



Words of making: how craft and industrial emphases impact market appeal in digital platforms

Antea Gambicorti¹ · Federico Mangiò² · Federica Nieri³ · Daniele Dalli³

Received: 30 October 2025 / Accepted: 14 September 2026
© The Author(s) 2026

Abstract

As traditionally offline sellers use digital platforms to reach global consumers, online narratives become central to market appeal. Yet digital markets require sellers to address both domain-based expectations, such as tradition and attention to detail, and platform-based expectations of efficiency and scalability. Using Etsy as a research site and drawing on the social constructionist view of craft and Language Expectancy Theory, we examine how the intensity of craft cues, reflecting the craft domain, and industrial cues, reflecting platform characteristics, impact market appeal. Analyzing 17,480 Etsy seller narratives, we find an inverted U-shaped relationship: craft and industrial cue emphasis increase appeal up to a point, after which additional emphasis reduces it. These findings extend research on craft narratives and platform-mediated activities by showing that market appeal depends on cue emphasis: sellers benefit neither from overemphasizing craft cues nor from avoiding industrial cues, offering guidance for craft producers seeking online visibility.

Keywords Craft · Industrial · Narrative · Digital platform · Language Expectancy Theory · Etsy

✉ Antea Gambicorti
antea.gambicorti@wu.ac.at

Federico Mangiò
federico.mangio@unibg.it

Federica Nieri
federica.nieri@unipi.it

Daniele Dalli
daniele.dalli@unipi.it

¹ Department of Marketing, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Vienna, Austria

² Department of Management, University of Bergamo, Bergamo, Italy

³ Department of Economics and Management, University of Pisa, Pisa, Italy

1 Introduction

“I really love working with both my mind and my hands. I feel good knowing that I am making solidly hand-crafted products that I know will be long-term companions for their owners.” – Etsy seller 1.

“Our mission is to provide high-quality items at a competitive price. Our customers are our #1 priority. We strive to provide a quick response, fast turnaround, and customer satisfaction.” – Etsy seller 2.

Contrasting narratives like these are common on digital multi-sided platforms. The first seller resorts to traditional craft cues, emphasizing handmaking, love, and durability. The second uses more industrial and platform-oriented cues, highlighting affordability, efficiency, and customer satisfaction. This contrast is not merely stylistic. It reveals a broader challenge that emerges when traditionally offline, local, or relationship-based markets move onto digital platforms (Wichmann et al., 2022).

While this transformation offers greater visibility and access to global audiences (Wichmann et al., 2022), it also requires sellers to address both domain-based and platform-shaped expectations. Similar challenges arise in other traditionally non-digital settings, from local hospitality on platforms such as Airbnb (Bajde et al., 2024) to independent restaurants on delivery platforms (Bunders & De Moor, 2024), where sellers must account for both domain-based expectations, such as localness, community-orientation, and personal connection, and platform-shaped expectations of efficiency, reliability, and customer-centricity. Since sellers' market appeal on digital platforms depends not only on what they offer but also on how they narrate themselves (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2023), narratives become central to success but difficult to manage under multiple consumer expectations.

Craft is a useful context for studying how to address this challenge because much of its value has historically relied on manual skill, uniqueness, authenticity, and an explicit distance from industrial production (Bell et al., 2021). Yet, on digital marketplaces, craft sellers must also compete on efficiency and affordability, scale production to meet global demand (Gandini et al., 2025), and harness the new entrepreneurial opportunities offered by the platform ecosystem (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2023). This creates a difficult strategic narrative problem, which many sellers are not formally trained to manage (Eckhardt et al., 2019): to what extent does complying with domain-based expectations, by emphasizing craft cues (e.g., handmade, attention to detail, tradition), and complying with emergent expectations, by emphasizing industrial cues (e.g., promptness, efficiency, scalability), ultimately shape sellers' market appeal?

Prior research shows that craft-related cues can signal authenticity (e.g., Beverland, 2005) and that authenticity cues can signal craft (e.g., de Kerviler et al. 2022). Yet it has largely overlooked industrial cues, which have become pivotal in digital contexts where craft cues alone are insufficient to meet parallel expectations arising from the platform (Schmitt et al., 2022). Extant research also widely suggests that blending cues can help accommodate multiple requests in contexts characterized by

competing expectations (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Moss et al., 2018). However, it has said less about how these cues should be combined and, in particular, about the intensity with which such cues should be used. Finally, recent research in the craft domain has shown that sellers could mitigate negative perceptions of atypicality through abstract, cohesive, and conventional language across multiple product categories (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2023). Yet, whereas this work focuses on how producers within the same field (i.e., craft) should communicate across multiple product categories, it overlooks the more upstream communication problem of how craft sellers should present themselves in the first place in platform-mediated environments. It therefore remains unclear to what extent craft and industrial cues should be emphasized in sellers' overall narratives, regardless of whether sellers operate in a single or span multiple product categories.

