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Crafting the Brand: Characterizing Consumer Perspective of Brand Equity Among
Microbreweries in Northwest Arkansas

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Agricultural and Extension Education

by

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Arkansas Tech University
Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, 2020

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

Craft beer and craft breweries are on the rise across the United States and more importantly, in Arkansas. Throughout the past two decades, craft beer has gained popularity in the state of Arkansas as the number of craft breweries have risen across the state. However, there is currently little literature on how branding in craft breweries in Northwest Arkansas is used to gain and retain loyal consumers. This study aimed to add to the academic literature and provide practical recommendations to practitioners on how brand equity is built among craft breweries in Northwest Arkansas, using qualitative interviews. Marketing strategies of craft beer producers were examined by interviewing loyal consumers. Participants were asked a series of questions relating to the six building blocks of Keller's Brand Resonance Model and what efforts their respective brewery utilize. Researchers identified loyal consumers noted value in how the brewery made them feel and how it reflected their self-evaluations. Marketing tactics were also identified, and the findings revealed breweries utilize social media, point of purchase signage, and word of mouth to engage consumers and further develop their brands.

Keywords: craft beer, Brand Resonance Model, branding, loyal consumers, brewery personnel

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I would like to thank the craft beer industry of Arkansas for creating a community and space that inspired my graduate research. If it weren't for the passion of the brewers and fellow patrons across the state, I would not have been able to complete what I see as the perfect thesis project.

I would also like to thank my family, friends, and AECT family members who had my back throughout these past two years. Every single one of them were integral parts of my master's education experience. Life is full of its trials and tribulations, although many of the tribulations coincided with my master's education, my support system has guided me through this and kept me levelheaded and sane.

Lastly, I want to tell myself that I am proud of me. As a first-generation college student, I never expected that I would be graduating with a master's degree and researching something I am so passionate about. I have big dreams and goals; I am slowly but surely getting there.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Need for Study

When a consumer walks into the store, they are faced with a multitude of beer options. Additionally, with the rise in craft breweries and craft beer, the consumer is faced with more craft options available to them (Elzinga et al., 2015). Porral et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study on beer brand equity in Europe, identifying importance in beer companies' utilization of brand image to curate brand equity and consumer loyalty. As identified by Porral et al. (2013), brand equity is built with high brand image and brand loyalty from the consumer, this addresses a need to study the factors that build loyalty of a consumer through a qualitative lens. It was recommended that similar research be conducted outside of Europe to identify beer brand equity (Porral et al., 2013).

Jolly et al. (2021) conducted a study in Oklahoma to discover how local craft breweries establish their brand in their community. Based on the findings of their study, Jolly et al. (2021) recommended academic research into branding for craft breweries in states with more established brewing industry. While Jolly et al. (2021) recommended studying craft beer consumers for their perspectives of place-based branding in craft breweries, they also recommended studying craft brewery customers to understand their perspectives for how craft breweries establish their brand, generally.

Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Model describes how an intense, loyal relationship is built between a consumer and a brand. This is accomplished by considering the consumer's way of thinking, feeling, and doing and how they are connected with the brand (Keller, 2013). Brand equity adds value to the consumer as it helps them process, interpret, and store large amounts of information about brands and their products (Aaker, 1991). There is a need to analyze how craft

beer consumers have built their intense and actively loyal relationships with a craft brewery through the lens of Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Model.

Problem Statement

The craft beer industry is not only growing throughout the U.S. but in Arkansas as well (Brewer's Association, 2021). According to the Northwest Arkansas Tourism Association (NATA), Northwest Arkansas (NWA) is comprised of four counties: Benton, Washington, Carroll, and Madison (Rawn et al., 2020). As of 2022, there were 21 craft breweries in the NWA area (Arkansas Brewer's Guild, 2022). With a state total of 48 craft breweries, the NWA area accounts for nearly 40% of the craft breweries in Arkansas. The first craft brewery in NWA opened in 2010; the craft beer industry is still young and growing in this area of Arkansas (Widener, 2022). As pointed out by Jolly et al. (2021), there is limited academic research on craft brewery branding and how brand equity of craft breweries relates to the consumer. Because of this, there is a need for a knowledge base for marketing and communication practitioners to understand how to build loyal consumers in a craft brewery brand. Since the first craft brewery in NWA opened in 2010 there has been rapid growth in this industry in this region, suggesting that a base of loyal consumers has been built (Widener, 2022). Researching how the craft brewery brands in NWA have built brand equity and ultimately, loyal consumers is important for developing marketing tactics to be utilized by microbreweries to build their brand.

Purpose of Research and Objectives/Research Questions

There was a need to characterize brand equity among microbreweries in Northwest Arkansas and identify what brings value to craft brewery branding according to the perspective of the loyal consumer and brewery personnel. While there is research on craft breweries that

provide insight on branding through place and localness, there is minimal academic research on craft breweries in Arkansas or how craft brewery brands in the state have built loyal consumers.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to characterize brand equity among craft brewery brands in Northwest Arkansas through the lens of the six brand building blocks of Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Model (salience, performance, imagery, judgement, and resonance).

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do craft breweries in Northwest Arkansas promote their brewery and products to the consumer?
2. How do Northwest Arkansas craft brewery brands fit into the six building blocks of branding from Keller's Brand Resonance Model according to loyal consumers and brewery personnel?

Limitations

Due to the qualitative nature of this study and use of semi-structured field interviews, the instrument used was the researcher. The presence of the researcher and the researcher serving as the instrument within the study could influence the researcher and imply biases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), with this form of research there is a need for the researcher to be open about potential biases. The methods section of this thesis includes a reflexivity statement to help clarify such potential biases.

The purpose of this study focused on a smaller geographic region of a larger industry. The study was conducted with loyal craft beer consumers in NWA about NWA craft breweries; therefore, the results of this study are not generalizable beyond the scope of the craft breweries and loyal consumers who were study participants. This study is further limited to consumers who were identified as loyal consumers by craft brewery personnel; therefore, the results of this study

will not be generalizable to all craft beer consumers in NWA. Another limitation of the study was the small sample size of participants.

Assumptions

As the methodological approach for this study included qualitative field interviews, it was assumed that the participants were being truthful in their responses to interview route questions.

Definition of Key Terms

1. Craft beer: beer that is produced for a limited market, and this beer is oftentimes solely sold through the brand's own restaurant or retail establishment (Dunham, 2021).
2. Microbrewery: a brewery that is small, independent, and traditional in the sense that it produces small quantities of beer, is not more than a quarter owned or operated by an alcohol industry member, and the brews are derived from traditional or innovative ingredients and fermentation (Pokrivcak, 2019).
3. Local: the community and geographic area surrounding a microbrewery and its consumers (Schnell & Reese, 2003).
4. Place attachments: an active and conscious process that creates a connection between the consumer and the geographic place and community (Schnell & Reese, 2003).
5. Loyal customer: a patron who has participated in repeat sales and/or repurchases of the brand's goods and/or services (Tardi, 2019).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In the United States, the beer industry accounts for nearly 2.04 million jobs and over \$331.8 billion of economic impact to the national economy (Dunham, 2021). The brewing industry in the United States is made up of four types of brewing firms: macro-brewers (e.g., Anheuser-Busch, Molson Coors Beverage Company, and Yuengling), import brews (e.g., Heineken and Corona), regional brewers that produce less than two million barrels of malt beverages but distribute nationally, and lastly, microbreweries (Dunham, 2021). According to Dunham (2021), most of the growth in the United States beer industry is coming from the micro and regional breweries.

Conceptual Framework

Definition of Craft Beer

Craft breweries produce beer for a limited market, oftentimes for the sole purpose to be sold through their own restaurant or retail establishment (Dunham, 2021). Globally, the craft beer market accounts for more than 15% of the total beer market (Baiano, 2020). A craft brewer is one that is usually defined as a small, independent, and traditional brewery (Pokrivcak, 2019). To be defined as “small,” a brewery must produce less than 9,539,238 hectoliters (hl) of beer annually and to be defined as “independent” less than 25% of the brewery is owned or controlled by an alcohol industry member (Pokrivcak, 2019). Finally, for a brewery to be defined as “traditional” a majority of its total beverage alcohol volume in beers must be derived from traditional or innovative brewing ingredients and their fermentation (Pokrivcak, 2019).

The Rise of Craft Breweries in the United States

In the United States, the rise in craft brewing known as the “craft beer revolution” has been a phenomenon as of the most recent decades, having a breakthrough in 1976 in California with the United States’ first microbrewery (Pokrivcak, 2019). Since the start of the first microbrewery, the United States has been considered to be a hub for modern microbrewing (Pokrivcak, 2019). In 1983, the United States only had 14 craft brewers (including brewpubs and contract brewers) and by 1985 the number of craft brewers had risen to 37 (Elzinga, 2015). The rapid growth of craft breweries in the United States continued until the late 1990s and experienced a decline from 1998 to 2000; however, after this decline, the number of craft brewers stayed consistent until 2010 and began to rise again. The demand for craft beer has grown as consumers’ personal income has increased. Additionally, the desire for locally produced products has increased as well and craft beer attempts to identify itself as locally produced (Elzinga, 2015).

The Rise of Craft Breweries in Arkansas

Craft brewing was slow to move into the lower Midwestern and Southern states. As early as 1996, every state along the Pacific coast had more craft brewers than any of the Southern states and it was not until 2001 that craft beer was being brewed in every state in the United States (Elzinga, 2015). Breweries were in Arkansas before prohibition and did not return to Arkansas until well after prohibition had ended; the first post-prohibition brewery that opened in the state was Arkansas Brewing Co. (from 1983 to 1986) in Little Rock (Widener, 2022). Wideman’s Old Fort Brewery opened in 1992 and closed in 1997, and it wasn’t until 2000 that Arkansas saw the rise of the craft brewing industry with Diamond Bear Brewery and many others (Widener, 2022). As of 2021, there were 46 craft breweries open in the state of Arkansas,

and the craft beer industry provides a \$496 million economic impact for the state (Brewers Association, 2021).

