

CASE STUDY

CRAFT BEER REVOLUTION AND THE POST-MODERN CONSUMER: BIRRIFICIO LA GRAMIGNA'S MARKETING MIX

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Abstract : Over the past two decades, the global beer market has witnessed the so-called *craft beer revolution* phenomenon and the spread of a rapidly growing number of microbreweries oriented to the production of craft beers derived by high quality raw materials according to traditional styles. Despite the central role played by wine heritage, this economical, cultural and sociological revolution has taken root also in Italy. The effects and consequences are significant and will be investigated throughout this paper. It is selected as a case study Birrificio la Gramigna, a young craft brewery located in Perugia. The survey gives an insight into the main features and factors that characterise the brewery, with particular attention to the Marketing Mix developed by the owners.

Keywords: Craft beer, *Revolution*, *Consumer*.

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THE RISE AND SPREAD OF CRAFT BEER REVOLUTION

Beer Market before Craft Beer Revolution

The factors behind the rise and spread of the craft beer revolution are complex and diverse and will be discussed throughout this article. Undoubtedly, the change in consumer behavior plays a crucial role and the sociological shifts found in what is referred to by scholars as the post-modern era have been able to subvert the dynamics of an over-established and standardized market.

Before delving into the sociological issues that underlie this change, however, it is important to reorder events chronologically with the aim of better understand the whys and wherefores of the craft phenomenon. The craft beer revolution finds its roots in the United States of the 1970s and its genesis can be interpreted as a kind of economic and

sociological reaction to a rigid and oligopolistic market. Before the rise of craft beer trend, in fact, the U.S. brewing market was a saturated market, manned by a few large brewing companies offering standardized products made through standardized processes. In particular, throughout the twentieth century, in the light of a huge increase in the quantity offered by the U.S. brewing industry, the number of breweries had undergone a sharp concentration, dropping from more than 4,000 businesses in the late nineteenth century to an all-time low of 43 in the years 1981 and 1983.

During those decades, Prohibition, the dust bowl (the great drought that hit the U.S. in the 1930s, causing a sharp reduction in grain production) and rationing due to the World Wars (which had severely limited the use of barley in brewing) led to a gradual concentration of the industry due to an

increasing importance of economies of scale [1].

The reasons behind such consolidation and homologation of the global brewing industry are to be found, first and foremost, in the technological advances achieved (one need only consider the standardization of production and packaging processes, the introduction of specialized machinery, improvements, in terms of timing, in brewing and fermentation processes, better distribution *etc.*) which resulted in significant economies of scale and, consequently, significantly reduced unit costs. At the same time, the ability to invest large sums of money in advertising and promotion became a luxury of the few (and large) breweries that dominated the market.

A further cause was the acquisition and merger strategies adopted by the multinationals, which allowed them to dominate the entire industry for decades: “[...] global mergers and acquisitions contributed to a dramatic consolidation of the beer industry in the 1900s and 2000s, creating market-dominating global multinationals: AB Inbev, SABMiller, Heineken, and Carlsberg. As a consequence, beer became more standardized and homogenous worldwide. The concentration was reinforced by the takeover of local breweries by multinational brewers such as AB Inbev, Heineken, and Carlsberg [1].”

The brewing market became thus a true oligopolistic market in which elements such as efficiency, rationalization and standardization prevailed on consumer preferences, tastes and needs, progressively hardening that sector. Quantity imposes itself over quality and the disruptive massification of beer styles leaves no room for elements such as local identity, culture, creativity and experimentation. These elements will become crucial during the craft beer revolution.

The Post-Modern Consumer and the Local Value

Economic and sociological branch of knowledge has highlighted how the key factors behind the emergence and spread of

craft revolution are basically attributable to changes in consumer behavior and improvements in the dissemination of information and content through what is now commonly referred to as Web 2.0.

More specifically, the craft phenomenon is part and intersects with another revolution starring the post-modern consumer. Following decades dominated by standardization and industrial homogenization, the consumer finally seems to be rediscovering the value of his/her own and unique identity and his/her power and influence in governing the decision-making processes of companies and industries.

Post-modern consumer no longer accepts the role of passive user, but becomes an active agent of the world in which he lives and consumes; he attributes value to his/her purchasing and dynamically contributes to the creation of what he is about to consume. Thus, a real revolution occurs and the fundamentals of demand appear now overturned.

This scenario decrees the final obsolescence of that conception of the economic and social sciences that underestimated -or even ignored- the creative skill of the consumer and delegated the research and development of new products solely to business, associating consumption exclusively to satisfaction of needs [2]. In other words, for post-modern consumer, the purchase of a good or the use of a service are no longer perceived as acts connected with needs satisfaction, but rather as a way through which the individual defines and expresses his/her unique identity. In the new post-modern hyper-reality, goods are no longer worth for their use value, but for what they are able to communicate [3].

