Community Stakeholders' Perspectives of Craft Breweries in Their Communities in Oklahoma

Cara Jolly

Quisto Settle
Oklahoma State University - Main Campus

Laura Greenhaw
University of Florida

See next page for additional authors

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Abstract

Craft breweries are a growing industry in the United States, including Oklahoma. Craft breweries have unique characteristics that affect their brands. One of those characteristics is craft breweries' tie to their local communities through place branding and serving as a third space (i.e., not home or work) for community members. Interviews were conducted with community stakeholders in Oklahoma to understand how the stakeholders perceived the brands of breweries in their communities. Results of the interviews indicated that craft breweries were positively received by communities. Participants believed the breweries were valuable to the local community by contributing to existing culture and fostering connections between community members. The participants also believed brewery personnel were positively engaged in their communities and other businesses, as well as engaging in socially conscious actions. The participants indicated that craft breweries enhanced credibility and tourism of communities. Community leaders should be aware of the potential contribution craft breweries for the cities. This includes aiding tourism, improving attractiveness of the city for those looking to relocate, and fostering interactions between community members. Community leaders and craft brewery owners should be aware of the added value of using place branding via local community ties. In other words, the brewery benefits from tying itself to the community while also adding value to the community. Future research should assess if these results apply to craft breweries in other states. Future research should also address consumers' perspectives of how breweries use community ties and how craft breweries influence tourism.

Keywords

craft breweries, place branding, third space, social capital, coopetition

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Authors

Cara Jolly, Quisto Settle, Laura Greenhaw, Ruth Inman, and Dwayne Cartmell

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Introduction

A craft brewery is a small, independent business rooted in tradition (Kleban & Nickerson, 2011). A craft brewery produces less than 6 million barrels per year and less than 25% of the brewery can be owned or controlled by a non-craft brewer (Watson, 2015b). Since 2011, the number of craft breweries in Oklahoma has increased more than five-fold (Brewers Association, 2019). In 2011, fewer than 10 breweries existed in Oklahoma, whereas today, the state is home to 55 craft breweries and counting (Brewers Association, 2019). Oklahoma's recent craft brewery growth can be tied to recent law changes (Roach, 2016), specifically State Question 792 and Senate Bill 424, which led to the modernization of Oklahoma's alcohol laws in 2016 (Barker, 2018). Convenience and grocery stores may now sell beer over 3.2% alcohol by volume (ABV), and breweries can sell full-strength beer directly to customers (Morgan, 2018; Perry, 2016). The law changes motivated breweries to open on-premises taprooms (Holcomb et al., 2018).

The growth of craft breweries in Oklahoma reflects the general trends of craft brewery growth in the United States. Since the 1980s the number of craft breweries in the United States has increased (Gatrell et al., 2018). Now, more than 80% of legal drinking age adults have a brewery within 10 miles of their home (Watson, 2015a). The craft brewery industry is growing while the overall beer market has been declining (Watson et al., 2020).

The craft beer industry has outperformed large breweries on percent growth and margins since 2006 (Kleban & Nickerson, 2011) and continues to grow as the creation of new beer and styles influence new product and new business entries (Holcomb et al., 2018). The craft brewery industry accounts for more than 24% of the $114.2 billion U.S. beer market (Watson et al., 2019). In 2018, Oklahoma craft breweries produced almost 80,000 barrels of craft beer and made a $646 million economic impact (Brewers Association, 2019).

Craft breweries have grown due to a localized response (Tremblay & Tremblay, 2011), an increase in demand due to changing tastes and preferences (Holcomb et al., 2018; Kleban & Nickerson, 2011), and the popularization of local beer (Holcomb et al., 2018). The appeal of the craft beer industry can be correlated to the higher perceived economic value consumers get from the experience of drinking craft beer (Kleban & Nickerson, 2011).

A large share of the growing demand for craft beer can be credited to the millennial cohort (Fromm, 2014). This generation has been credited as one of the largest consumer groups leading the movement toward more local and craft products (Reid et al., 2014). Craft breweries' customers are distinguished by their tendency to seek out new tastes and experiences (Kleban & Nickerson, 2011), and breweries are "generally presented as entrepreneurial and creative" (Hede & Watne, 2013, para. 23). This fits with the values of millennials, who prefer products and companies that reflect their values (McCluskey & Shreay, 2011). Millennials are often described as self-expressive and open to trying new products or experiences (Pew Research Center, 2010). Millennials tend to prefer spending money at socially responsible companies (Carter, 2016), and craft breweries make efforts to be socially responsible and practice sustainability (Sprengeler, 2016). Craft breweries also tend to engage in corporate social responsibility tactics, such as donations, community events, and sponsorships (Brewers Association, 2019). Craft breweries demonstrate the values, creativity, tradition, and social responsibility that draw in niche, community-driven markets and resonates with millennials (Gatrell et al., 2018).

Promoting to Millennials is more likely to be successful coming from their friends or online reviews (McCluskey & Shreay, 2011). Millennial craft beer drinkers are five times more likely to be influenced by friends' recommendations and word-of-mouth promotion than traditional advertising, and 70% followed their favorite craft brewery and brands on social media (Granese, 2012).

While craft breweries are a growing industry in the United States, they are still a relatively new part of Oklahoma's communities. Oklahoma is one of many states in the southern region of the U.S. that has lagged behind the rest of the country in their respective craft brewery industries (Reid et al., 2014). As such, craft breweries in Oklahoma need to be explored in order to understand how they can be successful. This paper specifically explores how key community stakeholders perceive local craft breweries using their potential roles within communities as a component of their branding. While the results reflect Oklahoma's craft brewery industry, the findings may have implications for other southern region states where the industry is in the early stages of its growth.