Branding Approaches in Craft Breweries

Place does not simply refer to a particular location, but also a way of understanding the world. While place is important as a geographical location it is also how people view the world—place is viewing the world through attachments and connections between people and place (Cresswell, 2014). According to Schnell and Reese (2003), place attachment with craft breweries can be built up by storytelling and a higher level of consciousness of local history. Williams and Barretta (2018) recently found that it is important for breweries to tell its story to the consumer focusing on its backstory (i.e., how and why it was founded, and what the meaning of product and brand names are) and what makes it locally relevant. This is backed up by Taylor and DiPietro's (2020) findings that consumers place importance on local brands telling a story through their branding and marketing as well as the interactions they have within their community. Taylor and DiPietro (2020) also found there is more importance in the connection between the brand and the place than repeated experiences when consumers develop feelings of attachment to a brewery's branding. It was also found that craft beer consumers built a connection through loyalty between their brand and their self-concept (Williams & Barretta, 2018).

Many craft breweries have built their branding around one-of-a-kind social settings that are often decorated with local historical photos, maps, and other relics that represent a place's personality to cater to the consumer's craving for uniqueness (Schnell & Reese, 2003). According to Schnell and Reese (2003), in craft breweries across the United States it is not just the décor that carry a local theme, but it is the beer names as well; locally rooted names produce

a sense of belonging and chance to share the local distinctiveness. The décor and beer names reflect the places where they are brewed and often times are derived from things like local historical events or figures, local legends, landmarks, wildlife, and even climatic events (Schnell & Reese, 2003). Much of the imagery used to market craft beers and craft breweries are obscure to anybody who is not an insider which then creates a sense of community through this practice; both contribute to the widespread appeal (Schnell & Reese, 2003). When craft breweries focus on connecting themselves with the local community and using local branding, this can improve the relationship between the craft brewery and the consumer (Taylor & DiPietro, 2020).

Schnell and Reese (2003) allude to craft breweries being proof that more and more Americans feel a lack of local connections and will cling to the brands that bring them reconnection with the economy, history, environment, and culture of their home. Many people are proclaiming the difference and distinctiveness of their own locale to attempt to build a sense of loyalty to their locale and craft breweries are one of the ways this is being accomplished (Schnell & Reese, 2003). Craft breweries that utilize local lore and history for their branding are able to increase the community's attachment to their homes and attract tourists to the community (Taylor & DiPietro, 2020).

A way for craft breweries to appeal to a sense of localness is by contributing to rural tourism and allowing consumers and patrons to connect with the locale while visiting the brewery (Murray & Kline, 2015). Breweries can address sociocultural sustainability through their expressions of the local community, history, and landscapes in naming the beers and creating their labels (Murray & Kline, 2015). In Oklahoma, brewery personnel identified the brewery contributing to the community culture as well as the revitalization and revival of the local culture being an important part of building a sense of place to the community (Jolly et al., 2021).

Brewery personnel also viewed the breweries as a gathering place for the community and how they were intentional about creating a community space (Jolly et al., 2021). Jolly et al. (2021) found that craft breweries engaging in community events and being locally minded contribute to a sense of place being established within their brewery for the community.

If a craft brewery can capitalize on its engagement with the local community, of course while providing quality service and beers, it can increase their patron's level of place attachment and brand attachment (Taylor & DiPietro, 2020).

Breweries utilize word of mouth as an important promotional factor (Jolly et al., 2021). Word of mouth is seen as more credible than marketer-initiated communications because it has been passed along through like-minded consumers. Word of mouth is important for brands as it brings credibility and increased purchase intent (Allsop et al., 2007). Word of mouth utilize consumer social networks when consumers gather opinions from one another, incorporate that into how they know and feel about a brand, and ultimately pass that along to others (Allsop et al., 2007). Word of mouth can be initiated with persuasive communication from a brand or even things like branded merchandise (Allsop et al., 2007). In addition to word of mouth, breweries utilize social media to keep patrons involved and engaged with the brand and its happenings (Jolly et al., 2021)

A prominent form of word of mouth is customer referral programs. Customer referral programs rely on satisfied or delighted consumers to refer other consumers to the brands (Berman, 2015). Customer referral as a form of word of mouth places value in the loyal consumers of a brand and the added credibility of the brand this gives the newly referred consumers (Berman, 2015).

A 2013 study found that with higher beer brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and better beer brand image, there is a higher brand equity for the consumer of the beer (Calvo Porral et al., 2013). While the Calvo Porral et al. study was conducted in Europe, it provided a basis for how consumers build brand equity in a beer brand and is important to compare regionally. Calvo Porral et al. (2013) asserted that brand equity is positively related to consumer purchase intention as well as the consumer's willingness to pay a premium price for craft beer.

Theoretical Framework

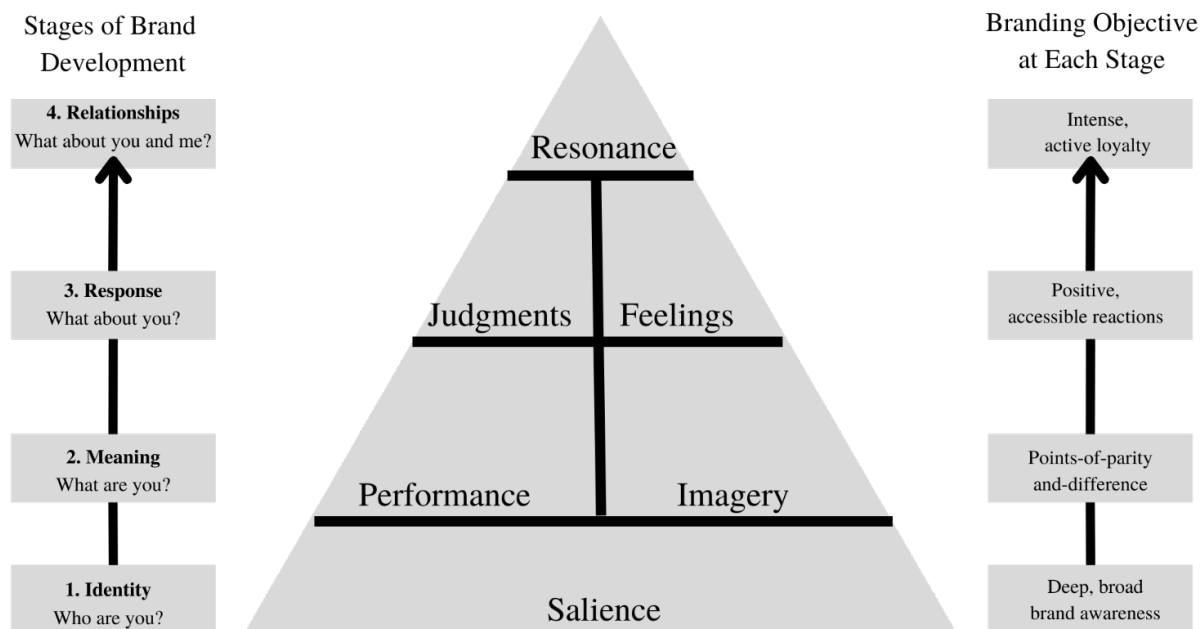
Brand Equity and the Brand Resonance Model

Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Model served as the theoretical underpinning for this study. According to Keller (2013), there may be many different understood definitions of brand equity, but most practitioners will agree that it consists of those marketing effects that can be uniquely attributed to a brand. The agreed upon way of understanding brand equity is that "brand equity explains why different outcomes result from the marketing of a branded product or service than if it were not branded" (Keller, 2013, p. 29). Aaker defines brand equity as, "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and or/or to that firm's customers" (Aaker, 1991). Even more so, "brand equity provides a common denominator for interpreting marketing strategies and assessing the value of a brand" (Keller, 2013, p. 29).

To achieve brand equity, the brand must reach the top of the pyramid in the *Brand Resonance Model* (Keller, 2013, p. 79). Keller's Brand Resonance Model lays out how to create an intense and actively loyal relationship with customers; while considering how the consumer's way of thinking, feeling, and doing and the level in which they connect with a brand are affected

by brand positioning (Keller, 2013, p. 79). According to Aaker (1991), brand equity adds value to the consumer as it helps them process, interpret, and store large amounts of information about brands and their products.

Figure 1 *Brand Resonance Model*



Note. The building blocks to the left side of the model represent a “rational route” to building a brand and the building blocks to the right side of the model represent an “emotional route” to building a brand. From *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity* (p. 80), by K. L. Keller, 2013, Pearson Publications.

Each of the six brand building blocks define how a business can build brand equity and the parameters within (Keller, 2013). Once a brand has reached the top of the pyramid with a consumer, this has created a brand-loyal consumer.

Brand Salience

According to Keller (2013), creating brand salience is crucial to achieving the right brand identity. Brand salience is used to measure how easily a brand is recalled in assorted circumstances and situations as well as different aspects of the brand’s awareness (Keller, 2013,

p. 79). Keller posed the following questions to address salience, “To what extent is the brand top-of-mind and easily recalled or recognized? What types of cues or reminders are necessary? How pervasive is this brand awareness?” (2013, pp. 79-80). Through brand salience, a product is then given an identity from combining associated purchase and consumption situations with the product’s category (Keller, 2013). To do this, the depth and breadth of the brand’s awareness must differentiate. “The depth of brand awareness measures how likely it is for a brand element to come to mind, and the ease with which it does” (Keller, 2013, p. 80). Keller defined breadth of brand awareness as measuring “the range of purchase and usage situations in which the brand element comes to mind and depends to a large extent on the organization of brand and product knowledge in memory” (2013, p. 80).

Aaker’s (1991) views of brand name and symbols support Keller’s (2013) level of brand salience within the Brand Resonance Model. Consumers will often buy a familiar brand because they are comfortable with the familiarity and assume that a familiar brand is probably reliable and of reasonable quality (Aaker, 1991). Aaker (1991) also noted that brand awareness is an important factor because the brand must first be considered by the consumer, and it is difficult for an unknown brand to be a part of this consideration.