This new conception of the consumer -or *prosumer*, referring to the neologism coined by Alvin Toffler- proclaims the final sunset of concepts such as homogenization, massification and standardization. These concepts are outdated and no longer applicable to today's increasingly pluralistic, dynamic and flexible society.

Pluralism, dynamism, and flexibility are essential elements within the world of craft beers. In this respect, the brewing industry has been particularly clever in exploiting what David Harvey considers one of the main effects of post-modernity, namely the need to reassert an identity (collective or single, often linked to a physical place) as an act of defense of its own territorial features, threatened by the homogenization imposed by the globalized economy. In particular, Harvey points out the ability to evoke a kind of feeling of belonging to a certain territory with the aim to establish a connection between individuals, their hometown and their local economy:“(that) the more unified the space, the more important the qualities of the fragmentations become for social identity and action” [4].

If we decline these sociological reflections to the brewing context, it becomes evident how much the local culture is back in vogue thanks to the eclecticism of the post-modern consumer and his/her desire to reconstruct a territorial and cultural identity. All this translates, on the demand side, into an increasing variety of styles and tastes that gives priority and encourages the heterogeneity and diversification the post-modern consumer is looking for. The craft beer revolution can be conceived, then, as an economic and sociological phenomenon aimed at recovering -and in some cases reinventing- a brewing tradition that in fact does not belong to Italy, but is paradoxically mourned. An inexplicable nostalgia that pushes producers to rediscover and reinterpret their local dimension.

What distinguishes both regional and microbreweries from large firms is that they primarily borrow meanings from elsewhere. They reference something, anything, and incorporate it into their own brand identity. Surprisingly, the findings also suggest that regional breweries- largely ignored in the literature - are actually the most likely to borrow meanings in this way, especially in terms of their use of place-based elements on a local scale. If anything, the literature would lead us to expect they would be surpassed by the microbreweries in this regard, given the

latter's smaller size and integration into specific communities [5].

Foodies and Locavores

A further aspect to be explored concerns the reinterpretation of food culture that we are currently witnessing. Isabelle De Solier's essay *Food Culture* highlights how closely the relationship that binds individuals to food is tied to elements such as space, time and memory and how this, throughout history, has played a crucial role in shaping and preserving the social and cultural identity of humans. In the last few decades, the passion for food has grown and spread at a dizzying rate. One need only think of the numerous television programs and the consistent presence of chefs, of magazines dedicated to the culinary world, but also the digital world; recipes, in fact, have become a recurring topic in Internet searches by users and YouTube is literally supplanting traditional cookbooks. Digital world presides over all stages of food consumption, generating socialization and more opportunities for people to share their experience and build a real food culture based on knowledge and transparency.

What is more, this surge of interest has also had an impact on the choice of study course: enrollments in hotel schools and faculties of agriculture have increased significantly and more and more young people aspire to work in this sector. This trend has fostered the emergence of new categories of consumers: the *foodies* [6] and the *locavores* [7], who have intensified even more clearly the deep connection between the culinary world and the social sphere.

Foodies consumers are food lovers who perceive the culinary experience as an art, absolutely comparable to painting or theater, while the expression *locavores* refers to individuals who prefer to purchase and eat local, kilometer-zero and seasonal products. The link between this brief culinary digression and the craft beer revolution is to be found, first and foremost, in the idea of anti-industrialism that is emerging and spreading, together with values such as authenticity, freshness and homegrown culture.

Likewise, De Solier's sociological studies conducted on foodies show how this peculiar category of consumers finds in food not only a binding force for creating social relationships, but also -and above all- a means by which they can re-discover craftsmanship skills that have fallen into disuse in modern society.

The above is absolutely consistent and congruent with the craft beers world, in which producers are averse to the industrial system and prefer homegrown and artisanal foods. Thus, the rise and spread of craft breweries in Italy is to be interpreted as a result of the new trends in food consumption which over the past few decades have been reflected in a tighter and closer connection with the local area and in the rediscovery of local identity. In addition, more and more breweries highlight and emphasize the organic origin of the ingredients and the raw materials obtained from fair trade in offering their beers to the market. This confers social and ethical value to the product, which is perceived by the consumer as environmentally friendly and, therefore, qualitatively superior.

