

**COMMUNICATING SENSE OF PLACE TO BUILD BRAND IDENTITY:
AN ANALYSIS OF CRAFT BREWERY WEBSITES**

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated and analyzed how eight craft breweries in Southern New Jersey communicated Sense of Place (SOP) to build brand identity through their websites. In the highly competitive market of craft breweries, many utilize their distinctive geographic identifiers to market their unique SOP to their customers. SOP can be described as the entire group of cognitions and affective sentiments held regarding a particular geographic locale (Altman & Low, 1992; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). In this study, SOP was evaluated through Gruenewald's (2003) Multidisciplinary Framework for Place Conscious Education (MFPCE), which details five indicators: perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological. A sixth indicator, temporal, was also added (Cavaliere, 2017). Additionally, an effective brand identity strategy informs, guides, and helps develop, nurture, and implement a business's overall branding strategy (Madhavaram et al., 2005). Brand identity activities ought to be significantly influenced by an in-depth understanding of, and appreciation for, an organization's unique SOP. Since a website is often used by a business as a comprehensive tool to communicate their unique products and services, the increasingly competitive online domain depends on a business's ability to orchestrate verbal and visual stimuli on product web pages to effectively convert page visitors into buyers (Schlosser et al., 2006). Only one of the eight breweries communicated SOP through all six indicators. Their website communication was comprehensive, descriptive, effective, and visually appealing. This model allows breweries to create interesting, memorable, and engaging website content that drives consumers to experience the place and product.

Keywords: Sense of Place, Craft Breweries, Brand Identity, Multidisciplinary Framework for Place Conscious Education (MFPCE), Website Communication

INTRODUCTION

The Craft Beverage Business is growing rapidly in the United States. While overall US beer volume sales in 2019 were down two percent, craft beer volume sales continued to grow at a rate of four percent. Additionally, craft beer retail sales increased six percent and accounted for over 25% of the overall US beer market in 2019 (Brewers Association, 2020). The Brewers Association (2020) defines craft breweries as having an annual production of fewer than six million barrels and at least 25 % of craft brewery ownership.

All 50 states and the District of Columbia now have craft breweries and with this rapid growth, the industry is becoming very competitive. These craft brewery businesses need to position

themselves differently from those in their competitive set. Through a differentiation strategy, a business can offer its consumers unique products and services which are distinctly different from its direct competition (Okumus, 2021). One of the ways craft breweries can differentiate themselves is through the use of distinctive geographic identifiers to market their unique Sense of Place (SOP) to their consumers. For example, including the names of the business and products, labeling that reflects their location or local ingredients used, and indigenous folklore and nostalgia to acknowledge the culture that shapes their business; all to create a bond with consumer's lifestyles, sense of community, and place attachments (Williams & Stewart, 1998).

SOP is a multifaceted concept that is derived from personal and interpersonal experiences, direct and indirect contact with an area, product or service, and cultural values and shared meanings (Farnum et al., 2005). Anholt (2009) refers to SOP as communicating location distinctive and memorable aspects that can be derived from a variety of place factors such as the physical and cultural environment, the products with which the place is associated, and the people. In this study, SOP is examined through Gruenewald's (2003) Multidisciplinary Framework for Place Conscious Education (MFPCE). Within the MFPCE, Gruenewald (2003) details five components that define this framework: (a) perceptual, (b) sociological, (c) ideological, (d) political, and (e) ecological. Cavaliere (2017) has contributed a sixth indicator, (f) temporal, resulting from empirical research involving agritourism and climate change in NJ. The six framework indicators served to structure the website analysis of this study and also serve as the structure in which the findings are reported.