Brand Performance

The next brand building block is brand performance, which addresses how the product performs with the consumer (Keller, 2013). In order for there to be a brand, there must be a product or service, as it is the primary influence on the consumer’s experience with a brand (Keller, 2013). Keller defines brand performance as, “describing how well the product or service meets customers’ more functional needs” (2013, p. 84). Aaker (1991) stated a brand will be

associated with the consumer's perception of its overall quality. If a brand is well-regarded by the consumer, there is the assumption that it will have high performance (Aaker, 1991).

Brand performance is built from five different sets of attributes or benefits of the brand (Keller, 2013). The first are the primary ingredients and supplementary features; these attributes are identified by consumers in the quality of the primary ingredients as well as any extra features the product or service may have like a patented feature or the ability to customize. The second is the product's reliability, durability, and serviceability. Reliability is the measurement of the product or service's consistency of its performance over time as well as from purchase to purchase (Keller, 2013). The third is service effectiveness, efficiency, and empathy. Service effectiveness is measured by how well the consumer's service requirements are met by the brand (Keller, 2013). Service efficiency is simply the responsiveness and speed of the service (Keller, 2013). Service empathy is the level of trusting, caring, and having the consumer's interests in mind while a service being provided (Keller, 2013). Next is style and design, meaning how the product or service performs for the consumer. A consumer may take aesthetics of the products into consideration, focusing on characteristics such as, size, shape, materials, and colors involved as well as how it looks, feels, sounds, smells, or tastes. The last is price, how expensive or inexpensive a brand is and the frequency it is discounted is a part of the performance association of a consumer (Keller, 2013).

Aaker (1991) also stated that the quality perception may look different dependent on the industry that the brand is a part of. The consumer's perception of the brand quality and performance is important because it directly influences the purchase decisions and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991). Aaker (1991) also noted that when the performance of the brand is high and

influencing a loyal consumer, branded products and services can support premium prices which can be reinvested in other aspects of brand equity.

Brand Imagery

Brand imagery includes the way a brand attempts to meet the consumer's social and psychological needs and the way the consumer thinks about a brand abstractly instead of what they think a brand actually does (Keller, 2013). When discussing brand image, Aaker (1991) describes brand image as a set of associations that the consumer often times organizes in a meaningful way. Thus, brand imagery is comprised of more intangible aspects and allows the consumer to form imagery from their unique experiences, from other sources like word of mouth, or indirectly through advertising (Keller, 2013). There are four main intangibles that are linked to a brand when it comes to imagery, they are user profiles, purchase and usage situations, personality and values, and history, heritage, and experiences (Keller, 2013). User profiles or user imagery is derived from the type of person or organization who uses the brand. This form of imagery contributes to the consumer's mental image of either actual users or ideal users of the brand using descriptive, demographic factors or factors that are more abstract like psychographic factors (Keller, 2013). Demographic factors that contribute to user profile or user imagery can include gender, age, race, and income (Keller, 2013). One way brand image is created through brand association is connecting the brand or product with a type of user or consumer, presenting an image of who is using the brand to the consumer (Aaker, 1991). The psychographic factors that can contribute to the user profile or user imagery are "attitudes toward life, careers, possessions, social issues, or political institutions" (Keller, 2013, p. 86). Brand image and association is a way for brands to appeal to the values and personality of the consumer by

creating associations with things or people that create positive feelings with the brand (Aaker, 1991).

Aaker (1991) explains that most of the time the underlying value of a brand name is formed from specific associations that are linked to it. These associations can provide context for differentiation from other brands to the consumer (Aaker, 1991). Reason to buy and purchasing decisions can be derived from the associations and brand image experienced by the consumer driving them closer to brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991).

Brand Judgments

According to Keller (2013), brand judgments are the consumer's own opinions of the brand that are formed by putting together all the different brand performance and imagery associations with four important judgments being: judgments about quality, credibility, consideration, and superiority. The two things that play into brand judgments are the brand's quality and credibility (Keller, 2013). Attitudes towards a brand are the consumer's overall evaluation of a brand and can help form the brand choice for the consumer, the most important attitude a consumer can have is the perception of the brand's quality. Another component of brand judgments is the brand credibility. Keller says (2013, p. 89), "brand credibility describes the extent to which customers see the brand as credible in terms of three dimensions: perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and likability." Perceived expertise can be addressed if the brand is seen as competent, innovative, and a market leader. Brand trustworthiness is addressed when the brand is seen as dependable and keeping customer interest in mind and lastly, brand likability is addressed when the brand is seen as fun, interesting, and worth spending time with (Keller, 2013). Brand likability is the consumer having a respect or feeling of friendship towards a brand (Aaker, 1991).

Brand consideration as a part of brand judgments is important because even if a brand is highly credible, if the consumer does not even consider the brand for purchase, they will keep it at a distance (Keller, 2013). Brand consideration is derived from the strong and favorable brand associations that are created in part of the brand's image. This is backed up by the concept that the associations created by the brand's image can lead to a reason to buy or consider buying a product (Aaker, 1991). Lastly, brand superiority measures the degree in which the consumer sees the brand as unique and better than other brands (Keller, 2013).

Brand Feelings

Brand feelings are the consumer's emotional reactions and responses to a brand and what feelings are evoked when there is interaction with the brand. According to Keller (2013), the six important types of brand-building feelings are: warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval, and self-respect. Warmth is when the brand evokes a feeling of peacefulness and a sense of calm, fun is the upbeat feelings that make consumers feel things like amused, joyous, playful, cheerful, upbeat, and lighthearted (Keller, 2013). The feeling of excitement is when the brand can make the consumer feel something special or a sense of "being alive," the feeling of security is when a brand makes the consumer feel safety, comfort, and self-assurance (Keller, 2013). The social approval of brand feelings is when the brand gives the consumer the belief that other consumers look favorably on their appearance and behavior (Keller, 2013). The last component of brand feelings, self-respect, is when the brand is able to make the consumer feel better about themselves (Keller, 2013).

Brand Resonance

The last of the six brand building blocks in the Brand Resonance Model used to achieve brand equity is brand resonance. According to Keller (2013), resonance is characterized by

intensity as well as the level of activity generated by this level of loyalty. Brand resonance is used to describe the nature of the relationship and the extent in which the consumer feels they are “in sync” with a brand (Keller, 2013). Brand loyalty is the attachment a consumer has with a brand (Aaker, 1991). The two dimensions of brand resonance, intensity, and activity can be broken into four categories: behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community, and active engagement (Keller, 2013). Behavioral loyalty is gauged in terms of repeat purchases like, how many times they purchase a brand and how much they purchase (Keller, 2013). According to Aaker (1991), this level of brand loyalty starts with a consumer just being a habitual buyer that are typically not on the lookout for an alternative. Attitudinal attachment is a part of resonance because in order for resonance to occur, there is a requirement of a strong personal attachment to the brand from the consumer (Keller, 2013). A sense of community is a way for the brand to take on a broader meaning to the consumer (Keller, 2013). According to Keller (2013), one of the strongest affirmers of brand loyalty is when customers are engaged and willing to invest their time, money, energy, or other resources in the brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption. Aaker (1991) describes this kind of brand loyalty as being a committed buyer. This means that they truly have pride in being a consumer of the brand and places high importance in the brand (Aaker, 1991). According to Aaker (1991), these are the consumers who sometimes have the brand as an extension of who they are, and they are extremely involved and committed to the brand itself.

Summary

The review of literature guiding this study includes the usage of place-based branding approaches within craft breweries as well as the utilization of localness. As the craft beer industry is growing not only in Arkansas and more specifically the NWA area, but it is also

important to understand what current branding approaches are being utilized in the industry. The literature used also gives context to the usage of brand equity and brand resonance to build loyal consumers in the craft beer industry. The literature given in this chapter should be utilized to gain a base understanding of the rise of craft breweries in the United States and Arkansas, place-based branding, localness, and brand equity (built through salience, performance, imagery, feelings, judgement, and resonance).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to characterize brand equity among craft brewery brands in Northwest Arkansas through the lens of the six brand building blocks of Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Model (salience, performance, imagery, judgement, and resonance). With the craft brewing industry growing rapidly, especially in the NWA area, there is a need for communicators and marketing practitioners to understand how to build brand equity among craft brewing brands. This research was designed to understand how consumers and brewery personnel perceive branding of craft beer in NWA and how brand equity is achieved. Even so, the information promoted by this research should be utilized to fill a gap in knowledge of branding within the niche agricultural market of craft beer for communicators and marketing practitioners.

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How do craft breweries in Northwest Arkansas promote their brewery and products to the consumer?
2. How do Northwest Arkansas craft brewery brands fit into the six building blocks of branding from Keller's Brand Resonance Model according to loyal consumers and brewery personnel?

Design of the Study

Taylor and DiPietro (2019) suggested further research into branding of craft breweries to examine the individual or shared emotions of the consumer; therefore, this study utilized qualitative research methods. With craft brewing being a relatively new industry in the NWA area, it was necessary to examine how consumers perceive craft breweries and the level of brand

equity they hold. Because this research was focused solely on how consumers and brewery personnel perceived the branding of craft breweries; a qualitative approach was selected to identify and characterize consumer and personnel attitudes and opinions in their current settings without any manipulation of variables or interventions present. Qualitative research is utilized to provide a holistic picture and a deeper understanding of the subjects' personal experiences rather than a numeric representation of data (Ary et al., 2010).

Researchers employed semi-structured field interviews as the data collection method. This method was chosen because it allowed the interviewer to follow a list of formulated questions but allowed the opportunity for the process to be modified by the interviewer as well as the opportunity to ask open-ended questions. This approach was also chosen because the interviewer was able to gain in-depth and descriptive answers to the research questions while uncovering feelings, perspectives, and meaning from the participants (Ary et al., 2010).

Subjects

Participant Selection

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), it is imperative in qualitative research to purposefully select participants and sites. Creswell and Creswell (2018) also suggested the point of being purposefully selective with participants is to help the researcher(s) understand the research questions and problem at a more accurate level. Purposive sampling was the sampling method employed to select participants for this study (Ary et al., 2010). The specific method of purposive sampling utilized in this study was criterion-based sampling. Criterion sampling is selecting cases or participants that meet a predetermined criterion of importance to the study (Cohen, 2006). Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that sample sizing in qualitative research varies between methods of study. The target sample size was to interview one loyal patron from

each of the 20 breweries in NWA as well as one brewery personnel member from 10 of the breweries.