To answer our research question, we draw on the social constructionist view of craft (Ravasi et al., 2025) as our domain theory and on Language Expectancy Theory (LET; Burgoon, 1993) as our method theory.¹ We theorize that craft sellers benefit from moderate use of both types of narrative cues. Craft cues align with consumers' domain-based expectations of handmade production, tradition, and quality, whereas industrial cues align with platform-related expectations of responsive customer service, scalability, and competitive pricing. However, overemphasizing either type of cue may be detrimental. Excessive use of multiple craft cues may represent a linguistic form of craft-washing, over-romanticizing the offering and triggering skepticism about fabricated authenticity and hidden commercial motives (Dobrev & Verhaal, 2024), whereas excessive industrial cues may emphasize categorical misalignment and market co-optation (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). We therefore expect both craft and industrial cues to increase market appeal up to a point, beyond which their effects become negative. We find support for our assumptions by computationally analyzing how craft and industrial cues impact the market appeal of 17,480 Etsy seller narratives.

Our findings offer three key contributions. First, we contribute to the literature on craft by showing that higher market appeal is not associated with narratives that simply overemphasize craft cues or distance from industry. Rather, sellers benefit from moderate craft cue emphasis. This moves beyond idealized representations of craft as a nostalgic myth (e.g., Suddaby et al., 2017) toward a more realistic and contemporary view of craft (Bell et al., 2021). We also show that industrial cues are not necessarily detrimental in online craft markets: when used in moderation, they can help sellers meet expectations of efficiency, responsiveness, and scalability. Second, we complement research on narrative strategies in platform markets. While prior work shows that sellers can mitigate negative perceptions of atypicality through abstract, cohesive, and conventional language across multiple product categories

¹ We consider the social constructionist tradition on craft appropriate because we conceptualize craft as a category and narrative rather than as a distinct approach to work or artisanal production (Ravasi et al., 2025). Similarly, we consider LET a particularly suitable method theory for our research aim because, despite its psychological foundations, it incorporates social constructionist tenets that align well with this perspective (Burgoon 1993).

(Cutolo & Ferriani, 2023), we show that the moderate use of craft and industrial cues matters regardless of whether sellers operate across one or multiple product categories. This suggests that market appeal in digital craft platforms depends not only on managing categorical breadth but also on managing the intensity of different narrative cues. Third, we provide guidance to sellers in traditionally nondigital markets increasingly mediated by online platforms.

2 Theoretical framework and hypotheses

We draw upon LET to theorize how the strategic use of linguistic cues can significantly influence the market appeal of sellers operating on digital platforms. LET posits that individuals develop expectations, rooted in interpersonal, social, and cultural norms, about appropriate communication styles, including linguistic cues (Averbeck & Miller, 2014; Burgoon, 1993). These expectations are shaped by three primary factors: the source, here, the craft seller; the communication context, here, the digital platform; and the nature of the relationship, here, between the craft seller and the consumer. When exposed to a message, audiences first evaluate whether it conforms to or violates these expectations. If a violation occurs, they shift their attention from the message to other source-, content-, or relationship-related cues, to interpret and evaluate the expectancy breach. Positive violations, which meet or exceed expectations, enhance credibility and persuasiveness, whereas negative violations reduce message effectiveness (Afifi & Metts, 1998; Averbeck & Miller, 2014).

Accordingly, sellers should employ narratives that comply with consumers' expectations while avoiding negative violations, as language emphasis directly affects both perceived credibility and persuasive impact (Burgoon, 1993). In digital craft platforms, consumers' expectations are influenced by the interplay between the craft seller, the platform, and the expected consumer–seller relationship. On the one hand, craftspeople and the craft platform evoke a “craft social imaginary” grounded in high-quality, traditional values, and handmade production (Bell et al., 2021). Consumers, therefore, expect sellers to use craft-related cues, which distinguish them from mass-market vendors operating on more conventional e-commerce platforms (Fetzer, 2025; Ganzin et al., 2024). A certain degree of craft-related language is thus likely to comply with audience expectations and enhance market appeal, whereas too little craft emphasis fails to meet baseline expectations associated with the category, resulting in a negative violation and lower market appeal.

However, the specific context of digital platforms concurrently influences the magnitude of linguistic expectations. By choosing to operate online, sellers emphasize their willingness to engage with broader and more competitive markets, extending their reach beyond local boundaries (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2023). This expansion requires some degree of standardization and categorical detachment from traditional offline craftsmanship, which is often positioned apart from commercial expansion (Gandini et al., 2025). Therefore, craft sellers who resort to excessive craft emphasis on digital platforms may be perceived as unrealistic vis-à-vis the digital context, and their narrative may be interpreted as a “sales tactic” that appears inauthentic, overly romanticized, and disconnected from reality (Adamson, 2007). In LET terms, such

overemphasis constitutes a negative expectancy violation. Taken together, this suggests that moderate levels of craft emphasis are most effective, while both low and excessive levels reduce market appeal. Accordingly:

H1: On craft-focused digital platforms, there is a curvilinear (inverted U-shaped) relationship between the craft emphasis adopted in sellers' narratives and their market appeal.

Beyond craft-related expectations, consumers also develop expectations linked to the industrial dimension of digital craft platforms. Drawing on prior experiences with e-commerce environments, consumers may expect sellers to demonstrate efficiency, reliability, and responsiveness, features typically associated with more industrialized forms of production and distribution (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2023). Communicating operational competence and market readiness can signal professionalism. Thus, a certain degree of industrial language is likely to comply with audience expectations about the communication context (i.e., the platform) and enhance market appeal, whereas too little industrial emphasis fails to meet such expectations, resulting in a negative violation and lower market appeal.

