degree Centrality</td>
<td>Authenticity as a visible projection of a given identity claim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A discernable appeal to broader social and moral expectations for how things should operate (Baron 2004, Carroll and Wheaton 2009, Hsu and Hannan 2005)</td>
<td>Emphasizes the number of ties incident upon a node.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Authenticity as actor assessments of credibility in terms of those nodes most visible projected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal types of Authenticity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Authenticity as adherence to ideal-typical features of the Authenticity model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying features of the conceptual model offered by Carroll and Wheaton (2009).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the primary music-only retailer form that survived technological innovation therefore remaining a topic of public discourse and b) their survival speaks to the socially constructed, contextual understanding of identity that is of central importance to scholarship on organizations as well as valuation.

3.4 **Network Results**

Generally, the network results offer a clear identification of commonly understood music retailer types over time. The systems in period 1 correlate with standard retailer types in the strong market of the mid-1990s. Some systems appear to consolidate slightly by period 2; likely due to the pressure of ongoing price wars and the introduction of new, internet technologies. The overlap among middling and smaller systems in period 3 is indicative of the great uncertainty in the field by the mid-2000s. By period 4, brick-and-mortar retail discourse is almost exclusively about independent record stores. I immediately noticed that the spacialization algorithm would not be as impactful as I had expected. The overlap of many systems is likely due to the institutional isomorphism among firms operating in a similar field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). I focus the analysis on dominant technologies and the clusters they inhabit to highlight how industry and news media discourse legitimates particular products and practices thus capturing the reciprocity necessary for an expression of organizational identity. I make note of those retailers that occupy major roles in specific technology systems as exemplars of particular identities in a given context (Baron 2004). Thus from the onset, I was drawn to the resonance of certain technologies and what modularity suggests about the focus of particular systems.
Figure 4. Time period 1: 1994-1996

Total Nodes: 196
Total Ties: 706

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major System Technologies (proportion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tastemaker</strong> (.174)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T10. Memorabilia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T36. Fanzines/publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Authenticity</th>
<th>Type Authenticity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A low level of sharpness is immediately evident in period one. Significant market growth at this time resulted in a wide variety of independent and regional chain retailers who relied heavily on the seemingly endless demand for compact disks. Thus the vertical center of the network map contains three “mainstream” systems indicative of this market growth. Mainstream A is the largest system identified in Figure 1 and overlaps with almost every other system. Many of these stores focused on specific genres (T18) and prided themselves on customer service through expert knowledge (T26). A geographical location (T35) that might ensure regular foot traffic was also of great importance to these firms. And, like other music retailers, mainstream stores were diversifying into electronics and accessories (T08). Mainstreams B and C also focus on common diversification practices of the time. Some began to carry a wider variety of media (T05) as well as lifestyle items (T06) like music-centered clothing. Smaller, regional chains like Wherehouse Music garnered a great amount of attention at this time for selling used product (T04) on a large scale. In combination, these range of systems suggest an identity built on specialization, expertise, and diverse product offerings that distinguished these stores from the larger retailers.

The relatively new emphasis on the mass marketing and high-volume retail of music product is evident in the two systems located mainly in the top-right quadrant. The Mass Retailer system is focused on sale pricing (T21) and popular artist releases (T22). The system includes retailers like Best Buy, Circuit City, Target, and Walmart who used CDs as a loss leader product where low prices would lure customers in with the hope that they might also buy a television, a blender, and so on. The music-only superstore form, like Tower Records, Virgin Megastore, or HMV is evident by the focus on quantity. The major technologies of the Music Superstore System include maintaining a large inventory (T29), providing customers with listening stations (T16) in order to sample a variety of titles, and expanding operations across the country (T17). The
emphasis on ambiance (T31) found in this system was also connected to the identity of many of these superstores; highly organized, technologically advanced, warehouses of music product.

The remaining system overlaps heavily with mainstream systems but offers a distinct form that separates it from the others. I categorize this system as the independent tastemakers because of the focus on rare and collectible product as well as the presence of Do-It-Yourself technologies. Stores like Waterloo Records in Austin, Texas focused on vinyl records (T02), exclusive product (T11), and memorabilia (T36) which suggest a strong connection to collector markets outside of the CD dominance of the 1990s. Moreover, many of these stores carried local publications or fanzines (T36) and some ran their own independent record labels (T28) showing a distinct connection to their regional music scene. This distinction between a tastemaker and mainstream identity is consistent with the boundaries formed by independent record store coalitions, introduced in 1995. At that time, these tastemakers often distanced themselves from those independent retailers that they believed relied too heavily on major releases and CD sales. The overall stability of the market at this time explains a general willingness by most firms to diversify and expand yet the resonance of tastemaker, mainstream, superstore, and mass retail identities reinforces an ardent attempt by the smaller retailers to maintain boundaries in an increasingly saturated market.
Figure 5. Time period 2: 2000-2002

Total Nodes: 201
Total Ties: 549

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major System Technologies (proportion)</th>
<th>Online Firms (.172)</th>
<th>Volume Retail (.252)</th>
<th>Mainstream A (.166)</th>
<th>Mainstream B (.159)</th>
<th>Tastemaker B (.086)</th>
<th>Tastemaker A (.159)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T28. Music Production and/or Promotion</td>
<td>T17. Expansion/Merger/ Acquisition</td>
<td>T04. Used Product</td>
<td>T03. Online Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T27. Advertising</td>
<td>T06. Lifestyle Items</td>
<td>T16. Listening stations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type Authenticity

Moral Auth.

Where sharpness remains low in period two, the introduction of online music services (T03) produces some interesting distinctions. First, the Online Firms system, on the top of the structure, includes those that provided physical sales like Amazon as well as services that provided unregulated file sharing services like Napster. Uncertainty over what the internet would mean for the music industry at the time largely explains its separation from the rest of the map. Second, where the relationship between mass retailers and music superstores remains competitive, their role as volume retailers consolidates at this time. It seems clear that the rise of the internet, a slowdown in overall CD sales at the turn of the century, and reliance on major artists’ releases aligned the general focus of these competitors against significant change. As the largest system in period 2, the Volume Retailer focus on pricing (T21), advertising (T27), and popular releases (T22) divides the online form of the top from the independent forms below. Interestingly, while expansion and acquisition technologies (T17) were common for large, publicly traded retailers, bankruptcy and closure (T24) also becomes common at this point. This is consistent with many accounts of market saturation that profoundly affected many national retailers that had overextended themselves at the time.

The separation from online technologies is not to suggest that the combined effort of mass retailers and music superstores shielded mainstream and tastemaker independents from the effects of change. Instead, the overlap at the bottom-right of the map suggests a growing uncertainty across small retailers due to a lack of market stability, low sharpness, and declining resonance in the discourse. For example, Mainstream systems A and B cater to features generally consistent with the mainstream retailers of Period 1 with some important strategic changes. The association of listening stations (T16) and large inventory (T29) into the new and used product of Mainstream B indicates the idiosyncratic development of the “super indie” form that has benefitted retailers like Amoeba Music in California. The new technologies orbiting deep catalog (T18) like
live music (T14), and ambiance (T31), may represent new efforts in Mainstream A to focus identity on place in a time where home-based technologies are threatening market stability. Similarly, the dominant technologies of the tastemaker identity from period 1 are now fragmented across Tastemaker systems A and B. Interspersed among the Mainstream systems, resonant connections to collectability or scene ideals from the previous period appear quite low.

The rise of internet technology and online access to music was an extremely salient development in the music retail industry and produced a sharp distinction between these new retail types and all brick-and-mortar retailer forms. As Baron (2004) suggests, when sharpness/resonance is low, responses focus on perceived strengths in an attempt to protect market advantages. We see this in all of the brick-and-mortar forms where prices (T21), products (T01, T02), or specializations (T11, T18) are the primary discursive cue when discussing identity. Underneath these dominant technologies, all firms appear to be scrambling to project an identity that resonates with target audiences while enabling survival in a changing market dynamic. The volume retailers utilize their material resources in an attempt to maintain economies of scale. The most resonant features of the small retail forms remain central but low sharpness and lack of overall resonance suggests a palpable confusion over what a real record store should be or do in this changing market.
Figure 6. Time period 3: 2005-2007

Total Nodes: 224
Total Ties: 664

Major System Technologies (proportion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Firms (.178)</th>
<th>Issue A (.089)</th>
<th>Volume Retail (.195)</th>
<th>Issue B (.071)</th>
<th>Mainstream (.136)</th>
<th>Tastemaker (.355)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T03. Online Services</td>
<td>T11. Exclusive Product</td>
<td>T01. CD sales</td>
<td>T24. Downsizing/Selling/Closure/Bankruptcy</td>
<td>T05. Other media</td>
<td>T02. Vinyl sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>T29. Large catalog/inventory</td>
<td>T14. Live music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>T31. Ambiance (color, posters, lights, props)</td>
<td>T29. Large catalog/inventory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>T08. Electronics/Accessories</td>
<td>T39. Curation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type Auth. Idiosyncratic/Craft Authenticity
3.4.3 Period 3 (2005-2007): The Crash of Brick-and-Mortar Music Retail

In perhaps the sharpest identities to date, Period 3 is dominated by three major product technologies: online services (T03), CD sales (T01), and vinyl record sales (T02). In addition, two major issues at this time take on such importance in the discourse that modularity measures indicate that they represent their own systems. I interpret their position among technologies as a significant indicator of which identities are most involved in this aspect of the discourse. For example, an emphasis on exclusive product (T11) took on a life of its own in Period 3, Issue A. To the left of Issue A, Online Firms are more prominent and diverse compared to the previous period. During this time, iTunes, Amazon, Napster and others initiate downloading services; some by subscription. Additionally, private organizations like the Gap, Nordstrom, and even some universities begin to offer online music services or individual downloads as promotional pieces. And while many of the large illegal downloading sites had been shut down by the Recording Industry Association of America, the ongoing proliferation of free online music resulted in a variety of archives, blogs, and person-to-person sites, some of which cater to specific genres or exclusive material.

To the right of Issue A, mass retailers like Walmart and Target saw online and non-traditional music retailers, like Starbucks, developing releases made exclusively for their firms. They responded with their own exclusive deals on specially priced (T21) deluxe CD releases (T01) by some of the biggest artists in music (T22). In this context, retailers that were unable to adapt were often considered destined for bankruptcy (T24) in a digital age. The most prominent of bankruptcy proceedings at this time was Tower Records, which dominated Issue B. Yet the proximity of Issue B to all brick-and-mortar identities is worth note as a major decline in all types of music retailers has characterized the 21st century music retail market.

The common media account of how smaller stores survived in the wake of online, mass retail, and other, non-traditional competition is captured in the Mainstream system. In many
respects, this system represents a return to the roots of innovation found in period 1 where stores focused on other media (T05) and lifestyle items (T06) to bolster declining music sales. In a new development, a greater recognition of the collaborative work (T20) these stores had been doing to stay afloat became a component of the survival story. In response, many independent record stores resisted what they considered an implied irrelevance by promoting a wider range of technologies under the umbrella of a single relevant organizational identity.

Consisting of only independent record stores, the Tastemaker system in Period 3 insisted on a growing demand for vinyl records (T02) and used products (T04) which compelled many of them to carry their own line of new and used record players (T08). A focus on specialization (T18), customer services (T26), large catalog (T29), and curation (T39) indicates how the relationship between store and consumer has taken a central role in the projection of a record store identity. Technologies like live performances (T14) and ambiance (T31) resisted non-traditional and mass retail strategies of place by reinforcing the allure of "a space by and for music enthusiasts." Where many of these technologies were housed separately between mainstream and tastemaker identities of the previous periods, here we see a new, largely consolidated iteration of the independent record store. Perhaps in response to the uncertainty of period 2, we see the tastemakers and mainstream stores expand and diversify in resistance to a common media account that implies that surviving music retailers are changing what they do best in order to survive.
Figure 4. Time period 4: 2010-2012

Total Nodes: 187
Total Ties: 713

Major System Technologies (proportion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue A (.072)</th>
<th>Independent B (.281)</th>
<th>Independent C (.084)</th>
<th>Issue B (.086)</th>
<th>Independent A (.497)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T35. Location</td>
<td>T04. Used Product</td>
<td>T03. Online Services</td>
<td>T42. Street Fairs</td>
<td>T14. Live music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T01. CD sales</td>
<td>T18. Deep-catalog/genre Specialization</td>
<td></td>
<td>T21. Sales/Pricing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T05. Other media</td>
<td>T39. Curation</td>
<td></td>
<td>T11. Exclusive Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T29. Large catalog/inventory</td>
<td>T30. Curation</td>
<td>T34. Free Sample/Promotional items</td>
<td>T06. Lifestyle Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(color, posters, lights, props)</td>
<td>T31. Ambiance/genre Specialization</td>
<td></td>
<td>T19. Signings/Appearances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T26. Customer Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Craft Authenticity

Idiosyncratic Authenticity
3.4.4 Period 4 (2010-2012): The Indie Survivor

Period four offers the sharpest depiction of discourse throughout the analysis with two dominant systems. These systems are exclusively focused on the contemporary independent record stores for a variety of reasons. I offer three here. First, music superstores like Tower Records or Virgin Megastore no longer exist and mass retailers had significantly cut the floor space dedicated to music product. In terms of brick-and-mortar music retail, independent record stores were largely understood to be the lone survivors. Second, by 2010 consuming music through various online sources had become common practice. As I have discussed in previous work (Hendricks 2015), by this time period most independent retailers accepted online music consumption as a fact of the market and preferred to focus their critique on the practices of mass retailers. Finally, the advent of Record Store Day has made an enormous impression on the identity of independent music retailers. Occupying almost 50% of all of the network ties, the focus on live performances (T14), food/beverage services (T13), signings and appearances (T19), and promotional items (T34) in the Independent A system illustrates the organization of many traditional promotional strategies through an event that emphasizes the importance of the record store as a destination. In fact, Issue B indicates the growing popularity of other event-based strategies by collectors and retailers who hope to capture the same excitement of Record Store Day throughout the year.

The left hemisphere of the network structure captures an independent record store discourse centered on the practice of music consumption. A palpable anxiety over selling physical products in a new technological reality supports the presence of Issue A among the larger system. However, the continued growth of vinyl record sales anchors an identity based on product and place. The Independent B system shows a level of product diversification not seen in earlier systems. Any audience sanction for carrying products previously deemed inconsistent for an independent record store likely holds little relevance when physical media has become more of a
niche interest. However, the independent record stores make note of their vinyl record collection over 66% of the time suggesting that product diversification is acceptable as long as vinyl records remain a primary focus. Independent C is consistent with niche collector discourses that focuses on selectivity (T39) and specialization (T18). In light of the vinyl record revival, a few retailers began buying the rights to music works in order to reissue rarities or manufacture unreleased material on vinyl (T28). Such practices are much more economically viable when retailers can experiment with selling these rarities online (T03). And while Independent systems B and C are largely indistinguishable, the proximity of customer service (T26) to this collector discourse may suggest that the aura of collectability strengthens the overall resonance of vinyl records among contemporary connoisseurs.