Passion, craftsmanship, connection with the local area and creativity are, therefore, key elements within today's beer market, whose values and ideals represent a real competitive advantage in the eyes of consumers, increasingly focused on quality and diversification.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING MIX CASE STUDY: BIRRIFICIO LA GRAMIGNA

Umbrian Craft Beer: Birrificio La Gramigna

An emblematic example of how the craft beer phenomenon is now taking root everywhere (even in Umbria, an Italian region historically characterized by a very strong wine vocation) is represented by Birrificio la Gramigna, a small brew house that is making inroads into Italian country. In the course of the following paragraphs the brewery will be examined in order to analyze in detail the strategies related to its marketing mix, as well as the sociological components underlying this new form of

consumption that is becoming widely established among post-modern "drinkers."

"Birrificio la Gramigna was established in 2016 in Casa del Diavolo, a small town in Perugia, from the idea of Alberto Castaldo and Francesco Bisello, two young Umbrian entrepreneurs who share a strong passion for beer and agriculture, as well as a solid friendship. The farm's land, a heritage of Alberto's grandfather, is devoted to organic cultivation of native seeds aimed at producing Anglo-American-style craft beers. Specializing in the production of six-row barley and later two-row barley, the brewery is dedicated to growing malting barley and hops of European and American varieties that have adapted well to the Umbrian climate.

Counting with a 1,500-liter production plant and a 15,000-liter cellar, the company houses the entire production process, except for the malting phase of the barley, a process that takes place in a malting plant outside the production facility. The two partners personally control each stage of the supply chain, from planting, to production, to marketing, to direct relations with the consumer.

Birrificio la Gramigna's mission borders on a philosophy of life and a way of conceiving work as a true passion with the ultimate goal of exporting the local brewing product beyond national borders. Since 2016 the company's production and turnover have tripled thanks to an increasingly careful management and planning of the Marketing Mix that focuses on the consumer and his needs, as well as the desire to express the company's "dream": the promotion of a bucolic and unconventional lifestyle that enhances the local reality and in which the working and hobby dimensions interpenetrate. In this ideological embrace, "Pura vida," "Drink local," and "Keep it real" are the most recurrent and eloquent slogans used by Birrificio la Gramigna to express its mission and celebrate its roots and local culture, promoting its economy and distancing itself from the industrial sector. A virtuous example of how the ancestral knowledge of the brassic tradition is perfectly combined with continuous experimentation

and innovation. Creativity, local flavors, accurate attention to detail and pop culture converge to create quality craft beers made through completely environmentally friendly production techniques.

The Target Market and the Marketing Pianification

The target market of Birrificio la Gramigna is a fairly heterogeneous market, within which it is possible to identify, broadly speaking, three different types of consumers. The largest cut is undoubtedly represented by a young and dynamic market aged 25-35. This is a niche of consumers who are attentive to nutrition care, both in food and beverage. These consumers follow a healthy lifestyle and prefer organic, traceable and farm-to-table products, through which they re-establish a cultural link with their local dimension.

Alongside this niche of consumers, in Birrificio la Gramigna's target market there is also -although to a smaller extent- an additional subcategory consisting of young people, who are intrigued and/or passionate about the world of craft brewing, attracted by the pop character of the labels and the appealing beer styles. These young consumers appreciate the craft and local dimension in spite of industrial and commercial products, offered by large retailers.

Finally, the Ho.Re.Ca. sector is another relevant market segment for the company. With this acronym, we refer to the Hotellerie-Restaurant-Café business sector and, therefore, hotel, restaurant and catering companies, bars and generally all activities related to consumption away from home, also known as Away From Home (AFH).

What the *Craft* Product is?

The first lever of the Marketing Mix to be examined is the product, which concretely represents the offer presented by the company in order to satisfy consumer needs. This decision-making lever includes multiple strategic components ranging from the practical functionality of the product, to its packaging, to after-sales service. Its features can be encapsulated in four categories:

functional, symbolic, emotional and experiential. In order to develop and elaborate an offer that appears complete and "satisfactory" in the sight of the consumer, identifying and delineating his needs and expectations is crucial and compelling.

This first section will be therefore devoted to the characteristics of the craft beer product proposed by Birrificio La Gramigna Marketing Mix. As outlined with the approval of the Collegato Agricoltura of July the 6th of 2016, Italy obtains its first formal and legal definition of "craft beer" which, according to the bill, must conform to certain quantitative, technological and structural criteria. In order to correctly describe the craft product and illustrate its quality characteristics, a preliminary comparison with the industrial one is essential. The first criterion that distinguishes craft beers is the absolute absence of filtration and pasteurization processes during brewing. Whereas these processes turn out to be very frequent in industry as they allow and guarantee maximum preservation of the product, limiting and/or discouraging variations in taste from the prototypical product.