However, when the industrial emphasis becomes too dominant, it may appear misaligned with the core characteristics of the craft category. Overemphasis on industrial discourse can heighten the disenchanting features of commercialization (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007), undermining the perceived authenticity of the platform's craft ethos (Mathias et al., 2020). In LET terms, this also represents a negative expectancy violation. Accordingly:

H2: On craft-focused digital platforms, there is a curvilinear (inverted U-shaped) relationship between the industrial emphasis adopted in sellers' narratives and their market appeal.

3 Research setting and data

We test our hypotheses on a large-scale dataset of sellers' narratives published between 2005 and 2019 on Etsy, one of the largest and most well-known online marketplaces for unique craft-made items. The dataset consists of a random subset (45.42%, $n=35,775$) of the web-scraped data originally collected by Cutolo and Ferriani (2023). Accordingly, this initial subset preserves the characteristics of their main dataset: it is cross-sectional, based on the latest website scrape conducted in March 2019, includes sellers from 146 product categories, and contains one narrative per craftsman with at least 30 words, along with profile-level information. As linguistic expectations change depending on the language, cultural context, and the type of product (Burgoon, 1993), for our analyses we focus on English-written narratives of North American and European sellers operating in at least one home-related product category widely characterized by craft offerings (namely, art collectible and home and living) or personal-related (namely, shoes, clothing, bags, accessories, jewelries), thus obtaining a final subsample of 17,480 narratives.

3.1 Dependent variable

Following previous research (e.g., Cutolo & Ferriani, 2023; Zhao et al., 2013), we operationalized “market appeal” through seller performance, proxied by the number of products sold by each seller on the platform.

3.2 Independent variables

We used automated textual analysis (ATA; Humphreys & Wang, 2018) to analyze sellers’ narratives and quantify the extent to which they emphasized craft and/or industrial cues. Specifically, we measured “craft emphasis” and “industrial emphasis” using a top-down ATA approach, involving the development, validation, and application of custom dictionaries (Humphreys & Wang, 2018; see Table 1 and Appendices A-E for details).

Table 1 Validation of the ATA-based measurements

Type of validity	Description
Construct	Following Humphreys and Wang (2018), for the craft and industrial emphasis scores, we used a top-down method employing custom dictionaries
Concurrent	The craft and emphasis scores show substantial concurrence with human ratings (81% agreement; Cohen’s $\kappa=0.62$. See Appendix B)
Convergent	The craft and emphasis scores show substantial convergence with LLM-based coding (84% agreement; Cohen’s $\kappa=0.68$. See Appendix D). Our results also hold when substituting the craft and industrial emphasis measures with the “family” LIWC dictionary, and with the “market orientation” measure (Damavandi et al., 2025), respectively (see Table C2, C3 in Appendix C)
Discriminant	The ATA-based measures do not show strong, significant correlations with other constructs included in the model (see Table 2)
Causal	We included 12 control variables to account for alternative explanations
Predictive	Across different measurement approaches, we confirm the theoretically derived relationships between craft and industrial emphasis and market appeal
Generalizability	The main relationships are replicated with an independent sample (see Appendix E)
Face	The automated classification aligns with intuitive human judgments. For instance, a narrative predominantly adopting a craft emphasis such as “ <i>My name is S. and welcome to my shop where fashion art and creativity is my passion. Long before I decided to launch my own line of handcrafted accessories, I knew that I had a knack for all things creative and crafty. When I wasn’t working for a major Engineering Firm, I was often found creating one-of-a-kind, handmade gifts for friends and family for Christmas, birthdays, and other special occasions</i> ” contrasts clearly with a narrative predominantly adopting an industrial emphasis such as “ <i>We at our shop believe that customer service is the most important aspect and we seek to provide that exact thing to our customers. Because we know that without you guys and excellent products, we would not be where we are today. Our shop was founded to provide buyers with excellent products at affordable prices with outstanding customer communication and satisfaction. We provide the user with an experience to express themselves through our products. We thank you for your support and we hope you enjoy each and every purchase. Thanks. And remember those who seek the truth are the ones that will understand the future. Look towards a better future.</i> ”

3.3 Controls

We controlled for several potential confounders. At the seller-level, we controlled for: “seller quality”, measured as the average star rating (on a 0–5 scale) received by each seller over the past 12 months; “seller experience”, measured by the number of years the seller had been on the platform; “seller gender” based on whether they self-present as male (1) or female (0) on Etsy; “geographic origin” captured by a dummy variable indicating whether the seller is based in North America (1) or Europe (0). At the product-level, we controlled for: “product category” represented by a set of dummy variables indicating the specific category to which each seller is classified; “category spanning”, which measures whether the seller targets multiple product categories (1) or not (0). At the narrative-level, we first controlled for verb tense by including three different variables: “narrative past focus”, “narrative present focus”, and “narrative future focus”, as well as for each narrative’s “readability” (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2023). We also included narratives’ “anti-system orientation”, indicating the extent to which sellers frame their narratives in opposition to mainstream mass-production systems (Chreim et al., 2020), tracked with a custom ATA instrument (see Appendix A for details). Following previous guidance (Moss et al., 2018), prior to analysis, the ATA-based measures were scaled and mean-centered (via z-score) and shifted so that the minimum was equal to zero to facilitate interpretation in a large sample.

