

The Clash of Legitimation Rhetorics : the Book Industry as a Discursive Arena

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ABSTRACT

We look at the book ecosystem not only as a competitive market, but also as a discursive arena where players struggle with words and symbols. To this end, within the neo-institutionalist approach, we mobilize both the theory of organizational legitimacy and discursive legitimation. More specifically, we study the forms of legitimacy mobilized in the discourses of several book industry players during the French Darcos law process: Amazon, booksellers and the National Parliament.

Keywords: organizational legitimacy – discursive arena – book industry – Amazon – bookshops

Introduction

Since Amazon's arrival in France in August 2000, online sales have steadily increased their share of the book industry. Today, estimated at 21.9% (Xerfi, 2023), Amazon accounts for around half of this, with a global market share of 10%. Independent bookshops, despite their shrinking business, remain a major player in book sales (22.9%), as do cultural superstores (27.7%), both of them remaining the main players in the book economy. The French book market is thus dominated by three hyper-competitive players. This structuring has been the subject of numerous studies based on strategic approach and competitive analysis.

In this article, we propose to look at confrontation in the book market not from a competitive perspective, but to shift the focus to symbolic confrontation, by considering the book industry as a discursive arena. To this end, we will study the argumentation discourse of some players on the occasion of the adoption of the Darcos law (December 2021) and its implementation (October 2023). The Darcos law was the object of a symbolic confrontation between different conceptions of legitimacy carried by these three players: Amazon, the booksellers and the French National Parliament. To analyze this case study, we mobilize neo-institutionalist theories (Scott, 2014) around organizational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) and discursive legitimation (Vaara and al., 2024).

After explaining our theoretical framework and methodology, we present the main results of this case study and the contributions of this article.

Theory

Our theoretical framework is part of the neo-institutionalist approach of organizational legitimacy. We analyze organizational legitimacy using discursive legitimation, and consider the organizational field as a discursive arena.

Organizational legitimacy

Legitimacy is a central concept in neo institutional theories (Lawrence, Leca and al., 2013; Scott, 2014). It is certainly a concept that has generated the most definitions and typologies, in all social science fields (Bitektine, 2011). For all that, following Suchman (1995), a concise definition of legitimacy has been proposed: « *Organizational legitimacy is the perceived fit of an organization to a social system in terms of rules, values, norms and definitions* » (Deephouse and al. 2017).

With this in mind, our main approach is that of neo-institutionalism, which makes legitimacy a key issue in the adaptation of organizations to their field. According to Richard Scott (2014), an organization's

legitimacy is based on three pillars. This approach integrates the coexistence of these three interdependent dimensions, even if some organizations may value one of the dimensions more highly. The first pillar is the normative: legitimacy is based on moral foundations, norms and values recognized as superior. The second pillar is the regulatory pillar: something is considered legitimate if it conforms to the rules. Finally, the last pillar is cognitive and cultural: legitimacy is founded on conformity to a common frame of reference. In the same perspective, Mark Suchman distinguishes three forms of legitimacy (1995). Pragmatic legitimacy *"is based on the calculation of the individual interests of the organization's immediate publics"* (...) *This immediacy means that direct exchanges take place between the organization and its public"* (1995). This form of legitimacy is oriented towards the organization's immediate audience, in contrast to two other forms. Moral legitimacy, on the other hand, is based on the judgment of stakeholders, who ask themselves *"whether the activity is the right thing to do"* (1995). Finally, cognitive legitimacy is based on cultural models that become social reality. A fourth dimension has been added to Suchman's trilogy: regulatory legitimacy, defined as compliance with the legal framework (Deephouse and al., 2017).

Discursive legitimation

To analyze legitimacy, we use the method of Suddaby and Greenwood (2005), who analyze the rhetoric used by organizations, faced with change, to justify their orientations and legitimize themselves. This type of approach has been used in a variety of contexts, for instance within institutional entrepreneurs in the personal hygiene sector (Gorge, Galluzzo, 2020) even Abbé Pierre Foundation (Cailluet and al., 2018). The forms of legitimacy mobilized depend on their contexts and legitimation scenarios, of which there are five (Deephouse and al., 2017): *gaining, maintaining, challenging, responding* and finally *institutionnally innovating*.