3.5 Authentic Organizational Identity

Unlike the analysis of sharpness, resonance, and focus above, authenticity requires an attention to not just the presence of particular technologies but also corresponding discussions of credibility and perception. To do this requires three components. First, I isolate the dominant technologies among the systems identified as independent record stores above. These technologies serve as a legitimate representation of visibly projected identity claims (Carroll and Wheaton 2009). Second, I incorporate the qualitative data that corresponds to these dominant technologies to understand context and detail issues of credibility surrounding these claims. Finally, I use Carroll and Wheaton’s (2009) ideal typical domains of authenticity to define the nature of the associations present. This illustrates both the “philosophy behind the enterprise” (276) as well as its distribution across invested actors, the technologies used, and the context in which they surface. What results is not only evidence of expanding identity but also an adapted notion of authenticity that recognizes the reality in which these firms now operate. The shifting notion of authentic organizational identity is represented in Figures 1-4 through shaded system columns that correspond to the domain of authenticity indicated in the bottom row.
3.5.1 Early Notions of Authenticity

In period 1, modularity measures indicate a large amount of boundary work taking place. The overall market stability and sheer amount of brick-and-mortar music retailer types at this time supports the analysis above. In terms of authenticity, the distinction of mainstream and tastemaker independents aligns strongly with Carroll and Wheaton’s (2009) type and moral domains respectively. Type authenticity is communicated through a conformity to a code of expectations. This is evident in the predominance of carrying deep catalogs of music the “giants” could not match or simply “ignore[d]” and focusing on customer service that produced a “much friendlier environment.” Much of the discourse regarding expectations focused on the juxtaposition between what these authentic stores did and what the large volume music retailers did not. One interviewee said that at mass retailers you are “asking for help from someone who might know a lot about Maytag’s but not much about Motown.” Another argued that being the “collector’s choice” meant providing the “service and selection that you’re not going to find at the superstores.” Such a purposeful separation from the volume retailer forms is both consistent with a type authenticity and explains the variety of store strategies that fall under the mainstream independent category.

While similarly focused on a collector niche, the tastemakers aligned more strongly with a moral authenticity where the practice of operating a music retail store is linked to a seemingly sincere expression of value and choice. Unlike the CD dominance that trends toward the mainstream stores, the allegiance to vinyl record sales aligns these retailers with “purists” and often challenges their credibility in public discourse. More frequently described as an outmoded novelty item, the stores themselves recognize that they are “going for a narrow slice of the market” such as “collectors” or “DJs.” To their loyal constituents, the owners of these stores regularly held an authoritative place in the music genre, serving as “a direct link” between the music and the fans. Such a strategy falls outside dominant social expectation and is further evidenced by the
tastemaker’s tendency to “[shy] away from major-label product.” Instead, these stores established their identity on the “pleasure” and “love of records” where staff and owners “always wanted to work in this environment” because it facilitates their own “passion for collecting” as well as “turning people on” to different music.

3.5.2 The Internet and a Crisis of Authenticity

The industry changes resulting from online access to music are best described by telecommunications consultant and analyst, David S. Isenberg (1999) who characterized the rise of internet technology as the mother of all disruption. While the music industry is no stranger to technological change, it had been decades since new technology had challenged the sale and distribution of physical product (e.g. cassette tape duplication) and never had it affected the sustainability of the industry to such a degree. Large firms that engaged in online destabilization fell into the trappings of hypercompetition (D’Aveni 1998) where firms looked to exploit temporary market advantages through promotional downloads or exclusive releases. However, these strategies fall short of producing sustainable profits as new social understandings regarding the practice of music consumption accompanied these disruptive technological shifts (Christensen et al. 2001, Latzer 2009). Issues regarding ownership, access, value, and place forced many smaller firms to reconsider what a record store should be or do in this new social dynamic.

As a variety of regulated and unregulated online firms become a significant force in period 2, both mainstream and tastemaker independents relied most heavily on the technologies that defined their notions of identity prior to the internet revolution. This is consistent with what we should expect from specialist firms in periods of high uncertainty. However, new consumption practices challenged the credibility of both identities. For example, many mainstream independent retailers argued that their focus on the “product that the big boxes don’t have” and their “loyal following unconcerned with trends and fads” was sustainable. Yet even supporters of these specialists would often argue that with sales down across the board, those that are too
specialized, are too vulnerable and that their approach to music consumption had become an “anachronism.” In the case of tastemaker retailers, many of their supporters reconsidered the viability of physical product in light of new, digital options. Indeed, discussions of the DIY ethos lauded the internet as a cheaper and quicker way to get music heard and others argued that record shopping had become “a costly, arduous sport” where collectors had “been combing the stacks for so many years, it’s hard to find dirt-cheap treasures among the trash.”

On one hand, the credibility of the independent store type is challenged in terms of market survival yet it’s recognition as distinct remains intact. Audiences recognize the type but questions its purpose. On the other hand, and I argue much more damning in the public discourse, those who took a moral stand seem at risk of losing their connection to the music. In other words, where the love of music is paramount, why not utilize new tools that circumvent the manufacturing and search costs associated with physical product? Clear domains of authenticity between previously established organizational identities are therefore somewhat decoupled and remain so as we transition to period 3. But just as the practice of online music consumption grows and diversifies during period 3, I argue the notion of an authentic independent record store begins a transition to contemporary forms. The remnants of older notions are found in the Mainstream system that captures a common media account of how smaller stores survived in the wake of market disruption. These accounts elude to the criteria that had to be changed in order to survive, implying an end or near-end of a type of retailer. And while in its infancy, the efforts of surviving stores signaling new, valuable identity cues indicate features of both the craft and idiosyncratic authenticity domains.

Craft authenticity is evident in the advanced knowledge of some owners and staff who have been in business and/or collecting for decades, the skill of DJ’s often represented as "master[s] of vinyl," and the “tactile media of vinyl” and its associated rituals. The idiosyncratic form of authenticity surfaced through the celebration of the “unmistakably quirky atmosphere of
an independent shop.” In addition, some argue that the music “e-community has its limits” and that contemporary consumption of music is void of valuable practice; “driving down to the neighborhood record store” and spending “hours flipping through boxes.” Perhaps most importantly, the context of both vinyl sales and deep-catalog/specialization technologies include claims that these services were valuable for “both old- and new-school” record shoppers and that a consumer need not be a collector to value the listening practice of vinyl records.

3.5.3 A Contemporary Authenticity in Music Retail

The independent record store discourse of period 4 is dominated by vinyl records and national Record Store Day. The peculiar persistence of brick-and-mortar record stores and growing popularity of an antiquated technology lends itself to an idiosyncratic interpretation of authenticity. Indeed, Record Store Day defines itself as a national celebration of “the unique culture of a record store and the special role these independently owned stores play in their communities.” Owners often make reference to this event as “more what it used to be like”, promoting a “record store culture… that a lot of us grew up with.” And while some challenge the sincerity of the event, defining it as “the record shop equivalent of a Hallmark holiday”, the massive success of this event is regularly credited as a central factor in a 389.4% increase in U.S. vinyl record sales since its inauguration. And while a variety of tactics are utilized to convey that local record stores are “still here and still exist,” vinyl records serve as the preeminent artefactual evidence, “memorializing and communicating the idiosyncratic” (Carrol and Wheaton 2009).

Yet underlying this focused, public display of idiosyncratic authenticity and the popularity of vinyl records that embodies a tradition of music culture, is a craft understanding of the contemporary independent record store. Like the earlier references to the craft form of authenticity, the training and “pedigree” of the owners and staff is central to the credibility of the store. Yet the discourse that surrounds many of the major technologies in system B does not convey the same reverence for the past we see in the Record Store Day discussion. Instead,
these “expertly curated emporium[s]” serve as “an excellent place to get a legal education in popular music.” More than a record store, these “social hubs” are embedded in the local community and serve an “all-things-to-all-people” function. Thus while vinyl records dominate the discourse, the variety of associated products and services suggests a diversified organizational form that maintains legitimacy because of its “new and used vinyl… chosen lovingly by the staff” and “cool vibe” that make it a “go-to spot.” In other words, the display of legitimate tools of the trade (i.e. vinyl records) in combination with the tacit knowledge and processes associated with these forms of music consumption illustrates a second, coexisting craft domain of authenticity.

There is a marked change in the dimensions of authentic organizational identity over time for both retailers and audiences. The entrance of internet technologies into the market compromised the resonance of the independent record store identity forcing most to refocus their approach. The mass retail of music in the mid-1990s certainly posed a threat to the position of smaller retailers yet overall sales increases due to the popularity of the CD offered the stability to maintain boundaries rooted in traditional authentic claims. Features of the internet revolution compromised traditional moral claims to authenticity and while claims of authentic type were recognized, what these types should do remained in flux. I argue that surviving independent retailers navigated this uncertainty through a restatement of identity facilitated by both idiosyncratic and craft claims of authenticity. While uneven at first, these domains of authenticity congeal into separate yet coexisting domains in period 4. The former through the advent of Record Store Day as an effective rhetorical tool that focuses and legitimizes a celebration of unique, surviving retailers. The later through diverse yet selective presentations of cultural knowledge that maintain the tools and practices recognized as part of the cultural community. These coexisting domains draw on separate identity claims yet overlap in their use of vinyl records as a visible projection. In this sense, vinyl records bridge contrasting claims to secure organizational identity in a changed market reality.
3.6 Discussion and Conclusion

Through multiple analytic methods, I have considered the extent to which surviving music retail firms have adapted in the wake of technological innovation and whether changes among individual independent record stores follow any pattern over time. It is clear that the contemporary independent record store identity differs in important ways from its historical reference. By examining how record store identity is articulated in public discourse, I argue their niche revival in a drastically changed market has required a social acceptance of what these stores are despite some variation in traditional membership standards. Part of this discursive shift is facilitated by the evidence of a market transition into a late stage renaissance. With the decline of music superstores, the associations among products and practices across independent retailers indicate expansion in a hollowed market. In light of this evidence, we must consider how technological innovation coincides with new spaces of identity innovation that counter our expectations of identity change. The coexistence of authentic domains also indicates an expanded identity which I argue is possible because of two important factors. First, Record Store Day serves an accreditation role that has tightened the dimensions by which an organizational identity is assessed. Second, vinyl records have served as a brokerage technology that bridge the spaces between the two domains of authenticity.

My network analysis of identity sharpness, resonance, and focus offered compelling evidence of an expansion of the form of independent record stores; what it is that they do. Had I uncovered a transition, I would expect to find many of the central attributes of the traditional identity to be rejected by the new, highly resonant identity resulting in a reconfiguration that stands in sharp contrast to its previous reference (Baron 2004). Contrary to my initial expectations, sharpness was not a major factor throughout which I credit to the institutional isomorphism among brick-and-mortar firms operating in a similar field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Resonance, however, was a major factor clearly identified through the degree centrality visualizations and
exemplars of common retail forms from each time period. Similarly, focus remained important as the assemblage of technologies orbiting the most resonant features expand as the market evolved.

Notice the focus of period 1 where distinctions between retailer types are quite clear, mapping onto resonant features and relevant exemplars of the time. Internet technologies forced a reassessment of these earlier associations based on identity boundaries that lost relevance in a changing technological reality. Yet in many respects, this polarization of the market simplified the task of boundary work for survivors. Period 3 shows the foundation of a new identity discourse in music retail centered on online retailers, mass retailers, and independent record stores. By period 4, there is no longer any need to maintain distinctions among types of independent retailers; the differences among music retailer categories had been codified in these three forms. As Baron (2004) suggests, a juxtaposition of identities may fuel efforts at fusing multiple resource spaces in an attempt to innovate. Independent retailers take advantage of the hollowed market to change what they do or, perhaps more precisely, adapt to what can be done. In what I call a space of identity innovation, the uncertainty of drastic technological change produced opportunity for these specialists to expand services and products. With the threat of audience sanction low, due to new social acceptance of three legitimate categories, independent retailers were able to explore new possibilities without losing their jurisdiction over valued core products and practices.

The analysis of authenticity provides further evidence of an expanded identity through a progression toward contemporary notions of authentic identity that coexist in the diverse space facilitated by the late stage renaissance. On one hand, the peculiar persistence of brick-and-mortar record stores and growing popularity of an antiquated technology, championed by a national Record Store Day, lends itself to an idiosyncratic interpretation of authenticity. On the other hand, the training and “pedigree” of owners and staff in conjunction with the ritual of vinyl record consumption offers a craft interpretation of authenticity central to the contemporary
credibility of the store. It may be plausible that these two notions of authentic identity are the result conflicting discourse camps that persist from the traditional type and moral authenticity domains. Like Yeotis and Westfall earlier, perhaps we see one perspective that promotes the unique value of local retailers to their communities and another that takes a more purist approach to the practice and knowledge of collecting. However, the robust organizational identity that persists in period 4 despite drastic technological change and a wide range of product and service strategies does not support such a conclusion. Instead, I offer two important factors that are consistent with spaces of identity innovation discussed above and support a model of coexisting authentic claims.

First, we know that minimizing the dimensions by which an organizational identity is assessed is central to maintaining legitimacy among uncertain audiences. The advent of Record Store Day as an effective rhetorical tool has legitimized the celebration of these unique, surviving retailers in specific terms. Despite the expansion I’ve outlined above, this annual event focuses audience attention on exclusive vinyl record releases and “the unique culture of a record store and the special role these independently owned stores play in their communities” (recordstoreday.com). In addition to the message, that dominates the discourse of period 4, the popularity and growth of the Record Store Day event serves an accreditation role by defining what stores qualify to participate. This new distribution of social power (Anand and Jones 2008) validates an organizational identity through membership (Rao, Davis, and Ward 2000) despite an expansion of traditional form in a significantly changed market.

Second, I argue that vinyl records serve a bridging function between idiosyncratic and craft authenticity domains as the focal consumer good of national Record Store Day as well as the embodiment of contemporary music connoisseurship. As Burt (2005) might argue, I define the vinyl record as a brokerage technology that bridges the “holes” between the two domains of authenticity in this space of identity innovation (see also Bowker and Star 2000). An authentic identity requires a visible claim that is regarded as both credible and consistent with the standards
set in the field (Carroll and Wheaton 2009). The vinyl record is both a consumer technology and a cultural object; a product that embodies new understandings in light of technological innovation and enables contemporary practice of historically relevant rituals. As a cultural object, it reinforces a craft understanding of the contemporary independent record store. As an outmoded consumer technology, it connects these ritual processes to a peculiarity and uniqueness honed in the Record Store Day message.