4 Modeling

To examine the relationship between craft and industrial emphasis and market-appeal, given the count nature and the over-dispersion of the dependent variable (mean = 3393.88, s.d. = 6951.62), we employed negative binomial regression models with robust standard errors (Cameron & Trivedi, 1998).

5 Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among all variables. All correlations in the dataset are reasonably low, mitigating the risk of multicollinearity, as also indicated by variance inflation factors being smaller than two.

We present the results of our test of hypotheses in Table 3. *Model 1* includes only control variables predicting seller performance. *Model 2* introduces the direct effect of craft emphasis, while *Model 3* adds its quadratic effect to capture potential curvilinear effects. *Model 4* incorporates industrial emphasis, and *Model 5* adds its corresponding quadratic effect. Finally, *Model 6* includes all the variables and represents the saturated model. Coefficients are expressed as incidence rate ratios (IRR). A value greater than 1 indicates a positive effect on market appeal, while a value below 1 indicates a negative effect.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix

Variables	Mean	s.d	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
(1) Market appeal	3393.88	6951.62	1.00											
(2) Craft emphasis	0.18	0.13	0.02*	1.00										
(3) Industrial emphasis	0.03	0.07	0.06*	-0.02*	1.00									
(4) Seller quality	4.63	1.16	0.12*	0.01	0.01	1.00								
(5) Seller experience	1.74	0.47	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	1.00							
(6) Seller gender	0.33	0.47	0.01	-0.02*	0.05*	0.00	-0.00	1.00						
(7) Category spanning	0.14	0.34	0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.00	0.10*	0.00	1.00					
(8) Geographic origin	0.54	0.50	-0.01	0.00	0.03*	-0.00	0.23*	-0.01	-0.00	1.00				
(9) Anti-system orientation	0.00	0.03	-0.00	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.02*	0.00	1.00			
(10) Narrative past focus	3.57	2.42	0.00	-0.00	-0.01	0.00	0.00	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.00	1.00		
(11) Narrative present focus	8.81	2.93	-0.02*	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.01	-0.34*	1.00	
(12) Narrative future focus	0.91	0.91	-0.02	-0.02*	0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.00	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	-0.06*	0.19*	1.00
(13) Readability	62.11	13.59	0.01	-0.05*	-0.14*	0.00	0.01	-0.03*	0.01	-0.01	-0.00	0.00	-0.01	-0.01

* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 Negative binomial regression results

DV: Market appeal	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Craft emphasis		1.374** (0.175)	2.557*** (0.709)			2.595*** (0.717)
Craft emphasis ²			0.296** (0.143)			0.304** (0.147)
Industrial emphasis				5.644*** (1.270)	16.328*** (6.175)	17.018*** (6.453)
Industrial emphasis ²					0.030*** (0.029)	0.027*** (0.026)
Seller quality	2.250*** (0.052)	2.252*** (0.051)	2.250*** (0.051)	2.245*** (0.052)	2.244*** (0.052)	2.244*** (0.051)
Seller experience	1.023 (0.036)	1.021 (0.036)	1.019 (0.036)	1.025 (0.036)	1.026 (0.036)	1.021 (0.035)
Seller gender	1.069* (0.037)	1.072** (0.037)	1.075** (0.037)	1.060* (0.037)	1.059* (0.037)	1.065* (0.037)
Category spanning	1.084 (0.072)	1.090 (0.073)	1.093 (0.073)	1.079 (0.072)	1.076 (0.071)	1.085 (0.072)
Geographic origin	0.976 (0.033)	0.973 (0.033)	0.973 (0.033)	0.974 (0.033)	0.974 (0.033)	0.971 (0.033)
Anti-system orientation	0.789 (0.337)	0.780 (0.337)	0.765 (0.332)	0.811 (0.356)	0.806 (0.357)	0.783 (0.354)
Narrative past focus	1.000 (0.007)	1.000 (0.007)	1.000 (0.007)	1.000 (0.007)	1.000 (0.007)	1.000 (0.007)
Narrative present focus	0.993 (0.006)	0.993 (0.006)	0.993 (0.006)	0.993 (0.006)	0.993 (0.006)	0.993 (0.006)
Narrative future focus	0.953*** (0.017)	0.955*** (0.017)	0.955*** (0.017)	0.951*** (0.017)	0.951*** (0.017)	0.953*** (0.017)
Readability	1.002** (0.001)	1.002** (0.001)	1.002** (0.001)	1.003*** (0.001)	1.003*** (0.001)	1.003*** (0.001)
Product category	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	62.402*** (9.758)	58.403*** (9.257)	55.896*** (8.986)	56.203*** (8.742)	55.704*** (8.647)	49.590*** (7.859)
Llnalpha	2.315*** (0.018)	2.314*** (0.018)	2.313*** (0.018)	2.306*** (0.018)	2.304*** (0.018)	2.301*** (0.018)
Logpseudo likelihood	-150,723.87	-150,717.37	-150,712.23	-150,673.47	-150,661.65	-150,648.91
Chi ² (d.f.)	1326.41 (16)	1397.39 (17)	1384.15 (18)	1403.83 (17)	1415.13 (18)	1502.95(20)
p_value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