Following Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Model, in order for a brand to achieve brand equity, it must reach the top of the Brand Resonance Model; this is where the brand-loyal consumers sit in relation to a brand. A customer is considered loyal when they participate in repeat sales or repurchases which include the sale of goods and/or services (Tardi, 2019). The primary researcher traveled to the breweries in NWA with study information as well as contact information to recruit participants. Participants selected for the interviews must have been a repeat customer who has been identified as loyal to the craft brewery before selection in order to gain a better picture of the brand's resonance. Additional criterion for the participants of this study included that they live within the NWA area, be at least 22 years old, and have been patrons of the craft brewery for at least a year prior to the study. For the personnel participants, it was required they were able to identify marketing and branding efforts employed by the brewery's brand. In addition to this, the brewery personnel participants were required to be familiar enough with the respective brewery's brand to address, in-depth, the tactics and efforts utilized.

Human Subjects Protection

Subject Recruitment

According to Kristensen and Ravn (2015), an acceptable way to recruit potential participants who have interests in common but are not a part of a specific organization is to directly approach them for the field interviews. The subjects a part of this study were ones that were not a part of the same organization; however, they shared the interest of craft beer. The subjects were all recruited through craft brewery personnel, including owners, managers,

brewers, and staff members. All participants in this study were protected from harm as a result of the study by the University of Arkansas Internal Review Board (#2211435665) (Appendix A).

Instrument: Field Interview Questioning Route

Development of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was developed using the guidance of the research questions. Guidelines for building interview questions as suggested by McNamara (2022) are: (a) wording should be open-ended; (b) questions should be as neutral as possible; (c) questions should be asked one at a time; (d) questions should be worded clearly; (e) be careful asking “why” questions. While Patton (2003) recommends qualitative interviews questions be open-ended questions that probes for in-depth responses about the participant’s experiences, opinions, perceptions, knowledge, and feelings.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) state that a part of the process in developing interview questions involves dialogic engagement with experts as well as peers. The use of dialogic engagement in developing research questions allows the researcher to fully conceptualize the problem, as well as how the lived experiences of the participants can influence the interpretation and responses to the interview questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The utilization of the thesis committee for input and feedback on question development was important in this study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) also state that developing the interview questions should be formed from the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that have guided the background and basis of the study as this provides the researcher with rationale on how to conceptualize the research problem.

The instrument was also developed following the flow of Keller’s (2013) Brand Resonance Model. Keller’s (2013) Brand Resonance Model followed lower order to higher order thinking; the base of the model, the concept of salience, is where the instrument started, at a

broad brand awareness. As the questions moved further into the interview, they followed the rest of the building blocks in the model until they reached the ideas covered by the highest order concept of brand resonance, an intense, active loyalty (Keller, 2013). The specific interview questions used for participants can be found in Appendices B and C.

Data Collection

The researcher traveled to the seven craft breweries in NWA that had respondents who were willing to participate to conduct these interviews. The researcher conducted face-to-face field interviews. The interviews ranged from 20 to 50 minutes in length and were guided by a format of semi-structured interview questions. While probing questions were utilized as needed, informants were asked the same core questions throughout the interviews. Through the usage of semi-structured interviews, the interviewer was able to ask specific and tailored follow-up questions (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). Probing questions were imperative in order to gain full insight on the participants' thoughts in regard to the branding tactics utilized by NWA craft breweries (Ravitch and Carl, 2016).

Each of the semi-structured interviews were recorded in real-time as suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016). The recordings were later transcribed by the researcher because Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggests that transcripts are more reliable than interview notes and are necessary for valid and rigorous data analysis. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), transcription transforms the spoken word gained in interviews into valuable data to be used.

Participant Observation and Journaling Procedures

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), it is important in qualitative research to include journaling and participant observation because it allows the researcher to see and record activities and context of the participants during the field interview process. One way that Ravitch

and Carl (2016) suggests the researcher taking participant observations is to (a) seek out observable data related to the focal topic based on existing theory or methodologies; (b) record action and interaction in context; (c) move between insider-outsider sensibilities; (d) monitor observations and include evidence of personal bias or prejudice.

Data Analysis

Open and axial coding were utilized as methods of data analysis for this study. Open coding, or thematic cluster coding, is the process of starting with coding chunks of data sets to then seeing how these codes come together in thematic categories (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The process began with open coding, because it let the researcher see the finite details or the lay of the land through or the forest according to Ravitch and Carl (2016). Post-transcribing the interview recordings, the researcher coded the data set in an axial coding method. The codes that were derived from the transcripts, were then re-coded into thematic groups after multiple re-reads to gain an idea of responses in context to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Field notes and observations were also open- and axial-coded to ensure the full picture was gained.

The qualitative analysis software, NVivo12 was used for the data analysis. NVivo12 is a visual analysis application that allows researchers to organize data that had been collected, it can be organized into themes, topics, and trends. The utilization of this application allowed the researcher to organize field notes and interview transcripts into emerging themes categories.

Qualitative Rigor

In qualitative research, validity is obtained from credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility is the researcher's ability to identify the complexities that arise in a study and how to handle the patterns that are not explained (Ravitch

& Carl, 2016). Credibility is directly related to the research's design and instrumentation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The use of multiple participants and field notes were used by the researcher to ensure credibility was maintained.

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), transferability is utilized to develop descriptive, context-relevant statements. To help establish transferability of the study, the researcher has detailed descriptions of the data sets as well as the context of the findings so that aspects of the research could potentially be transferred to different contextual factors instead of replication (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). Dependability refers to the stability of the data that is represented by the research (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). To ensure dependability, the researcher made sure to utilize methodology that was appropriate to the research question and objectives. Confirmability is presented in the form of relatively neutral and reasonable from unacknowledgeable biases from the researchers (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). To ensure confirmability in this study, the researcher has acknowledged any possible biases that may have been presented through a reflexivity statement.

Reflexivity Statement

The authors and committee members on this thesis, Alyssa Johnson, Jeff Miller, Chris Estepp, and Nick Johnston, were all residents of NWA and were repeat customers of breweries in the area when the study was conducted. The primary researcher of this thesis, Alyssa Johnson, had an interest in the craft brewing industry across the nation. The primary researcher was also a consistent craft beer consumer for four years when this study was conducted. She attended many festivals and events revolving around the Arkansas craft beer industry. In addition to this, she also had an interest in marketing communications and academic research in the discipline. She

was interested in seeking a career that involves both the craft beer industry and marketing communications.

Summary

This study was qualitative in nature and utilized content analysis along with semi-structured in-person interviews. A codebook from interview transcripts and field notes was maintained during the duration of this study and led to the results and conclusions of this study. Participants were selected based on criteria defining a loyal, craft brewery patron in NWA.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter four serves to present the findings of this study through the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and field notes transcripts during the data analysis process. The purpose of this study is to characterize brand equity among craft brewery brands in Northwest Arkansas through the lens of the six brand building blocks of Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Model (salience, performance, imagery, judgement, and resonance). This research was also intended to provide practitioners and craft breweries with knowledge on branding tactics that build a loyal consumer base. The results of the study are presented in the order of the following research questions to address these goals:

1. How do craft breweries in Northwest Arkansas promote their brewery and products to the consumer?
2. How do Northwest Arkansas craft brewery brands fit into the six building blocks of branding from Keller's Brand Resonance Model according to loyal consumers and brewery personnel?

Data Analysis

The data that were analyzed consist of transcripts and field notes from the 10 in-person, semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and field notes was utilized to draw the findings of this study.

Questions utilized in the interview instrument can be found in (Appendix B and C).

Demographics

The interview transcripts of this study represented similar perspectives because of the similarity in the subjects' ages, genders, education, and geographical locations. The

demographics were self-reported by the participants during the interviews. The participants consisted of both loyal craft brewery consumers as identified by brewery personnel as well as brewery personnel themselves. There were five loyal consumers and five brewery personnel members who participated in the study. The following table details the demographics of the study's participants to provide context for the results of the study, pseudonyms for participants and breweries were given to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Table 1

Demographics of Study Participants

Name	Brewery	Age	Gender	Education	Location	Occupation
James	Bock Brewery	42	Male	Bachelor's	Fayetteville	Entrepreneur/ Brewery owner
Daniel	Kolsch Brewery	22	Male	Bachelor's	Fayetteville	Taproom Manager
Sarah	Porter Brewery	31	Female	Bachelor's	Bella Vista	Registered Nurse
Justin	Red Ale Brewery	42	Male	Bachelor's	West Fork	Head brewer/ Co- owner
Ryan	Hefeweizen Brewery	24	Male	Bachelor's	Lowell	Brewery General Manager
Chris	IPA Brewery	26	Male	High School	Centerton	Senior Engineer
Michael	Hefeweizen Brewery	32	Male	Doctorate	Springdale	Physician

Josh	Kolsch Brewery	33	Male	High School	Centerton	Freight Brokerage
Emily	Porter Brewery	28	Female	Bachelor's	Fayetteville	Real Estate Agent Industrial
Bill	Stout Brewery	52	Male	Some college	Bentonville	Electronics Technician

An overarching theme among demographics of the participants was they all reported to drink beer at home, and although they were obviously frequent brewery customers, all ten of them reported drinking craft beer at home, especially beers local to Arkansas and the NWA area.

Research Question One: How are craft breweries in Northwest Arkansas promoting their brewery and products to the consumer?

This section describes consumers' and brewery personnel's perceptions of promotional strategies used by the specific brewery in relation to the interview that were identified by the participants. The participants were asked an open-ended question to identify what marketing tactics they see being utilized by their respective brewery as well. The thematic marketing tactics identified by the participants included social media, word of mouth, signage, and merchandise.

Social Media

All ten participants noted that their respective brewery utilized social media as a form of a marketing tactic. When asked what marketing tactics his brewery utilizes, James, the owner of Bock Brewery, emphasized the size of their social media following, “So right now, predominantly just social media posting. We have about 10,000 followers that we acquired with the business, which was, you know, pretty nice base.”