In the diverse product space of the Independent B system, found in period 4, the vinyl record might be seen as a “placeholder” (Hsu and Hannan 2005). In line with the craft authenticity of a collector culture, the fusion of product, knowledge, and place overshadow the diversification of the period. Drawing on the work of Kim and Jensen (2011), a deliberate maintenance of specific, cultural objects can reinforce market identity in order to explore other resource niches that may support survival under conditions of uncertainty. Yet while a visible placeholder is certainly a necessary precondition for a cohesive organizational construction of authentic identity, it is not a sufficient explanation of the innovation that has resulted in coexisting authentic claims. As we see in periods 2 and 3, the exclusive reliance on the loyalty of enthusiasts was not enough to maintain market credibility. Period 4 establishes a technological shift where the value of vinyl records is widely understood to transcend its materiality and bridge the practices of collectability to the social position of fandom (Beckert 2011).

Vinyl records embody a series of practices and experiences often associated with a better time in music culture that allows both fan and collector to realize her or his own selfhood (Fine 2004). As an essential part of Record Store Day, exclusive vinyl record releases generate a desire through cultural participation. The vinyl record itself may be purchased anywhere, including online, but without the independent record store and the anticipation of a “familiar surprise” from interacting and discovering, the experience of vinyl record consumption is devalued (Hutter 2011). By coordinating history, practices, and community in these places increasingly rejected by the
contemporary music industry, the vinyl record technology brokers a new authentic value from craft and idiosyncratic ideals as both tool and artifact. Where these contrasting evaluative claims become commensurable through the utilization of a brokerage technology, that does not suggest that all invested actors will unconditionally adhere to this new value. Indeed, like Westfall's purist approach to vinyl, some audiences will characterize some stores or practices as inauthentic. What I am suggesting here is that in a polarized, late-stage market renaissance, even the most discerning of audiences adapt to the context in which they are making evaluative claims.

The organizations literature tells us that identity discrepancies can compromise a firm as well as the legitimacy of the category in question. Thus under conditions of uncertainty, an organization should look to minimize the dimensions by which identity is assessed to avoid audience sanction. In this case, the hollowing of the market, brought on by drastic technological innovation, opened a space of identity innovation for firms. As firm identity expanded, it seems audience perception of the membership standards by which these firms are judged also expanded. How is this possible? Throughout this work, the use of public discourse as a reciprocal legitimation of a given social identity suggests that dominance of enduring features and advent of Record Store Day have limited the uncertainty within the discourse to tolerable levels (Czarniawska, 1997). Put another way, the fans and collectors that continue to support these firms today are more accurately defined as an enthusiast audience rather than a general music audience. Kovács and Hannan (2010) “argue that enthusiasts in an audience will react strongly to producers who span domains but less strongly than the general audience to spanning categories within a domain” (Hannan 2010, 175). From this perspective, we might understand audience acceptance of expansion as within the domain of products and practices generally associated with a music and/or retailer domain. Though changes to products and services characterize the evolution of independent record store identity detailed here, resonant, authentic features maintain salience with a range of collectors, audiophiles, fans, and novices.
As our contemporary economic and political rhetoric maintains a strong affinity for the small business owner and entrepreneur alike, the ongoing effect of technological change on specialist firms will remain of central importance to organizational research. This relationship has implications not only for the survival of organizations as markets change but also for our social understanding of value. By examining the interesting role of organizational identity in the case of independent record stores, I extend previous empirical work on the relationship between generalist and specialist firms detailing the potential for innovation activated by a late-stage renaissance. Drawing on both Baron (2004) and Carroll and Wheaton (2009), I consider the impetus for such a market outcome through a detailed analysis of the social identity of these organizations. My analysis offers empirical support to Carroll and Wheaton’s (2009) domains of authentic organizational identity and expands upon them by illustrating how the details of an organizational construction of authenticity vary over time and by industry. Finally, I introduce the concept of a brokerage technology in spaces of identity innovation to capture the vital role of symbolic value under conditions of change. As both authentic tool and artifact, the vinyl record focused the dimensions by which the organizational identity is assessed in a new technological reality.

While I will make reference to major technologies throughout the analysis and all associate technologies are referenced below each network map, it is much easier to visualize the modularity metric through the color coordination that Gephi provides. Where full color versions of each figure are not available, I encourage all readers to reference the full color versions of each figure, available at <jmhendricks.weebly.com/research.html>.

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The arrival of MP3s to the market place has undoubtedly proved challenging for the independent store on the street, but we have also seen many, many examples of stores embracing these changes and developments, moving forward, reaping the benefits of online and the digital, making real successes and... “defiantly thriving”.

–Emma Pettit, Old Rare New

4.1 Introduction

On Friday, December 22nd, 2006, the final Tower Records closed its doors in the United States. Aside from its massive inventory of compact discs (CDs), Tower was considered a cultural hub; a place to meet friends, peruse video and artist merchandise, check out music magazines from all over the world, and occasionally see a live performance. An entire industry of music retail firms like Tower suffered a similar fate as larger retailers offered increasingly lower prices and, perhaps more importantly, innovation in online digital downloading technologies rendered many of these music superstores obsolete. In November of 2006 alone, 55 million songs were sold online (Nielsen 2012); a figure that does not include online file sharing through person-to-person technologies. The immediacy, convenience, and price of music via the internet allowed consumers to re-evaluate their role in the music retail market. In a 2009 retrospective on the music retail industry, National Public Radio points to this accumulation of factors that led to the extinction of Tower and its ilk.
“Big-box stores undercut Tower in pricing CDs. Baby Boomers stopped buying new music. Young people stopped caring about liner notes and owning a physical product... by the late 1990s, Tower Records was no longer a music lover's mecca. It was just a higher-end Sam Goody [i.e. just another chain music store].” (NPR 2009)

Without question, our ability to locate and consume music via the internet has irrevocably disrupted the exchange relationships between music producers, retailers, and consumers. The result is a contemporary music retail market that looks nothing like 2000 where total unit sales peaked at $838 million and CDs accounted for approximately 90 percent of album sales. Since then, the digital music industry grew more than 1,000 percent between 2004 and 2010 yet total unit sales fell more than 51 percent over that same time period to $326 million. Mass retailers like Wal-Mart now sell more physical music than music-only brick-and-mortar stores, which have become less than a third of all music retailers.

Today, "digital music [has] made it so people don't have to go into stores" (The Atlanta Journal-Constitution 2011). Yet against this backdrop of declining sales and closing stores, vinyl record sales are experiencing an unprecedented explosion. The 599 percent increase since 2006 (to $6 million in 2013) is a small yet important share of the retail market as it is the only category of physical product showing significant growth (RIAA 2010). In addition, industry estimates find that two-thirds of these vinyl records are being purchased at independent record stores' (Digital Music News 2012, Nielsen Soundscan 2012). According to the National Record Store Day website, an independent record store is defined as:

"a stand-alone brick and mortar retailer whose main primary business focuses on physical store location, whose product line consists of at least 50% music retail, whose company is not publicly traded and whose ownership is at least 70% located in the state of operation" (recordstoreday.com 2012).

In many respects, the survival of the independent record store stands in stark contrast to the trajectory of an industry trending away from physical media. And despite the decline of brick-and-
mortar music retail overall, the independent record store appears to contribute to the music retail market in ways large chains and music superstores did not.

In this paper, I ask how firms negotiate dissonance between industry trends and day-to-day market realities. I do this by analyzing the contributions of surviving independent record stores to those understandings that reinforce their relevance within the market in the midst of rapid industry change. As mentioned above, the price, immediacy, and convenience of new technologies has rendered many organizational forms in music retail obsolete. And while many independent record stores have also been forced out of business, the curious survival of some firms suggests a complex of understandings not readily evident in general accounts of industry change. Some have suggested the relevancy of the independent record store clings to a collector consumer in unglamorous, boutique ventures that exist purely for the love of music (Calamar and Gallo 2010). Others argue a variety of independent record store types have surfaced in response to new market realities; some that have survived based on traditional collector markets, others that offer a more complex notion of music consumption and experience (Pettit 2008). In the analysis that follows, I confirm that new market realities have surfaced in the wake of drastic technological change. And where some stores fit neatly into the traditional collector mold, others promote a redefined role for independent record stores that reconciles consumer interest in digital technologies with the ritual experiences of vinyl records in a single narrative.

The case of independent record stores offered here captures broader concerns about meaning in the context of market and industry change, which remain of the utmost importance to economic sociologists. Our ability to observe these social structures and identify alternatives to rationalist economic theory brings new light to the circumstances that enable firms to survive under conditions of uncertainty. As an intermediary firm, the independent record store takes on the task of maintaining value “between” industry and consumer trends. While a rational actor perspective would suggest that when value is uncertain consumers are less willing to buy goods
and services, price mechanisms are an inadequate explanation of the new roles many successful independent stores are occupying. I argue successful market relevance hinges upon both the cultural aesthetic these intermediary firms embody and the strategic use of culturally relevant meanings within their field. Together, actors articulate a specific vision of the field to various audiences and, in turn, aim to ascribe value to a firm. By comparing the prevalence of various independent record store understandings in two distinct time periods, I establish changes in the way the field is presented to audiences. My focus on an intermediary firm reliant upon physical product in an industry trending toward digital technologies illustrates how successful symbolic work can produce new material value within a new market composition.

4.2 Economic Sociology on Culture and Markets

Since Granovetter’s (1985) critique of the rational economic actor sparked a revival in economic sociology, scholars continue to take issue with conceptualizations of market change based on idiosyncratic consumer preference largely void of meaning. Economic sociologists argue that all economic objects and processes are characterized as such by the meaning they have for human action (Smelser and Swedberg 2005). Certainly, the objects and processes that comprise a given market render interactions and exchanges central, but it is in the values that producers, intermediaries and consumers apply to these structures that constitute the main difference between competing firms (Aspers 2010). Such value in a market requires legitimation in terms of social understandings and those firms that achieve this legitimacy change over time (Zelizer 1979). Yet despite this emphasis on meaning in markets, issues remain regarding how to fully conceptualize the intersection of cultural meaning and market change (Zukin and DiMaggio 1990, Levin 2008, Zelizer 2005). Two theoretical approaches have made significant progress in bridging the gap between economic and cultural factors; new institutionalism and valuation studies. Where both generally treat markets as an organized system of cultural practices (a constitutive approach), further examination of these approaches leads me to embrace the
valuation stream. From this perspective, markets can be seen as systems that both embody cultural meaning and utilize cultural value throughout exchange practices (Levin 2008).

The organizational theory of new institutionalism has helped new economic sociologists explore the link between cultural components and organization and field change. The theory argues that formal organizational structures often reflect the myths operating within the institutional environment, rather than reflecting the demands of the actual work processes (Meyer and Rowan 1977). These myths often lead organizations to rationalize work practices through collective cultural understandings, or institutional logics (DiMaggio 1997), whether these practices are the most effective use of resources or not. Thus once organizations are structured by an overall field, they often make changes that are less about rationality or efficiency, and more about legitimacy among the “totality of recognized actors” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 148). Such an approach is a sharp contrast to a rationalist economic perspective yet critics argue that new institutionalism takes the importance of culture too far. Specifically, by emphasizing the institutional logic of a given organizational field, actors are commonly stripped of their individual agency (Binder 2007, Boltanski 2011). An environment void of the immediacy of action tends toward a totalizing perspective of field change (Fligstein and McAdam 2012) overly reliant on ‘key’ entrepreneurs (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005, Wijen and Ansari 2006).

New economic sociologists who focus on systems of valuation have also criticized the lack of attention to cultural meanings in rationalist economic approaches. Like new institutionalism, valuation studies recognize how cultural meanings affect choices that might otherwise be regarded as rational. In addition, this stream regularly incorporates the work of cultural sociologists who have advanced the validity of symbolic consumption as a central characteristic of advanced capitalist societies. One particular iteration of valuations studies often uses cultural markets to explain economic outcomes (Aspers 2010, Benjamin and Podolny 1999, Ravasi et al. 2011, Velthuis 2010). The attraction to these markets lies in the nature of product value that
seems somewhat separate from its physical form and clearly socially constructed (Aspers and Beckert 2011). Today, where many markets are functionally saturated, these studies illustrate the importance of symbolic criteria that often takes precedent over the physical performance of a product (Beckert 2011). Indeed, Zukin and DiMaggio (1990, 17) contend that the symbolic value of culture has a “dual effect” on markets both constituting economic structures and affecting market forces. As a result, many valuation studies focus on producers and their processes of differentiation that establish valuable niches corresponding to firm identities (White 1981) and make firms different in the eyes of consumers (Aspers 2010, Boltanski and Thevenot 1991).

In regard to the case at hand, new institutional theory would predict that firms operating during drastic technological change would succumb to isomorphic pressures or suffer the consequences. Rather than attributing these pressures to rationalist models of consumer taste or market competition, a new institutional approach would emphasize those exogenous forces that have influenced the standardized logics and practices of the music retail market. As the industry trends toward a “downloading logic” due to advancements in computer technology, internet availability, and mobile technology, retailers are expected to adapt to new product offerings and cultural expectations rooted in digital consumption. As a result, many traditional organizational forms are no longer viable and those firms succeeding in the current music retail market have achieved legitimacy among a newly structured organizational field. While such an approach effectively illustrates how markets change in reaction to cultural change, such an approach implies that any remaining independent record stores are just hearty holdouts, surviving despite changes in the environment.

Valuation studies allow for the potential of innovation in situations of uncertainty like this one. As the music industry trends toward new technologies, retailers are charged with the task of adapting while establishing niche value through differentiation. Where some surviving independent record stores may cling to traditional collector markets, many are offering
contemporary, localized visions of their value that re-emphasize the importance of symbolic criteria in music consumption. When a product like music is largely available for free online, these new visions must resonate with consumers based on alternative “orders of worth” (Boltanski and Thevenot 1991, 1999). In other words, where store survival may require the embodiment of a familiar record store aesthetic, additional value can derive from strategic use of meanings legitimized by stores, artists, music lovers, and media. A valuation approach incorporates both the dominant cultural meanings that make markets as well as those local and regional visions that can modify markets as they spread through a multiplicity of contexts.

4.3 Analyzing Change through Public Discourse

Identifying a range of common evaluations across independent music retail markets presents several methodological challenges. First, the extent to which independent record stores communicate niche values in their market requires consideration of the context in which stores perceive other actors and events as important. Second, a descriptive study of innovation and change among local businesses on a national scale requires a multipronged sampling approach in order to accurately represent the organizational population (Bail 2012). Finally, capturing a precise history of industry understandings requires a research design that avoids potential inaccuracies of memory or bias from respondents in the sample. In response to these issues, the work that follows utilizes a comparative design to analyze discourse before and after the most recent digital shift. A systematic purposive sample of three archived sources provides the data from two distinct periods in the evolution of the music retail field. The individual accounts of various independent record store actors serve as the focal unit of analysis and are described and compared.