The massive and standardized production of multinational corporations, in fact, aims at achieving a kind of homogenization and leveling of taste in order to satisfy as many consumers as possible. This tendency to standardize the taste experience, however, deprives the beer of many of its peculiarities, found, for example, in the aromas or color nuances that normally become much appreciated strengths of craft drinkers.

In the industrial field, an extensive use of chemical additives, preservatives and barley malt substitutes is frequent too. One need only think of rice and corn, which undoubtedly keep production costs down, but at the same time significantly compromise taste. In addition to quality, another considerable difference between craft and industrial beer concerns purely quantitative terms. Because of their small size, in fact, craft breweries such as La Gramigna do not enjoy facilities and plants sufficiently advanced to allow economies of scale. Craft beer is thus generally produced in limited

quantities (usually no more than 100,000 hectoliters per year), firstly to respect the seasonality of the products from which it is made and also because -due to the lack of additives and preservatives- the product has an average shelf life of a few weeks to a few months. A further element of contrast between the two brewing universes concerns the area of Research & Development. Differently from the industrial sector, within the craft beer world, experimentation is continuous and constant, as well as necessary for the purposes of its own "ideological" assumptions.

In this sense, innovation, creativity and incessant research appear to be essential elements, as well as selling points of craft beers, which through the ingenuity and eclectic vein of the master brewer are produced with ever-changing brewing modes, in a variety of distinctive flavors and styles. All these aspects that distinguish Birrificio la Gramigna's artisanal production chain appear particularly important in differentiating the product from the competition.

An additional aspect that characterizes and differentiates Birrificio la Gramigna from other national breweries is related to traceability. As previously outlined, most Italian craft breweries buy raw materials from abroad because they are cheaper, while Birrificio la Gramigna's production uses indigenous raw materials from its own cultivations.

This represents an added value in the eyes of the consumer, as well as a relevant contrast to the competition that leverages the value of local culture and the link with the territory promoted by this contemporary craft phenomenon. In addition to the purely qualitative aspects that distinguish the product proposed by Birrificio la Gramigna, other important strengths that make the craft beer well recognizable among competitors lie in the promotional strategies adopted, the experiential marketing promoted by the entrepreneur, as well as the use of atypical and appealing packaging.

These aspects related to the Marketing Mix will be described and explored in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Price: an Indicator of Value and Quality

A particularly important aspect related to this decision lever is the concept of value. Indeed, from the consumer's point of view, price becomes a decisive indicator of the value of the product in relation to its benefits or, to be more accurate, in relation to the relationship between the perceived benefits and the price paid.

In order to implement a profitable marketing strategy, the preliminary stage to the price fixing concerns an in-depth analysis of the value consumers attribute to the product. In general, a proper marketing strategy must analyze not only the behavior of demand, but also that of competitors; determine the level of costs and investments incurred and analyze the product life cycle.

Craft beer in itself has a higher price than industrial beer and operating a downward pricing strategy would necessarily lead therefore to a devaluation of the product itself. For this reason, a good communication strategy should involve not only a storytelling which is engaging but also "educational". This strategy may turn out to be a useful tool in nurturing and increasing consumer awareness and knowledge about the product.

If the consumer is "trained" about the qualitative characteristics of the product he will be able to recognize and ascertain that craft beer's higher price finds justification in the high quality standards that distinguish it. For cultural, historical, geographical and climatic reasons, Italy has never boasted a true brewing tradition. Because of this lack of a consolidated beer culture within the country an ad hoc communication that educates and sensitizes consumers, enriching their knowledge becomes necessary.

Not all consumers are aware that, compared to the production processes of industrial beer, craft beer has much more expensive procedures, both in terms of time and raw

materials, whose quality standards appear infinitely higher. Likewise, being in most cases small-scale companies, craft breweries do not have the facilities and structures big enough to rely on economies of scale. A further aspect to be considered with regard to price fixing phase concerns the packaging used. As will be discussed in the course of the chapter, in order to ensure the absolute integrity and quality of the product, it is necessary to use a packaging that protects the beer, guarantees its freshness and prevents light to penetrate. These types of packaging entail considerable, but absolutely indispensable, expense. For all these reasons, the setting of the price of the product takes into consideration multiple factors essential to restore the greater expense incurred during the production and packaging phase, but also to position itself strategically and profitably within the market.

Distribution Strategies

A further lever of the Marketing Mix to be analyzed concerns the distribution channels adopted by the company, that is to say the paths taken by products or services from the producer to the consumer. The distribution networks of Birrificio la Gramigna consist of e-commerce, direct sales, both to individuals and companies related to the catering sector, and indirect sales. As for its direct sales, the company has two commercial establishments with a point of sale: the brewery itself, where the entire production chain is developed and the tap room.