Place branding and destination marketing can convey a destination's feel. Marketing and branding are important strategic tools to allow destinations to create their unique identity and to differentiate themselves from the competition (Phelan et al., 2019). Branding and positioning activities ought to be significantly influenced by an in-depth understanding of, and appreciation for, an organization's unique SOP. Additionally, an effective brand identity strategy informs, guides, and helps develop, nurture, and implement a business's overall branding strategy (Madhavaram et al., 2005). A website is a comprehensive tool that can be used by a business to communicate a unique brand identity. Websites are often used to communicate products and services and thus, the increasingly competitive online domain depends on a business's ability to coordinate verbal and visual stimuli on product web pages to effectively convert page visitors into buyers (Schlosser et al., 2006). The purpose of this study was to analyze how craft breweries communicated SOP to build brand identity through their websites. The study examined eight Southern New Jersey craft brewery websites using content analysis to evaluate how SOP is communicated to build brand identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Craft Beer/Breweries

Over 1,500 microbreweries opened across the country during the 1990s. This expansion of microbreweries stems from the desire of people to break away from mainstay brands. Microbreweries consciously sell and promote local culture, including historical photos, maps, and other artifacts that are the essence of a brewery's personality. Geographer Wes Flack has hypothesized that the growth of such establishments is a prime illustration of a movement termed

“neolocalism,” in which people are attempting to reconnect with the local, the personal, and the unique (Schnell & Reese, 2003).

Beer in the United States has evolved over the past 30 years. Beer is now a sophisticated and complex beverage that spans many demographic categories. Beer encompasses different types (e.g. Ales and Lagers), styles (e.g. Amber Ale, Barley Wine, Hefeweizen, IPA, Pilsner, Stout), and varieties of styles. To date, the Brewers Association (2021) has classified more than 79 styles in 15 style families. Craft beer can be found everywhere from high-end country clubs to convenience stores. Beer is also the subject in several academic disciplines as researchers have used craft beer as a vehicle in which to explore many aspects of the social world (Withers, 2017).

Craft beer is independently brewed in a facility that does not produce more than six million barrels of beer per year (Brewers Association, 2020). Craft beer starts from a combination of four main ingredients: water, malt, yeast, and hops. While craft beer is partially dependent on these ingredients, its uniqueness comes from the brewer and regionalism of beer-style varieties and additional ingredients. However, research shows that the complexity of beer is due to variances in geography. The location of breweries in the United States is closely tied to historical themes. Economic expansion, war, immigration, temperance/prohibition, politics, religion, transportation, and economic depression all shaped the beer brewing landscape from colonial times to the present (Batzli, 2014). The state of New Jersey (NJ) has 21 counties with varied histories, styles, communities, and cultures. Craft Beer is a beverage that brings people together to engage with local places. Whithers (2017) found it important to not only look at how products shape the local settings where they are produced and consumed, but also to evaluate how the region shapes the product.

Sense of Place (SOP)

While the notion of SOP has evolved, the scholarship in this area has grown considerably in recent years (Nelson, et.al., 2020). There is a lack of a common definition or understanding of SOP, both from the fact that it has become a catchphrase used to suit various purposes and from the interdisciplinary nature of the concept. The academic literature suggests that SOP is a multidimensional concept that extends beyond the physical attributes of a given location (Beidler, 2016).

SOP describes a wide range of connections between people and places that develops based on place meanings and attachment a person has for a particular setting (Rajala, et.al. 2020). Furthermore, while these meanings and attachments are often different based on a specific place, several common typologies have been identified in various research contexts, such as those place settings that focus on biophysical attributes, functional meaning related to actual or desired use, experiential meaning based on individual experiences, and interpersonal meaning that comes from social aspects of interactions with other individuals or the place (Rajala et al, 2020).