A comparative analysis of independent record store understandings requires practical consideration of the most recent shift to digital commerce. To this end, the work here compares
the public discourse of independent record store actors from 1994 through 1996 (period 1: CD dominance) and from 2010 through 2012 (period 2: relative stability following the crash of brick-and-mortar retail). I focus the analysis on the independent retailer perspective in order to establish the nature of broad change empirically. It is from their field position that the discourse of recent innovations in music retail includes both the crash of brick-and-mortar and the revival in vinyl record sales. In period 1, CD sales reached approximately 73% of all album sales. Independent record store owners, managers, and employees understood day-to-day operations in light of a field comprised of music superstores, mass retailers, and others focused on price point and market saturation. Period 2 begins at the moment of the lowest total album sales during the twenty year time frame--336 million units which marks a 47.1% decrease from the end of period 1. Despite some slight growth throughout period 2, independent record stores are largely alone in a new market dominated by online retailers and mass retail outlets.

I employed three sources to produce a data set of 258 relevant documents that represent independent record store discourse in periods 1 and 2. The search phrases “independent record store” or “music retail” (82% precision) were used after a series of open searches purposefully designed to capture those stories connected to the research question while minimizing the “noise” associated with internet searches (Stryker 2006). I first used the designed phrases in a LexisNexis search of major US newspapers to gather articles about US music retail markets across the country (Bail 2012). All of the US newspapers used are among the top one hundred according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (2014). Because of my specific concern with industry understandings, I collected a second sample of industry media sources. These industry sources incorporate an emphasis on insider information and issues deemed most relevant to industry actors (Hoffman 1999). I included a third sample of alternative weekly newspapers to provide additional localized perspectives and guarantee a greater balance of voices from throughout the target population. Alternative weeklies offer an exciting thread to the fabric of the sample because
of their “strong focus on local news, culture and the arts” as well as their “eagerness to report on issues and communities that many mainstream media outlets ignore” (Association of Alternative News Media 2012). The alternative weeklies included were selected systematically based on a composite score that considered circulation, region, independent record stores per-capita, and national recognition of local record stores based on multiple “best of” lists. Following data collection, each document was vetted for validity in terms of the research question resulting in a wide range of industry voices from both local and national perspectives. Note that Table I, from Chapter 1, lists the US newspapers, industry media, and alternative weeklies that comprise the finalized data set.

The analysis that follows draws on studies that have effectively utilized archived sources and industry-specific documents for tracing field changes and organizational understandings (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005, Mohr and Guerra-Pearson 2010) as well as actor accounts of salient situations (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999, Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Individuals have become increasingly accustomed to interpreting and presenting messages and perspectives through media formats (Gamson et al. 1992, Altheide 1996) establishing, “the language and symbolic meanings and images that are associated with certain problems and issues” (Altheide and Schneider 2013:17). In market terms, promoting one’s products and services is clearly in the best interest of any small business and it is crucial that firms are engaged in the production of field narratives to maintain value in the eyes of various audiences. As such, my initial round of coding sought to isolate field narratives and organize them by individual data segments that indicate expressions of common knowledge as well as strategic visions regarding the field, including an actor’s perceived location within it.

Of the 1296 data segments coded in the two time periods, 617 were coded as involving owners, managers, and employees of independent record stores based on the information available in the document or by internet searches to determine whether the organization fell under
the definition of independent records stores offered earlier. Approximately 46 percent of the time, data segments alluded to how these actors understood the field in which they operate. Table VIII shows the total number of independent record store data segments by time period as well as the references identified as field understandings. In a second stage of coding, I focused on the implicit categories of meaning that are associated with these field understandings. I do so by incorporating a model of evaluative principles called orders of worth (Boltanski and Thevenot 1991, 1999) to organize the 281 field understandings by their underlying values (see Table 2 for a typology). These orders of worth are filters through which actors adopt or contest meanings based on the context in which they operate. These categories of evaluation help differentiate the variety of perceptions often simultaneously active when common meanings or structures are discussed among invested actors. Such a model enables an analysis of both broad expressions of common knowledge as well as the multiple local and regional visions that contribute to market variations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Total References</th>
<th>Field Understandings Referenced</th>
<th>Proportion of Total References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994-96</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-12</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>.448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>617</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>.455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE VIII**

DATA SEGMENTS REFERENCING INDEPENDENT RECORD STORES BY TIME PERIOD
Using the orders of worth model first required a determination of whether the independent record store account justified its own actions or criticized another's. Separate codes were recorded for the recipient of criticism. Second, I identified the theme of the data segment based on key words as well as the object of action. These themes led to an identification of relevant criteria outlined in column one of Table IX. Once relevant criteria were identified, the appropriate order of worth was assigned to the data segment. The reliability of the coding was tested on a random sample of thirty data segments showing a strong interrater correlation ($\alpha = .83$). Table X provides examples of how text segments were coded during this stage.

### TABLE IX

**ORDERS OF WORTH***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inspired</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Civic</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Industrial</th>
<th>Project-Oriented*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mode of Evaluation</strong> (worth)</td>
<td>Grace, nonconformity, creativeness</td>
<td>Esteem, reputation</td>
<td>Collective Interest</td>
<td>Renown</td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Productivity, efficiency</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Format of relevant information</strong></td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Oral, exemplary, anecdotal</td>
<td>Formal, official</td>
<td>Semiotic</td>
<td>Monetary</td>
<td>Measurable: criteria, statistics</td>
<td>Network reach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elementary Relation</strong></td>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>Functional link</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Qualification</strong></td>
<td>Creativity, ingenuity</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>Desire, purchasing power</td>
<td>Professional competency, expertise</td>
<td>Adaptability, flexibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Boltanski and Thevenot 1999
** Boltanski and Chiapello 2005
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Data Segment</th>
<th>Order of Worth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title: “Nostalgic music lovers return to the warmth, crackle and pop of vinyl records”</td>
<td>“Getting on the Internet, clicking a button, and downloading your favorite album is easy. Going out and hunting for the music you want takes it to another level and gives something extra to the buyer, something more than music, and it's very cool.”</td>
<td>Primary Action: Critique of consumers/internet retail. Theme: shopping can be cool Criteria: Emotion, ingenuity Order of Worth: Inspired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date: July 2012</td>
<td>Source: Tampa Tribune, Florida</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title: “City Sounds specializes in R&amp;B, indie support.”</td>
<td>&quot;I'm honest about this music with everybody. I'll talk to my customer about what I think sounds good or not. There are so many good R&amp;B records out there that I'm allowed to say when some things are really bad.&quot;</td>
<td>Primary Action: Justification Theme: honesty about the music Criteria: Trust, reputation Order of Worth: Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date: January 1996</td>
<td>Source: Billboard (Florida)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title: “Treehouse Records celebrates another 10 years”</td>
<td>“People make a conscious, political decision to shop here because of that very sense of community, and because they value the independent record store. There are going to be file-sharers, and there are going to be haters, but we are extremely blessed to have some of the best people in the world for our customers.”</td>
<td>Primary Action: Justification Theme: Customers stand with the indie stores Criteria: Solidarity, collective interests Order of Worth: Civic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date: March 2011</td>
<td>Source: City Pages, Minnesota</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title: “Countdown to Record Store Day: Neil from Origami Vinyl in Echo Park”</td>
<td>“Record Store Day is really about awareness. Awareness of vinyl and local record shops. I feel like it's a huge reason why many people are coming back to vinyl. It's because of events like this that really help evangelize the medium.”</td>
<td>Primary Action: Justification Theme: Record Store Day is a symbol of indie store success Criteria: Recognition, semiotic Order of Worth: Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date: April 2011</td>
<td>Source: LA Weekly, California</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title: “N.J. chain offers discount program”</td>
<td>&quot;We're very concerned about the oversaturation of music retail stores in New Jersey and nationally, and about the erosion of price points and margin because of the introductions of more mass merchants and electronics chains,&quot; Lang says. &quot;All of this is happening while the customer base is not increasing.&quot;</td>
<td>Primary Action: Critique of national chains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date: April 1995</td>
<td>Theme: oversaturation, price point, customer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Billboard (East)</td>
<td>Criteria: Price, purchasing power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Order of Worth: Market</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Title: “Unable to compete with chains, indies offer alternatives” | “They come in and say they heard this record and it goes like this, or they'll say they heard it at 3 a.m. on a certain radio station. Our staff is trained to know how to find it. The customer feels the service here." | Primary Action: Justification |
| Date: March 1996 | Theme: Training and Service |
| Source: Billboard (North) | Criteria: Competency, expertise, efficiency |
| | Order of Worth: Industrial |

| Title: “Download, but Not Out” | “I think record stores are more than just retail stores. They are social hubs. I still have fond memories of shopping at Orpheum and Fallout and I can’t say that about any other retail. We just need to figure out how to make it work with the shifts that are happening now, and we are trying.” | Primary Action: Justification |
| Date: March 2010 | Theme: The role of the indie store |
| Source: The Stranger, Washington | Criteria: Adaptability, communication, networking |
| | Order of Worth: Project-Oriented |
4.4 The Independent Record Store Perspective

An analysis of how surviving independent record stores contribute to market understandings requires both isolating the trajectory and analyzing the nature of field change. Orders of worth are local, contextual evaluations that modify dominant understandings as they spread through a multiplicity of contexts interacting with similar expressions. Thus a simple comparison of the presence of orders of worth codes in both time periods can identify those principles deemed most worthy and confirm whether a change has occurred. While such a comparison can establish broad change empirically, the quality of these changes remains somewhat clouded. To unpack the nature of field change requires specific consideration of the surviving stores in terms of these changes in orders of worth. I will therefore present the independent record store perspective in two phases. First, I will discuss the changing presence of orders of worth codes from the two time periods (Figure 8) taking note of three important trends that result. Second, I look specifically to the accounts of surviving stores in terms of the changes identified in phase one. I will illustrate below how shifts in inspired and project-oriented orders of worth have contributed to new material value for independent record stores within a new market composition.

The most notable trend in Figure 8 is consistent with what we might reasonably expect with any analysis of small businesses; market understandings dominate independent record store evaluations of the field in both periods. As indicated in Table IX, price dictates evaluation processes in a market order of worth rendering the desire to purchase and exchange as fundamental components of field meanings. Over one-third of the time, explanations of the music retail field would incorporate discussion of current sales figures, the products “driving business”, “profit margin”, or competition. However, it is worth noting that this approach decreases by almost ten percent between periods. A closer examination of market justifications and critiques indicates a shifting emphasis from price point to consumer demand. This likely reflects a change in focus
from the price wars of the mid-1990s, when mass retailers like Wal-Mart or Best Buy undercut many music-only stores, to the significantly decreased role of brick-and-mortar retail in the contemporary music industry due to online retail and illegal downloading.

Second, the inspired order of worth emphasizes the relevance of emotion, passion, and creativity in the field. Its rise from period to period is consistent with an increased emphasis on the artistic value of the vinyl format and its unique consumption rituals. A store owner in Seattle argued, "I think there is also something about vinyl that just makes it cool… It sounds better,"
feels better, and you can actually enjoy the artwork." Additional comments that referred to the “soul”, “passion”, and “power” of the independent record store are consistent with an inspired order of worth and more prevalent in the contemporary period. Note the attention to the elegance of the medium as well as the emotional connection to the store. This nuance distances many contemporary perceptions from the nostalgic interpretation often championed by traditional collector firms. I argue the decline in the domestic order of worth further supports this semantic shift away from sentiment and reverence toward promoting a genuine consumer experience. As a Pittsburgh store manager explained, “[s]o many people are reacting to the tactile experience of walking into a store, picking up a record, touching it, going home and listening to it, really feeling the music.”

Third, project-oriented evaluations emphasize networking and communication as well as maintaining flexibility to adapt and change. This increase is consistent with other works that use orders of worth to identify changes in practices and understandings (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). It suggests that our performance of economic activities has evolved from its functional, industrial roots to more flexible styles. Note the decrease in the industrial order of worth consistent with such an evolution. While actors in both periods certainly referenced the relationships developed while digging through albums at a local music store, identification with the independent record store as a “social hub” emerges in the contemporary period. This new social hub perspective extends to a recognition of the necessary social infrastructure (i.e. artist or live music scene) within the area to support record store survival as well as an increased emphasis on versatile strategies and rotating product within the stores. Again, while some similarities were evident in the earlier period, the nature of the early perspectives took on a clear industrial tone. In other words, references to products and store strategy in period 1 often emphasized expert service, location, convenience, and the efficiency with which stores could locate hard-to-find products. Where many of these strategies have been rendered obsolete by the internet, the
increase in project-oriented perspectives has translated the earlier period’s expert “staff that is knowledgeable and into music as opposed to a generic clerk” into a valuable store-based network “where people can come in to talk about music.”

Phase one of the analysis illustrates how orders of worth can differentiate among a variety of perceptions often simultaneously active when common meanings or structures are discussed among invested actors. As a result we see broad expressions of common knowledge manifest in the domination of the market order among these small business actors. Yet a decline in this perspective in combination with underlying shifts in other orders of worth indicate variation among local and regional understandings. This dissonance between dominant and alternative meanings requires further consideration of independent record store accounts in terms of the changes identified. In the section that follows, I find many surviving retailers are adapting to the technologies of modern consumption through two interrelated topics. First, many surviving independent record stores are emphasizing the complementary role vinyl records play with new digital technologies thus reconciling interest in digital portability and the aesthetic experience of analog in a single narrative. Second, a curation discourse has emerged that both communicates a music perspective on contemporary music culture and decreases uncertainty for consumers.

4.4.1 Inspired Worth and Consumption Practices

There are two general representations of vinyl record consumption that surface from the period 1 analysis. Primarily, vinyl was a collectible item to be searched out and discovered, "like baseball cards or vintage cars." The “small coterie of vinyl lovers who insist on the superiority of analog recordings” not only rejected the CD digital rendition but found the history, rarity, and artwork of vinyl records equally important. Record collecting was an addictive pastime for passionate, die-hard fanatics and largely discussed separately from mainstream music consumption. One Minneapolis collector admitted to living below the poverty line but justifies his
lifestyle arguing that he doesn’t “need much anymore… it is the thrill of the hunt, the passion that keeps him in the business.” Vinyl was also discussed as a central music format for small record labels and underground music acts. At the time, the cost of manufacturing a 7-inch vinyl record was significantly less expensive than CD duplication and therefore supported the production and circulation of these works. From these accounts, independent record stores offering vinyl were those that “[shied] away from major-label product” and the sale of underground records and collectibles signaled legitimacy outside popular genres. In both representations, consumers of vinyl were outsiders, often portrayed as archivists of a kitschy, nostalgic format unwanted by mainstream consumers. In an article about those places where one can still find vinyl records, one independent record store owner explained, “A lot of time we’re the dumping ground for people’s garage sales.”