Literature Review

Branding

According to Franzen and Moriarty (2009) a brand is a complex combination of consumers' reactions and management systems. Brands identify products, build awareness, and create meaning (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). Branding can influence consumers in multiple ways. The strength of a brand can be correlated to its saliency, which influences consumers' choices and purchasing behaviors (Ehrenberg et al., 1997). Saliency can be split into external (i.e., presence of a brand in a consumer's surroundings) and internal (i.e., the accessibility of a brand in memory) factors (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). Consumer experiences and usage affects internal saliency (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). "Brand managers believe they 'own' a brand, but a brand is a perception that lives primarily in the mind of the customer" (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009, p. 7).

To establish internal and external saliency, businesses use differentiation to make their brand more memorable (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). To achieve differentiation, a brand needs points of difference from competing brands but also some parity with competitors so the brand is included within the general category of those other brands (Iyer & Muncy, 2005; Keller, 1998; Webster & Keller, 2004). Brand image and reputation create differentiation (Mudambi, 2002).

Social and cultural factors are important to brand strategy development as well as consumers' brand perceptions (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). "Since values are the core of culture, research on cultural values is particularly important to brands that seek to immerse themselves in an appropriate value system," (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009, p. 35). Brands have relationships, personalities, and reputations, and the quality of the brand relationship is correlated with meaningful actions of the brand and the consumers' mutual benefit (Evans et al., 2002; Fournier, 1998). People develop attachments and relationships with brands through satisfaction and trust for the brand (Fournier, 1998).

Neolocalism

A unique aspect of craft breweries compared to macro breweries is their tie to the place they are located. Massey (1994) described place as "a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (Massey, 1994, p. 154). A sense of place

makes people care about their physical surroundings, creates community attachments, builds relationships, and adds value to a place, which explains why it makes people feel like they belong (Hummon, 1992; Marcu, 2012; Tuan, 1991). A sense of place is a combination of visual, social, cultural, and environmental characteristics and qualities that make communities different from one another (Hummon, 1992). Craft breweries can also use sense of place to help reinforce emotional connections between a brewery's brand and its customers (Hede & Watne, 2013).

The conscious effort to foster a sense of place based on community identity is neolocalism (Holtkamp et al., 2016). Neolocalism is a deliberate attempt at creating a relationship with local ties, reconnecting with places, and supporting local economies (Shortridge, 1996). The idea of boosting local economies by spending money at the brewery or on local beer through distribution channels is appealing to consumers (Taylor et al., 2020).

The attempt to create a sense of place and utilize place branding has increased the popularity of craft breweries (Flack, 1997). Place branding is the concept of regions, cities, and communities being branded (Hanna & Rowley, 2008), and craft breweries often use place branding to create a sense of community (Schnell & Reese, 2014). Craft breweries often use the local history, landscape, and culture through the names of their beers, label design, logo, and even the name of the brewery (Taylor et al., 2020), which helps craft breweries ingrain themselves into the local community. Examples of place attachment, neolocalism, and place-brand would be the names of breweries as well as the names of the beers the breweries sell (Schnell & Reese, 2003, 2014).

Successful craft beer marketing stems from marketing strategies that focus on local attachments and quality of products (McQuiston, 2013). Creating a design and product consumers notice and can relate to is important for craft brewery marketing (Lahnalampi, 2016). Being on tap in local bars and restaurants is another way craft breweries can market and distribute their products, expand their customer base, and forge local ties (Lahnalampi, 2016; McQuiston, 2013). By hosting their own events and entertainment, breweries can also foster word-of-mouth promotion from current to potential customers (Francioni & Byrd, 2012; Fountain et. al., 2008).

Past research in agricultural communications related to local food has largely dealt with messaging to promote local food, perceptions and behavioral intent related to local food, and how operations engage in local food promotions. Message testing research has generally shown that quality of local food is important (Qu et al., 2017; Ruth & Rumble, 2016), but other research has shown quality did not outperform a control group (Abrams & Soukup, 2017). There have also been conflicting results on supporting the local economy with Qu et al. (2017) finding quality outperformed supporting the local economy while Abrams and Soukup (2017) found that supporting local farmers messaging did not differ from the control group. Holt et al. (2018) found that moral obligation was a predictor of purchasing intent for local blueberries. While there may be general preferences for locally produced food (Ruth & Rumble, 2016), consumers are often looking for the product they want, not necessarily noting if the product is locally in season (Gorham et al., 2015). In terms of how community-supported agriculture (CSA) shareholders and operators communicate, Hall et al. (2013) found that websites and interpersonal communication were the most frequently used channels by shareholders, while print, social media, mass media outlets were rarely used. The operators used a variety of messaging tactics, such as importance of supporting local producers, history of the operation, and cost of joining the CSA, but the efficacy of those messages was not assessed in the study. Bowman et al. (2020) assessed agritourism operations, which often have a local food component, and found that user-generated content among the variables assessed in their study that community posts and reviews were the strongest indicator of page likes. While there is past research in agricultural communications relevant to neolocalism,

that work has largely been focused on perceptions of buying and selling a product as opposed evaluating the role food and agricultural organizations play within their communities, particularly in terms of shaping how community members interact with each other.