This approach has been synthesized by Vaara and al. (2014) as discursive legitimation that is to say *"how organizational legitimacy is established through communication (...) We thus use "discursive legitimation" as an umbrella term to encompass research on how language or communication may relate to underlying assumptions about what is deemed legitimate"*. This form of legitimation practice constitutes the implementation of symbolic management (Ashforth, Gibbs, 1990). In Vaara's theoretical framework (2014), five key elements have been identified: discursive strategies, discursive positions, discursive foundations, discursive temporality and discursive arenas (Table 1).

Table 1 – The five key elements of discursive legitimation

Key aspects	Focus	Role in legitimation
Discursive strategies	Strategy types Rhetorical vehicles	Different types of strategies to construct, shape and maintain legitimacy in direction of stakeholders, with different forms of arguments
Discursive positions	Social positions Rhetorical authority positions	Players can leverage their social positions (roles and identities) and also their authority positions constructed with words and symbols
Discursive foundations	Discursive structures Ideological assumptions	Different types of discourses that are multifaceted and hidden (rhetoric, narrative, framing) Discursive struggles are considered as competing ideologies
Discursive temporality	Process dynamic Historical context Narrative reconstruction	A continuously adaptive process over time, shaped by the sociohistorical process, that also implies narrative reconstruction of past, present and future
Discursive arenas	Arena types	Different types of arenas where players interact

[adapted from Vaara and al., 2024]

Organizational field as a discursive arena

The discursive arena can be defined as a space *"where legitimacy is established and legitimation is thereby shaped (...) i.e., the type of context where actors engage in contests and negotiations, thereby shaping legitimation"* (Vaara and al., 2014). For example, Meyer, Höllerer (2010) have analyzed the legitimation of the "shareholder value" concept in a context of opposition. The role of the media (and therefore of the media arena) has also been highlighted by several works (Pollock, Rindova, 2003), particularly in a context of hostility, confrontation and crisis (Luyckx, Janssens, 2020). Similarly,

several articles analyze discursive legitimation practices in contexts of hostility and high degree of contestation (Vaara and al., 2006; Patriotta and al., 2011). All these studies highlight the multi-level nature of discursive legitimation and emphasize the importance of context-specific communication dynamics in shaping legitimation process and outcomes.

Organizational field is a central notion in neo-institutionalist theory (DiMaggio, Powell, 1983). Fields are formed around issues and problems that become essential in the eyes of players (Scott, 2014). They go beyond the simple circle of actors directly involved to also include those who perceive and experience the same issues. It is not just the relationships between members, but also the shared social meaning that establishes a community and a field. Each field is thus constituted by its own culture, i.e. a system of beliefs and practices. There are three possible states for organizational fields (Hardy, Maguire, 2008): emerging; mature and stable; mature and in crisis. Mature fields in crisis are full of contradictions and struggles between players. Practices and forms are called into question, leading to decline, de-institutionalization and, finally, institutional innovation (Zietsma, Lawrence, 2010). Considering that organizations seek legitimacy in order to act and be recognized in their organizational field, it is possible to view fields as symbolic and discursive arenas where players struggle for legitimacy and engage in institutional work (DiMaggio, 1988). From this perspective, we consider the book industry as an organizational field (Vaslet, 2020).

Material and method

After briefly outlining the context of the Darcos law, we present the material collected and our method of analysis.

The Darcos Law

The Darcos law takes its name from the French Senator Laure Darcos (a former book professional) who proposed the first draft of the law in the Senate in December 2020. After a year of debate by the two Assemblies, the law was passed in December 2021. Article 1 sets a mandatory minimum delivery cost for home deliveries of books bought online. After a two-stage legal consultation (with the French ARCEP authority and the European Union in early 2023), a decree set this tariff at 3 euros for orders under 35 euros. The tariff has been applicable since October 2023. Amazon challenged this law article in front of the French Conseil d'Etat in June 2023. The Conseil d'Etat asked the European Court of Justice for an opinion in May 2024.