By period 2, the massive decline of CDs brought on by the rise of internet technologies revived a discussion regarding vinyl records as a viable consumer product throughout the country. As stated in LA Weekly, the internet made CDs an “awkward middleman” lacking the aesthetic value of vinyl and now, the efficiency and speed of the MP3 format. While vinyl record sales have not come close to replacing CD sales, many small independent record stores find the demand for new and used vinyl to be more than enough to succeed as illustrated in this evaluation of the used record market by a Chicago store owner:

“I used to see Led Zeppelin records in dollar bins across America… And maybe you’ll find that here and there for a real beater copy, but that’s just not the case anymore because the demand has almost outweighed the supply on what used to be seen as supercommon stuff” [emphasis added] (Chicago Reader 2011).

Unlike the collector approach of the earlier period, firms benefitting from the increase of vinyl record sales offer distinctly modern accounts of consumption. While discussions do retain traditional collector references to the “sexy artwork” or “superior sound”, many contemporary accounts describe the appeal of vinyl records like “opening a nice bottle of wine or having a nice
meal.” In this approach the elegance of the ritual and tangibility of vinyl records have been juxtaposed to the instant, disposable perception of the MP3 as we see in this interview with Michael Kurtz, the director of National Record Store Day:

“The experience of buying a 12” vinyl record, opening it, feeling it, looking at the artist's artwork and finally dropping the needle on the record requires a certain amount of attention and focus. The listener ends up being drawn into the experience that the artist worked so hard to create” (LA Weekly 2011).

Kurtz makes note of both the ritualistic shopping and listening experience and extends this value to all consumers. Such an approach complements modern connoisseurship and identity development (Zukin and Smith-Maguire 2004) by softening the niche collector mentality of the past. Rather than relying exclusively on those aspects of vinyl records that have made it worthy for collectors over time, new evaluations are inviting a much broader consumer population to participate in the “thrill of physically flipping through records” as well as having “a more personalized, intimate engagement with the songs and albums that move them.” The efficacy of new evaluations is justified by not only the significant rise in vinyl record sales but the contemporary artists like Radiohead, the Black Keys, and Bon Iver that top the overall vinyl sales category (Nielsen SoundScan 2012).

Additionally, unlike the somewhat purist attitude of traditional comparisons of analog and digital formats, modern accounts tend to argue vinyl and MP3s can (and perhaps should) coexist. For example, one owner of a Seattle independent record store outlined the benefit to consumers that utilization of both formats can offer:

"As an early MP3/iPod adopter, I've always felt that vinyl was the perfect complementary medium. MP3s are practical and they're always with us. There's nothing practical about vinyl, but it gives us something tangible to hold while we listen. And album covers are sexy and will always appeal to music and art lovers. I love my iPod, [but] I love my records more! I wouldn't want to give up either” (The Stranger 2010).
While references to the "crappy sound fidelity" of digital formats persist, the account above is consistent with industry trends toward new and reissued records that include a free MP3 download of the music for use with digital devices. New vinyl records are often manufactured at 180 gram, audiophile grade which signals a high level of durability and quality. And, many record players are now made with USB adapters enabling consumers to transfer old records without a digital option onto a computer. These strategies illustrate how independent retailers appear to have learned from the mistakes of the past. Rather than preserving a long-standing critique of digital formats in its original form, surviving record store actors adopt traditional critiques of sound quality but accept the functional advantages of MP3s. This offers the contemporary music consumer an account that reconciles interest in digital portability with the aesthetic experience of analog in a single narrative.

4.4.2 Project-Oriented Worth and Store Strategy

In period 1, independent record stores often specialized in order to compete with large chains. This specialization surfaced in two forms. First, across the country many independent record stores practiced genre specialization. These stores advertised that they were the “collector’s choice” for fans of a specific types of music. One independent record store owner described it as, "If you’re an R&B fan, and you found yourself here, you would think you had died and gone to heaven.” This approach to specialization was particularly important for vinyl record sales at the time because some stores served as the only resource for genre-specific products. For example, many dance or hip hop specialty stores catered to DJs who required vinyl records for nightclub performances. From this perspective, if your store is “the only reggae specialty store in a 10-block radius,” retailers often expressed a certain market protection because they filled a niche the chain retailers did not know or care about.
A second form was the deep catalog strategy where many independents would "specialize in having everything," carrying the discography of many artists or the entire catalog of a particular record label. Independent record stores were regularly threatened by the predatory pricing strategies of some large chains and most mass retailers. Being the “largest vinyl emporium in Western Pennsylvania” or a “one stop music shop” allowed many stores to compete by offering superior inventory despite the premium price. One Chicago independent record store owner summarized the strategy by stating, “Of course, I get people asking why is it $15 when they pay $9.99 at Best Buy, so I ask them why they didn't buy it there. They always say, ‘Because they didn't have it.' So, pay me for having it." The financial commitment of maintaining a large inventory in combination with search and availability advantages of the internet rendered this strategy largely obsolete by the 2010-12 period.

Instead, period 2 offered new approaches to large inventory where multiple vendors might collaborate in a single store, for flea markets, or in “pop-up” locations to offer the variety and selection that once came from the deep catalog strategy. In February of 2011, the recently closed Fat Beats in New York City started a monthly pop-up store they described as “reminiscent of the atmosphere and energy that the [New York] and [Los Angeles] stores once exuded.” These strategies are consistent with additional accounts of collaborative efforts like special cause fundraisers, live artist performances, and events with local businesses. Such an approach is most evident in the celebration of National Record Store Day. Since 2008, the third Saturday in April serves as an independent record store holiday where participants offer special releases, various promotional products, and artist appearances to celebrate music culture and, in the process, support brick-and-mortar stores through increased traffic.

Proponents of Record Store Day and similar events emphasized “the energy in the store and the absolute enthusiasm from the patrons” who can use these events to “support local musicians and impact the community and the music scene in their area.” Additionally,
independent record store owners point to radio support, music venues, musicians, supportive local press, and a vibrant art scene as vital in maintaining a healthy music retail environment. While appreciative of this social infrastructure that makes their survival possible, many stores frame such support as a “conscious, political decision” to “show personal and financial support”, be a part of a “supportive record-collector community”, or ensure “more of the tax dollars stay local.” Although direct criticism toward downloading and online retailers is a component of the independent record store narrative, it comes with an air of regretful acceptance such as in this interview with a manager at Amoeba Music in Los Angeles:

“The album art form has been lost with the advent of MP3s and single track marketing, and that is sad. As much as it makes music accessible quickly, it also makes it more disposable—like so many other things these days. Physical formats mean it is here for longer and there is more of an investment in it as a creative piece of art and expression… That culture and that experience means a lot to people, and to continue it means a lot to people. It is a respite from the stress-filled day-to-day, it is a witness to their individuality, it is fun!” (LA Weekly 2011)

Whether bemoaning change or embracing it, the period seems replete with reference to the importance of a creative community of consumers and retailers. Through coalitions of interconnected interests, independent record stores are promoting what Johnston and Bauman (2010) might call a reconstructed “musicscape” where vinyl record consumption is the physical manifestation of affiliation in an authentic music community.

Many contemporary independent record stores communicate this authenticity through a reinterpretation of inventory in terms of curation. Like the genre specialization in the previous period, curation emphasizes exclusivity of stock that reinforces the importance of the titles offered. However, unlike genre-based stores, these collections are pulled together across a range of musical tastes. As opposed to inventory depth, these curated stores fuse passion, selectivity and breadth to offer a unique evaluation of music for consumers. The owners of Wall of Sound in Seattle, WA emphasize the importance of carrying “interesting” music. They qualify this
assessment by identifying how, "Independent recording was exploding. [Their] main effort was to learn what was the ‘best’ or most desirable and have [their] selection serve as a sort of recommendation." Other stores echo this labor of love where owners and employees look to stock records that are "important cornerstones of a respectable record collection." This often involves making tough decisions about what they order and what they don't as outlined by this Ohio independent record store owner:

“That’s one of the drags about the market now… There’s only so many people buying records, and you have to know when to say “no,” sadly, to some things. Sure, if they’re still in print, you can get them, but to keep this deep catalog — there’s very few things I always try to keep the full catalog of” (Little White Ear Buds 2012).

Independent record stores have been forced to respond to market changes that made both large inventory and deep catalog specialization impractical or impossible. For those that have succeeded, a curation discourse has emerged as a central component to many critical assessments of the music retail field. Such an approach to inventory communicates a music perspective built on the passion, creativity, and cultural knowledge of independent record store owners and their employees. It expresses knowledge of one’s clientele “so when you go in [to the store] you don’t have to paw through piles of crap.” And while curation often increases risk for the retailer, it decreases uncertainty for consumers by certifying the quality of a product through streamlining selection and supervising supply. The reputation built on such decisions situates these intermediary firms as central to quality evaluation, and valuable to consumers within the new market composition.

4.4.3 Reinforcing Market Relevance by Curating Value

Where a reverence for the traditional record store aesthetic is implicit throughout the independent record store perspective, it is clear that contemporary accounts rely heavily upon the dynamic of inspired and project-oriented orders of worth. Many store actors are offering new
interpretations of social position based on ritualized practices and authentic cultural connections that emphasize place in the relationship between consumer and product. I use the term curating value here to capture the “dual effect” of cultural meaning on market change (Zukin and DiMaggio 1990). Drawing on scholarship that links aesthetic value to organizations (Pettinger 2004, Williams and Connell 2010, Witz, Warhurst, and Nixon 2003), curating value similarly emphasizes the extent to which a firm is able to embody particular cultural styles and therefore enhance their value through larger symbolic meanings that appeal to particular consumer groups. Thus curating value indicates preservation of the elegance and tangibility of vinyl records by way of archiving important works. However, organizations like these independent record stores can both reproduce and transform market position in context as past, present, or future references to cultural meanings are enacted. In this manner, curating value also indicates selective presentation of the most interesting, quality products; a service that sifts through the mass of options locating those most relevant. I offer curated value as a concept where firms both embody a cultural aesthetic that is of some market value and augment meanings with the intention of enhancing this value.

Thus one side of the conceptual coin reveals the embodiment of symbolic ideals valuable to status-seeking demographics reproduced through preservation of traditional aesthetics and culturally relevant meanings. Independent record stores draw on the culturally relevant meanings that make their markets in three ways. First, the vinyl record epitomizes both the nostalgia of a classic technology and the intimacy of the listening experience. Second, many store environments regularly embrace the traditional, “old-school” record store aesthetic through décor, new and used product, staff recommendations, and so on. Third, these retail jobs are often occupied by “record store lifers,” “collectors,” “fans,” and “musicians” as a source of financial support (Sargent 2009, Calamar and Gallo 2010, Lena 2012). The demonstration of common status and culture signals contributes to overall market value by extending meaning from the product, to the store
environment, to the employees (Pettinger 2004). A firm’s ability to maintain local legitimacy through this symbolic work can reinforce their relevance within the market by reproducing a niche value largely familiar to discerning audiences.

The other side of the coin establishes ways in which intermediaries negotiate between relevant field evaluations in innovative ways. Unlike Tower Records, Sam Goody, or any mass retailer, the risk involved with carrying the "interesting", "best", or "important" music differentiates the independent record store from other similar organizations. In turn, successful symbolic work in the form of selective presentation can reshape markets and affect industry outcomes. As stated earlier, a rational actor perspective would suggest that when value is uncertain consumers are less willing to pay for products or services. The analysis above illustrates how these intermediary firms certify the quality of products through streamlining selection and supervising supply for consumers, thus building a reputation based on these decisions. In addition, vinyl records facilitate a unique contemporary consumption where music lovers can participate in authentic practices while supporting local businesses. The newest of these products enable analog and digital formats to coexist which further reconciles the dissonance between broad industry trends and the day-to-day market realities of these firms. Thus successful firms are executing new, culturally relevant meanings that differentiate their role from others by positioning independent record stores as an authority on the quality, status, and ritual of contemporary music consumption practices.

4.5 Conclusion

The intersection of cultural meaning and market change remains a central concern of new economic sociologists. Yet despite a recognition of the importance of the relationship, some have argued that current theoretical approaches produce incomplete concepts that overlook the intersectional dynamism of economy and culture (Levin 2008, Zelizer 2005, Zukin and DiMaggio
1990). Instead, we are often left with an interpretation of culture as something that affects either market construction or market operation but not both. Levin (2008) points to works like Velthuis’s (2005) analysis of contemporary art markets that avoid these either/or assumptions by illustrating both the cultural foundation of markets and the value of culturally resonant objects within a market. In response to this call for multidimensional analysis of culture and market, I offer a case of firms forced to navigate an industry trending toward digital technologies despite their reliance on a physical product for survival. My analysis establishes changes in field understandings due to this dissonance between industry trends and day-to-day market realities. And where some independent record stores maintain a perspective that resonates strongly with traditional meanings, these data show new evaluations that promote a redefined store identity coinciding with a contemporary consumer experience featuring vinyl records. Like research on foodies (Carroll and Wheaton 2009, Johnston and Baumann 2010) and grocery produce (Jordan 2007), the meaning and ritual embedded in products and services takes precedent in a rising contemporary concern with authenticity distinct from tradition.

As with changes in many other United States retail industries, price competition has made the chances of survival for smaller retailers increasingly slim. The challenge for these intermediary firms is to promote unique value rooted in an innovative combination of principles. Like in fashion, hospitality, home décor, and many other retail industries, surviving independent music retailers are appealing to consumers through both the embodiment of familiar symbolic criteria and strategic, symbolic work in regard to products and services. By curating value through the dual effect of preserving traditional aesthetics and selectively presenting a contemporary authenticity, intermediary firms can establish valuable niches in a world of seemingly unlimited choice. Aspects of this phenomenon are evident in the automation of banking and customer service where the trust and knowledge of person-to-person contact has been refashioned into a valuable commodity. And as consumers continue to use their purchasing power to “participate” in desired
events, values or ideals (Beckert 2011), independent record stores offer some respite from a music industry often criticized for its commercial interests and uninspired product. Like boutique retailers, craft industries, or fine dining establishments, surviving independent record stores are transitioning from a place to purchase products or services to a place where consumers have an experience. The decisions each store makes, curating their vision of music culture, signals association to a familiar aesthetic and repositions selected rituals, products and practices as a component of the art consumers value.

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1 When I began researching the curious yet significant sales increase in vinyl records, I was cognizant of the variety of options available for purchasing vinyl records (independent record stores, online options, non-traditional music retailers, flea markets, etc.). At first glance, the choices for consumers certainly appear to weaken the connection between independent record stores and vinyl record sales. However, as I continued to gather data I found that despite changes in how we buy music and the explosion in vinyl record sales, independent record stores have continued to sell at least two-thirds of all tracked vinyl records according to Nielsen Soundscan data. These estimates are certainly low considering that not every store is tracked, many independent vinyl record releases that are not tracked, and stores regularly rely on used vinyl sales to survive. In light of these facts alone, I felt confident that the connection between independent record stores and vinyl record sales was more than sufficient for the analysis that follows.