Place elements can include actions, emotions, experiences, intentions, and meanings. It is a person-to-place bond that can be defined interchangeably with terms such as place attachment, place meaning, and place identity, knowing that place can be defined in various ways affected by the scope of scholarly interest (Nelson, et al, 2020). The research synthesizes the notion of place as

place attachment (the emotional element) and place meaning. Scholars studying the concept of SOP examine the cognitive framework associated with place meaning and the descriptive narrative that captures the experience (Nelson et al., 2020). Place attachment is defined as a process and an outcome of bonding oneself to an important place” (Insch & Walters, 2018, p. 154). Place attachment may shape how consumers view destination image, destination attractiveness, personal involvement, and visitor satisfaction. The meaning of place changes over time and thus, relationships between place meaning and place attachment are dynamic. Someone’s perception of place (place meaning) is constantly being reshaped as they are affected by varied experiences, social interactions, and dynamics. (Nelson, et.al., 2020).

Multidisciplinary Framework for Place Conscious Education (MFPCE)

MFPCE was selected and utilized in this study because it is useful in understanding sub-contexts of SOP. Gruenewald (2003) details five components that define this framework: (a) perceptual, (b) sociological, (c) ideological, (d) political, and (e) ecological. Cavaliere (2017) has contributed a sixth indicator, (f) temporal, resulting from empirical research involving agritourism and climate change in NJ. Gruenewald (2003) states "Places are fundamentally pedagogical because they are contexts for human perception and participation with the phenomenal, ecological, and cultural world. What we know is, in large part, shaped by the kinds of places we experience and the quality of attention we give them" (p. 645). Place is an inescapable aspect of daily life and is intimately linked to life experiences. Places provide the context in which individuals learn about themselves and make sense of and connect to their natural and cultural surroundings; shaping identities, relationships with others, and worldviews (Butler & Sinclair, 2020).

The first indicator of the MFPCE, perceptual, identifies specific elements that affect the five senses, including touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight. The second indicator, sociological, includes elements that communicate location, specifically mentioning claims of being "first" or the "only" as an identifier. The mention of folklore, gender, and nostalgia are also included. The third indicator, ideological, includes examining awards won and identifying larger connections with the world, gender and power, humor, colonialism, and the economy. The fourth indicator, political, includes examining all references to laws such as prohibition, age verification, occupancy as well as legislation, and geopolitical boundaries. The fifth indicator, ecological, identifies all references to agriculture and ingredients used in production and the elements including earth, wind, fire, land formations, weather, and seasons. The sixth indicator, temporal, identifies specific perceptions of seasonality and time in travel and transport.

Gruenewald (2003) explains that the problem is that human institutions, “such as corporations, have not demonstrated an orientation of care and consciousness toward the places that they manipulate, neglect, and destroy” (p. 622). Gruenewald (2003) applies the original MFPCE framework as a construct to examine perspectives on place that can advance theory, research, and education practice. Concerned about the lack of place-based education over state mandates and standardized testing, Gruenewald’s (2003) MFPCE framework examines the relevance of place and supports the claim that educational research, theory, and practice need to pay more attention to places. Beyond education, place is a concept of growing interest in many fields, including architecture, ecology, geography, and business. Gruenewald (2003) posits “an understanding of place is key to understanding the nature of our relationships with each other and the world” (p.

622). Therefore, the selection and application of the MFPCE framework is well situated within this research context.

Brand Identity

The Southern NJ craft brewery experience offers homegrown ingredients in their beverages. The packaging and promotion associated with the breweries highlight landmarks, artifacts, and local features capturing SOP. This geographic region reaches different target audiences. Branding the SOP experience requires intentionality and strategy. Brand identity is the combination of images, graphics, and text used by a company to create a brand image. The brand reflects the company's mission, values, and interests through visual elements (Rukosuev, 2021).