Bill, a patron of Stout Brewery, said, “Pretty much everything that I've seen from them has been social media things on Facebook, Instagram, things like that.”

Daniel, taproom manager of Kolsch Brewery, explained their social media is mainly used to promote events occurring at the brewery:

We do a lot of heavy advertisements like what you see here (Daniel points to a table tent), we have an upcoming events display at each table, and we post little pictures like this on our stories and individual Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter posts.

This was confirmed by Kolsch Brewery patron Josh: “A lot of, like, Facebook, mostly for specific like events that are happening.”

Word of Mouth

When asked what marketing tactics the brewery relied on, nearly half of the participants, all of whom were brewery personnel, identified word of mouth as a key tactic. Justin, co-owner and head brewer for Red Ale Brewery described word of mouth as being a big deal for his brewery. “Word of mouth is a big thing— but here in this community Fayetteville it seems like word of mouth is probably the biggest thing.”

Ryan, general manager of Hefeweizen Brewery said word of mouth is being utilized at his brewery as well: “The marketing tactics I think we mostly utilize is trying to encourage word of mouth from other customers about how we have a really enjoyable spot, and our environment is really relaxed.”

The marketing director for Porter Brewery, Sarah, said, “We do have a lot of locals and just the word of mouth really helps with our quality of business as well.”

James of Bock Brewery noted that he felt that for his brewery, word of mouth was an ideal marketing tactic:

I think the brewery is perfectly capable of surviving on, you know, just a customer base that goes out and refers and tells people, ‘Hey, this place is awesome!’ Like, you know, or invites their friends there because that's the place they like to go, things like that.

Point of Purchase Signage

In this portion of the interviews, participants identified various types of signage that were a notable marketing tactic for the respective brewery. This included table tents, signs within the brewery, and road signs. As he was picking up a table tent Chris, a patron of IPA Brewery, explained, “this is a very good example, yeah, table tents specifically with, like, events and things like that.”

Daniel from Kolsch Brewery noted that his brewery relies on table tents as well, “We do a lot of heavy advertisements like what you see here (points to table tent) when we have upcoming events display at each table.”

Signage within the taproom was a notable tactic for Bill, a patron of Stout Brewery, “I guess like signage and stuff like that. You know, on the premises, you know they might have a new beer that’s coming up and signage for that.”

Red Ale Brewery has seen success with road signs, explained Justin, co-owner, and head brewer:

To be honest getting a little— I think it was like a two by two sign that said brewery open and sticking it out by the road has been one of the greatest marketing tools that we've had really. I mean it just brings people in like crazy, it's weird.

Merchandise

Another noteworthy marketing tactic utilized by these NWA breweries is merchandise. Chris, an IPA Brewery patron, said, “... but yeah, I mean I've noticed that obviously they have a

very specific brand of like merchandise. The merchandise that they've built up really is the extent of things that I've noticed.”

Michael, a Hefeweizen Brewery patron, describe the role that Hefeweizen’s merchandise plays in his family’s lives:

Yeah, I have the hat on. Alright, I pointed at my hat for the recording, but no, hats and shirts we've seen. My daughter who is four— judge me if you want— she comes here all the time, and she will be here today. She has an unofficial Hefeweizen Brewery Playhouse with a sticker on it.

As a patron of Kolsch Brewery, Josh said, “I wear Kolsch Brewery branded shirts and stuff like that.”

Research Question Two: How do Northwest Arkansas craft brewery brands fit into the six building blocks of branding from Keller’s Brand Resonance Model according to loyal consumers and brewery personnel?

This section presents the themes that participants identified in relation to each of the building blocks within Keller’s (2013) Brand Resonance Model in relation to their respective brewery. Each participant was asked an open-ended question that directly related to each building block within the model. Themes emerged that coincided with each building block of the model.

Salience

Salience is the lowest order thinking in the Brand Resonance Model, it is broad awareness of a brand—how easily it is recalled and what situations aid in recall (Keller, 2013). To identify brand salience, participants were asked what all craft beer brands in NWA come to mind and what are things that help to recall them. All participants mentioned their respective

brewery as well as multiple others. Every participant, both consumer and personnel, listed the majority, if not all, of the breweries located in NWA. The breweries named by participants were named very quickly, as the participants were familiar with most of the breweries in this region of the state. The concepts related to salience that were thematic among responses were word of mouth, the actual beers of the breweries, and location of the brewery.

Word of Mouth

According to Daniel, taproom manager of Kolsch Brewery, word of mouth is helpful for brands that expand across NWA. He said:

Also, I would say word of mouth because we have a lot of regulars that come in here. You know, for breweries like [a brewery in Fayetteville], IPA Brewery, and Stout Brewery, they really don't need to be introduced in this area because everyone knows who they are because they've been around for so long, and back to what I said earlier about word of mouth--everyone knows about them through word of mouth.

Stout Brewery patron, Bill, noted, "I mean a lot of these I heard about them yeah, so you know it's word of mouth things like that. I mean beer lovers get together and we talk about beer."

Chris, a patron of IPA Brewery, how word of mouth keeps another brand at the top of his mind, "Okay, [a beer from a brewery in Rogers], I know like that that is something that's sold everywhere and it's like a really popular beer with my buddies."

Justin, co-owner and head brewer at Red Ale Brewery, how conversations with those at the bar top keep other brands at the top of his mind: "I suppose kind of customer conversations I have when they come in as to what their favorite places are and what makes them their favorite places."

Location

Location of breweries and their taprooms was a common way for participants to recall craft beer brands of NWA. Ryan, general manager of Hefeweizen Brewery stated:

I grew up in Rogers and [a brewery in Rogers] I went by it a couple of times and I went to church or events next to that building. IPA Brewery, I never really went to [the] actual city of Bentonville. [A brewery in Fayetteville] is the Fayetteville craft brewery, it's big I see a lot of college kids going there that are getting into craft beer. That is, it may not be the first one that they go to, but it is around them where it's a couple miles away from campus.

Emily, a patron of Porter Brewery, even noted that location is a main thought when recalling craft beer brands in NWA, “I guess I when I think of craft breweries, I think of like where they're located.”

With location of breweries comes easy access to them and aids in recollection explained Michael, “the ones that I can bike to I remember them better I came here because it's right around the corner from my house.” Josh, a Kolsch brewery patron, confirmed this, “...then like IPA Brewery is right by my house, okay.”

Beers of the Breweries

One way that consumers can recall craft beer brands in NWA is the quality of their beers. In regard to this question, the participants attributed the taste and how well they enjoyed it to the quality of the beers. Stout Brewery patron, Bill, seemed to recall brands solely from their beers and their quality:

[A brewery in Bentonville] –I think about all the IPAs they have, Stout Brewery—I’m here so much that I don't even really you know my favorite beer here is—well, the [popular beer from this brewery] and so I might think of that. But like when I think of [a

brewery in Rogers], I know they have an awesome stout so that's one of the things that I think about. IPA Brewery probably has the best IPA in Northwest Arkansas right now.

Yeah, those four I have a thought whenever I think of beer. [Another brewery in Rogers] I don't really know the stuff that they're producing so you know, it's a great brewery but I just don't go enough to be fully aware. [A brewery in Eureka Springs] in Eureka Springs they produce the best beer in Arkansas. Unfortunately, I don't live in Eureka Springs but whenever I think of [a brewery in Eureka Springs], I think of quality.

When asked what helped him recall the craft beer brands he identified, Justin of Red Ale Brewery succinctly said, “beers that they produced.”

Emily, a patron of Porter Brewery, revealed what helped her recall craft beer brands was, “having beers that I actually like.”

Performance

This section of Keller’s (2013) model describes how participants view the performance of the brand as a whole. Essentially, what a loyal patron of a brewery or the brewery personnel themselves identify as things that add to the quality of the brand that has been built. Three main themes occurred here, and they were the people, quality beers, and location of the brewery itself.

People

Participants identified the people of the brewery, whether those who were brewery personnel or fellow patrons, contributed to the quality of the brand built by the brewery. Owner of Bock Brewery, James, likened patrons of the brewery who add to the quality to the popular television show *Cheers*: “they, you know, have that *Cheers* vibe like the 20, 30 or 40 people who come here regularly. They all know each other, and are hanging out you know, like this is their place.”

Josh from Kolsch Brewery described the fellow patrons who contribute to the brand's quality as:

I don't wanna say I make new friends because like some of these people who have talked to you, [you're] probably not gonna be friends with but like nobody that comes here is like shy like yeah people are gonna like interact [and] talk, whatever.

Five participants mentioned brewery personnel as contributing to the quality of the brand. Chris, a patron of IPA Brewery, described the quality of personnel as:

I think they— they hire people who are very personable to a certain degree. I mean obviously you kind of have to be right? But I think it's also, it also kind of speaks to the fact that they care more about retaining customers or not pissing anybody off, so they are more likely to come back.

Friendships with brewery personnel contributes to the quality of the brand for Bill, a patron of Stout Brewery:

I, of course, I think of the people. That's probably, I mean they produce some good beer here, but I've developed such, you know friendships that [bartender], [bartender], we know what's going on in each other's lives. They've had some growing pains just like anybody else but I don't think that they have lost sight of the beer and they're good about keeping people that you know, believe in what they're doing.

When asked what contribute to the quality of the brand for Josh, he described the brewery personnel as:

It's like the employees, I don't really want to just say the employees do their job. They have a good staff like they're personable, they remember like, 'Hey Josh, you'll have a bock?' Like they have a lot, or they do offer a lot of services for people that truly do

come here regularly like, they have the membership— umm I think that do actually care.

I can tell they actually care about what they do.

Emily confirmed that the personnel at the Porter Brewery are also what contributes to the quality of the brand:

Another thing that kept me coming back here was the, like, super friendliness of the bartenders. Because there's a lot of breweries where, like you know, the bartenders are great, but they don't really like get excited to see you as much unless you know, you go in there time after time after time. So, I feel like they have a really high standard of like who they hire. Yeah, because they're, I mean, they're all friendly, they're all knowledgeable, like they're just like good people to hang out [with]. [Because of that] like, I just feel really passionate about them, and I want to drive business to them because I legitimately love the people, and the beers. Like [brewer] does an amazing job with the beers and like, you could literally see them working really hard. So, like, I love that aspect that like you can see just like the love and time that's like put into this place.