2 Economists have defined intermediaries as types of firms that purchase products for resale or help buyers and sellers meet and exchange (Spulber 1996, 1999). Intermediaries have been studied in terms of financial markets (Zuckerman 1999, Smith 2010), legal services (Suchman and Cahill 1996), labor (Gress and Bagchi-Sen 2007), creative industries (Negus 2002), and technology (Lichtenthaler and Ernst 2009, Methlie and Pederson 2003) yet less consideration has been given to the role of resale agents in making markets and influencing product value (Negus 2002, Miller 2006, Velthuis 2007).

3 The social world described in the pragmatic sociology championed by Boltanski and Thevenot (1991, 1999) is not one dominated by external constraints. Rather, their research program treats the social structure as somewhat fragile and only held together by the reflexive work of invested actors. This work requires the activation of justifications and critiques that offer an evaluation of what is happening, or the worth of equivalent actors, events, objects, or ideas. Actors are beholden to an imperative of justification where critiques of a given value requires justification of an alternative. The resulting social relations are therefore fluid and contextual where even the most dominant of common understandings are subject to modification as localized evaluations spread through a multiplicity of contexts interacting with other justifications or critiques. Orders of worth provide the underlying grammars to this array of different situations encountered in everyday life. As illustrated in Table 2, each order is based on different
modes of evaluation, views humanity through different filters, and offers a specific ordering of the population in question (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Where any and all of the orders of worth may be active in a given context, those orders seen as most legitimate consolidate through public discourse into a common knowledge that is further codified and enforced by authoritative actors. The strength of an order of worth framework lies in its leverage to isolate competing values, identify more temporary local arrangements, and analyze those compromises aimed at more durable agreements (Jagd 2011). The model has been applied to a variety of organizational settings, including instances of organizational change (Fronda and Moriceau (2008, Gagnon and Séguin 2010). These studies find organizational actors “mobilize different orders of worth in many different ways at different stages of organizational change processes” (Jagd 2011, 354). Thus rather than focusing on the trajectories of dominant logics, research based on orders of worth involves a broader set of issues including the co-existence of competing orders of worth and organizational field change.
5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 A Message of Worth

The independent record store is surviving. Their survival rests on a refashioned message that fuses the traditional and the contemporary into an organizational identity suitable for the current music retail market. Like the three examples offered in the introductory chapter, innovative messages draw on multiple, sometimes conflicting, meanings to author new justifications for action. With their skinny vegan program, PETA has brought individual consumption decisions regarding health and body into the field animal rights activism. And while there are still major discussions on whether movement change need be obtained the “right” way, PETA stands firm that the achievement of end goals is what’s most important. Through a meaning project centered on healthy individual lifestyle choices, PETA has been able to achieve strategic goals.
When massive environmental damage results from human acts, how might we find justice for those effected? Is there truly a price that can properly capture the effect of environmental disasters? And if not, how else could we hold culpable parties responsible? Authorities have devised economic measures for such atrocities that incorporates the aesthetic value into the price tag. In this way, the actions taken have been justified as more appropriate across groups of activists, residents, officials, scientists, and the organizations responsible. 360hiphop.com looked to bring the political and social meanings embedded in the traditional hip-hop community to the burgeoning online media sector. Where this strategy was initially embraced by the financial sector as a viable approach to tapping into the urban teen market, the fragility of “dot.com” markets proved to be too much to overcome. Where content has become a central feature of new online media sources, the case of 360hiphop.com illustrates the vital importance of context and negotiated reality among invested actors. It seem their innovative approach was simply too far ahead of its time and assumed an unreasonable level of engagement from target audiences.

Together, these examples and the case of independent record stores emphasize the potential of intermediaries to recognize a social position, make sense of the dynamics of that position, and produce new, resonant meanings. These skilled actors are able to coordinate relationships across fields in creative ways to make issues of lifestyle, economy, and culture commensurable with animal rights, environment, and technology issues respectively. The independent record store has refashioned the cultural relevance of practices associated with the collection of vinyl records with the contemporary consumer passion for authentic experiences and value in specialist selectivity. By reframing the meaning of the independent record store to be both cultural icon and authority on contemporary quality and status of goods, survivors have legitimized questions regarding where one’s music was purchased and how one came to acquire music in consumer evaluations. In this final chapter, I will review the empirical and theoretical contributions throughout this dissertation and consider the importance of these specialist
organizations as market creators and cultural authorities. I conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of my work for related topics like consumption and entrepreneurship and comment on the future of independent record stores in a constantly evolving field.

5.2 Research Limitations

All three substantive chapters rely upon a longitudinal, multimethod content analysis of media and industry documents. And while I stand firm on my approach to the research design and data collection, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the potential impact of these decisions. First, rather than randomly sampling archived sources, this analysis relies upon a purposive sample of documents. I recognized early in the design phase that a random sample of media accounts, or even music and culture section accounts, would not provide the precision necessary to answer the research questions I have. In all likelihood, a random sample of the same archives would overlook much of this niche survival focusing instead on dominant actors like iTunes, Tower Records, Walmart, and so on. I found that a purposive sample would allow for more precise collection of data and credible analysis of the surviving specialist firms. Second, previous studies of organizational form and identity regularly rely on documentation from the firms in question to capture the internal processes associated with change. Prior to deciding on a content analysis, I did some preliminary work attempting to gain access to a few Chicago record stores with the aim of reconstructing a data set from store documentation. It turns out that even the most successful record stores are not the most conscientious record keepers. In fact, I was told later in my data collection process that many of the events and collaborations I identify were hand-shake deals or word-of-mouth developments. I therefore justify my use of public discourse to analyze organizations and change based on the works of many organizational ecologists who look at issues of identity and form through social identities (Hsu and Hannan 2005, Polos et al. 2002). From this vantage point, what a firm does and what that means is more appropriately found in the surrounding discourse of firm actions. Whether actively engaged in public discourse or not,
these popular accounts serve as both a common image of record stores in context and the measure by which all other stores are evaluated.

Finally, my analysis of emergence and change required some follow-up qualitative work with independent record store actors in order to clarify actions or events that were poorly covered in the media and industry documents. My initial strategy was to identify key players in the coalitions and in the creation of Record Store Day and ask for additional documentation on the action or event in question. This was the moment where the lack of formal documentation became most evident. Moreover, in some cases where it seems likely that historical records are available, I was met with significant resistance and denied access to a range of requests. To this day, I have been unable to even speak with Carrie Collition, a founding member and current employee of Record Store Day. Because of these limitations, I was forced to include select interviews to obtain much of the information I required. As I discuss in chapter two, I took every precaution to verify the accounts of these respondents and chose to limit their inclusion throughout the dissertation to only those actions or events that demanded additional data. To this day, I am confident that there are quality counts of total U.S. independent record stores available that would help me substantiate my claims. Unfortunately, Nielsen data is not only expensive but has changed their store categories over time and only tracks the retailers that collect Nielsen data. Other expensive options have given me some indication that their data does not go back to 1994. Government data is not annual and categorizes independent record stores with other collectible retailers. I believe Record Store Day has these data but continue to send me other data that while helpful, is not an annual raw number of stores.

5.3 Empirical Summary and Contributions

In paper one (chapter two), I ask how organizations in challenger positions might exert influence in changing markets. The case of independent record store survival brings the decline of the music retail market and the expected failure of associated firms to our attention. In similar
cases of market decline, the smaller firms are expected to fail more rapidly due to limited resources, market uncertainty, and decreased demand (Hannan and Freeman 1977). Instead, we see the smallest and therefore most vulnerable of firms surviving drastic technological change where we would logically expect total market failure only slowed by the resilience and resources of larger firms. To understand this development, I utilize strategic action field theory (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012) to consider how legitimate challenges to the status quo emerge. By studying the actions and perspectives of invested individuals, groups, and organizations within and across the networked fields that constitute the music industry, I find the collaborative efforts of these specialist retailers central to the influence they now maintain in a new market reality.

Explaining the evolution of the music retail market required an analytic history of major shifts in the music industry over the past twenty years. The narrative I offer isolates particularly salient actions by major record labels and other high order fields that play a significant role in the material and symbolic shocks to brick-and-mortar music retail. In line with strategic action field theory, I am able to organize these actions into two major destabilizing periods and the series of response dynamics that surface as a result. Early destabilization is the result of the introduction of mass retail strategies into the industry. The ability of mass retailers to buy in bulk and sell under cost permanently destabilized field relationships and quickly elevated these new entrants into an incumbent position in the music retail field. While major record labels enjoyed unprecedented market value, an overcrowding of the retail market forced firms to reassess their position and restate their value in a changing field. Later the advancement of personal computing and internet technologies allowed consumers to reject this mass marketing of music. Through litigation and investment in restrictive digital music technologies, record label incumbents successfully alienated many consumers and devalued online products.

Where price competition remains relevant throughout the music retail field, socially skilled challengers have quickly recognized a need to communicate alternative definitions of value that
capitalize on the strengths of the independent record store. By detailing challenger attributions of threat and opportunity, I identify the emergence of new meanings among independent record store owners in common circumstances. Through the development of independent record store coalitions, these types of retailers were able to appropriate new meanings and tactics collectively and redefine the value of their stores in innovative ways. Over time, sporadic collaboration across major coalitions increased interaction and communication which further articulated this foundation of common interests. These collaborative efforts reinforced the value of independent record stores among many artists, record labels, and distributors which all but ensured the adoption of national Record Store Day. Where price competition and claims-making to governance units and proximate fields offered no respite from market collapse, their collective articulation of alternative criteria called on the discerning consumer to re-establish the niche value of these culturally relevant actors.

This emergence and development of independent record store coalitions in response to a series of destabilizing events illustrates the central role knowledge-sharing can play in legitimizing and innovating across organizations (Edwards and McCarthy 2004, Soule 2012). The initial sharing of stories, experiences, beliefs, and so on served as the impetus for shared meaning projects that would facilitate joint action therefore increasing the inter-field legitimacy of their claims through their programming. As major technological shifts erupted, the coalitions began to expand their network of tactics and resources rooted in shared meaning projects across coalitions. The success of the “weird” campaigns, Think Indie distribution, and annual conventions lauded the uniqueness of each record store. By the time a discussion of a national Record Store Day occurred, the culture and local idiosyncrasy of each independent record store was central to the framing of the event. In other words, the inter-coalition collaboration that resulted in the development of Record Store Day was built on a strong ideological position that both resonated across challenger retailers and fit pre-existing beliefs shared with many record labels, distributors,
and artists. The position similarly resonated with discerning consumers, tired of the profit motive of major record labels but hungry for a connection with the artists they supported.

The independent record store should be extinct due to their limited resources, overall market uncertainty, and decreased demand. Instead, this case uncovers the vital role of collaboration both with and across fields in periods of destabilization. I show how a particular configuration of challenger firms has exerted influence within a changing market through the innovative execution of culturally valuable meanings. The art, history, ritual practices, artifacts, and common stories that constitute a record store culture provided a discursive platform for a legitimizied justification of action. Where market uncertainty had left a wider range of actors more receptive to new ideas that offer alternatives to the status quo, the challenger identity enabled innovative strategic action that resisted the perceived commodification of music, musicians, and music culture.

Where the first paper considers the ways that independent record stores have influenced the market, paper two (chapter three) considers how the changing market has affected the independent record store. In the third chapter, I ask to what extent the organizational identity of surviving music retail firms has changed in the wake of technological innovation and whether any changes among individual independent record stores follow any pattern across the evolving music retail market. Despite previous works to the contrary, I find that the contemporary independent record store differs in important ways from its historical reference yet has maintained a resonant identity with target audiences. By examining how record store identity is articulated in public discourse, I argue their niche revival in a drastically changed market has required a social acceptance of what these stores are despite some variation in traditional understandings of what they do. I argue that this chance is made possible by a space of identity innovation that allowed firms to expand services and products without the same threat of audience sanction. The uncertainty of drastic technological change produced an opportune moment where categorical
changes in the music retail market enabled the exploration of new possibilities without losing jurisdiction over valued core products and practices.

I identify this space of identity innovation through a longitudinal approach to public discourse regarding music retail. I isolate four periods that exemplify major moments in the market’s evolution and use network mapping software to visualize the associations made by the retailers and media and industry actors based on Baron’s (2004) criteria of organizational identity. In period one of the analysis, market stability explains a general willingness by most firms to diversify and expand yet the resonance of tastemaker, mainstream, superstore, and mass retail identities reinforces an ardent attempt by the smaller retailers to maintain boundaries in an increasingly saturated market. Uncertainty from new computer technologies in the second period led most retailer types to rely heavily on dominant products or services. Yet, a cloudier visualization underneath these dominant technologies suggests that firms were indeed scrambling to maintain relationships with target audiences. Thus the most resonant features of the small retail forms remain central but low sharpness and lack of overall resonance suggests a palpable confusion over what a real record store should be or do in this changing market. By period three we see a new, largely consolidated iteration of the independent record store. Perhaps in response to the uncertainty of period two, many of the salient boundaries from period one no longer seem relevant. Instead, the independent record stores have begun to diversify in various ways as a response to market realities.

By the final period in the network analysis, public discourse regarding music retail is almost exclusively in regard to the surviving independents. With online music consumption largely institutionalized by this point, the network visualization aligns strongly with a late-stage market renaissance where surviving brick-and-mortar retailers serve a wide range of niche interests. Though the identity of the independent record store persists, the range of strategies used to execute this social position suggests that both organizations and audiences have adapted their
notions of identity to the context in which they are making evaluative claims. Nowhere is this more evident than in the presence of coexisting claims of authenticity in period four. Where authentic claims aligned strictly with form types early in the analysis, period four shows little indication of salient forms yet a strong representation of both idiosyncratic and craft authenticity. The former through the advent of Record Store Day as an effective rhetorical tool that focuses and legitimizes a celebration of unique, surviving retailers. The later through diverse yet selective presentations of cultural knowledge that maintain the tools and practices recognized as part of the cultural community. I argue that these domains can coexist due to their common use of vinyl records as a visible projection. In this sense, vinyl records bridge contrasting claims to secure organizational identity in a changed market reality.

Rao, Davis, and Ward (2000) attribute an organization’s social identity to the “industry to which they belong, the organizational form they use, and through membership in accrediting bodies” (270). My work illustrates how the identity of surviving music retail firms has expanded through new products and services that have, in fact, altered the organizational form of many of these niche retailers. Where drastic technological change resulted in great uncertainty and the collapse of industry as it was once understood, it also facilitated a space of identity innovation where all invested actors, firms and audiences alike, were forced to adapt to a new market reality. Public acceptance of an expanded independent record store identity that includes a wide variety of products and services would not have been possible without these broader industry changes that compromised the earlier boundaries of a healthy market. Yet the continued legitimacy of the record store identity has required socio-cultural accreditation that smooths the transition to a late stage market renaissance. By tracking discursive features of authenticity throughout the analysis, we see that on one hand the success of Record Store Day and other similar events have served an accreditation role by tailoring the public message of these surviving retailers through idiosyncratic means. Such events infuse the practice of consumption with an event to be
experienced. Not all independent record stores are involved in these events but its success has produced a standard by which survivors are measured as well as a blueprint for social identity maintenance.