Brand identity resonates with consumers as they connect the experience, memories, and product. Elizondo et al. (2016) refer to brand identity as a “mental construct” achieved through brand recognition and product interaction. They state:

[B]rands become easily identifiable through the products and interactions, increasing brand awareness in consumers' minds which leads to brand attachment. However, embodying the brand's essence in products attributes is not an easy task. Far beyond a brand name or logo, there must be a clear understanding among design teams on what the brand stands for in order to achieve its translation into low-level multi-sensory attributes. (Elizondo et al., 2016, p. 101)

Brand identity interconnects with the MFPCE framework indicators as the shared emphasis on the “essence” of the product. SOP captures a multidimensional lived experience of the consumer's association with the local craft beer served in an intentionally designed local environment. The local culture is conveyed through artifacts, logos, designs, and any localized focal point. SOP provides a layered and interconnected framework to reinforce the brand identity through personal experience. Marcotte et al., (2011) stated “Whether considering local stakeholders or visitors to the area, it is necessary to ensure that they share the values and images promoted by area brands” (as cited in Lecompte et al, 2017, p.401).

SOP provides a paradigm to differentiate the product and space where consumers experience the brand (LeCompte et al, 2017). The consumer interacts with the brand through cognition and affect (Insch & Walters, 2018). Artifacts including menus, websites, social media, and décor reinforce the mission and values of the business. Hede and Watne (2013) state SOP is the connection between the brand's message strategy and consumer experience, as told through narrative and images. SOP humanizes (or personalizes) the experience and brand for other consumers (Hede & Watne, 2013).

SOP branding articulates the cultivated connection between the physical environment, social sphere, and cultural significance of the experience (Campelo et al., 2014). This identifies the constructs of time, landscape, ancestry, and community as the intersection between the physical and social environments (Campelo et al., 2014). They posit that SOP can be used as a strategic guide to create and re-create meaning within the social space through personal interaction.

Conveying the social experience and cultural richness of the brand through implicit and explicit strategies (Campelo et al., 2014) builds a framework that establishes expectations for the experience. “The experience of engagement and interaction requires presence (being in) and action (being with), always influenced by physical, historical, social, and cultural aspects that, together, contribute to creating a shared sense of meaning” (Campelo et al., 2014, p. 155).

Craft breweries in the Southern NJ region offer a unique appeal to local residents and visitors. Each brand can integrate the local culture into its product, packaging, and promotion. “For craft brewers, these relationships exist between individual breweries and their various stakeholders, including consumers, regulators, other brewers, etc.” (Lee et al., 2017, p. 5). Relationship cultivation begins with a consumer’s connection to the brand. Therefore, it is important to appreciate the nuances in place branding and place identity.

Place branding provides a glimpse into the brand’s distinctive characteristics. LeCompte et al. (2017) identified three stages of place branding: a) promoting the attractiveness of the space to differentiate the brand; b) identifying the elements that promote a favorable appeal to diverse audience members within the target audience, and c) establishing action steps. Place branding demonstrates an intricate and intuitive understanding of the brand and the user experience with the brand.

A successful place branding promotion will identify core values and convey distinctive features of a brand in a way that resonates with new and returning consumers. Place brand articulates strengths and key attributes as a positioning tactic (LeCompte et al, 2017). They proposed a five-tier model noting the interconnectedness of SOP to place branding; positing touristic destination branding includes historical and cultural heritage; physical attributes of the place, social relations in the place, recreational activities in the place, and personal journey in the place (LeCompte et al, 2017).

Another branding tactic that connects the user experience and product is place identity which describes how the brand fits within a social setting (LeCompte et al, 2017). Hankinson (2004) identifies three elements that convey the culture of place as defining pillars: organized social spaces for gathering and interaction, differentiating symbolic elements that capture the local nuance of the brand, and subjective descriptors that express the sensation experienced within the environment (in LeCompte et al, 2017). Promoting brand identity is often accomplished through multiple communication channels. Websites are a common communication channel used to promote brand identity.

Communicating Brand Identity Through the Website

Storytelling and narratives are powerful tools to reinforce brand promotion (Hede & Watne, 2013). Promotional efforts often include an integrated marketing communication (IMC) campaign where “attempts to combine, integrate, and synergise elements of the communication mix...” (Luck & Moffatt, 2009, p. 317). The benefit of IMC is the intentional and congruent messaging that is conveyed on multiple communication channels. IMC campaigns build and sustain brand identity and brand equity (Luck & Moffatt, 2009).