This case study is particularly interesting because the French book industry has been a symbolic sector since the Lang law in 1981 established a fixed price and a protective public policy framework for bookshops. The arrival of Amazon in France in 2000 changed all that. Competition is now intense between bookshops, cultural superstores and online sales (Xerfi, 2023). The Darcos law was passed facing this background.

Material collection and discourse analysis

We study the discourses of three key players on the subject of the Darcos law (December 2021: Amazon, booksellers and Parliament (Table 2). Since the law was passed unanimously, we considered the discourse of parliamentarians as a single form, without distinguishing between the positions of the two cultural and economic commissions, nor the political affiliations of the deputies and senators expressing themselves in the debates. We would also like to point out that, while the debates may appear free in their form, the legislative process nonetheless establishes a certain framework for discourse. Booksellers support the process, notably through their National Union (named SLF) and regional associations. With the exception of the National Union's press releases, the other documents in which the booksellers express their views are part of the two consultations held by ARCEP and the European Union because of the legislative process. In this way, booksellers speak with several voices: the Union, which has represented the community since 1999, associations responding to the consultations, and even individual booksellers. This multiple voiced-discourse is globally coherent. Amazon is the key opponent of the Darcos law. These three discourses were collected by a qualitative review between the beginning of 2020 (the start of the legislative process) and the spring of 2024.

Table 2 – Discursive material collected

National Parliament	Booksellers	Amazon
Documents relating to the law-making process, from September 2020 (submission of the proposal to the Senate) to April 2023 (implementation orde) – listed in Appendix 1	National Bookshops Association press releases ARCEP consultation of bookshops European Commission consultation of bookshops	Article in national press (feb. 2022) ARCEP consultation (may 2022) European Commission consultation (feb. 2023) Press releases (june 2023) National Pool (feb. 2024)
500 pages	40 pages	40 pages

We used the theoretical grid of Suchman (1995), Deephouse et al. (2017) and Vaara et al. (2024) to analyze the collected material. In particular, we identified the dimensions of discursive legitimation (Vaara et al., 2024) and the forms of legitimacy mobilized by the various actors. At the opposite of Salvadore and Benghozi (2023), this analysis was carried out qualitatively, without lexicometric support due to the wide variety of discourse forms collected.

Main results

Using the theoretical framework previously presented, we have identified the different forms of legitimacy mobilized by the three key players in the Darcos Law (Table 3).

National Parliament

Based on an analysis of the debates in the two assemblies (Appendix 1), we have identified the forms of legitimacy mobilized in the legislative process. The first form of legitimacy is pragmatic. It circumscribes forms of discourse that aim to directly satisfy the most immediate audience (Suchman, 1995). By posing as the defender of bookshops, Parliament makes these economic players (and their public) its most direct audience. The objective is thus to benefit from their legitimacy by a transactional operation: by supporting bookshops, Parliament acquires the legitimacy enjoyed by bookshops, through a halo effect. In the various analyses and debates, two other types of audience are also targeted: people living in rural areas, and those living in AB+ categories, both of which could potentially be impacted by the effects of Article 1 and shipping costs. This is a very delicate issue, and parliamentarians are very nuanced on the question of possible negative effects on certain clienteles. It's important not to exclude anyone, and to show consideration for these groups. Finally, several members of parliament emphasized Amazon's positive contribution to business and employment in France. This last point is subject of intense debate, as the other forms of legitimacy invoked are rather offensive and hostile towards Amazon.