N = 17,480; robust standard errors are in parentheses; *p-value ≤ 0.1, **p-value ≤ 0.05, ***p-value ≤ 0.01

The results of *Model 3* support the contention that the use of craft emphasis has a positive effect on market appeal only up to a tipping point, after which the effect shows diminishing returns. More specifically, we found a significant, positive effect of the linear term (IRR=2.557, SE=0.709, $p<0.001$) while a significant, negative effect of the squared term (IRR=0.296, SE=0.143, $p<0.05$), supporting an inverted U-shaped relationship between craft emphasis and market appeal (H1).

Similarly, the results of *Model 5* support the contention that the use of industrial emphasis has a positive effect on market appeal only up to a tipping point, after which the effect shows diminishing returns. More specifically, we found a significant, positive effect of the linear term (IRR = 16.328, SE = 6.175, $p<0.001$), while a significant, negative effect of the squared term (IRR = 0.030, SE = 0.029, $p<0.001$), supporting an inverted U-shaped relationship between industrial emphasis and market appeal (H2). The results of *Model 6* further confirm our hypotheses: *ceteris paribus*, both craft (IRR = 2.595, SE = 0.717, $p<0.001$) and industrial emphasis (IRR = 17.018, SE = 6.453, $p<0.001$) exert a positive effect on market appeal up until a turning point (respectively, 0.41 and 0.39), beyond which too much emphasis on either orientation inhibits market appeal (Craft Emphasis: IRR = 0.304, SE = 0.147, $p<0.01$; Industrial Emphasis: IRR = 0.027, SE = 0.026, $p<0.001$). This pattern is further illustrated by the plots of the marginal effects of craft (Fig. 1a) and industrial (Fig. 1b) emphasis squared. Indeed, consider the following narrative:

“We began our shop with the desire to create **affordable**, fun, creative, designer bags and *handmade craft* items. We are a *family-owned* and operated company. Our shop can proudly say that all our bags are 100% *handmade* by us in the USA. Please follow us on Facebook, where we post a behind-the-scenes look into our little shop and where you can get updates on any sales we

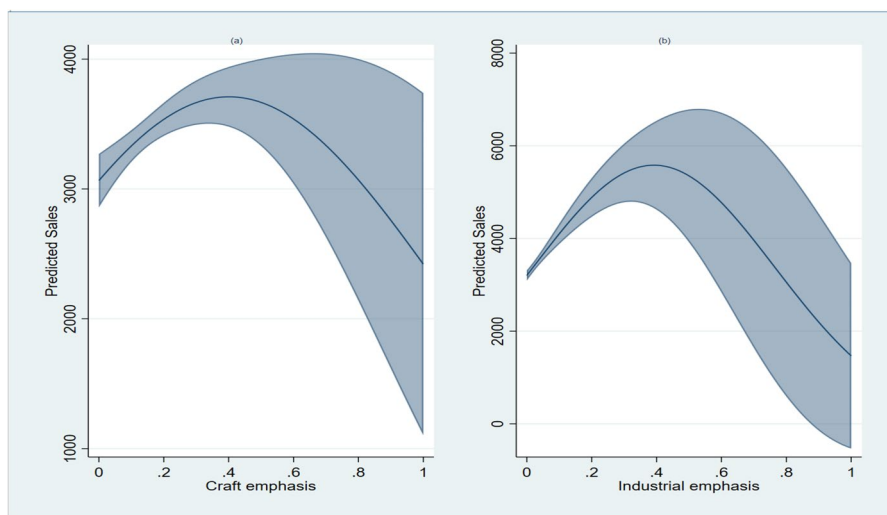


Fig. 1 The inverted U-shaped relationship of craft (left panel) and industrial (right panel) emphasis with market appeal. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Model 6, Table 3

may have. Our goal is to bring you **affordable, fast**, well-made, unique bags and to provide you with the best **customer service** possible. Thank you for visiting our shop!” (Sales: \$55,000)

This narrative, which contains four industrial (in bold) and about four craft (in italics) cues every 100 words, ranked the top 1% of sellers in terms of sales. Interestingly, while both narrative strategies display the hypothesized curvilinear effect, they appear to operate at different baseline levels of market appeal. In particular, industrial emphasis is associated with a higher average level of sales than craft emphasis. One possible interpretation is that this difference reflects the relative “expectedness” and “importance” of consumers’ linguistic expectations (Afifi & Metts, 1998), although our analyses do not directly test this mechanism. While necessary, craft emphasis may be relatively predictable on Etsy, given the platform’s taken-for-granted association with craft production. By contrast, emphasizing industrial capabilities may be less expected but potentially more consequential: once consumers are reassured that the seller belongs to the appropriate product category (through craft cues), they may place greater weight on reliable service, efficiency, and fulfillment, as signaled by industrial emphasis cues. Indeed, a craft seller who fails to meet basic service expectations may be heavily discounted by consumers, who are increasingly aware that they can challenge mainstream consumerist markets from within the market itself (Schmitt et al., 2022).