Third Space

Craft breweries create unique social value for communities and serve as a third space location (Mifsud, 2018), which has the potential to affect their brands. Hickey (2012) described third spaces as the places where people go when they are not at home (i.e., the first space) or at work (i.e., the second space). Third spaces are locations where people are neither family nor employees, but instead they are venues where people share interests, values, and build connections (Hickey, 2012). Third space locations are hangout locations such as cafes, hair salons, bookstores, craft breweries, and other locations that serve a community best when they are local and inclusive (Oldenburg, 1999). Being part of the neighborhood allows craft breweries to build trust with the residents and helps breweries share their stories (Notte, 2016).

Social capital, which is the idea that people's social connections are a resource that can be used for gain (Bourdieu, 1986), is related to this third space concept. Social capital has three components: moral obligations and norms, such as reciprocity or mutual assistance; social values, such as trust; and social networks, like volunteer organizations (Putnam, 1993). Social capital is built when people interact with each other (Scott, 2017). Relationships and trust are foundational pieces of social capital, which leads to support and sharing of information in communities (Domínguez & Arford, 2010). Social capital consists of the networks of relationships between people, which allows society to function efficiently (Putnam, 2000).

A unique aspect of craft breweries in terms of their role as a third space and social capital is alcohol. Alcohol is linked to endorphin release, which plays an important role in social bonding in people (Machin & Dunbar, 2011). Moderate alcohol consumption, especially in relaxed social environments such as craft breweries, increases psychological wellbeing and can promote large-scale close personal bonds through storytelling, laughter, singing, and dancing (Dunbar et al., 2016).

Another unique aspect of the craft brewery industry is their ability to cooperate with each other while technically being competitors, which is called coopetition (Said, 2019). Coopetition is the binary relationship that emerges when businesses simultaneously cooperate in activities such as strategic alliance and compete against each other for sales or other performance measures (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). Access to shared knowledge is one of the benefits of coopetition (Mathias et al., 2017). Coopetition explains how belonging to a place or community can increase innovation, identity, and shape practices (Said, 2019). This type of relationship emerges when competitors are better off helping each other to help ensure higher quality products and an impact on their market position against a larger organization (Mathias et al., 2017). Coopetition can build an emergent market and can legitimatize a category or industry (Chen & Miller, 2012; Mathias et al., 2017).

For an organization to be successful, it needs an effective brand. Craft breweries have unique characteristics because of their intrinsic ties to the place they are located (i.e., place branding), how they foster interactions between community members (i.e., serving as a third space), and how craft breweries collaborate with each other despite being competitors (i.e., coopetition). How these characteristics are perceived by customers and community members will largely determine the success of craft breweries' brands.

Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how key community stakeholders perceive the brand of breweries within their communities. The following research questions guided the study:

- RQ1: How have breweries affected their communities' environments?
- RQ2: How have community members reacted to the breweries?
- RQ3: How do community members believe brewery personnel engage and interact with their communities?
- RQ4: What role do community members believe the breweries have within their communities?
- RQ5: What do community members perceive as the salient and differentiated aspects of breweries within their communities?

Methods

For this study, key stakeholders from communities with craft breweries were interviewed using a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is used to interpret a situation in terms of the meaning people bring to it by studying a phenomenon in its natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A qualitative approach was important for this study to understand the different perspectives of community members.

Four communities in Oklahoma were selected to represent a variety of community sizes and locations. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used to select participants (Creswell, 2007). Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to address different aspects of the study (Creswell, 2007). Snowball sampling is used once a researcher breaks into a population because it identifies potential participants from people who know others who are information-rich (Creswell, 2007). Email was used to recruit participants using email addresses obtained from business or company websites, social media platforms, and other interviewees.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews because the "interviewed subjects' viewpoints are more likely to be expressed in an openly designed interview situation than in a standardized interview or a questionnaire" (Flick, 2018, p. 216). Using semi-structured interviews allowed for the questions to be asked in a flexible order best suited for each interviewee. To help develop the questions for the interview guide, the lead author met separately with two community members who were knowledgeable about craft breweries and their engagement with communities for pre-interviews. The feedback from these pre-interviews aided the development of the interview guide. After the initial interview guide was developed, feedback was sought from an agricultural leadership faculty member at the University of Florida, an agricultural communications faculty member at Oklahoma State University [OSU], and a doctoral student in agricultural education at OSU. The two faculty members are coauthors on this paper.

The feedback was incorporated to finalize the interview guide, resulting in seven focus questions, with accompanying follow-up questions. The focus questions were intended to be research questions asked using everyday language (Hernmanns, 2004). Follow-up questions were used to "stimulate more details or depth at certain points in the interview," (Flick, 2018, p. 217). Probe questions were utilized as interventions to gain further detail and depth (Flick, 2018). The interviews consisted of open-ended, direct questions to gather responses from participants regarding their perspectives related to the brewery and its brand within the community. The

questions addressed community member reactions, community member interactions, brand awareness, and the third space concept in relation to craft breweries.

Participants completed a consent form prior to the interview. Those participants interviewed by phone signed and emailed their consent forms before their scheduled interviews took place (Creswell, 2007). A total of 11 community members were interviewed through phone and in-person interviews. Four interviews were conducted over the phone due to schedule complications and time constraints. In-person interviews were conducted at each of the interviewees' choice of location. Locations included a local bookstore, personal offices, conference rooms, and a communal office sofa. Three community member interviewees provided a statewide perspective along with the specific town they were from.

The participants included current and former directors of community development organizations, economic development managers, a sales director, a marketing director, a business CEO, a journalist, and an apparel business owner. Interviews began February 27, 2020, and were completed March 17, 2020. The interviewers were completed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic causing non-essential businesses in 27 counties across Oklahoma to close on Wednesday, March 25, 2020.