Communication and marketing professionals strive to create “[m]arketing communication that represents the ‘voice’ of the brand” (Luck & Moffatt, 2009, p. 318). Consumers, especially digital natives, expect that brands live on an updated website. A brand’s website presence tells a story about the product or service. Storytelling provides meaning to others who may be intrigued or motivated to experience the brand. “Narratives enable consumers to feel a connection or belonging with brands” (Hede & Watne, 2013, p. 209). Messaging resonates with consumers when the narrative creates an emotional connection and integrates the user experience for the target audience (LeCompte et al., 2017).

Websites provide a platform to promote brand identity through their logo, text, graphics, and images. Increasingly, to make a more informed decision, consumers are reviewing websites before purchasing or experiencing goods and services (Meintjes et al., 2011). Foroudi et al., (2019) found that consumers are more likely to engage in a brand when they find the website more visually favorable. Thus, a website reinforces brand identity through its visual presence and contributes to overall marketing success (Phillips et al., 2004).

Corporate visual identity (CVI) is increasingly significant as a means of differentiation in today’s economy that creates a corporate reputation. Undoubtedly, the two key elements that have a considerable impact on a company's corporate reputation are the company's logo and website. (Foroudi et al., 2019, p. 43)

Websites promoting brands intended for multiple target audiences need to provide appealing elements to capture the attention of different demographic groups. A well-designed website features the logo, pertinent information about the brand, photos, videos, social media handles, important announcements, and stories about people, place, and product. Mobile-friendly websites provide access to consumers who seek out their services. Technology has a distinct advantage as most mobile devices can directly connect to a phone number or click on an address for driving directions. The website is a key feature of an IMC campaign as it provides the bridge between promotion and relationship management (Luck & Moffatt, 2009). A website reaches multiple stakeholders such as investors, employees, loyal patrons, and new consumers. It is a valuable communication tool to build brand identity to multiple audiences through the website.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A purposive sample of eight Southern NJ craft brewery websites, located in four counties, was selected as an intentional strategy to collect data. A “[p]urposive sample is a non-representative subset of some larger population and is constructed to serve a very specific need or purpose” (Rai & Thapa, 2015, p.6). The craft brewery websites were selected to represent a variety in size and offerings within these Southern NJ counties: 1) Atlantic including Hidden Sands and Somers Point Breweries, 2) Cape May including 7 Mile, Cape May, Ludlam, and Slacktide Breweries, 3) Cumberland including Glasstown Brewery, and 4) Ocean including Pinelands Brewery. A descriptive analysis of each brewery, as communicated through the website, will be described in greater detail in the results section.

Data Collection

The review of the eight websites resulted in a range of web content including multiple tabs of resources, links, text, images, and videos. From September to November 2020, each author collected data from the craft brewery websites on two different occasions as it related to modified MFPCE framework indicators. To address validity, the authors reviewed each website separately and independently. In January 2021, each author conducted the first phase of website analysis for a general overview to identify emerging research themes as related to the MFPCE framework indicators. In February 2021, the authors compared the results of the first analysis to further identify common themes with the MFPCE framework. In this phase, the authors identified applied examples that reflected the theoretical framework indicators for each brewery. The final review in January 2022 evaluated all eight websites searching for MFPCE framework indicators changes.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Content Analysis Method to determine how each of the eight breweries communicated, via their website, SOP through the MFPCE framework. Content Analysis is widely regarded by researchers as a flexible method for analyzing text (Cavanagh, 1997). This method can also be described as a group of analytical approaches that can range from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive, to systematic strict analysis (Rosengren, 1981). Content Analysis also focuses on language characteristics as a communication tool with an emphasis on the contextual meaning of the content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Additionally, this method is an effective and widely used research method that can systematically examine the communication content and performance of a website (Camprubí & Coromina, 2016; Krippendorff, 2004). More specifically, according to Law, et al. (2010), researchers often use the Content Analysis Method to analyze data on tourism and travel and visitor/hospitality-type websites.