The marketing personnel for Porter Brewery sees the personnel as bringing quality to the brand as well, “We all work through it and everyone's very open with each other and they really are what contribute to the quality— and like just our staff is very friendly and like it's very engaging and as well.”

Quality Beers

Both brewery personnel and patrons identified the quality of the beers to directly contribute to the quality of the brand. Justin of Red Ale Brewery describe the quality of their beer with pride:

The quality of the brand I suppose [is] the quality of the beer, the product itself. You know I really put a lot of time and effort into it. I researched it a lot, I approach it from a scientific standpoint. I mean I don't wanna toot my own horn, but I think the only place I think that competes with this, at least in Fayetteville, is [another brewery in Fayetteville]. They have a really good product as far as beer quality... like I said I put a lot of effort into it, I do a lot of research, I'm very technical so yeah [another brewery in Fayetteville] produces really good product but beyond that I think we're head and shoulders above everybody else.

Ryan, general manager of the Hefeweizen Brewery, also described the quality of their beer with pride and how it relates to their consumers:

Our goal with our beers is to have them all taste good where you can drink a couple and enjoy it still, but it's not gonna be to your detriment. There's also a lot of people that don't really know craft beer, who drink exclusively a Michelob Ultra or Miller Lite and they only stick to the macro brands. They'll come in here too because our stuff is still palatable for those that aren't craft beer enthusiasts.

As a patron of Porter Brewery, Emily was passionate about the quality of the beers at Porter Brewery when asked if her perceived quality of the beers contributed to the quality of the brand:

Yes, for sure. What I really like about that aspect, which is kind of what kept me coming, was that they have like a good variety. So, they have, you know, 19 plus beers on tap at any given point. Yeah, and they have everything from super light to super dark, which I really love because a lot of the local breweries will have, like, six beers and five of them are, like IPAs. And I'm not an IPA drinker and so it— and then it was just like, it was also hard to find a brewery that had like a good dark beer. There's really only, like two in

the area that have dark beers that I actually really like. And then every other brewery, it's like maybe there's one or two beers that I actually like, but with here, I really vibe with the majority of them.

Location

To several of the participants, location played a role in the quality of the brewery's brand, whether it be the proximity to their homes and careers or the geographical location of the brewery and what surrounds it. Chris, a loyal patron of IPA Brewery, said, "then this place honestly the reason that, the reason that I come here is because it's the closest place that I can reasonably get a drink that's by my house." Emily finds quality in the location due to the proximity to her career:

Because it's just being in Northwest Arkansas, is my job. I'm like everywhere. So, it's nice that this is right off the highway, and I'm really close to like, it's just a convenient location and I actually like their beer, so yeah.

While Chris and Emily find the location to contribute to quality due to the locations in relation to their homes and careers, Bill and Josh find the location of quality due to what's surrounding the brewery. Bill, a patron of Stout Brewery said:

It's not just the people, it's the location. I love food, right? So, I, I've got food trucks to choose from I love Indian food, I've got some great Asian food right here. Yeah so, I mean it's just an optimal location to just feel at home.

Josh, a Kolsch Brewery patron said:

I think they would do well to market themselves more [that] they have a really cool location. I mean that view, like sitting on the patio, that lake's beautiful and like it's cool in the summer. Like, I get it's you know wintertime, it's tough when your big draw is

having this amazing outdoor space. So, like they have done better when they have the polar pints now that you know if it's really cold and you want to be outside still, like you can do that.

Imagery

This portion of the interview described what participants associate with the brand in the abstract, not necessarily how the brand looks. In addition to this, brand imagery is how a brand attempts to meet the consumer's social and psychological needs (Keller, 2013). The themes developed were community and the brewery's atmosphere.

Community

When asked what he relates with the Stout Brewery, Bill happily said:

Community, um friends, obviously good beer. I have made many friends here; I can't tell you how many people I've met and not even remember. Uh you know uh tourists and they come back a year later and like oh I remember you. Yeah, so yeah, it's you know, it's obviously more than the beer because you can get good craft beer and drink at home, right? It's about the people, the connections you know? It's like [bartender], he bought a house with his wife, how many people know that about their bartender?

Josh described the community he found at Kolsch Brewery with excitement:

I'm gonna sit down, yeah, I'm gonna relax whether it takes me three hours or 45 minutes. I'm going to be here every day because I know you're (gesturing to the bartenders) going to be here every day and when I walk in the door you guys are happy to see me and I'm happy to see you and [pause] it's fucking awesome!

As taproom manager of Kolsch Brewery, Daniel's response to what he relates to with the Kolsch Brewery brand goes hand-in-hand with Josh's thoughts:

We try to make our customers feel special when walking in. You know [they] walk in it's a Thursday night, we got half a dozen parties in the taproom we greet them and say 'hey, welcome to Kolsch Brewery, what are we gonna get started for you? Well come on in, happy you're here. You know we specialize in authentic German style craft lagers and ales if you're here for IPAs, you're out of luck' and then we'll laugh and make them feel welcome. Make them relax. There is a German term, oh I forget it at the moment, but it has to do with like community and bonding starts with an 'r' I'm not going to try to pronounce it.

The word Daniel was looking for here turned out to be *Gemütlichkeit*. The term *Gemütlichkeit* is used to convey the idea of community and warmth.

Co-owner of Red Ale Brewery described the brewery's community as one he is appreciative for:

We appreciate our community greatly. We have a huge like regular base, probably over 100 people that come in every week, multiple times a day sometimes— or multiple times a week I should say. So yeah man, it's kind of a hard question to say I mean to answer, just really appreciative of everybody that takes part in it.

One participant described the community they relate to the respective brewery brand as the community the brewery has built around them. Michael, a patron of Hefeweizen Brewery, related the brewery's brand to:

I think the events they've done, that first like charity thing they did to help [community member]. He's a friend of mine so it was very you know, I'm like, 'oh my gosh. Like they're raising money to support him. After he's been through a traumatic thing.' I'm like, 'that's, that's great.' Which is weird I didn't say you know their beer and pizza first which

are also great. Oh, and then there's actually, this is big too, my daughter she has asthma, she has been hospitalized a few times. I came in one time and [bartender], her favorite bartender, her and [bartender] did that for her (pointed to a hand drawn get well card) that's framed on the wall of our house.

Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the actual taprooms was one another thing participants related to their respective brewery's brand. Chris, a patron of IPA Brewing succinctly described their atmosphere, "a place to exist outside of my house, just like you know more of a casual atmosphere."

James of Red Ale Brewery described the thought process behind building the atmosphere of the taproom:

The atmosphere of the brewery, there was a lot of thought that was put into that so once people get in here, they really enjoy it. When we first got it, it was just a big empty room, and we knocked out a couple walls. I have some friends that have lumber mills, and we got a bunch of rough-cut lumber and put it all up on the walls to kind of like make it a like a rustic Arkansas feel. I'm an Arkansas native so I wanted to kind of like make it to where you walk in and it's like you're out in the Ozark Mountains or out at the Buffalo River or something like that.

Ryan, general manager of Hefeweizen Brewery, also put thought into creating an enjoyable atmosphere at his brewery:

We want this actual building this taproom this brewery to be enjoyable spot where everyone is looking forward to going there. This is supposed to be enjoyable with a good-tasting drink and then you're going to be able to relax a little bit better in this area. So

having a fun environment and beer that tastes good to aid you in making some friends.

They just like the environment, and they want to hang out and have some pizza and they like us for the space and the environment.

Josh even went as far as to say the atmosphere at Kolsch Brewery had importance second to that of the quality of the beer:

So, like if I come to a brewery obviously like I mean I enjoy [the] beer. So, I mean flavor's first so if your beer isn't good, I don't care what kind of atmosphere you have. I really want to drink it, then it gets nice outside and nicer times, it's nice to have a cool outside atmosphere... so it's cool to have things like that while I'm enjoying a beer that tastes better than the beer I would just drink at home anyway... I don't wanna go back to atmosphere again but like this is a place you can just come and chill out and not be bothered if you don't want to be bothered but also other people that are like minded [are here].

Emily also found Porter's atmosphere to be important:

Or their atmosphere. Atmosphere is also important. So, I like Porter because they're dog friendly, like inside the taproom because most of them have patios where the dogs are let outside, but not a lot of them allow them inside. Plus, there's a lot of space which is nice. It's not like cramped, so I feel like I can come in and then I like that there's a bar to sit at. And how they decorate? That's not the right word, but like, just the interior atmosphere.

Judgement

Brand judgement describes the participants' view of the brand's credibility and what contributes to that. Brand judgement is built off the brand's quality and credibility (Keller,

2013). Two themes emerged related to judgement of the brand: consistency of the beers and a want for improvement.

Consistency

Consistency emerged as a theme for participants to determine a brewery brand's credibility. As a patron of IPA Brewery, Chris described the credibility with, "like it seems like there's a, there's a particular consistent quality and consistency with their beer. Their brew masters are obviously very creative, they're always coming up with new flavors."

Josh, a patron of Kolsch Brewery, also described their credibility with consistency, "so they have their standard beers, you know you're gonna come here the same beer every day all the time which is not a problem."

Co-owner of Bock Brewery, James, said he wanted consumers to see his brewery as credible through their consistency:

You got to be able to get customers here in much the same way you've got to, you know, deliver a consistent experience. We hope to do them really well, have them be very popular and consistent brews and then fill our taps with other great brews.

A Want for Improvement

Another way these brewery brands gain credibility is through carrying a want for improvement of the beers they're producing. It is important to note that this theme derived from two different points of view: the point of view of the consumers and the point of view of the brewery personnel. Brewery personnel participants noted they were continually seeking to improve and want the consumer to know that. Consumer participants noted seeing the want for improvement from the brewery and how that contributed to the credibility of the brand. The consumers saw and put value into one of the things the personnel wanted them to.