Data saturation was reached after five participants were interviewed (Guest et al., 2006). However, to ensure broad representation from all communities, 11 community stakeholders were interviewed before data collection was concluded. The interviews ranged from 15 to 60 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded, and handwritten notes were taken during each interview. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was removed or masked, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Data was transcribed verbatim using Temi, a professional transcription service.

Transcripts were cleaned and confirmed. MAXQDA was used to code the interviews, which made coding more organized and served as a tool for transparency (Trochim, 2020). Codes and themes were developed by "describing, classifying, and interpreting" the transcribed interview documents (Creswell, 2007).

A combination of the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was used to identify themes. Constant comparative method divides data into different incidents that are coded and compared to each other (Glaser, 1965), and thematic analysis is used to report patterns and themes (Flick, 2018). Boundaries are set through the constant comparison of incidents and themes, which then allows themes to become more focused. The boundaries consisted of whether the incident was mentioned in multiple interviews or if someone from each community represented mentioned similar things.

Credibility involves establishing that the results of the study are believable (Trochim, 2020). Researchers experienced in qualitative research reviewed the interview guide to help ensure credibility. The verbatim transcripts were compared to the audio recordings and the handwritten notes from each interview to ensure credibility as well (Creswell, 2007). For consistency and confirmability, a summary of the discussion was provided to each participant at the end of the respective interviews, and participants were asked if the summary was accurate, which served as a member check (Flick, 2018). Descriptions of the interviews, including where the interviews occurred, what they were about, and the impending pandemic were included in this manuscript for transferability measures (Trochim, 2020). Audio recorders and handwritten notes were utilized during data collection to provide an audit trail, which a fellow researcher reviewed for confirmability measures (Flick, 2018). Data triangulation was used to collect data from different locations and populations to help ensure the dependability of the data (Carter et al., 2014).

Results

RQ1: How Have Breweries Affected Their Communities' Environment?

The first research question sought to understand community members' perceptions of breweries' effects on communities' environments. The following themes emerged from participants' responses: breweries influence people to slow down and enjoy life, breweries enhance the existing culture, craft beer is viewed as a sociable drink, craft brewers promote social conscious awareness, and craft breweries have helped revitalize neighborhoods and vacant buildings.

Breweries Influence People to Slow Down and Enjoy Life

Participants described craft breweries as places where people can slow down, enjoy life, and others' company. Quincy, executive directory of a community development organization, said,

> It's just, it is a different mindset we're getting back to, I mean sometimes you just see new ways to get back to what people used to do, which is getting together and hanging out. We don't do as much of that as people used to. We're just always in a hurry. We're always on our phones. We always have things to do. So, I think the breweries are helping people slow down and enjoy things a little bit.

Veronica, CEO of a local business, voiced a similar opinion, saying, "I think it [has] been another step toward opening up our culture in enjoying things again and getting together."

Breweries Enhance the Existing Culture

Participants indicated that breweries had added to the culture of their communities rather than changing it. Ryan, journalist, said, "I think people really appreciate just generally craft anything, authentic coffee roasting, authentic Mexican food, authentic baked goods," and he continued saying, "So, I feel like breweries just take it to another level where people really understand it and appreciate the fact that it's local." Similarly, Walker, a business development director, suggested that breweries had changed the community's way of thinking, saying, "I think it's changed our way of thinking and over time changing the way of thinking changes culture. . . . I love the passion and the love to participate in something, and you kind of get a little of that yourself from going to breweries."

Craft Beer Is Viewed as a Sociable Drink

Participants expressed belief that breweries have shifted the way their community and Oklahomans feel about drinking. Shawn, apparel business owner, said, "Um, you know, beer is not like liquor. [Beer is] more sociable, I think. People are sitting with other people, meeting other people." Ryan concurred:

> People are there to have conversation, and certainly the beer is a draw, but it isn't about just getting inebriated or partying per say. It is really more about community conversation. It's just what our taproom culture has really become, I mean it's really just become that low-key, fun place to enjoy a good beer and have conversation. I never go to one of the taprooms where I don't end up striking a conversation with somebody else, and people are generally happy. They're not drinking their sorrows away. They're there to enjoy life and enjoy other people.

Penny, executive director of a community development organization, noted that the impacts are being seen in policy initiatives, citing an upcoming vote to approve liquor stores being open on Sunday: "Now, drinking is not this shameful thing we do in the privacy of our home. I think breweries really kind of helped that culture, and I think kids will grow up seeing people enjoying drinks responsibly."

Craft Brewers Promote Social Conscious Awareness

Participants described breweries as businesses that are socially conscious and community conscious. Shawn said, "I would say for the most part, um, they're very community conscious." Ryan said, "So many of the breweries here tend to really focus on being socially responsible, um, you know, from sourcing products to recycling their spent grains, that sort of thing." Penny postulated that the kid-friendly atmosphere of breweries would foster a sense of drinking responsibly: "I think that having kids in breweries, which was also something that changed in the last couple of years, I don't know exactly when, will show them how to be responsible."

Craft Breweries Have Helped Revitalize Neighborhoods and Vacant Buildings

Participants expressed that breweries had helped revitalize the neighborhood through restoring vacant buildings, increasing activity, and increasing property values. Taylor, executive business director, said, "What [they've] done with the buildings helps the community, [the breweries] look inviting, it's very nice landscaping, it looks sharp. Even the activity level helps, um it's something to be proud of." Penny and Ryan both noted the property value impact of the breweries' improvements. Penny said, "The property values are going up and the property values around the businesses are going up." Ryan shared that these improvements have lured in additional businesses: "So, we started to see a lot of vacant properties or underutilized properties being snapped up."