Additionally, the Content Analysis Method is unobtrusive, unstructured, context-sensitive, and can address large quantities of data. Content Analysis examines the text, images, articles, and more of the web-based communication itself and not the individuals directly (Kim & Kuljis, 2010; Krippendorff, 2004). More importantly, since this study was done amid the COVID-19 Pandemic, Content Analysis was also the most effective research method to limit in-person contact during the research process. There are; however, some limitations to this research approach such as being devoid of a theoretical basis. The authors addressed this limitation by applying a theoretical framework that allows this contribution to focus on both what is perceivable and what is theoretically significant.

RESULTS

Overview

The MFPCE Indicators served as an effective framework to capture SOP as represented through the eight brewery websites. The results show the criteria evaluated for each website using overarching common themes, as related to the MFPCE framework. The six indicators provided a consistent measure to evaluate SOP. This section presents the common overarching themes found

in the content and communication among websites. The six framework indicators served to structure the research results for this study (see Table 1).

Table 1. MFPCE Framework Indicators: Themes, Examples, and Criteria

The MFPCE Framework Indicators provided a consistent model for data collection from the brewery websites.

MFPCE Framework Indicators	Emerging Research Themes	Examples	Criteria Evaluated
Perceptual	Interpretation and connection with information presented	Breweries named after geographic locale, name-branded beer, and labels.	Brewery names, beer names, and beer labels and logos
Sociological	Location and Firsts	First-ever first-place winner, first anniversary, New Jersey identified.	Elements that communicate the location of the brewery, specifically mentioning NJ, claims of being <i>first</i> or the <i>only</i> brewery as an identifier
	Identity/ Folklore	Ben Franklin reference, historical Millville identity	The mention of folklore and nostalgia were analyzed and reported in this dimension.
Ideological	Awards	Breweries identified awards won for their product.	Includes examining awards won and how they are communicated. The ideological indicator can examine any reference to being indigenous to the product, place, or process
	Larger connection with the world	Breweries communicated their beer production systems and capacities, had diagrams and pictures of events as well as their connection to sourcing and use of local ingredients	Identify or communicate any larger connection with the world, gender and power, humor, colonialism, or the economy.
Political	Age Verification	Brewery websites that identify age verification.	Examining all references to the laws that have impacted NJ craft breweries includes the drinking age.
	Regulations	Food, required tours, outside alcohol	New Jersey state brewery regulations regarding serving

			food, tours, and outside alcohol.
Ecological	Indigenous ingredients, fresh, local. Seasonality	Cranberries, Pine Barren needles, local coffee, and honey. Pictures, references, and ingredients connected to the four seasons	References to agricultural products including ingredients used in production, animal references. The elements include earth, wind, fire, weather, and seasons.
	Water	Water, the predominant ingredient in beer, referenced in sourcing and quality	The differentiating strategy of using natural and native ingredients grown and produced in NJ
	Geography	Use of land formation in brewery name or on website.	The shape of the state, geographic location, natural surroundings.
Temporal	Seasonality	Breweries appealing to summer, vacationing, outdoors.	Focuses on specific perceptions of seasonality and time in the travel and transport of food
	Time	Hours of operation, special events, holidays, and historical references about the origin of their businesses.	References to events, holidays, hours of operation and tours, age of operation, production, or historical references of the business were considered as related to the conceptualization of time

The eight Southern NJ craft breweries included in this study convey SOP through their website communication. Brand identity is promoted through distinctive images, graphics, and text that reinforce SOP through notions of place, experience, and cultural environment (Anholt, 2009). The results of this study capture how the craft breweries' websites communicated SOP through the MFPCE Framework Indicators. (See Table 2.)