As a long-time patron of Stout Brewery, Bill saw first-hand how the brand strives to improve:

First and foremost, to me is really the brewer, the head brewer, the guy that they have now, he's solid. He has tweaked some recipes that made them better the [notable beer from Stout Brewery] is much better now. It has went through a couple iterations, but as long as they can keep a good brewer, head brewer. You know that they might tinker with the recipes a little bit but not changing too much because that has happened in the past, but yeah as long as they got a good brewer and they're producing you know good quality beer, they're gonna be credible.

Ryan, general manager of Hefeweizen Brewery, described their credibility as, "Credible? We're on the way, we still only [have] been here a year, there's still a lot of stuff that we have to learn. I'm sure other breweries have stuff that they need to learn as well."

The taproom manager for Kolsch Brewery, Daniel, had similar regards to his brewery's credibility, "we work to always improve ourselves, working on our beers."

Feelings

Brand feelings are simply what feelings and emotional reactions are evoked in a consumer from a brand (Keller, 2013). The majority of the participants took a pause and physically expressed a happy/content emotion when asked about how the brewery made them feel or how they thought their patrons felt about the brewery's brand. Welcoming and home were the two main themes that were developed when discussing the feelings of these brands.

Welcoming

Michael, a patron of Hefeweizen Brewery, described this feeling as, "welcoming, you come in if [a bartender] – I mean, she's here a lot—she will run out to hug my daughter. I think

[owner of the brewery] got her a Christmas gift and like I mean we don't know them apart from here.”

The marketing personnel, Sarah, for Porter Brewery described the feelings of patrons as: I think that it, I mean it feels, I mean, you can probably tell from just like walking in. It's just very welcoming. We're trying to like really to bring in different demographics. It's hard because this area that we live in is like a lot of young professionals, but we really encourage, like anybody of all ages to come in.

Ryan of Hefeweizen Brewery also describe patron's feelings as welcomed:

I think the best word would be welcomed. We are always around, we're always talking to people we, myself and [owner] have a problem where we start talking and can't stop. So, we are very in the loop of everything that's going on and if people have been here a couple of times, we're probably going to remember their face and ask them how they're liking the place. So, very much welcome.

Home

When asked how the Stout Brewery brand made him feel, Bill went into a reflective state before answering:

It's almost like, and this may sound real corny, but you know whenever you've gone on a trip and you get home and you're like 'ahhh' it kind of feels that way when like I walk in the door. It doesn't matter what problems I've got you know, it's like I can sit down have some conversation, drink a couple good beers, and it's like it's a decompression and just and that's not just the beer, right?

Josh, a patron of Kolsch Brewery described his feelings toward the Kolsch brand as:

It's almost like—I don't say being at home—but it's like I come here to unwind. They know that I come here to unwind. So, it really is just like this is my place to just “blahhh” sit down. If I have eight people with me, cool. If I'm by myself, I'm gonna sit down and read a book on that patio, and I'm going to be here because they're here for me too.

Resonance

Resonance is an intense and active loyalty to a brand from a consumer and serves as a description for the consumer and brand's relationship (Keller, 2013). For this portion of the study, the participants were asked to describe the respective brewery's relationship with themselves or its patrons.

Family

Many of the participants mentioned the relationship between patrons and the brewery was one likened to a family. Bill, a patron of Stout Brewery, described his relationship with the brewery as:

Honestly, it's like family. I mean, I guess I don't know how to describe it [as] anything other than that. It's at least the owners, [owner] and [owner], we have good conversations, their daughter has worked as a bartender here. She's a new teacher this year, my wife is a teacher, so you know, it's just— it's you know it's just the connections and I think that, well I know, that they feel the same about me.

Brewery personnel noted that they felt this relationship between the brewery and its patrons as well. Sarah, the marketing personnel for Porter Brewer, said, “Like how our motto is like how cracking beer that brings taste and buds together, like kind of like family, kind of bringing people together.”

Justin of Red Ale Brewery described the relationship as:

Like a family you know...kind of like the Irish pub in a small village where everybody kind of gets together and hangs out and talks and that's one of the coolest things that I see when I'm in here is you'll have bar full of complete strangers and everybody will start talking and it's almost like family.

Friends

In addition to describing his relationship to Stout Brewery, Bill also described it as friends:

So, I mean if I wasn't so committed to this brand, I'd probably be [a brewery in Bentonville] more but I don't know any of the bartenders, I know their faces, but I don't know enough to develop you know, and start building those new relationships. It's hard, it is especially whenever you already have you know the close friendship that you somewhere else.

Emily, a loyal patron of Porter Brewery, also described her relationship with the brewery as friends when she said, "they're my friends, honestly. Like I come in, I know all their names. I sit at the bar."

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions and recommendations for this study were based on the 10 semi-structured interviews and their responses. Previous literature recommends research be conducted to identify beer brand equity (Porrall et al., 2013). This chapter seeks to summarize how brand equity is built in loyal patrons of breweries in NWA. Responses to the semi-structured interviews were organized by research question and coded into thematic groups to determine conclusions of the study and recommendations for building a loyal consumer base through Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Model. The recommendations made here are supported by previous literature presented in chapter two and results of the study as presented in chapter four.

Research Question One: How do craft breweries in Northwest Arkansas promote their brewery and products to the consumer?

Conclusions

Jolly et al., (2021) reported that craft brewery brands in Oklahoma utilize social media to promote their brand to the consumer. This was the case among participants in NWA as well. Among these consumers, the specific promotional purposes that social media were used for were to promote the brewery's events and happenings, which coincides with Jolly et al.'s (2021) findings.

Previous literature (Jolly et al., 2021) also identified word of mouth as an important promotional factor in breweries and these personnel members confirmed that their efforts were put towards word of mouth. However, among the consumer participants this was not the strategy that was pointed out. The personnel participants noted relying on consumers to refer the brands to their friends and encouraging them to spread the word. Among these personnel participants, some also noted the importance that word-of-mouth plays in the community around them. Thus,

the finding from this research showed the importance of word of mouth for a craft brewery's brand and there is a lack of consumer recognition of word of mouth efforts.

Participants also noted point-of-purchase signage as well as merchandise being promotional strategies utilized by these brewery brands. Among the personnel participants who identified point of purchase signage, they pointed how they saw consumers viewing them or how they were used to attract new consumers. Consumer participants noticed this point of purchase signage being utilized to specifically promote new beers and events. They also mentioned merchandise as a promotional strategy—specifically referred to clothing (shirts, hats, sweatshirts, etc.) being the most popular type of branded merchandise.

Even though it is not well addressed in literature surrounding craft brewery marketing, point of purchase signage and merchandise were important tactics to the participants of this study. Nearly half of the participants identified point of purchase signage and merchandise being utilized by breweries in NWA, showing this is a notable tactic.

Based on previous literature (Murry & Kline, 2015; Schnell & Reese, 2003; Taylor & DiPietro, 2020; and Williams & Barretta, 2018) place-based branding is a branding tactic utilized by breweries all over the United States. Many of the breweries examined in this study used place-based branding to some extent in their name, products, signage, and logos, etc. Interestingly, none of the personnel participants in this study identified place-based branding as a branding tactic that their respective brewery used, and none of the consumer participants noted seeing this form of branding to promote the products and services of the respective breweries. This is not to say that place-based branding is not used by these brewery brands. It simply did not appear in any of the discussions and, therefore, may not have been a prominent tactic brewery brands used in the eyes of the participants. Place-based branding might not have been as

important to them due to other factors such as how these loyal consumers seem to be seeking community or were just craft beer aficionados and the usage of place-based branding was not something they thought to consider in their choice of brand to become loyal to.

Recommendations

Based on the interview findings, it is recommended that communications practitioners for NWA craft beer brands put intentionality into word of mouth and consumer referral to draw new consumers to their brands. Breweries in NWA could expand on their current use of word of mouth by tying it to a referral or loyalty program to attract and retain new loyal consumers (Berman, 2015). Further recommendations for marketers and brewery brands include developing strategic social media campaigns encompassing more than just promotions for events. This could be sharing consumer posts of the brewery's brand or creating branded images for their consumers to share on their own pages (Allsop et al., 2007; Berman, 2015).

Because consumer and brewery personnel identified point of purchase signage and the success they had with them, it appears that signage throughout the brewery and taprooms could be increased. Signage could be utilized to showcase things like a new beer release, an upcoming event, or even just drawing extra attention to the brewery. Based on the interview results, it can also be recommended to maintain merchandise for the brand as not only is branded merchandise an easily recognizable promotional factor, but it is also something that can facilitate word of mouth (Allsop et al., 2007). Furthermore, brewery brands may also refresh merchandise options seasonally or annually to highlight events, product releases, and give consumers design options to choose from which may encourage participation and facilitate consumer referrals (Allsop et al., 2007; Berman, 2015).

For further research, it is recommended that this study be conducted in a way that allows for more consumer participation. Future research should consider researching consumer perception of brand equity among craft breweries in the state of Arkansas as a whole in order to gather data that is generalizable to the region. Additionally, it is recommended that research be conducted to address why place-based branding was not as important to participants in this study as it was to subjects in other studies. Academic research in these areas can be beneficial to practitioners because breweries may do their own research, it is likely proprietary information and academic research can be shared across competitors.

Research Question Two: How do Northwest Arkansas craft brewery brands fit into the six building blocks of branding from Keller's Brand Resonance Model according to loyal consumers?

Conclusions

At this intense and active loyalty to the brand, what is important to these consumers is not so much the merchandise they can buy, the logos that are used, or the design on the cans it is more so how they found themselves there; for example, the atmosphere they were in, the community they were a part of, and the relationship with the brewery.