As for regulatory legitimacy, it is based on two types of argument. The first stems from the sacred reference to the 1981 law: "*the 1981 law proved insufficient to protect booksellers at the turn of the 2010s*", so the aim is to complete the system by following in the footsteps of 1981, the founding act. By mentioning 1981 as a source of inspiration for the 2021 law, the parliamentarians are seeking, on the one hand, to establish a superalignment 40 years apart between two laws, and, on the other, a coherent narrative of legislative filiation. The second argument refers to the failure of the 2014 law, which already aimed to regulate online sales: "*The day after the text was published, the major platforms, such as FNAC and Amazon, charged their shipping costs at one euro cent. This derisory amount has exacerbated the distortion of competition between the major platforms and retailers. The desire to combat circumvention of the 2014 law is therefore a good thing*". The aim is to perfect the legal edifice to improve efficiency and impact, but also to reduce the opportunities for circumventing the prevalent legal framework. Amazon is specifically singled out. The debates show a strong commitment to confronting Amazon's strategies; the lexical field used becomes more offensive in the face of what the Members of Parliament describe as an attack on the 1981 single book price: "*we have understood the battle that Amazon is waging by losing money on books: it's a question of putting down the single book price! Amazon considers that it should set the price of the products it sells (...) the aim is to restore a single book price, by equalizing the price of shipping and objectifying its cost for books ordered on the Internet and delivered to the home*".

The third form of legitimacy is moral legitimacy. The aim here is to improve market conditions deemed unfair to the detriment of booksellers: *"As a result, physical bookshops are faced with a serious distortion of competition, which needs to be addressed (...) improving the conditions of competition in the book sales market between bookshops and online platforms"*. It is also a question of enabling bookshops to exist in the market while respecting healthy forms of competition: *"The players in this environment - a little like in the film industry - form a chain, and this can only hold together if all the players are solid and in good health"*. The parliamentarians are seeking to enable all players to compete within a regulated framework. The final argument is based on ecological criticism of Amazon's proposed mode of consumption.

Finally, the fourth form of cognitive and cultural legitimacy is often mobilized in parliamentary debates on the basis of two types of argument. Firstly, because the 2021 law concerns a particular and noble product - the book: *"it affects a product that is so indispensable to our cultural and intellectual life, that is like no other, and that is neither a commodity nor a simple consumer good"*. Secondly, the debates show parliamentarians' hostility to the societal model proposed by Amazon: *"Amazon's business development model has been denounced by many booksellers as a predatory model that the 2014 law failed to counter (...) We oppose the social and ecological model promoted by Amazon"*. Some even refer to platforms beyond Amazon as *"commercial steamrollers"*.

Booksellers

The booksellers, in a multi-voiced discourse, take up the four forms of legitimacy. The first of these - pragmatic legitimacy - is based on a defensive argument in response to Amazon's arguments. Using figures, scientific studies and maps, booksellers explain that the price of books will not rise, and that the new shipping charges will not penalize customers who are too far from urban centers, contrary to Amazon's rhetoric. The target audience for bookshops is therefore potential penalized customers, who need to be reassured about the risk. It is also a question of showing that, through their online selling websites, booksellers can serve all customers, as the pandemic has shown few years ago. In this case, the audience has been broadened, and bookshops are talking to all potential users.

The second legitimacy mobilized by bookshops is regulatory legitimacy, based on the argument of continuity with the double edifice of 1981 and 2014. The aim is to improve the legal framework to make it more effective and *"avoid the circumventions"* that have been recurring for ten years: *"Preserve the balance initially sought by the Lang law of August 10, 1981 ; Make the law of July 8, 2014 fully operational"*, these are the objectives of the 2021 law. Booksellers want to show that Amazon's strategy of charging near-zero shipping rates constitutes a break with the 1981 law, which the 2021 law seeks to remedy: *"[the 2021 law] reinforces the 1981 law on the single price of books by introducing a minimum shipping rate for book deliveries"*. Amazon has sought to develop *"a culture of free delivery contrary to the logic of the single book price"*. They speak of dumping practices *"devastating for its competitors"* and Amazon's desire to *"hold a monopoly"*, making competition impossible and the market unfair, contrary to what was intended by the Lang law on the single book price. According to the booksellers, Amazon is thus establishing a balance of power and aiming to increase its market share: *"the expansion of pure players is increasingly to the detriment of traditional players in book sales"*.