RQ2: How Have Community Members Reacted to the Breweries?

Participants were asked their opinions of the breweries, how they thought other community members reacted to the brewery, and if they had heard compliments or complaints about the breweries. The following themes emerged from interview responses: community members see breweries as an asset for the community, the more breweries the merrier, and communities have embraced the breweries.

Community Members See Breweries as an Asset

Participants mentioned breweries enhancing their communities by providing a locally made product and being a business that fits well in their towns and communities. Natalie, sales director of a destination marketing organization, said, "I love the brewery. I think it's a great fit for [town]. It just shows that we can branch out and bring new things in." Walker said, "We have seen a big push in that arena [local product] here lately. Made in Oklahoma. Buy local." Likewise, Penny said, "When you're going to like a small craft brewery, you're supporting someone local, which is really important to me." Ryan noted that a good local brewery really added to the community and caught on quickly as a gathering place, adding, "I think that's really something the taprooms have filled in [town] that perhaps we didn't even know that we needed." Taylor said, "I think everyone is very glad to have them. . . . Overall, it's definitely been a positive experience. They really add a lot to the community."

The More Breweries the Merrier

Participants expressed the belief that the brewery boom in Oklahoma has been a good addition for communities and having more than one brewery in their community was or could be

a good thing. Shawn said, "The laws changed to benefit a brewery and we saw, what happened as of 2016 off the top of my head, I think [city A], [city B], and in rural areas, I think there's probably been 30 breweries open." Quincy noted the uniqueness of each brewery, indicating that having more than one in a community did not detract from the appeal:

> They're so unique in their own way. So, even though a lot of communities are now getting breweries, it's cool how they're all different. You know, their atmosphere is different. Obviously, their beers are different because they're creating them or brewing them and formulating them. So even though more places are getting a brewery, it just makes you want to go to more of them because it's fun to see the difference and to taste the difference. So, it's just, it's been really nice.

Uriah, economic development project manager, said, "I'd be in the camp that we could use more than one brewery. Competition always makes them both better. You know, rising tide raises all ships."

Communities Have Embraced the Breweries

According to our participants, community members have embraced the breweries. Quincy recalled, "When the first brewery opened, there was about a hundred-foot-long line of people waiting for them to open their doors. The line went all the way down the block." Olivia, marketing director of a destination marketing organization, said, "It's been received really well, and a lot of people are excited to go out on, you know, Thursday nights or whatever and head to [local brewery] and see what they have." Ryan said, "I've heard compliments about every single one of them in various contexts." Penny said, "I know there are people who don't like fancy beers or something like that, but I feel like the craft beer culture has really exploded in Oklahoma. . . . I see more and more restaurants having local options."

RQ3: How Do Community Members Believe Brewery Personnel Engage and Interact with their Communities?

Participants were asked about breweries' engagement and interaction with the community, including what events they promoted, what events they were involved in, and if brewery personnel were active in the local business community. Several themes about brewery engagement with the community surfaced, including brewery personnel engage in the community, brewery personnel partner with local businesses and community, brewery personnel give back, and breweries create community amongst each other.

Brewery Personnel Engage in the Community

Participants said brewery personnel interact within the community by participating in and hosting community events. Michaela, executive director of a destination marketing organization, said, "They have a big focus on doing events and entertainment within the brewery to bring people out to play games together, to sing together, to listen to music together. They're sponsoring activities in the community that bring people out." Veronica said, "Anytime I've asked them for some help to help promote [town], they've provided me even product sometimes to help at a silent auction or whatever." Similarly, Walker said, "They're willing to sponsor fun runs, and 5K runs, and Saint Patrick's Day parade and anything else. You see them participate in various cultural events and music festivals. You see microbreweries right alongside the restaurant and entertainment venues."

Brewery Personnel Partner with Local Businesses and Community

Brewery personnel were described as good partners with local businesses and the community. Uriah said, "They get involved in our economic development by allowing us the opportunity to use their space to go in with clients and showcase our community and their beer." Quincy said, "I think they do all they can to foster those connections with everyone that they can. They'll join in on almost anything they're invited to." Penny said, "They host a lot of events, just kind of a fun things, pop up shops, pottery making things, just a variety of things, which is really fun." Similarly, Shawn said, "Sure, they have to pay bills and things like that, but they also want and give back and do what they can to help the community thrive, which in turn helps them." Olivia said, "They've got a good partnership with [local businesses], and they're trying to kind of help out other people in the community as well and push [local businesses] as well and not just themselves." Ryan described his personal experience partnering with a brewery, saying, "They've been good partners of the community in many ways, and I think that just speaks to who the brew masters and the employees and the ownership really are."

Brewery Personnel Give Back

Participants indicated that breweries actively give back to the community through charity events. Ryan said, "I know that other folks with the breweries [have] done things that have been more community minded as well, charitable fundraising campaigns and things too." Veronica said, "They're very, they're very active. They have been active in, in different charity events." Shawn said, "For a good cause the breweries are all open ears as long as they can do it, you know."