As for the control variables, seller quality is positively associated with market appeal (IRR = 2.250, SE = 0.052, $p < 0.001$, in *Model 1*), and male sellers perform better than their female counterparts (IRR = 1.069, SE = 0.037, $p < 0.01$, in *Model 1*). Also, while future-oriented narrative hurts sales (IRR = 0.953, SE = 0.017, $p < 0.001$, in *Model 1*), readability positively impacts sales (IRR = 1.002, SE = 0.001, $p < 0.005$, in *Model 1*).

5.1 Robustness analyses

To test the validity of our results, we performed a series of robustness analyses (Appendix C). To assess dependence on modeling choices, we re-estimated the models using OLS with log-transformed sales and zero-inflated models (Table C1). To establish convergent validity, we replaced industrial emphasis and craft emphasis with the alternative measures (Tables C2 and C3). To rule out narrative quantity as an alternative explanation, we controlled for word count (Table C4). To evaluate predictive validity, we estimated a ten-fold cross-validated XGBoost classifier using an 80/20 calibration–holdout split; performance was strong ($F1 = 0.79$). Finally, to assess replicability and generalizability, we retested the hypotheses in an independent sample (Appendix E). All results are consistent with our main analyses.

5.2 Post-Hoc analyses

To better understand how narrative emphases shape market appeal, we examined whether sellers benefit from balancing craft and industrial cues within a hybrid

narrative (Moss et al., 2018). Sellers facing both sets of linguistic expectations may combine cues from competing domains to navigate institutional complexity (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Vermeulen et al., 2016). Yet the effectiveness of this strategy is ambiguous: although hybridity may help sellers address competing demands, consumers may find such narratives less appropriate or confusing because they require additional cognitive effort to process (Cutolo & Ferriani 2022; Moss et al., 2018).

To explore this “razor’s edge,” we estimated an additional model including the interaction between craft and industrial emphasis (*Model 7*, Table F1, Appendix F). Because coefficients and standard errors do not reliably reveal interaction effects in nonlinear negative binomial models (Zelner, 2009), we used the delta method to compare predicted sales at benchmark values of industrial emphasis (Appendix F). Figure 2 plots the effect of craft emphasis when industrial emphasis is low (0; 10th percentile) and high (0.11; 90th percentile).

The average marginal effect of craft emphasis on sales is 1,482.78 ($p < 0.01$) when industrial emphasis is low and 2,991.49 ($p < 0.001$) when it is high. The difference is positive and statistically significant ($\Delta = 1,508.71$, $z = 2.22$, $p = 0.027$), indicating that industrial emphasis strengthens the effect of craft emphasis.

Nevertheless, the relationship remains nonlinear under both conditions: predicted market appeal initially increases with craft emphasis, then flattens and declines, consistent with diminishing returns. This decline occurs earlier and more sharply when industrial emphasis is low, whereas high industrial emphasis sustains the positive

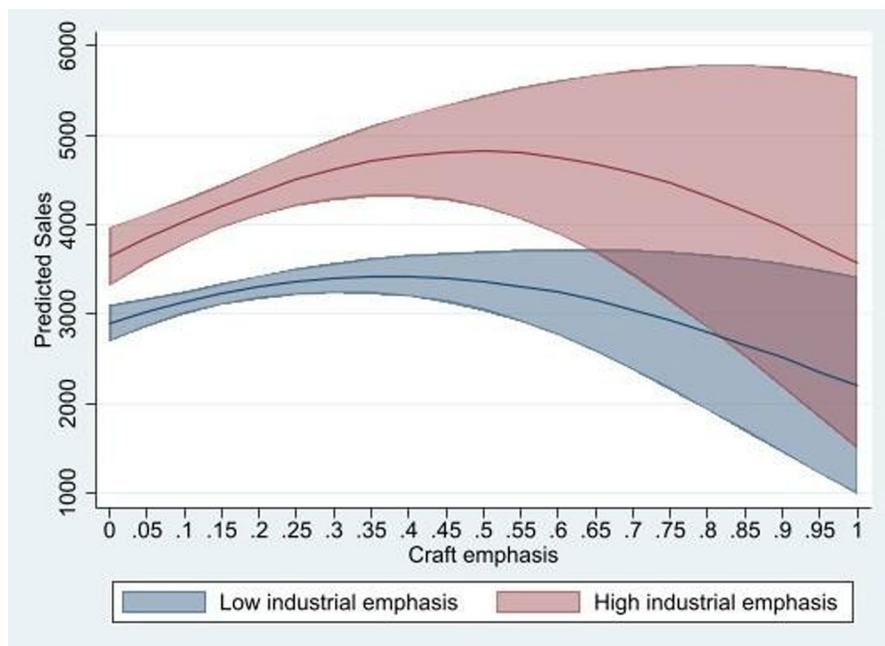


Fig. 2 The effect of the interaction between craft and industrial emphases on market appeal. Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on Model 7, Table F1, Appendix F

effect across a broader range. These results suggest that combining craft and industrial emphases can enhance market appeal by balancing competing expectations. However, consistent with our main theorizing, this benefit holds only up to a point: excessive simultaneous emphasis may undermine narrative plausibility and trigger consumer skepticism (Garud et al., 2014).