The latter, in particular, is the result of a trend that began several decades ago in the United States and has since spread extensively within Italy as well. The greatest advantage of these distribution strategies is essentially related to the strong communicative component that is developed in the premises, which become the company's true showcase, the business card through which it is possible to express the brewery's brand image clearly and eloquently and attract customers through persuasive experiential marketing. Not surprisingly, direct sales at the company's retail outlets is the most profitable distribution strategy of Birrificio la Gramigna.

The short supply chain, in fact, offers manifold benefits, especially in agriculture. Not only for the added value ensured by the high quality of the products and for the enhancement of the local territory, but also and above all for the better management of the relationship with the consumer. Interacting directly and correctly with the consumer by using a captivating and original storytelling turns out to be crucial to lay the foundations for long-lasting engagement. This is especially true within the craft beer sector, where experiential marketing is a very important element, both for the brand and the end consumer.

Thanks to its emotional footprints, experiential marketing enables a deeper brand-consumer interaction driven by elements such as curiosity, engagement and escapism that are able to transport the customer within the brand dimension, both physically and idealistically. The sensory experience offered by experiential marketing amplifies the interaction between the two parties, creating value for the consumer and establishing a solid relationship of trust.

Examples of such strategies operated by la Gramigna are beer tastings, guided tours and brewery workshops, during which the potential customers have the opportunity to literally plunge themselves in the company's universe and thus deepen their knowledge of the product and the brand. Likewise, the Ho.Re.Ca. sector represents another particularly profitable channel for the company.

In this case, distribution takes place either through direct sales, by means of internal sales figures appointed by the company or through niche channels and, therefore, unrelated to large-scale distribution, a sector that remains manned by industrial beer. These are mostly channels of wholesalers and distributors who act as intermediaries between the brewing company and the end customer within the entire national territory. Distribution through e-commerce operates extensively throughout Italy and, while not the most profitable distribution strategy, it has experienced strong growth in the last period.

Craft Promotion: Web Democracy and Experiential Marketing

The last lever of the Marketing Mix is promotion and it includes the set of initiatives that stimulate, support and push product sales. It aims at the achievement of correct relationships with target consumers, brand identity consolidation and reputation and this activity necessarily passes through processes related to the communication between the brand and the potential customers. The tools and techniques a company decides to use are several and heterogeneous, and their synergy within a coherent and straightforward integrated communication plan is crucial for the success of the promotion strategy.

Depending on the conformation and breadth of the target audience, the levers can be gathered into certain categories, such as advertising, public relations, personal selling, direct marketing *etc.* The difference between these categories is the degree of personalization of the promotional message, which appears greater in personal selling or direct marketing. Conversely, advertising and public relations are aimed at reaching a larger, more diverse and, consequently, depersonalized audience.

Communication is actually present in all the four areas of McCharty's proposed Marketing Mix model, directly influencing and stimulating consumer behavior. With regard to the craft beer sector, due to their small sizes, craft breweries such as La Gramigna mainly resort to digital channels, such as their own website or social pages. This choice allows the use of direct channels that do not require high expenses and allow the creation and dissemination of organic contents, i.e., content published within the website or social pages by the brewery itself. Through these channels, brands get direct feedback from the consumer, which can guide them on the tastes, preferences and directions of users, as well as potential buyers.

In the case of Birrificio la Gramigna, as in other more and less large business entities, the promotional leverage inherent in advertising is gradually being replaced and

supplanted by social media and their undeniable advantages in terms of eloquence and virality. Generally speaking, "content marketing" refers to an approach of creating, curating, distributing, and amplifying content that is interesting, compelling, and useful to a clearly defined segment of the audience, with the goal of sparking conversations about the content.

Content, in a sense, has become the new form of advertising, and the #hashtags used in their distribution on social media have replaced traditional slogans, radically changing the role of the marketer from a brand promoter to a storyteller. As previously mentioned, a proper management of digital marketing from a humanistic and relational point of view constitutes a choice of success that cannot be overlooked and in the digital age in which we are living, the human side of consumers manifests itself freely and clearly, showing all their critical, demanding, but also vulnerable nature.

For this reason, marketing must adapt to this reality and create brands with characteristics similar to those of human beings, placing a greater focus on elements such as authenticity, sincerity and loyalty, in an absolutely equal and bidirectional dimension with potential buyers.

By resorting to empathic listening and immersive research from the field of so-called digital anthropology, it is possible to holistically understand the complexities of the human side of consumers and interact with them in a significantly deeper and more strategic manner. The post-modern customer appears to be infinitely more skeptical and distrustful than in the past, and for this reason, nowadays marketing can hardly reach its audience by using only traditional advertising.