The third form of moral legitimacy is based on three arguments. The first repeats the previous one (that of competition), but from a different angle. It is not simply a question of respecting the founding text of public book policy, but of *"rebalancing the conditions of competition in the book delivery market, and thus enabling booksellers to develop their presence on the Internet"*. The second moral argument develops the idea of the *"ecological waste"* generated by free shipping and the consumption model proposed by the platforms. According to booksellers, the culture of free shipping will have a multiplier effect on online purchasing. The third argument is that the social model embodied by Amazon is close to *"uncivilized"*. As the booksellers point out: *"Isn't it paradoxical that a company that refuses to pay taxes in France, that destroys so many jobs, that weakens local communities by choking the commercial fabric, and that contributes to the deterioration of the climate (multiplication of unit deliveries, waste of considerable quantities of cardboard, soil artificialisation...), should cloak itself in virtues to justify its refusal to apply the law?"*. Targeting the negative consequences of Amazon's consumption model, booksellers invoke a moral legitimacy. The booksellers explain that Amazon's *"social model (...) destroys jobs and makes people redundant"*, whereas bookshops provide twice as many jobs, citing several studies in support.

Finally, their last legitimation discourse features cognitive and cultural legitimacy. The debate on Article 1 is thus a debate about society, and booksellers support this argument for reframing the debate: *"by defending this law, you are choosing independent bookshops and, through them, culture, employment and social life in our areas"*. It is not just a technical question of shipping costs that the Darcos law makes visible, but societal issues. By repositioning the debate in this way, booksellers are arguing for a form of culture, employment and social relations, and broadening the forms of legitimacy mobilized in their argumentation, towards the cognitive and cultural domain. The booksellers also point to the consequences that abandoning the Darcos law and shipping costs would have on future generations and reading, in the fragile context of the still recent pandemic: *"(...) contribute to the closure of a good number of bookshops, at a time when they were considered 'essential businesses' until recently. Future generations would become accustomed to home delivery, and would no longer know the difference between a bookshop (which makes choices) and a marketplace or warehouse where all books are available at the click of a button"*. The strategy of enrolling young readers repositioned legitimacy on the side of a large-scale and societal issue.

Amazon

Amazon uses all four forms of legitimacy to varying degrees. The first argument is based on pragmatic legitimacy, addressing the community of customers and users. Amazon thus defends the interests of its core audience. Amazon also constructs a mythological narrative of the successful company, listing the great dates and successes of its history since its creation in 1994: *"Everything started with book. When Jeff Bezos Left New York for Seattle, his online selling website with him (...) I understood there was somehow a way to launch a new retail that could only be online (...) Amazon has succeeded in this online business bet"*.

But Amazon also seeks to broaden its audience by claiming regulatory legitimacy, demonstrating its respect for the legal framework. The company first takes care to explain that its opposition is legal and that, in so doing, it respects the normative framework. But Amazon also refers to the 1981 law, the foundation of public book policy in France. By invoking this norm, Amazon aims to prove its commitment to regulatory compliance: *« Thanks to online selling (...) I am particularly proud that Amazon could contribute (...) to defend book and reading, and to promote the ambition of an equal book access of everyone, that is the objective of fixed-price system"*. It is an argument whose irrefutable power aims to install, in the debate, an argument of authority (reference to a sacred norm) designed to close the confrontation.

This argument shifts his defense to moral legitimacy, that is one impactful discursive legitimation strategy. This form of moral legitimacy mobilized by Amazon is based on two arguments. The first moral argument is that of the just cause. Amazon mobilizes the lexical field of the nobility of the mission defended and of a sovereign good rallying the widest possible audience: *"Amazon has become, over the years, an active and creative vector for the dissemination of culture and books, in France and in other countries"*. The second moral argument is based on scientific authority. Amazon's discourses are very well sourced, citing numerous studies by consultants or seemingly serious, there are lots of footnotes, figures, graphs, etc. In short, they all have the appearance of a scientific production, with the aim of conferring an unassailable authority. These two arguments seek to establish moral legitimacy with an audience broader than mere customers.