6 General discussion

This study examined how sellers caught between more traditional, domain-based and more modern, platform-shaped expectations should use narratives on digital multi-sided platforms to enhance their market appeal, through the computational analysis of craft and industrial emphases in 17,480 Etsy sellers' narratives. Our findings show that both types of emphasis follow an inverted U-shaped relationship with market appeal: they are beneficial up to a point, after which additional emphasis becomes detrimental. The interaction between craft and industrial emphasis further suggests that different narrative configurations can enhance appeal, but only when the two sets of cues are combined in credible proportions. When both are highly emphasized, the narrative may appear paradoxical or less plausible.

These findings first contribute to the literature on craft as a socially constructed category and narrative (Ravasi et al., 2025). Prior research has emphasized that craft derives much of its value from narratives based on authenticity, manual skill, uniqueness, and symbolic distance from industrial production (e.g., Bell et al., 2021). Our results show that, in platform-mediated markets, higher market appeal does not come from simply intensifying craft cues or reinforcing anti-industrial positioning. Rather, moderate emphasis is the best strategy. This supports a more contemporary view of craft (Bell et al., 2021), in which its values remain central but are influenced by the digital platform. Similarly, we show that industrial cues are not necessarily detrimental in online craft markets. Industrial cues can help sellers communicate their ability to operate effectively in this environment. Yet, when over-emphasized, these cues may distance sellers too much from the craft category. Thus, craft and industrial cues are neither simply incompatible nor automatically complementary; their value depends on how strongly they are emphasized.

Second, we contribute to research on narrative strategies in platform markets (e.g., Cutolo & Ferriani, 2023) by shifting attention from what sellers should communicate to how intensely they communicate it. Prior work has shown that language can help sellers manage categorical atypicality, especially when operating across multiple product categories. We complement this view by showing that cue intensity matters regardless of whether sellers operate in one or multiple categories. Even sellers who are not categorically atypical must decide how strongly to emphasize craft and industrial cues in their overall narratives.

From a managerial perspective, our findings offer guidance to craft sellers who may be artisans first and platform-based entrepreneurs only later (Gandini et al., 2025). To make these implications more actionable, we developed illustrative combinations of craft and industrial cues (see Appendix G). Although we examine craft sellers, our findings may also extend to other traditionally offline markets

increasingly mediated by platforms, such as local hospitality or independent restaurants. In these settings, sellers similarly need to manage narratives that address both domain-based values and platform-shaped expectations.

Our study is not without limitations, which open avenues for future research. First, although Etsy is the most relevant platform for online craft producers, future studies could test the hypothesized relationships across other platforms. Second, we adopted a social constructionist perspective, emphasizing how narratives and the craft category itself are shaped by social and contextual dynamics. This implies that our findings are closely tied to the characteristics of the current “third craft revival” (Jakob, 2013) and the platformization context, in which new forms of craft are emerging (Gandini et al., 2025). Future macro-level societal changes may further influence the evolution of craft, consumers’ expectations, and the discursive strategies craftspeople should employ. Finally, while narratives are central on digital platforms (Cutolo & Ferriani, 2023), future work could examine how their impact on market appeal interacts with other platform-mediated signals, such as product images, reviews, ratings, algorithmic rankings, or platform badges. Such research would further clarify how verbal and visual cues jointly influence market appeal in digital craft markets. Taken together, our findings suggest that the future of craft on digital platforms will depend not only on how products are made but also on how strongly sellers emphasize cues reflecting different expectations, making narrative strategies a central determinant of market appeal.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-026-09840-7>.

Funding Open access funding provided by Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU).

Data Availability Data are available upon reasonable request.

Declarations

This publication was funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), Mission 4, Component 2, Investment 1.1, PRIN 2022 Call (D.D. 104/2022), project: “BUMOLDS: a Business Model for Local Delivery PlatformS”, grant no. 20227SC9CC_001, CUP J53D23004100006.

We thank Donato Cutolo and Simone Ferriani for sharing with the authors part of their raw textual dataset, collected from the Etsy website, and presented in their paper “Now It Makes More Sense: How Narratives Can Help Atypical Actors Increase Market Appeal.” *Journal of Management* (2023).