Findings

This section focuses on the common themes discovered during the three phases of data analysis. The findings acknowledge craft brewery website content using the MFPCE Framework to communicate SOP to build brand identity. Table 2 depicts how each website portrays SOP through the individual MFPCE Framework Indicators. Further discussion and application follow the summary provided in Table 2. It is noteworthy to mention that some of the craft brewery websites met the indicator criteria generally rather than exhaustively. For example, if the logo included an image of indigenous an ingredient but did not name the ingredient, the authors included the visual expression as meeting the indicator.

Table 2. MFPCE Framework Indicators: Craft Brewery Website Results

Table 2 provides a visual representation of the MFPCE Framework Indicators noted on each brewery’s website.

Brewery	Perceptual				Sociological			Ideological		Political		Ecological			Temporal	
	Brewery Names	Beer Names	Beer labels	Beer logos	Firsts	Location/ NJ	Identity/ folklore	Awards	Larger Connection	Age	Regulations	Indigenous Ingredients	Water	Geography	Seasonality	Time
		●	●	●	●	●		●	●			●	●	●	●	●
	●	●		●			●		●					●	●	●
		●	●	●		●		●	●			●	●		●	●
	●	●		●					●	●		●	●	●	●	●
		●			●				●	●		●		●	●	●
		●	●			●	●	●	●					●	●	●
	●	●				●			●		●	●	●	●	●	●
	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●

Indicator One: Perceptual

Overview. The first indicator of the MFPCE framework is entitled perceptual, which identifies specific elements of the NJ craft breweries that affect the five senses, including touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight. Perceptual skills are activities that humans use to understand what their senses communicate. They involve one’s ability to organize and interpret information that is received and give it meaning. Through analysis of the NJ Craft Breweries websites, brewery names, beer names, and beer labels and logos, the following perceptual indicators were discovered. (It is noteworthy to mention that the content appeals to the specific senses of sight and sound; viewers cannot literally taste, feel, or smell the craft beer.)

Brewery Names. Four of the eight craft breweries use their namesake geographic locale as their brewery name; Somers Point, Ludlam Island, Pinelands, and Cape May Brewery. The remaining four use indigenous names relating to locale or relevant moniker attachment to their location. For example, Hidden Sands’ name reflects the rainwater that filters under Southern NJ before reaching the 800’ Aquifer. Slack Tide’s name refers to the occurrence of relatively still water at the turn of the low tide. For 7 Mile Brewery, their name reflects the length of the town of their location, Rio Grande, NJ. Glasstown Brewery’s name reflects the hometown of the brewery, Millville, New Jersey. Because South Jersey has an abundance of silica sand, it was perfect for the beginnings of the glass industry, hence “Glasstown” (Millville Public Library, n.d.).

Beer Names. Every brewery in this study utilized planned “naming” in their beer names. This supports their place name or location by linking to their brand location. Major consumer brands put enormous resources into developing brand names. Several examples are provided here. Somers Point Brewery’s beer names are indigenous to their locale and history including coastal and bay references such as Bay Rat, Beesly’s Point, and MDCXCIII (1693) which is dedicated to the establishment date of the town of Somers Point, NJ. Slack Tide’s beer names include Angry Osprey and Bell Buoy. Glasstown Brewery’s beer names include 856 and 609 which are area codes in NJ, and Maurice River, which is a tributary of the Delaware Bay in Salem and Cumberland Counties, NJ. Cape May Brewery boasts the name Cape May in at least four of their beer names. Other beer names include Coastal Evacuation; Always Ready (which pays homage to the Coast Guard located in Cape May, NJ); Misty Dawn, (named for a fishing boat); Tower 23 (named after an old WWII lookout at Cape May Point); Wild Wooder (after Wildwood a town in NJ); and Mooncusser (named after land-based pirates along the Delaware River who would lure ships to run aground by disabling the Cape May lighthouse and setting a separate fire further inland, giving the impression of a false shoreline). This research shows a beer name can do much more than simply convince someone to try the beer. Moore (2019) found that “A beer name can make you laugh, scratch your head or even ponder your place in the universe” (para. 1).