Finally, the fourth and last form of legitimacy invoked is cognitive and cultural legitimacy. In its search for this powerful form of legitimacy, Amazon refers to the reading community, enrolling other players in its quest for legitimacy (small publishers and lesser-known authors, French-language bookshops, customers in rural areas). By proclaiming itself the defender of other players, Amazon extends its legitimacy far beyond the primary sphere of users: *"Online and physical bookshops are complementary retails and contribute jointly to the diffusion of books and reading practices"*. This strategy is also part of a desire to pacify the confrontation by showing a positive rather than defensive face.

Table 3 – Legitimation discourses during the Darcos Law

Players	National Parliament	Booksellers	Amazon
Pragmatic Legitimacy	Booksellers' audience Halo effect Others social categories	Penalized customers Broader audience	Customer advocacy Mythological tale of a successful company
Regulatory Legitimacy	Superalignment with 1981 Narrative of filiation Improvement of impact	Filiation with 1981-2014 Culture of free shipping Dumping practices Monopoly	Respect of law Respect of spirit of law
Moral Legitimacy	Loyal and fair competition Reduce inegal competition Ecological argument	Unfair competition Ecological waste Consumption model	The just and noble cause Scientific argument
Cognitive and Cultural Legitimacy	Book as a cultural good Amazon's social model	Reframing debate to societal issue Enrollment of young generations	Community of reading Enrollment of other players

Discussion

Having completed the results of this research, we return to the three major contributions of our article. The first contribution concerns the forms of legitimacy mobilized. As can be seen in Table 3, all three players use all forms of legitimacy. We can identify constants within certain forms of legitimacy, whatever the actor's discourse. For example, reference to the 1981 law functions as a sacred foundation for all three discourses. Recourse to 1981 as the supreme value and producer of supra legitimacy is mobilized, in the confrontation, as a decisive argument, likely to close the debate. But this multiplication of usage produces a certain confusion, since the argument, which is supposed to be a major one, no longer makes it possible to stand out and find one's bearings in the debate. The spatialization of the clash of legitimacies is crumbling. To reinforce the 1981 effect, booksellers and Parliament add the 2014 argument in order, despite everything, to preserve a clear and different line of discursive argumentation. Over and above this regulatory legitimacy, the other two forms of moral and cognitive legitimacy are much worked on by the three actors. These two forms have a strong legitimizing potential (Suchman, 1995; Vaara and al., 2014). The arguments used are numerous and less overlapping than in the previous case. Despite this, we note a convergence between the discourse of Parliament and that of the booksellers, with the use of similar arguments (ecology, fair competition, the social model, etc.). The use of legitimation discourses cannot be understood in isolation from one another. A form of circularity and dynamics can be observed in the logic of confrontation, with each actor responding to the others, or even anticipating the others' discourses, or, finally, deconstructing the other's position. Amazon, facing social and intellectual contestation (Carrion, 2020), even responds to arguments outside the framework of the Darcos law. The confrontation here enables Amazon to broaden its legitimation strategy. The use of a form of legitimacy does not rest on a logic in itself, by nature, but must be understood within a logic of discursive confrontation.

The second concerns the legitimation scenarios developed by the three players, as described by Deephouse et al. (2017). The scenario mobilized by Parliament is part of a maintaining and responding strategy. Parliament's aim is to improve the legislative framework that Amazon is circumventing, so the objective is to respond to a player and a practice that the assemblies want to redirect in another direction. Booksellers, on the other hand, are rooted in the same dual logic of maintaining and responding. In other words, they are defending a historical legitimacy that is being challenged and attacked by a new player who arrived in the book industry in 2000 and is keen to reconfigure the balance of power. Amazon, finally, is developing a strategy of challenging and innovating. The aim is to shake up the established framework of legitimacy and propose new criteria for defining it. Not only do the arguments respond to each other, but the dynamics of the confrontation can also be understood in the light of very different and opposing legitimation strategies. Some want to maintain their legitimacy and the current framework

(Parliament and booksellers), even strengthening the foundations of legitimacy of the organizational field, while others (Amazon) want to change them.