On the other hand, the vinyl record as a cultural object reinforces a craft authenticity that remains central to the record store identity regardless of additional market exploration. The tradition and simplicity of the vinyl record recording offers the contemporary consumer a sense of purity in an industry that has been commodified and digitized. In this sense, such a craft credibility produces a cultural accreditation easily recognized by discerning consumers. I argue these idiosyncratic and craft domains of authenticity are able to coexist in the contemporary music retail market due to the bridging function vinyl records play. As the tool of traditional music consumption practices, it unites contemporary fans and collectors in its associate practices. As the focal consumer good of national Record Store Day, it serves as a unique artifact of not only music history but personal history. In this product is the experience of the Record Store Day Event and the stories that go along with it. And through the craft ritual of listening and studying this cultural object, the experience of searching and participating in a cultural event can be relived and shared.

The third paper (chapter four) aims to consider the macro developments uncovered in the first two papers exclusively from the perspective of the independent record stores. In chapter four, I ask how these firms negotiate dissonance between an industry trending toward digital content and the market realities of survival. Thus, where chapter two shows how the stores were able to influence change through collaborative meaning making and chapter three uncovers the adaptation required to maintain a strong social identity despite drastic technological change, this chapter illustrates how the owners, managers, and employees of surviving stores justify change on a day-to-day basis. I find that a curation discourse serves as the practical innovation from new strategic actions. In this final substantive piece, the concept of curating value reconciles the symbolic value of what these stores have meant with the positional value of what they mean
today. I locate this new understanding by coding instances where store actors justify their social position or critique other firms in the field. By comparing the public discourse of independent record store actors from 1994 through 1996 (period 1: CD dominance) to similar actors from 2010 through 2012 (period 2: relative stability following the crash of brick-and-mortar retail), I am able to analyze the way in which firms have differentiated themselves in light of broad change.

By focusing on producers and their processes of differentiation, we see how independent record store actors establish valuable niches that correspond to notions of organizational identity (White 1981) and thus make firms different in the eyes of consumers (Aspers 2010, Boltanski and Thevenot 1991). For many, these processes required the promotion of a new role for the record store that reconciles consumer interest in digital technologies with the ritual experiences of vinyl records in a single narrative. Where the elegance of the ritual and tangibility of vinyl records has often been juxtaposed to the instant, disposable perception of digital media, the contemporary firm often argues that these qualities should coexist. What is more, the contemporary independent record store account regularly softens the niche collector mentality of the past inviting a much broader audience to participate.

I argue that the success of this more inclusive narrative has hinged upon the cultural aesthetic these intermediary firms embody and the strategic use of culturally relevant meanings within their field. Thus the legitimation of this new narrative often requires a social infrastructure of other types of local retail, artists, musicians, conscious consumers, and media in order to take hold. Moreover, the comparative analysis suggests that independent retailers appear to have learned from the mistakes of the past. In this new market reality, record store actors are cognizant of the balance between what products they want to offer and what they can offer. Whether motivated by economic reality or a situated perspective on music culture, the selective presentation within stores has become central in the production of new value.
I use the term curating value to explain the way in which these firms negotiate this dissonance between industry and local market stability. Curating value captures the “dual effect” of cultural meaning on market change (Zukin and DiMaggio 1990) by incorporating both the dominant cultural meanings that make markets as well as those local and regional visions that can modify markets as they spread through a multiplicity of contexts. Thus the firm is able to embody particular cultural styles and therefore enhance their value through larger symbolic meanings that appeal to particular consumer groups. This embodiment of the traditional record store aesthetic maintains some market value through the reproduction of an environment largely familiar to discerning audiences. In addition, curating value isolates the selective presentation of the most interesting, quality products therefore serving the consumer by sifting through the mass of options and locating those most relevant. Record store actors reference the passion, selectivity and breadth of their collection designed to offer a unique evaluation of music for consumers.

Where market changes have made both huge inventory and maintaining a deep catalog impractical or impossible, curating value has changed record stores for both retailers and consumers. Rather than establishing an association with a given type of retail store by drawing on the familiar aesthetics of the past, contemporary survivors look to carry the "interesting", “best”, or "important" music that differentiates them from other similar organizations. This active process of valuation increases the risk on the part of the firm with the expectation that decreasing uncertainty for the consumers through a certification of products will enhance value. Successful execution of curated value has allowed surviving retailers to build a reputation on their decisions and position their stores as central to quality evaluation. I argue this fusion of aesthetics and risk management is unique to contemporary consumption practices where music lovers of all kinds can participate in the authenticity of record stores while supporting local business. The surviving independent record store is charged with the task of emphasizing the meaning of products and services to capture a rising contemporary concern with authentic experience. In this sense, these
firms exemplify a transition from one of many places to purchase products and services to a place where consumers have an experience.

5.4 Theoretical Summary and Contributions

I introduced the case of independent record stores as a fruitful space in which to continue theoretical conversations regarding embeddedness. New Institutional perspectives take on this paradox by emphasizing collective, socially constructed understandings that structure meanings and emphasize relationships. Organizational ecology looks at the various ways in which firms use resources available to them to survive in the population in which they operate. Social movement scholars often point to how actors collectively frame social reality in response to changing social and political factors. And, economic sociologists focus on the objects and practices that comprise a given social space rendering valuation and exchange meaningful in context. This common concern with the ways in which individuals and groups act independently despite various social systems that reinforce conformity is central the discussion that follows. Below I will consider this paradox of embedded agency by first returning to the themes of market, format, and place value discussed in the introductory chapter. This results in a review of the culture and strategic action typology offered in paper one (chapter two) and the both/and approach to value illustrated in paper three (chapter four). I conclude the section by summarizing the benefit of fusing literatures on organizational change.

Implicit throughout my work is a support for scholarship that respond to the issue of embeddedness by identifying micro- and meso- level processes where invested actors navigate meaning systems. In terms of market value, this work has emphasized a cooperative value that stands in sharp contrast to the competitive, profit maximization that regularly characterizes markets. Regardless of social position, we see the dependence industry actors have on a constructed order of specified relationships in a given social context. From this order, rules, understandings, and expectations emerge that subsequently guide all firms’ actions. Thus all
market actors rely upon an embodied knowledge of how a market is to operate in order to survive. Over time, this knowledge becomes a common sense approach to how competition operates in the market. Thus a “right” and “wrong” way to participate drives a juxtaposition between dominant and challenging consumption practices.

The exogenous shocks brought on by mass retail and technological innovation disrupted this common sense approach to the market that had allowed a wide variety of brick-and-mortar, music retailers to flourish. By emphasizing the survivors throughout this dissertation, I have shown how firms that focused locally by engaging creative, urban communities have been able to utilize this infrastructure in uncertain times. While we see a wide range of strategic actions prove effective by the beginning of the 2010’s, this disparity in what a record store does is countered by a relatively consistent cultural understanding of what these firms still are. The foundation of this identity is rooted in the niche meanings of the tastemaker collector and genre specialists and the dedication to this identity is central to independent record store survival today. This embeddedness can also offer insight into the failure of a range of organizational forms during the crash of major brick-and-mortar music retail. As the market changed and competitive advantage shifted to online and mobile options, those organizational forms that could not rely on cooperative resources and realize their own niche strategy quickly became obsolete.

More often than not, this inability to adapt to the changing market was due to an over-reliance on the compact disc as a product. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, a product of consumption gives rise to an opposition of knowledges and lifestyles. The CD format as an object may retain certain practical, physical advantages over alternatives like vinyl records but the advent and proliferation of the mp3 as an object stripped the CD of its symbolic value. No longer was the CD the format of convenience, speed, and modernity. What is more, without these symbolic values that had made CDs the dominant format for the better part of two decades, the physical attraction to the vinyl record as an object was revived. In other words, many have argued that what physical
media does has been rendered obsolete, but with larger artwork and a pleasing “warmth” to the sound, why wouldn’t you buy a vinyl record? Yet this value remains secondary to the larger symbolic value that remains relevant to discerning consumers of music culture.

For the conspicuous consumer, the vinyl record has retained a positional value that signals the consumer’s location in social space. Often associated with a “hipster” culture or contemporary preoccupation with authenticity, the vinyl record signals a recognizable membership in a music lifestyle distinct from the disposable, mass produced characterization of the contemporary music industry. As an integral piece of independent record store survival, this object also maintains a transcendental value that connects the consumer with subjective, aesthetic ideals. First, as an antique technology, the object connects some to a different cultural and political time. The object is perceived as representing the purity and simplicity of an earlier period in music and social worlds. Second, owning a product of the musician’s labor creates an image of proximity for some and allows the consumer to participate in the artist’s identity. Thus the product, with its embedded meanings and rituals, offers the consumer a medium for self-expression and status that contradicts technologically advanced, mass produced, contemporary trends.

Yet the survival of independent record stores required that social understanding of market change not be solely embedded in the value of the products themselves. The symbolic value of space remains a highly contentious arena in which the success or failure of each independent record store remains in flux. As an institutionalized structure in the market, the place of purchase confers an objective boundary in identity and membership formation. Location offers an occasion for conspicuous spending where indicators of quality and taste are transferred from place to people to product. As a third dimension of transcendental value, the origin of purchase matters to the narrative embedded in the product. Thus the consumer derives additional benefit in the practice of consumption itself; uncovering rarity and appropriating some of its distinctiveness through stories of discovery and pleasure shared with others. Moreover, many survivors have
actively politicized the value of space to emphasize the “good” one does by supporting local business and the cultural community.

This fusion of place, practice, and product has proven integral as a rhetorical vehicle for expressing a relevant cultural community while rejecting a corporatism credited with the demise of the industry. Whether the distinctions made are warranted or not, the association of place with product has facilitated niche resources spaces of “right” and “wrong”, loosely connected by more canonical, culturally accepted meanings. Technological changes compromised some of the most taken-for-granted meanings in the music retail field thus rapidly increasing uncertainty among all invested actors. These surviving, specialist retailers responded with a variety of diversification strategies, catered to local audiences, based upon a narrative of resonant ideals. Thus the ability to act in a given field, where dominant actors look to reinforce the order, rules, understandings, and expectations conducive to their continued control, rests on the project of meaning-making. How one justifies social position and subsequent action among a variety of potential strategies requires the skillful negotiation of localized perspective among relevant common sense understandings. This perspective on agency and structure is most evident in my introduction of the typology that captures cultural influence and dimensions of strategic action.

Where the case of independent record store survival is but one example of the salience of culture in the development and execution of strategic action, Table V in paper one (p. 66, chapter two) looks to situate a generalized cultural element in Fligstien and McAdam’s (2012) theory of strategic action fields. While ideal-typical, the four dimensions I offer illustrate how actors might use their social skill, rooted in social position, access to resources, and available networks, to author new forms of action that resonate with invested others. Through the use of previous research, I locate each dimension of strategic action in settled and unsettled cultural periods though my conceptualization of cultural influence accepts a high level of historical contingency. Indeed, the resonance of record store culture across networked fields implies its establishment in
a previously settled period. Yet the high level of contention over mass retail and technological advancement exemplifies a period of high uncertainty where the execution of coherent ideological claims is central to the control of action. Similarly, further study of the strategic action dimensions would certainly uncover overlap, transition, and so on. As discussed earlier, the collaborative action identified in this work was rooted in the entrepreneurial efforts of individual store owners across the country. However, to understand how challengers influence fields, it became necessary to document episodes of contention through to the achievement of some institutional settlement. The establishment of a newly constructed social order was not evident until after the inter-coalition collaboration detailed in paper one (chapter two).

I argue that my emphasis on a field perspective throughout the substantive chapters is the most appropriate approach to dealing with what are interconnected issues of meaning, context, survival, and change. It is through the foundation of strategic action fields that I have found the necessary theoretical leverage for contributing to economic sociology, new institutionalism, social movement, and organizational ecology literatures. Rather than limit the potential of the data, the emphasis on constructed meso-level social structures in strategic action fields provides an analytic framework that embraces an inclusivity and common purpose across these fields of study. Specifically, these literatures all benefit from a common dialog regarding organizations in the midst of change. When technological innovation brought on new types of markets for music retail, a sub-field emerged that challenged market meanings and reappropriated vital resources. Despite a recognition of this movement and its potential as a new market, the biggest and oldest firms reacted to change as threat and attempted to leverage their advantages into regulation rather than new opportunities. This results in significant changes in dominant fields like music production and distribution, first mover advantages for online retailers like Apple, extinction of the music superstore form, and coalitional structures to support the survival of smaller, specialist firms. The field perspective offers a change dynamic cognizant of control over pure competition.
Thus rather than overlook the innovative responses of these niche retailers by focusing on broad institutional shifts that have destroyed a market, a field approach offers a framework to discuss how change creates opportunity. By centralizing survival as a central factor in the work, I identify factors that have produced less variety in organizational types while maintaining a strong consideration for adaptation under shifting circumstances. Where I argue that evolving meanings associated with the record store identity are essential to seizing opportunities as they develop over time, by incorporating exogenous actors and events, I avoid conceptualizing identity and associated resources in a vacuum. Instead, I interpret organizational meanings through a reciprocal process of legitimation across a range of strategic acts. Where some acts fail, others successfully emerge, maintain, or repair legitimacy in light of perpetual shifts in products and markets. This classification of legitimate strategic acts uncovers the symbolic resources available to those most able to wield them. In other words, despite the dominant notions of culture that hold significant weight in American society, this work illustrates the significant variation in advanced market renaissance where niche perspectives, practices, and objects can survive and thrive among a population of discerning consumers.

5.5 Implications and Future Directions

Though this work is almost exclusively focused on the producer side of market change, there is certainly ample discussion of the consumer perspective and significant implications for a sociology of consumption. As Zukin and Smith-Maguire (2004) assert, the study of consumption can effectively bridge the relationship between individual ends and collective meanings to broad institutional changes. I argue that the successful innovation of survivor meaning projects in this case are rooted in a moral discourse where historical and cultural features are made relevant in consumer evaluation processes. This echoes the work on ethical consumption where individuals make ethical or moral purchasing decisions based on social, nontraditional components of products (Auger et al. 2003, Carrigan et al. 2004) as a form of consumer activism where one votes
with one’s dollars (Brinkman 2004, Johnston 2007). Some studies have suggested that this form of activism might be better understood as a simple expression of personal political beliefs, ethics, and principles (Neilson and Paxton 2010). In other words, more people are making ideological connections to their purchasing decisions regardless of an explicit partnership with political or activist groups (Auger et al. 2003, Berry and McEachern 2005, Graziano and Forno 2012). Like the retailers in chapter four that emphasize shopping local and supporting the music community, we should consider other instances where non-activist organizations politicize their meanings in an attempt to mobilize target audiences. More generally, the findings here certainly support previous research that highlights the growing connection between social and civic identity claims and day-to-day consumption decisions.