Consumers no longer trust classical media: they refuse to passively "absorb" the information contained in advertising messages and tend to check, almost obsessively, its veracity and reliability by asking for confirmation from people or communities they belong to and really trust.

In this sense, content marketing, in the eyes of the consumer, appears to be a "safer" and more trustworthy tool as it fully exploits the transparency and explicit nature that distinguishes online communication. Up to a few years ago, customers only relied on the contents conveyed by traditional media such as advertising.

They placed their trust in the messages and information conveyed and let themselves be "charmed" by visual, aesthetic, psycholinguistic elements. Nowadays, with the rise of social media, the situation has evolved rapidly and drastically: customers have access to a huge amount of data and content generated by users themselves, and they find this content more credible and, above all, more compelling and interesting than that from traditional media.

As extensively described by Donatella Padua in *Trust, Social Relations and Engagement - Understanding Customer Behaviour on the web*, the radical evolution fostered by the Internet that is impacting global society and economy implies an equally radical change in mindset on the part of brands. From a cultural point of view, in particular, the classical Western approach should make way to a more Eastern vision. As the author illustrates, the Eastern approach is based on the concept of "advantage," while the Western view is based on the concept of "utility." In the former case, the focus is on the process, while in the latter case on the end goal and, therefore, the outcome.

If we decline these concepts within the commercial sphere, it becomes clear that brands should place a greater focus on elements such as dialogue, conversation and relationship with the consumer, instead of fossilizing solely and exclusively on sales. The above does not imply, of course, that companies should not pursue profit, but rather that their efforts should place greater emphasis on the management of so-called relational goods. These, in fact, play the role of authentic bridges of dialogue and interaction that generate trust in customers.

The digital democratization promoted by the Internet has generated a strong sense of freedom and sharing among users.

The absence of barriers and boundaries that characterizes the Net and its complete pervasiveness and accessibility have led to a real liberalization of information, as well as a renaissance in terms of learning, knowledge and interaction.

All of this has led to a shift from a push strategy to a pull strategy, in which the customer is no longer perceived as part of aseptic and statistical clusters or as a mere passive subject to whom the promotional message is directed. On the contrary, the customer plays a very important role by actively participating in the brand's creative process. In the eyes of companies, the customer is no longer a target, but rather a collaborator, a true partner whose shared information and data, prove to be a valuable resource for offering increasingly personalized products, services and messages.

The main effect generated by the advent of Web 2.0. concerns precisely this horizontal dimension, in which the brand and the customer occupy the same position, interacting bidirectionally. In this way, once the objectives of the content marketing campaign is set, the audience is mapped and the content road map is designed and planned, the company is able to communicate in an accurate and personalized way according to the features of the profiled customers.

The comments left by users under Birrificio la Gramigna's social content give evidence of how much the breaking down of barriers between brand and consumer is a matter of fact. Post-modern customers feel absolutely free to express direct opinions, ask questions, make requests and demonstrate their increasing trust placed in social tools. In addition to digital channels, another promotion strategy adopted by numerous craft breweries, including Birrificio la Gramigna, is participation in local, national and international fairs, festivals, workshops and events.

Taking part in events of this kind allows breweries to make themselves known within

new markets, enhancing and reinvigorating their brand awareness and dealing directly with new potential customers. As previously mentioned, the ability to “sew” together the various levers is essential and even within this sphere of the Marketing Mix the concept of multichannel occurs.

Digital channels and trade show events play important and mutually complementary functions, as they allow both to convey educational messages and to build highly informative and experiential moments. The use of both channels, very different but highly connected, leads to the deployment of an integrated communication strategy that is very useful in guiding the consumer's final choice.

Experiential marketing within craft brewing context represents the strongest point of companies, which can benefit from sensory, emotional and synesthetic elements to intrigue and attract consumers. Even within this decision-making lever, the value placed by customers on the concept of experience carries preponderant weight and prestige: attention to the relationship, strategic storytelling and strong empathy are the key ingredients for a successful engaging and loyalty-inducing experiential marketing. In recent times, the value associated with experience has become the core of marketing. A further insight is thus required.

As has already been amply demonstrated, the modern concept of consumption differs considerably from that of the past, which was purely massive and utilitarian. The global and digital society of our day clamors loudly for ever greater personalization, as much in products and services as in relationships and utilitarianism and mass production is no longer applicable to the new social paradigms: the product is no longer the end point of consumption, but rather a vehicle through which to achieve the new true purpose, that is to say experience.