Breweries Create Community Amongst Each Other

Participants commented on efforts brewery personnel collaborate with and help other breweries in their communities. Quincy said, "They're very friendly toward each other. I don't want it to sound like anything different, but sometimes you can have almost a dueling, you know, the dueling beers and the dueling breweries, and they don't duel." Ryan said, "I feel like there's a real camaraderie among most of the owners, um, to make sure that they are supporting each other." Ryan also told a story of a new brewery having a machine issue, and a competing brewer down the street helping the new brewery get its machine working: "I think that says a lot. . . . I think they all want each other to do well cause again, it's more about growing the pie at this point." Shawn shared a similar perception, saying: "I know they're all competitors, but there seems to be a real collaborative spirit and a lot of them are okay with working together."

RQ4: What Role Do Community Members Believe the Breweries Have Within Their Communities?

Research question four sought to understand the role community members perceived the brewery to have within the community. Themes that emerged included breweries give communities social credibility, breweries are a vital element to a community's economy, breweries provide a third space for community members, and breweries attract tourists and open communities to a different demographic.

Breweries Give Communities Social Credibility

Participants used the presence of a brewery as a measure of the type of community their town is. Uriah said it sets communities apart, stating, "I think they're a true test of what kind of community you have. If you have a brewery, you're in a different subset or different category of community than if you don't." Veronica said, "I believe that a brewery makes you look a little bit more progressive. I think it did add some credibility to our, not just our nightlife, but to just

different things that people can go enjoy." Quincy said, "It's so exciting to finally get some here. It's like a huge milestone that the town got to get past it." Taylor said, "It shows it's more of a hip place; it's happening. There's a lot of stuff going on, a younger demographic, and it works to help us fill that need and to change that perception."

Breweries Are a Vital Element to a Community's Economy

According to the participants, breweries are vital elements to their community's economy, contribute to quality of life, and contribute to the sense of place a community has. As Michaela explained,

> It's a quality-of-life piece, and everybody's in a fight for talent right now to fill the jobs we have available. So, the other piece, besides just making sure your community has plenty of jobs, you've got to make sure you've got plenty of people to fill those jobs and having places like a brewery helps provide a quality of life that brings people to town, that want to live and stay and continue to live here. So, it's a big piece of what's important in a having a great place to live.

Walker said breweries bring a "vital integral element of economic commerce," and went on to describe how a business that was relocating used the number of microbreweries in the area as part of their site selection criteria. "I was just flabbergasted," he said. "We inquired with them a little bit more, and they told us it's just a technique they use because breweries attract the age group they're looking to recruit."

Breweries Provide a Third Space for Community Members

Participants indicated breweries are welcoming, family-friendly environments where people gather and get together. Many of them described elements of a third space prior to being introduced to the concept during the interview. Ryan described breweries as welcoming businesses and gathering spots:

> It's kind of like coffee shops or that gathering spot. I think they really kind of filled a gap where people can just kind of go, and you almost feel like you're hanging out with friends. It's kind of like the living room or the backyard you always wished you had, you know, it's kind of that feeling. They definitely have established a culture that's really been a third place for people to gather.

Penny also believes breweries provide a third space for community members, recalling a local brewery that hosted a Thanksgiving potluck party: "So, people who had family out of town or don't have family you know, around or, they had a place to go for Thanksgiving, like a community place to go and drink beer and eat food and get together." Quincy also agreed that breweries fulfill a third-place need, offering a "comfortable place to meet people and hang out." Walker mentioned that breweries provided a place for those teleworking where "customers not only come in and have a drink, but they can set up their office space there and work."

Breweries Attract Tourists and Open Communities to a Different Demographic

Participants described how breweries attract tourists and open communities to different demographics. Shawn said, "A lot of people want to know where the closest local brewery is, you know, and so now you're getting out of towners to come and kind of getting to experience our beers and things like that." Veronica voiced similar enthusiasm:

I've been wanting a brewery in town my whole career with [local business], just knowing for a fact that different communities have you know, beer trails and ale trails and uh, it's just something else, not only for the residents to enjoy, but it's something that will attract visitors into [town].

RQ5: What Do Community Members Perceive as The Salient and Differentiated Aspects of Breweries Within Their Communities?

The final research question sought to understand how community members develop awareness of breweries in their communities and the branding efforts breweries utilize. The following themes emerged from participants' responses: brewery events attract customers, product distribution helps create brand awareness, word of mouth is a major factor, and unique branding, "swag," and place branding creates brand recognition.

Brewery Events Attract Customers

Interview responses suggested events breweries participated in or hosted develop awareness of the breweries. Natalie said, "They're good at hosting beer gardens at different events and having live music. They have live music just about every night of the week." Veronica said, "It's helpful for them to get live music because, obviously, the fanbase who follows that musician is going to go there." Walker said, "Well, you know, just like wineries, they have tastings at local stuff." Penny noted events hosted by one brewery's neighborhood community being one of the ways that brewery attracted customers.

Product Distribution Helps Create Brand Awareness

Participants mentioned brewery distribution contributing to brand awareness. Natalie said, "Having their beer just in stores around [town] or on tap around [town] I think is great for them." Uriah agreed, indicating that local restaurants "do a good job of having a local tap and always having the ability for someone to try the local beer." Penny said,

[Local brewer] has a really wide distribution, and regionally I think [local brewer] is a name in craft beer, so people who like craft beer would know [local brewer]. You see [local brewer's] stuff in restaurants. Um, [local brewery] has done a lot of really good marketing since the law changed and grocery stores could have beer. They've really been pushing the distribution side of things and really been like putting their name out there.