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article’s Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article’s Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Adamson, G. (2007). *Thinking through craft*. Berg.
- Afifi, W. A., & Metts, S. (1998). Characteristics and consequences of expectation violations in close relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 15(3), 365–392.
- Averbeck, J. M., & Miller, C. (2014). Expanding language expectancy theory: The suasive effects of lexical complexity and syntactic complexity on effective message design. *Communication Studies*, 65(1), 72–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2013.775955>
- Bajde, D., Golf-Papez, M., Kolar, T., et al. (2024). The multiple logics of market-based governance: How the sharing economy platform Airbnb governs user conduct. *Marketing Theory*, 24(3), 367–396. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931231202359>
- Bell, E., Dacin, M. T., & Toraldo, M. L. (2021). Craft imaginaries—past, present and future. *Organ Theory*, 2(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317872199114>
- Beverland, M. B. (2005). Crafting brand authenticity: The case of luxury wines. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(5), 1003–1029. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2005.00530.x>
- Bunders, D. J., & De Moor, T. (2024). Paradoxical tensions as a double-edged sword: Analysing the development of platform cooperatives in the European gig economy. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 33(4), 366–382. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10564926231202422>
- Burgoon, J. K. (1993). Interpersonal expectations, expectancy violations, and emotional communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 12(1–2), 30–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X93121003>
- Cameron, A. C., & Trivedi, P. K. (1998). *Regression analysis of count data*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chreim, S., Langley, A., Reay, T., Comeau-Vallee, M., & Huq, J. L. (2020). Constructing and sustaining counter-institutional identities. *Academy of Management Journal*, 63(3), 935–964. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2017.0528>
- Cutolo, D., & Ferriani, S. (2023). Now it makes more sense: How narratives can help atypical actors increase market appeal. *Journal of Management*, 50(5), 1599–1642. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920632311516>
- Damavandi, H., Mai, F., Astvansh, V. (2025). A new technique for measuring a firm's marketing emphasis. *Mark Lett*, 1–15. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11002-025-09781-7>
- de Kerviler, G., Heuvinck, N., & Gentina, E. (2022). Make an effort and show me the love!" Effects of indexical and iconic authenticity on perceived brand ethicality. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 179(1), 89–110. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04779-3>
- Dobrev, S. D., & Verhaal, J. C. (2024). Organizational authenticity: How craft-based ventures manage authentic identities and audience appeal. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 18(4), 740–769. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.1496>
- Eckhardt, G., Houston, M., Jiang, B., et al. (2019). Marketing in the sharing economy. *Journal of Marketing*, 83(5), 5–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242919861929>
- Ertimur, B., & Coskuner-Balli, G. (2015). Navigating the institutional logics of markets: Implications for strategic brand management. *Journal of Marketing*, 79(2), 40–61. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.13.0218>
- Fetzer, G. T. (2025). Days of future past: The tradition–novelty paradox and the endurance of heritage crafts. *Organization Studies*, 46(4), 471–497. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406251317267>
- Gandini, A., et al. (2025). Platform-ised' work? The case of neo-craft work. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 28(1), 204–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13678779241253624>
- Ganzin, M., Chirico, F., Kroezen, J. J., Dacin, M. T., Sirmon, D. G., & Suddaby, R. (2024). Craft and strategic entrepreneurship: Exploring and exploiting materiality, authenticity, and tradition in craft-based ventures. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 18(4), 671–685. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.1528>
- Garud, R., Schildt, H. A., & Lant, T. K. (2014). Entrepreneurial storytelling, future expectations, and the paradox of legitimacy. *Organization Science*, 25(5), 1479–1492. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0915>
- Humphreys, A., & Wang, R. J. H. (2018). Automated text analysis for consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44(6), 1274–1306. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx104>
- Jakob, D. (2013). Crafting your way out of the recession? New craft entrepreneurs and the global economic downturn. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 6, 127–140. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rss022>

- Mathias, B. D., Huyghe, A., & Williams, D. W. (2020). Selling your soul to the devil? The importance of independent ownership to identity distinctiveness for oppositional categories. *Strategic Management Journal*, 41(13), 2548–2584. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3180>
- Moss, T. W., Renko, M., Block, E., et al. (2018). Funding the story of hybrid ventures: Crowdfunder lending preferences and linguistic hybridity. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 33(5), 643–659. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2017.12.004>
- Ravasi, D., Svejenova, S., Kroezen, J., Sasaki, I., & Suddaby, R. (2025). Rediscovering craft in organization studies: Perspectives and pathways. *Organization Studies*, 46(4), 445–469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406251326739>
- Scaraboto, D., & Fischer, E. (2023). Restless platformance: How prosumer practices change platform markets. *Marketing Theory*, 24(1), 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931231195188>
- Schmitt, B., Brakus, J. J., & Biraglia, A. (2022). Consumption ideology. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 49(1), 74–95. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucab044>
- Suddaby, R., Ganzin, M., & Minkus, A. (2017). Craft, magic and the re-enchantment of the world. *Management research* (pp. 41–72). Routledge.
- Thompson, C. J., & Coskuner-Balli, G. (2007). Countervailing market responses to corporate co-optation and the ideological recruitment of Consumption Communities. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(2), 135–152. <https://doi.org/10.1086/519143>
- Vermeulen, P. A. M., Zietsma, C., Greenwood, R., et al. (2016). Strategic responses to institutional complexity. *Strategic Organization*, 14(4), 277–286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127016675997>
- Wichmann, J. R. K., Wiegand, N., & Reinartz, W. J. (2022). The platformization of brands. *Journal of Marketing*, 86(1), 109–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429211054073>
- Zelner, B. A. (2009). Research notes and commentaries: Using simulation to interpret results from logit, probit, and other nonlinear models. *Strategic Management Journal*, 30(12), 1335–1348. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.783>
- Zhao, E. Y., Ishihara, M., & Lounsbury, M. (2013). Overcoming the illegitimacy discount: Cultural entrepreneurship in the US feature film industry. *Organization Studies*, 34, 1747–1776. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613485844>

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.