Finally, our fourth and last contribution focuses on the book industry conceived as an organizational field and as a discursive arena. Considering the strategies of players seeking legitimacy in the book industry, we have highlighted the relevance of neo-institutionalist theory (Scott, 2014; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) in observing this sector as an organizational field already constituted but prey to clashes. These, are not only economic and strategic, but also discursive. Conflicts bear witness to the crisis that this organizational field is undergoing: clashes over legitimacy reveal Amazon's entrepreneurial and institutional work to de-institutionalize the field and shake up prevalent definitions of legitimacy. The field is therefore mature but in crisis (Hardy and Maguire, 2008). Amazon's strategy is to confront the field's historical players: booksellers and Parliament, the master of public policy. By provoking a semantic blurring, the platform's strategy is to operate an ideological confusion in the field, making it difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint players, values and legitimacies. The map may become unreadable. Thus, blurring constitutes a new modality of institutional work that complements DiMaggio (1988) and Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). The strategy of blurring echoes philosophical work on the status of truth in the post-modern era that characterizes our society (Lyotard, 1984). Not only can the organizational field of the book be read as a discursive arena, but it can also be described as a symbolic and political arena as clashes of legitimacy convey power relations within the field. Our article sheds new light on the book industry, often naively considered as a pure and noble sector without any jammed wheels. But like any organizational activity, its underground workings often conceal other dimensions. We reintroduce the notion of power relations and political confrontation in this industry. Finally, we emphasize that the current clash of conceptions of legitimacy between these competitors bears witness to the field's degree of vitality. While some predicted the decline or even the end of the book industry in the face of digital disruption (Gilbert, 2015), these clashes show that the economic match has, so far, not been won by the platforms, and that the result is still uncertain.

Conclusion

The culture industry, like other fields (health, education, justice, etc.), can often be seen as activities devoid of power stakes or confrontation, due to the specificity of their object. We have shown that this is not the case in the French book industry. Through the confrontation of the forms of discourse mobilized by three players in the Darcos law process, we have uncovered different regimes of legitimacy that reproduce and shift economic competition towards discursive and symbolic competition. Therefore, the book industry is not just a competitive market, but also a discursive and symbolic arena.

This question is particularly important in our contemporary society, where platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2017) has taken on a dominant role in economic exchanges. While platforms have become a major player in markets and consumption over the past twenty years, the case study showed that legitimacy is never a definitively stabilized process, and that these platforms are still seeking to become acceptable and accepted.

While our study is currently limited to France and the book industry, we can imagine that one of the extensions of this research would be to broaden the prism of analysis to other countries (outside Western Europe, for example) and other cultural industries (more technological sectors such as cinema). In these industries and markets, are there other discursive and symbolic clashes? Or, have platforms become so omnipotent that economic competition has won over legitimacy? This is an agenda not only for research but also for the all society.

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Appendix 1

Process	Documents
Senate 1st reading	<p>First draft by Laure Darcos and explanatory memorandum (December 21, 2021)</p> <p>Opinion of the Conseil d'Etat (March 2021)</p> <p>Report by Céline Boulay-Esperonnier (June 2021)</p> <p>Report by Martine Berthet (June 2021)</p> <p>Debates in Cultural Com. (June 2021)</p> <p>Debates in Eco. Com. (June 2021)</p> <p>Debates in Senate public session (June 2021)</p> <p>Text adopted (June 2021)</p>
Assembly 1st reading	<p>Report by Géraldine Bannier (September 2021)</p> <p>Debates in Cultural Com. (september 2021)</p> <p>Debates in National Assembly (October 2021)</p> <p>Text adopted (october 2021)</p>
Senate 2 nd reading	<p>Report by Céline Boulay-Esperonnier (November 2021)</p> <p>Debates in Cultural Com. (November 2021)</p> <p>Debates in Senate public session (December 2021)</p> <p>Text adopted (December 2021)</p>
End of process	<p>European Commission opinion (February 2022)</p> <p>ARCEP public consultation (May 2022)</p> <p>European Commission public consultation and decree (February 2023)</p> <p>Final legislative decree (April 2023)</p> <p>Opinion of the Book Ombudsman (June 2023)</p>