Word-Of-Mouth Is a Major Factor

Participants felt word-of-mouth was a major factor in community members being aware of local breweries. Shawn said breweries gain customer awareness by "largely word-of-mouth and social media." Olivia said, "That's something people take for granted. Word-of-mouth is a huge deal for any business, especially for [local brewery]. Word-of-mouth is the biggest push they could give." Penny said, "I mean, I will say the people who like good craft beer, like to talk about how much they like good craft beer with other people who like the craft beer. So, word-of-mouth works really well."

Unique Branding, "Swag," and Place Branding Creates Brand Recognition

Participants mentioned breweries having unique logos, designs, and names of products,

which usually have a local tie. Shawn said, "I think all of them have their own unique kind of spin on it and how they want their brand to be perceived by the, by the public." Michaela said, "They have quite a bit of, um, swag in the sense of glasses or t-shirts, and they are doing a different logo and design for each of their types of beer." Uriah said, "I think they do a pretty good job of branding. Some of their artwork can be really cool. They keep some things really simple and then use something super unique to grab your attention on the shelf." Olivia expressed a feeling of being transported back to the community when you see a brewery's products, surfacing a sense of connection. She described one particularly memorable beer, saying,

> I think with the [beer name], it's so [town]. Anybody that's ever been to [town], you know what [beer name] means. It's just so recognizably [town]. I think taking that and naming a beer after that is genius because whether you liked the beer or not, you just see the can and think, "Oh, that's [town]" and that takes you back. . . . They were smart and strategic from the beginning of just making people feel a connection with their product and making people think of [town] and having that association. It also just helps bring in a little bit more of a community.

Ryan said, "The taproom decor really kind of sets the particular tone for what they [breweries] feel about themselves and their product felt that even the taproom."

Conclusions & Recommendations

RQ1: How Have Breweries Affected Their Communities' Environment?

Participants spoke positively about the effects breweries have on communities' cultures. The following themes were associated with this research question: breweries influence people to slow down and enjoy life, breweries enhance the existing culture, craft beer is viewed as a sociable drink, craft brewers promote social conscious awareness, and craft breweries have helped revitalize neighborhoods and vacant buildings. Participants mentioned breweries had enhanced the existing culture of the community by being a local and inclusive location that serves as a third space location for their community, which help unite neighborhoods (Oldenburg, 1999). Behaviors can be branded as well as goods and services, and this study's findings indicated the craft brewery personnel represent their brand through socially responsible behaviors, which can improve brand relationships (Evans et al., 2002). Practicing socially responsible activities, such as recycling spent grain and being environmentally sustainable, are important social and cultural behaviors that influence how consumers perceive craft breweries' brands (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009).

Participants indicated that craft breweries have encouraged people to slow down and enjoy one another, which contributes to the social wellbeing of community residents as Smith and Marontate (2010) suggested. Craft breweries could be an important for place-making because craft breweries are a location where people meet and interact with one another. These are all factors Massey (1994) said contribute to place-making. Participants described beer as a sociable drink, which supports Mifsud's (2018) suggestions that getting together to drink a glass of beer plays a role in connecting communities. Participants in this study believed craft breweries influenced residents to make connections and provided a reason for residents to want to live in a community. This finding supports Mifsud's (2018) suggestion that craft breweries add a quality-of-life aspect in a town or community. Participants in this study believed craft breweries helped community

members make connections with other customers in the taproom and a fostered a sense of belonging, which supports what Flack (1997) found relating to microbreweries' use of neolocalism to create a sense of place.

RQ2: How Have Community Members Reacted to the Breweries?

Community stakeholders see breweries as an asset for the community, believe the more breweries the merrier, and communities have embraced the breweries. Participants described the breweries as an asset to their communities as well as their desire for additional breweries in their communities. Participants described breweries as a location where people have a sense of belonging, which also supports Flack's (1997) findings. Participants from this study said breweries are an asset to communities by filling a void. Participants suggested more breweries would be a good thing to provide more experiences for community members to try because each brewery is unique. As Franzen and Moriarty (2009) mentioned, internal saliency is created through the experiences customers have with a business, and participants indicated craft breweries create internal salience through their taproom experiences.

RQ3: How Do Community Members Believe Brewery Personnel Engage and Interact with their Communities?

The themes from this research question were brewery personnel engage in the community, brewery personnel partner with local businesses and community, brewery personal give back, and breweries create community amongst each other. When community members interact with each other, social capital is built (Scott, 2017), and findings from this study indicate craft breweries are venues where social capital is built. Participants suggested craft breweries provide opportunities for people to make connections due to the local nature of craft breweries and the community focus they have. These findings support Shortridge's (1996) ideas of neolocalism being a deliberate attempt to create a sense of place by forging relationship with local ties. Participants described craft breweries as community focused. Examples of craft breweries' community focus from this study were charity events and local partnerships breweries have with local businesses and organizations.

RQ4: What Role Do Community Members Believe the Breweries Have Within Their Communities?

The themes associated with this research question were breweries give communities social credibility, breweries are a vital element to a communities' economy, breweries provide a third space for community members, and breweries attract tourists and open communities to a different demographic. Participants said craft breweries attract tourists and open their communities to a different demographic, which contributes to a community's economy as Smith and Marontate (2010) suggested. Participants said craft breweries are used as a site selection criterion when companies are looking for a location to open a business or to relocate. Results indicated craft breweries could be a useful criterion because breweries create a sense of belonging, which supports Flack's (1997) suggestion that craft breweries evoke a sense of belonging. Another reason craft breweries are used as a site location criterion is because craft breweries provide something for residents to do (Mifsud, 2018). Participants also mentioned having a craft brewery as a true test of

the kind of community they have.