In the essay *Experience in Marketing: Concepts, Frameworks and Consumer Insights* edited by Bernd Schmitt, this topic is debated more than exhaustively: “Customers do not only engage in rational choice, but are

just as frequently driven by emotions. [...] As a result, experience marketing is usually broadly defined as any form of customer-focused marketing activity that creates connection to customers. Based on this broad view, experience may be evoked by products, packaging, communication, in-store interactions, sales relationships, events, and the like [8].

The concept of experience can be conceived as a complex of interactions between the customer and the product or company itself. The experience resulting from these interactions is deeply personal and features the consumer and his/her own participation at various levels (rational, emotional, sensory, physical and spiritual).

Returning to the concept of value, it is worth pointing out how this value does not reside merely in consumption for its own sake, but also and above all in the experience associated with such consumption. In this regard, scholars deemed it necessary to make a distinction between utilitarian value (linked to functionality) and hedonistic value, the result of experience. As providentially anticipated by Pine and Gilmore in 1998, in today's global society, the so-called “experience economy,” has risen.

The contemporary food & beverage sector and, in particular, the craft beer sector, appears particularly inclined to embrace this new form of synaesthetic marketing: “[...] Motivation to drink craft beers is generated by three important factors: desire for more knowledge, new tasting experiences, and a move away from the mainstream beer consumption. [...] The motivation to consume craft beer emerged as more experience-based than functional [9].” A mindset that embraces curiosity and culture of the unconventional, against the massive depersonalization of the industrial sector. A new form of consumption that does not arise from a need of a “functional” nature, but rather from the need to build and feel part of a common physical, mental and emotional experience. A final aspect that deserves consideration concerns the figure of the entrepreneur and the importance his or her role plays within the relational context.

“Some tourist or customers emotionally connect their experience with the meeting of a famous owner. It is a subjective gesture when customers are tied with different aspects of an owner’s lifestyle, interests, or role identities. Moreover, the interpersonal interaction between owner and customers creates a positive atmosphere that provides a quality experience. In this regard, the entrepreneur can be built on the experience economy framework to fulfill the tourist’s total experience [10].”

The ability of the entrepreneur lies in welcoming the consumer into an evasive and hedonistic dimension. In this sense, the smaller the size of the business entity, the greater the benefits arising from the interaction between those involved. The degree of increased intimacy, authenticity and confidence removes the gap between the brand and the consumer, leading to an increasingly high degree of personalization in communication. With his/her *ars rhetorica*, the craft brewer not only intrigues the listener, but also plays a real educational role, useful in increasing the customer's beer culture.

The educational factor related to the experience is a salient element that is basically provided through tastings, brewing classes and the dissemination of craft world knowledge. Since craft beers have a wide range of characteristics and flavors and are brewed from an equally wide variety of ingredients, spreading more product knowledge may generate potential positive effects on the purchase of the final product.

Moreover, these "formative" moments are encouraged and emphasized by aesthetic elements such as rural landscapes and local traditions, an ideal setting for an experience of immersion and participation that allows an authentic and hedonistic escape from the patterns of everyday life. The role of the entrepreneur is, thus, essential in building a holistic and profitable consumer experience that can more than positively shape the customer's conception of the brand.

The Role of Packaging in the Consumption Experience and the Renaissance the Can

As illustrated above, in addition to a more careful, costly and time-consuming process, another particularly important aspect related to the product that deserves to be explored in depth is packaging. Even though it does not belong properly to the four P's proposed by McCarthy's model, the role and importance "played" by packaging is to date a non-negligible element in strategic and profitable marketing planning, especially in the field of brewing. The packaging of goods is undoubtedly among the most popular and original practices grafted by postmodern consumption.

The strategies adopted embrace the ostensive vocation of packaging, its being designed not only to store goods, but to be shown and appreciated. They are not mere containers, but real interfaces that, in their materiality, become means of expression of imaginary desires.

Packaging is thus an active and proactive agent to be exploited within the company's branding strategies able to communicate the product positioning and quality and to greatly influence not only the experience, but also the relationship with the consume. Craft brewing universe appears to be well embedded within a precise ideological imaginary, whose core values are conveyed not only through the company's entrepreneur, but also by means of places and objects connected to the brewery.

In this regard, it is considered important to note how, over the past few years, the use of the can has played a key role in the material culture of beer. Not surprisingly, there is a great number of Italian craft breweries that have recently chosen to resort to this product packaging practice, not only for reasons strictly related to the preservation methods of the finished product, but also and above all to make the most of the communicative, symbolic and persuasive value ensured by graphic customization.