Salience

As mentioned in chapter four the participants of the study, both consumer and personnel, carried most craft beer brands in NWA at the top of the mind. In accordance with previous literature (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2013) brand salience is all about how easily brands are recalled—and the identity given by consumers to easily recall these brands. Keller's (2013) level of brand salience discusses the identity of brands given by various cues or reminders that allow these brands to stay at the top of the mind. The participants easily recalled many of the brands in NWA

due to word-of-mouth situations. Consumer and personnel participants use recommendations from other consumers to learn about beer brands within NWA, easily bringing them to the top of their consideration. This aligns with Aaker's (1991) view of brand salience and recall derives simply from brand awareness, a consumer must be aware of a brand before it can even be considered. Participants cited the location of breweries as one way to keep them at the top of mind and easily recall these brands. The towns these brands are in, what familiar businesses, and ease of access to them were the cues that made these brands easy to recall. Falling in line with Aaker's (1991) view that familiar brands are seen as reliable and have a reasonable quality, both consumer and personnel participants recalled craft beer brands because of their beer's quality. Craft breweries with quality beers are ones that easily stay at the top of the mind.

Performance

Keller (2013) describes a brand's performance can be built by the consumer's view of the brand's service. The quality of the service provided by the brand, in Keller's (2013) model, is viewed by its effectiveness, efficiency, and empathy. According to the consumer participants, all three of these are met. Some consumer participants cited the brewery's service as meeting their service requirements and being in a served in an efficient manner, typically when they first arrive, Keller's (2013) performance level of the Brand Resonance Model addresses these as a part of a consumer's view of quality of service. Service empathy is all about how the service meets the consumer with trust, care, and having their interest in mind (Keller, 2013). Several consumer participants attributed the performance of the brand to the empathy, and even friendships, the bartenders and brewery personnel meet them with. While Keller's (2013) level of brand performance does not address how fellow patrons of brands can contribute to a brand's performance, Aaker (1991) notes that the quality perception may look different depending on the

industry a brand is in. Several consumer and personnel participants noted that patrons of these breweries add quality to the brand; for these participants, patrons are a factor that play into the quality of the brand within this industry.

To further confirm Keller's (2013) view on how brand performance is derived from the perceived quality of the product being provided, participants noted the quality of the brand comes from the quality of the beer that is being produced. According to Keller (2013), to consider the quality of the product, taste is involved, and the participants cited the tastes of the beers as being their quality.

Lastly, consumer participants noted location of the brewery as a part of the brand's quality, Keller (2013) described brand performance as how well the products or services meet the consumers' functional needs, and the location of the brewery meets several does just that. Participants identified how the location of the breweries met their functional needs in several ways. One of which was ease of access to the brewery—whether this was how close it was to their homes, their recreational activities, or even their careers. Participants also noted practical features of the locations meeting their needs—this was evident in the mentions of restaurants near the brewery and patio and outdoor leisure space available on the premises.

Imagery

Confirming previous literature (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2013), the brand's imagery was derived from the brand meeting the consumer social needs and the associations to the brand that are organized in a meaningful way. Brand imagery was evident when half of the participants associated the brand with a community that was built at the brewery. The community participants described were filled with like-minded individuals, brewery personnel who were there for them, relationships built with fellow patrons, and how a brewery helps others. All of

these confirm Keller's (2013) idea of user profiles building brand imagery; this includes factors like attitudes towards life and social issues.

Another way brand imagery was built for participants was through the atmosphere provided by the brewery. Consumer and personnel participants associated the brands with the atmosphere that the taprooms provided. As Aaker (1991) noted, the underlying value of the brand is formed from specific associations that provide context for differentiation from other brands, these participants described the brewery atmospheres as a part of why they chose this brand over other brands and why they cared so much for the brand.

Judgement

According to Keller (2013), a brand's judgement can be attributed to the brand's credibility and quality. All participants noted the respective brands to be credible, mainly due to their consistency in beers and how the brewery brands maintain a want for improvement of their brand. The participants noted the perceived expertise and trustworthiness as things that contributed to the consistency within the brand. This confirms Keller's (2013) view of brand credibility being described in terms of a consumer's perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and likeability. Keller (2013) discusses the perceived expertise being addressed by a brand when they are seen as competent and innovative which are things that participants noted when discussing a brand's beer consistency. Keller (2013) discusses the brand trustworthiness is addressed when the brand is seen as dependable and keeping consumer interest in mind, the participants discussed these attributing to the consistency as well. The need for being dependable and keeping consumer interest in mind was also addressed when discussing a brand maintaining a want for improvement in beer quality; this is something that was noted by both consumer participants and personnel participants. Both consumer and personnel participants noted a want

for improvement by the breweries contributed to the credibility of the brand, which directly confirmed Keller's (2013) notion of brand trustworthiness leading to a brand's credibility.

Feelings

According to Keller (2013), brand feelings are simply the emotional reactions and responses that a brand evokes; going deeper, Keller (2013) mentions the feelings of warmth and security as main feelings toward a brand. Participants confirmed the feelings of warmth and security were evoked from the brand when they mentioned the brand made them feel welcomed. The feeling of being welcomed by the brand confirmed Keller's (2013) idea of warmth when participants explained the calm and peacefulness when they described how the brewery brands made them feel welcomed. The feeling of being welcomed by the brand confirmed Keller's (2013) idea of security was addressed when participants described how the brand gave them comfort which led to their welcomed feeling. The idea of security as a brand feeling was further confirmed when participants described the brands feeling like home (Keller, 2013). The participants having felt welcomed by the brand and like it was home confirms Keller's (2013) notion that warmth and security are important feelings a brand can impart. It should also be noted that the idea of emotion or feeling seemed to be an underlying current throughout all the building blocks from the perspectives of the participants.

Resonance

When reaching the top of Keller's (2013) Brand Resonance Model, this can be described as an intense loyalty to a brand and the brand's relationship to the consumer. Keller's (2013) discussed brand resonance as a strong personal attachment to the brand from the consumer, this was confirmed when participants, both consumer and personnel, described the relationship with the brand as family and friends. Both the consumers and the personnel witnessed such a strong

personal attachment shared between the brand and the consumer that it was described as a family. The participants who described the relationship as a family confirmed Aaker's (1991) view that the consumers sometimes have the brand as an extension of who they are, are extremely involved, and committed to the brand itself. This was also confirmed when participants described their relationship to the brand as friends. This relationship even added to their extreme commitment to the brand, with one consumer saying they would go to a different brewery if they did not have the relationship they have with their brand. Aaker (1991) described the brand resonant consumer as one who was a committed buyer who placed high importance into the brand. This is evident in how the participants viewed the relationships between the consumer and the brands being a family or even close friends. These strong of relationships require the consumer to be engaged and willing to invest their time, money, and energy into the brand which is confirmed by Keller's (2013) description of a consumer who was at the resonant level of loyalty with a brand.

Recommendations

The consumer participants of this study were loyal consumers who have worked their way through Keller's Brand Resonance Model (2013) and the personnel participants described how they view their contributions to the different levels of the model. At the top of the model, the resonance of the brand with consumers is the point where they are extremely loyal and have built a relationship with the brand itself (Keller, 2013). The respective breweries in this study have achieved brand equity with consumers and should continue the aforementioned practices that have contributed to the brands moving through the building blocks of the Brand Resonance Model (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2013). Based on participant responses, practical recommendations for brewery brands and brewery personnel members should place importance on building an

atmosphere that allows for patrons to be able to relax as well as build relationships with fellow patrons. Brewery brands with an atmosphere that can foster connections between patron to patron or patron to brewery have shown to be important to the consumer participants who are at this brand resonant level, as well as the personnel participants. It is recommended that brewery brands focus efforts into creating spaces that facilitate relationships between the consumer and the brand (Keller, 2013).

Recommendations for further research would be to conduct this portion of the study solely from the perspective of the consumers. In addition to focusing solely on consumer perspectives, recruiting a larger sample is recommended. With this in mind, further research on consumer perspectives of brand equity among craft brewery brands in other regions and states that also have a growing craft beer industry is encouraged. Conducting the study focusing solely on the perspective of the consumer and with a bigger sample will allow researchers to gain a better idea on how brand equity is built with craft beer brands in NWA. It is further recommended to research brand equity among NWA craft beer brands through a quantitative lens. This will allow researchers and marketers to analyze brand equity more plainly as well as identify trends in methods used to build brand equity. Finally, for future research, it is recommended that this study be used as a baseline to determine what levels within brand resonance consumers of a singular brewery vary. Additional research recommendations include studying place-based branding's role in the Brand Resonance Model and if it transcends the levels of the model itself.

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Appendix A



To: Lys Johnson
From: Douglas J Adams, Chair
IRB Expedited Review
Date: 12/05/2022
Action: **Exemption Granted**
Action Date: 12/05/2022
Protocol #: 2211435665
Study Title: Crafting the Brand: Characterizing Consumer Perspective of Brand Equity Among Microbreweries in Northwest Arkansas

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Jefferson D Miller, Investigator

Appendix B

LOYAL CONSUMER

Demographic questions

What is your age?

What is your gender?

What is your highest level of education completed?

What is your primary occupation?

In what town do you primarily reside?

How many years have you been a patron of this microbrewery?

+ Do you consume beer at home?

If yes, what brands?

What marketing tactics--(marketing tactics as defined as specific actions used to promote a product or service) --have you noticed from this brewery?

When you think of a local craft beer, what brands come to mind?

When you think of local craft beer brands, what helps you recall them?

How would you describe the quality of this brewery's brand? What contributes to the quality of this brand?

What do you think of or relate to with the ____ microbrewery brand?

Do you feel the ____ microbrewery brand is a credible brand?

How does ____ microbrewery brand make you feel?

How would you describe your relationship with ____ microbrewery?

** “____” denotes to fill in the name of the brewery the field interview will be conducted at

Appendix C

BREWERY PERSONNEL

Demographic questions

What is your age?

What is your gender?

What is your highest level of education completed?

What is your primary occupation?

In what town do you primarily reside?

How long have you been a personnel member of this microbrewery?

+ Do you consume beer at home?

If yes, what brand?

What marketing tactics does your microbrewery utilize?

When you think of a local craft beer, what brands come to mind?

When you think of local craft beer brands, what helps you recall them?

How would you describe the quality of this brewery's brand? What contributes to the quality of this brand?

What do you think of or relate to with the ____ microbrewery brand?

Do you feel the ____ microbrewery brand is a credible brand?

How does ____ microbrewery brand make consumers feel?

How would you describe this brewery's relationship with consumers?

** “____” denotes to fill in the name of the brewery the field interview will be conducted at