The participants in the study indicated the craft breweries in their communities provide a welcoming place for community members to go, gather, and build connections. Welcoming locations where people gather and forge connections are third space locations (Oldenburg, 1999), and findings from this study show craft breweries are a third place for community members because participants suggested craft breweries provide venues where meaningful connections are made and are essential to the community. Participants indicated craft breweries are an essential element for communities because they provide a quality-of-life aspect for their communities, and they create a unique social value for communities as a third space location, as Mifsud (2018) suggested.

A potential limitation of this study is participants might have been primed by the questions to believe breweries are a third space location for community members. That said, three participants called craft breweries third space locations before the concept was mentioned in the interview guide. Other participants mentioned factors relating to the third space concept before they were asked if they believed craft breweries served as a third space location for their communities.

RQ5: What Do Community Members Perceive as the Salient and Differentiated Aspects of Breweries Within Their Communities?

Participants described ideas relating to differentiation and saliency, which included place branding, neolocalism, and other marketing tactics. The themes that emerged from this research question were brewery events attract customers, product distribution helps create brand awareness, word of mouth is a major factor, and unique branding, "swag," and place branding creates brand recognition. Craft breweries use differentiation to set themselves apart from other breweries through their branding as Franzen and Moriarty (2009) mentioned. Findings from this study show craft breweries in participants' communities host and participate in community events to build trust and connect with community residents, which supports Notte's (2016) suggestions for successful craft brewery branding. Participants described distribution as a way Oklahoma craft breweries increase their relevance and visibility, which ties back to brand saliency by being present in the surroundings of consumers (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). This study supports Schnell and Reese's (2003, 2014) findings related to neolocalism and place branding because participants indicated breweries use unique branding strategies and place branding to name their products and design their logos. Results showed participants noticed many Oklahoma craft breweries use ties to their communities' histories and characteristics.

Neolocalism and place branding are factors in craft brewery marketing as Hede and Wante (2013) described. Findings showed craft breweries in these communities were not marketing to the masses, but they use events, local attachments, and social media platforms to reach consumers, which supports McQuiston's (2013) suggestions. Participants identified word-of-mouth as one of the biggest promotional factors of craft breweries. This finding related to Francioni and Byrd's (2012) ideas about craft brewery promotion. Findings from this research question indicate craft breweries could play a key role in creating local place identities, which supported Tuan's (1991) findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

To understand how breweries shape a local sense of place, further research to learn about the local traditions would be valuable given the role place branding and neolocalism appear to play for craft breweries. Participants also suggested breweries help attract new businesses and employees by contributing a quality-of-life aspect for community members. Future research should specifically address employers' and employees' perceptions about the role craft breweries, among other elements, factored into how they choose communities.

Participants indicated a brewery in their community would increase tourism and having multiple breweries helps a community become a destination community. Further research to understand why consumers visit breweries would be beneficial for tourism organizations and brewery owners to develop product and marketing strategies. It would also be valuable to compare breweries across the country to gain a richer understanding of how community members perceive the brand of breweries within their communities. This research could also delve into differences between urban, suburban, and rural areas. For example, a rural area is unlikely to have multiple breweries, whereas an urban area could often support more than one.

Practical Recommendations

This study provides an understanding of what community members value from craft breweries and will be beneficial for brewery owners creating and improving their brands. This research indicates that breweries being involved in the community might help consumers develop an attachment to the brewery. Craft breweries should consider engaging in community events to help promote their brand. Word-of-mouth was described as the biggest factor in consumers' knowledge of craft breweries; therefore, breweries should be aware of the consumer experience affecting brand awareness.

This research provided greater insight into the process of place branding and neolocalism. Participants indicated beers named after certain locations or community attributes helped develop an attachment to the beer. While more research is needed to verify the results, Oklahoma craft breweries should consider incorporating local ties in their beer names and other external branding efforts to forge an attachment and create a sense of place, especially with the beers they distribute in gas stations and grocery stores.

Our findings provided insight on what companies look for in communities when they choose to open a business in a new location or relocate. Participants in our study indicated that companies looking to attract top talent prefer locations that have a nightlife or activities for their employees to do, including breweries. City planners should consider breweries as community partners due to their role in creating activities for community members to take part in, particularly because millennials are a large part of why craft beer demand has been increasing (Fromm, 2014). Not only are craft breweries used as site location criterion, but this research showed they have aided community revival. City leaders should be aware of the potential for increased property values and foot traffic craft breweries have influenced in their communities. Extension personnel engaged in economic and community development should also be aware of the potential value craft breweries could play in efforts to improve community resilience.

This study demonstrated community members believe craft breweries in Oklahoma serve as third space locations for consumers. City leaders should be aware of and promote the potential role third spaces play in communities, including improving social capital. Participants indicated craft breweries in their town filled a void they were not sure anyone knew needed to be filled.

For the agricultural and natural resources sector, neolocalism should continue to be

incorporated given the opportunities shown through this and past research (Holt et al., 2018; Ruth & Rumble, 2016). There are opportunities for financial gains because consumers are increasingly locally minded, but there are also sociocultural opportunities, such as improved perception of the agricultural industry, by fostering consumers' ties to local agriculture.

There are also implications for agricultural communications instructors. First, there is a need for students to understand how broader issues, such as neolocalism, affect the agricultural industry directly and indirectly. A holistic approach is needed. Fortunately, many programs are already incorporating issues-based communications in their curriculum, but those who have not should begin doing so. The other aspect is understanding that brands are affected by more than communications. Customer experiences and community engagement were indicated as key components affecting perceptions of craft breweries' brands.

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