Nowadays, can is no longer merely conceived as a "content"; it has partially lost its instrumental function to become a "material" representative of the brewery, able to express and convey its identity and individuality in

relation to the competition. It is no coincidence that cans, throughout world history, have starred in the art of collecting.

However, within the brewing universe a "dispute" between glass bottles and cans is currently going on. It is generally believed that bottled beers boast superior quality, as glass is associated by consumers with transparency, explicitness and purity. In other words, the "crystal clear" visibility of its contents appears more reassuring and reliable.

However, the use of glass involves a significant problem given by light, as some substances in beer tend to deteriorate when exposed to direct sunlight, giving the product an unpleasant "light taste" and causing a significant reduction in the product's shelf life. On the contrary, the can completely hides the contents and the consumer has no way of glimpsing what is inside, but can count on better preservation, ensured by the absolute impossibility of light penetrating the opacity of the metal material.

Despite the undeniable advantages offered by the can in economic and environmental terms, even now many consumers show a prejudice toward this popular confectioning practice, for two essential reasons: the first is that the can tends to be associated with taste contamination generated by chemical exchanges with the contents.

The other reason is related to the "derogatory" image linked to the industrial value and the references to mass production, standardization and serial homogenization it evokes. Actually, canning graphic customization represents a highly creative and ingenious activity, in which inspiration and inventiveness are essential elements for the purposes of a recognizable and intriguing graphic design. The surface of the can thus represents the brewery's ego and expresses its values and strengths. The reasons that led Birrificio la Gramigna to upgrade its product packaging practices from glass bottling to canning include various factors related to economic, ecological and, above all, marketing reasons. Above all, the can represents a packing practice that allows

better preservation of the product. Second, it is an environmentally friendly material, whose disposal appears easier and faster: cans are fully recyclable and can have a new life countless times, without ever losing the qualities of aluminum. In addition, its lower weight compared to glass allows a reduction in the cost of shipping goods, as well as more practical ways of storage. Last, but certainly not least, the persuasive power pursued through careful neuromarketing strategies: its storytelling, becomes a very powerful branding tool that, in the consumer's mind, allows an instantaneous association between the positive values promoted by the brewery and the unmistakable craft taste.

The naming process is never random and every can tells a story. The wide range of beers is characterised by original, fresh and pop cans whose eccentric look intrigues and attracts the consumer into the bucolic, unconventional and dreamlike universe embodied by Birrificio la Gramigna. Storytelling achieved through packaging is now a widely used practice in brewing, whose marketing foundations are widely demonstrated by scientific literature.

According to neuromarketing studies, in fact, during the purchase process the consumer would act under the influence of a number of irrational, emotional, heuristic factors. His/her unconscious own feelings and emotions guide him according to a peripheral and heuristic process that encourages the entire purchasing process. The graphic representation acts as an invitation to the consumer to establish a bond with the brand. The combination of various factors, such as the choice of colours, style, illustration and font of the overprinted lettering captures the consumer's attention and interest, carrying him/her into the brewery pop microcosm.

To pursue a successful packaging strategy, there are no universal rules to conform to: it all depends on the feeling you want to arouse in the consumer. Generally speaking, for the "advertising" image to be able to seduce and intrigue the latter, it must express something original, positive and consistent with the brand's values [11-57].

All this allows the customer to identify with the identity of the brewery, sharing its values and ideals.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper is to describe the rise and diffusion of the craft revolution phenomenon within the beer market and its remarkable effects and consequences. The investigation showed how the craft beer "trend" has led to a real economic, cultural and sociological revolution in which the value associated with craftsmanship matches perfectly with the "ferment" of creativity and the ability to reinterpret styles and traditions from different cultures.

Throughout the paper this phenomenon has been examined and investigated, going back to the historical and economic causes, the predominant features of so-called agricultural localism, as well as the sociological components found in the postmodern consumer, with particularly interesting results highlighting and explaining the new forms of consumption grafted by the craft phenomenon. This framework allowed us to delve into Birrificio la Gramigna Marketing Mix and thanks to the information and data provided by the owners, all the decisional levers and marketing strategies adopted have been investigated.

The most intriguing finding concerns the value related to communication and experience. As pointed out, the value placed by the *craft* consumer on the concept of experience carries preponderant weight and prestige and is intertwined with elements such as empathy, care in relationship and strategic storytelling. These ingredients are crucial in pursuing a successful engaging experiential marketing.

Today's global and digital society clamors loudly for a greater and greater personalization, both in products and services and in human relationships. Utilitarianism and mass production no longer appear applicable to the new social paradigms: the product is no longer the end point of consumption, but rather a vehicle through which to achieve the new true purpose, namely experience.

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