Where research on conspicuous consumption and the aesthetic value in organizations has recognized the consumer desire for positional value, the moral component isolates a valuable symbolic participation in a set of ideals. Where research on this practice has commonly focused on issues of environmental sustainability, animal welfare, health and safety risks, labor conditions, human rights, fair trade, and so on, the case of independent record stores brings to light symbolic social value used in a more common form of public opinion. Such a movement society perspective (Meyer and Tarrow 1998, Taylor 2000, Earl and Soule 2005) is integral in assessing the value of products and services in markets saturated with similar choices. The discerning audience that the independent record store looks to maintain may acquire some status value but has also made a statement about music consumption, corporate marketing of art, the state of technology, and so on. Some make this statement sincerely, others for selfish ends. Regardless, my work makes the physical, positional, and symbolic value of a product or service equally relevant for consumers and the material outcomes of firms. Thus from an organization’s perspective, this means that more time be spent on emphasizing who “we” are and how a product or service connects to seemingly unrelated consumer ideals and social values.
Where firms look to fuse place with products and practices, they must recognize that the contemporary consumer is buying an experience rather than just an object. Drawing on the work of Behavioral Psychologists, the success and survival of the independent record store is linked to the successful promotion of “doing” rather than just “having” (Kumar et al. 2014). The practice of flipping through crates of records as a common ritual of record shopping exemplifies Hutter’s (2011) notion of the familiar surprise. But it also is a key component in focusing the evaluation of a product on “where” and “how” one purchases rather than simply “what” was purchased. In social experiments on consumption and crowd behavior Dr. Amit Kumar and colleagues (2014) have found that people tend to be more rude and uncooperative when waiting in line for a product (i.e. a new iPhone) as opposed to an experience (i.e. concert tickets). They attribute their findings to the anticipation of doing that comes with the purchase of concert tickets or vacation arrangements. This active component increases the overall value of the purchase. What is more, no matter how memorable the experience is afterward (good or bad), the consumer is left with a story to share thus further extending the overall value of the purchase. They argue that the value of having something wears off quite quickly but through doing, we extend value based on anticipation and the stories we are left to share. These are social values that consumers more easily embed in experiences or practices that change individual biographies and connect social histories.

The challenge of implementing an experiential meaning project and participating in its day-to-day enactment will remain the central factor in record store survival. It also speaks to the general task of effective entrepreneurship in a capitalist system that reinforces monopoly, standardization, and technological advancement. Perhaps more than anything else, the lesson that independent record stores can offer to similar niche entrepreneurial ventures is to get organized with similar others. While some survivors do credit frugal business practices and individual expertise as the foundation of their success, much more often, they cite a social
infrastructure that comes from other local businesses, the art community, supportive radio, and a live music scene. As Battilana and colleagues (2009) argue, the institutional entrepreneur may often need to be aware of multiple fields active in a given context to initiate divergent change. This is evident in the inter-coalition collaboration of chapter two, diversification in response to a space of identity innovation, and the project-oriented justifications in chapter four that characterize the independent record store as a social hub. Awareness of common issues and organization across fields produces greater opportunity for events and tactics that reinforce the active, social practice of consumption. Sharing strategy and pooling social-symbolic resources spreads the meaning of purchasing an experience locally and delegitimizes the online or mass retail purchase void of the culturally relevant search story. With the range of fans and collectors that continue to support the vinyl record medium, the socio-cultural experience of consumption is what has sustained these niche retailers and what distinguishes the vinyl record from similar declining physical media.

Due to the practical necessity of framing a project of this size based on the data available, my analysis stops at 2012 with a few minor exceptions. At the time of data collection and early analysis, it appeared as if the music retail market had stabilized after the crash of the major brick-and-mortar retailers. Indeed, at this time, it appeared as if the market would be defined by iTunes, Walmart, and a range of independent retailers. Great, that only helps my story. However, as a scholar of change, I knew that technology would not stop at the mp3 and the rolling turbulence that defines all fields would manifest itself in new ways in music retail. Perhaps the biggest change has come in dominant social understandings of music as a stand-alone product. While there had been online radio services dating back to the end of the 1990s, the U.S. launch of Spotify on-demand music streaming service in 2011 and the growth of YouTube music streaming has made online music consumption much more of a service rather than a product. While Apple iTunes remains the largest online retailer of mp3 downloads, on-demand streaming services hit a new
high at 317.2 billion streams in 2015, up 92.8% from the previous year (Nielsen 2016). This has changed much of the industry conversation from product sales to collecting royalties as these on-demand services profit by providing mobile content online and via smartphone. This new technological trajectory in the music industry has resulted in two years of double-digit sales decline for Apple iTunes and there are indications that the proliferation of music as a service is affecting independent music retailers as well.

Still, 2015 marked the tenth straight year of growth for vinyl record sales reaching nearly twelve million units sold (Nielsen 2016). But with this consistent growth comes competition from new sources and a greater need for the resonant meaning project that has served survivors well over the past two decades. Major record labels have gotten more involved in the vinyl record surge causing issues with price and availability. Thus like the conflict over CD prices in the 1990s, major labels are again pushing retail prices. This time as high as $30 by increasing the wholesale cost by around $6 per record. In a world of online streaming services that average about $10 per month, the rising price tag for vinyl records can challenge the overall worth to the consumer. What is more, it has become increasingly common to find repressings of classic major label records at all types of retail outlets. This has resulted in the clothing store Urban Outfitters occupying an 8.1% market share in vinyl records, second only to the 12.3% share of Amazon. And while industry analysts insist that independent record stores remain the backbone of vinyl record sales, less than half of all vinyl records are now being sold at independent record stores (Nielsen 2016) which suggests that the niche stores are not benefitting from the vinyl record revival in the way they had just a few years earlier.

The success of these non-traditional retail sources speak to the ongoing necessity of emphasizing experience; the “where” and “how” of consumption. While much less of a factor in overall sales, some smaller record labels have responded to major label saturation of the vinyl record market by promoting the purchase of vinyl direct. This is an interesting strategy because
1) the label can offer cost savings to consumer by cutting out the intermediary and 2) the cultural legitimacy many independent record labels have may maintain some semblance of the “where” and “how.” For the independent record store, survival returns to an issue of experience and the skillful fusion of place, practice, and product. Where online and other nontraditional retailers have posed threats before, specialists can continue to rely on what distinguishes a local record store from a chain clothing outlet or a point-and-click experience. One can already find a discourse of resistance to buying vinyl records at Urban Outfitters on sites like Diffuser (Mills 2014) and in the Village Voice (Chafin 2013).

The case of record label direct sales poses interesting future questions about how much niche resources can be partitioned before survival can no longer be realized. Where the Amazon’s and Urban Outfitters of the world fit neatly into the current messaging of the independent record store, buying direct could be interpreted as an authentic connection to the artist in question thus reviving some of the purist, tastemaker uncertainty rooted in the DIY ethos of the past. Perhaps little of this will matter as generational shift will continue to normalize online purchases and streaming services and major record label saturation will either cheapen the authentic allure of vinyl records, make vinyl an object of distinction based on exorbitant pricing, or both. What can be said regarding the survival of independent record stores and the proliferation of vinyl records is that no value is irrelevant in an uncertain market environment. And as the definitions of products and services continue to be in flux, the social connections store actors make with fans and collectors maintain a localized space worth saving.
CITED LITERATURE


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  Summary: My dissertation explores the actions of intermediary firms in periods of rapid technological change. By asking how new developments in listening to and owning music have affected the music retail industry, I offer the independent record store as a case of such an intermediary. Through a longitudinal multimethod content analysis of media and industry documents, I investigate field patterns of organization and meaning arguing that store survival has required innovative action on the part of invested actors. Through localized, cooperative meaning making, new perspectives on music consumption situate many independent record stores as curators of music culture. Despite these understandings, stores have found a need to manipulate the traditional record store model to adapt to new market realities. This work illustrates how reciprocity among invested local actors and target audiences can collectively alter the meaning of goods and services to reconstruct niche value in changing markets.

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Publications


Teaching Publications


• Ranked in the top ten most downloaded resources on Trials for 2015.

Online Scholarly Contributions

2015  "Inter-Coalition Collaboration as the Impetus for a National Record Store Day." Mobilizing Ideas. (https://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/2015/10/05/inter-coalition-collaboration-as-the-impetus-for-a-national-record-store-day/)


2014  "Utilizing Name Entity Recognition to Identify Unique Actors." Center on Organizational Dynamics. (https://organizationaldynamics.wordpress.com/2014/06/19/utilizing nameentity-recognition-to-identify-unique-actors/)


Works in Progress

• "Surviving Decline: A Field Analysis of Challenger Emergence and Legitimacy in Changing Markets." Submitted to Sociological Theory

• "Our Own Way: Determinants of New forms of Social Protest among College Students" Submitted to Mobilization

• "Notions of Identity: Brokerage Technologies as Facilitators of Contemporary Authenticity." Submitted to Academy of Management Journal

Jerome Hendricks  Curriculum Vitae
• “Bringing the Civic Back in: Contentious Discourse over Public-Private Partnerships and Urban Renewal.”

• “Name Entity Recognition Software for the Social Sciences” Working Title (methodological piece)

• "Vinyl Revival: A Brief History. Part 2, The Value of People and Place.” (online contribution)

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- Research Assistant; University of Illinois at Chicago: 2011
  - Schools of Bureaucracy: Fraternal Orders in the Industrializing Midwest, 1860-1920
  - Supervisor: Dr. Pamela A. Popielarz

- Research Assistant; University of Illinois at Chicago: 2009
  - Chicago Area Study
  - Supervisor: Dr. Maria Krysan

- Legislative Liaison; City Colleges of Chicago: 2006-2008
  - Department of Intergovernmental Affairs
  - Supervisor: Marie Joelle Isidore

Honors & Awards

- STGlobal 2016 Organizing Committee Travel Award. 2016
- Department of Sociology, Graduate Student Teaching Award. 2015
- ASA Student Forum Travel Award. 2014
- Graduate Student Council Travel Award. 2013
- Graduate Student Council Travel Award. 2012
- Midwest Sociological Society Annual Graduate Student Paper Award; First Prize. 2011
- David P. Street Master's Paper Prize Winner, University of Illinois at Chicago. 2010

- National Dean’s List. 2005-2008
- Northeastern Illinois University Dean’s List. 2007-2008
- Northeastern Illinois University Foundation Scholar. 2007-2008
- Harry S. Truman College Dean’s List. 2004-2006
- Harry S. Truman College Outstanding Student Award in the Field of Social Science. 2006
- Cook County College Teachers Union Scholarship. 2005
Teaching & Related Experience

University of Illinois at Chicago
Instructor
- SOC 300: Sociological Research Methods (Spring 2016)
- SOC 100: Introduction to Sociology (Fall 2015)
- SOC 100: Introduction to Sociology (Spring 2015)
- SOC 490: Senior Research Project (Spring 2014)
- SOC 440: Topics in Organizations and the Economy (Fall 2013)
- SOC 300: Sociological Research Methods (Spring 2013)
- SOC 300: Sociological Research Methods (Fall 2012)
- SOC 385: Sociological Theory (Summer 2012)
- SOC 241: Social Inequality (Spring 2012)
- SOC 300: Sociological Research Methods (Fall 2011)
- SOC 300: Sociological Research Methods (Spring 2011)
- SOC 300: Sociological Research Methods (Summer 2010)

Teaching Assistant
- SOC 490: Senior Research Project (Fall 2014)
- SOC 385: Sociological Theory (Fall 2010)
  Guest Lecturer: Sociological Theory
- SOC 300: Sociological Research Methods (Spring 2010)
  Guest Lecturer: Sociological Research Methods
- SOC 201: Sociological Statistics (Fall 2009)
  Lab Instructor: Sociological Statistics
- SOC 225: Race and Ethnicity (Summer 2009)
- SOC 225: Race and Ethnicity (Spring 2009)
- SOC 241: Social Inequality (Fall 2008)

Northeastern Illinois University
Instructor
- SOC 221: Sociology of Work (Fall 2015)
- SOC 314: Urban Sociology (Summer 2014)
- SOC 211: Sociological Research Methods (Spring 2014)
- SOC 310: Social Movements (Fall 2013)
- SOC 105: Women, Men and Social Change (Summer 2013)
- SOC 204: Sociology of Small Groups (Spring 2013)
- SOC 310: Social Movements (Fall 2012)
- SOC 204: Sociology of Small Groups (Spring 2012)
- SOC 310: Social Movements (Fall 2011)
- SOC 105: Women, Men and Social Change (Summer 2011)
- SOC 204: Sociology of Small Groups (Spring 2011)
- SOC 100: Introduction to Sociology (Fall 2010)

DePaul University
Instructor
- SOC 381: Sociological Research Methods – Qualitative Methods (Spring 2016)
- SOC 105: Social Problems (Spring 2016)
- SOC 101: Introduction to Sociology (Fall 2015)
- SOC 105: Social Problems (Spring 2015)
- LSP 200: Culture Quests in Literature & Film (Winter 2015)
- LSP 200: Culture Quests in Literature & Film (Fall 2014)
- SOC 340: Sociological Inequality (Spring 2014)
- SOC 381: Sociological Research Methods – Qualitative Methods (Winter 2014)
- SOC 380: Sociological Research Methods – Quantitative Methods (Fall 2013)

Illinois Institute of Technology
Instructor

- SOC 351: Sociology of Work (Fall 2015)

**University Service**

- President, Sociology Graduate Student Organization. 2011-2012
- Webmaster, Department of Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago. 2009-2011, 2015 - Present
- Graduate Student Representative, Awards Committee, Department of Sociology, University of Illinois at Chicago. 2009

**Community Service**

- *Volunteer - Freshman World History - Uplift Academy, Chicago, IL. 2006-2007*
- *Tutor - Midtown Educational Foundation, Chicago, IL. 2006*
- *Tutor - Sylvia Center; After School Program, Chicago, IL. 2005-2006*

**Professional Affiliations**

- American Sociological Association
  - Section Member: Economic Sociology, Collective Behavior and Social Movements, and Organizations, Occupations, and Work
- The Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics
- The Society for the Study of Social Problems
- Midwest Sociological Society
- Center on Organizational Dynamics, University of Illinois at Chicago
- Phi Alpha Theta, National Honor Society in History
- Phi Theta Kappa, International Honor Society