Beer Labels and Logos. Four of the eight breweries' beer labels reflected their beer with graphics linked to their brand locale. Hidden Sands Brewery portrays a water pump that is a link to the aquifer, the source of water used in the production of their beer. Slack Tide Brewery's beer cans are drawn by an exclusive artist hired by the brewery to reflect their beer names and indigenous seashore graphics including their signature fishing hooks logo. Glasstown Brewery embeds their "GB" logo with the outline of the state of NJ on each can label and Cape May Brewery beer labels reflect the Cape May name and three Seagulls. The Cape May beer labels depict the beer name in mostly seashore-themed graphics including seagulls, beach umbrellas, surfboards, clamshells, crabs, life rafts, octopus, shark jaw, and starfish.

Four of the eight breweries use graphics and images on their logos to depict the beer product and its process. Somers Point Brewery labels depict a glass of beer, with hops and wheat. Hidden Sands logo reflects the water aquifer, as previously mentioned. Slack Tide Brewery logo depicts beer hops and Ludlam Island Brewery logo depicts a diver’s helmet.

Indicator Two: Sociological

Overview. The second indicator of the MFPCE framework, sociological, includes elements that communicate the location of the brewery, specifically mentioning NJ, claims of being *first* or the *only* brewery as an identifier, the mention of folklore, gender as it relates to nostalgia were also included.

Claims of First. Three of the eight breweries communicated claims of first as an identifier. Hidden Sands Brewery boasts their "First ever first-place win" at the 2018 Atlantic City Craft Beer & Music Festival for their "First Drop" beer. This coffee maple beer mixes neighboring Ocean City, NJ coffee and Vermont-based Davis Family Maple Syrup. Additionally, 7 Mile Brewery celebrated its first anniversary with a fundraiser that raised 10K for local charities and Cape May

celebrates First Firkin Friday where they tap a special firkin (small cask of specialty beer) available only in their tasting room.

Location/NJ. Five of the eight breweries specifically mentioned the state of NJ or surrounding geographic identifiers on their website. Hidden Sands Brewery communicated their proximity to Atlantic City, NJ as well their proximity to the Garden State Parkway and Atlantic City Expressway using NJ Exit number references. Slack Tide Brewery further makes a geographic connection to NJ by stating on their website they are located in Clermont, Cape May County, “a highly sophisticated state with ‘gardenful’ of choices to appreciate”. Glasstown Brewery communicated “Drink NJ Beer in Millville, NJ”. Pinelands Brewery communicated “Right at the edge of the Pines in Little Egg Harbor, NJ”. Cape May Brewery boasts “NJ Proud” with a picture of the state using the moniker “Crafted on the Cape”.

Identity/Folklore. Two breweries used folklore references to communicate tradition, beliefs, or stories of their communities. Somers Point Brewery named a beer after Ben Franklin called “Death and Taxonomy”. Glasstown Brewery is named after a rich history in Millville, NJ, a glass-making town. The brewery is located at the Millville Airport within the Army Airfield Historic District. The Millville Army Airfield played an integral part in WWII where pilots were trained to fly the infamous P-47 Thunderbolt. Pinelands Brewery referenced nostalgia on their website communicating that they are “inspired by their surroundings” Further stating that “founder and Brew Master Jason Chapman handcrafts approachable ales of historic character.” The website communicated that they are “ever inspired by our surroundings, the spirit of the Pinelands influences everything we do, from the names of signature brews to the laid-back atmosphere in our taproom”.

Indicator Three: Ideological

Overview. The third indicator of the MFPCE framework, ideological, includes examining awards won and how they are communicated. It also includes how the brewery identifies larger connections with the world, gender as it relates to power, humor, colonialism, and the economy. The ideological indicator can examine any reference to being indigenous to the product, place, or process.

Awards. Half of the eight breweries in the study communicated awards won for their product. Hidden Sands mentioned winning the first-ever award for their Coffee Maple Beer in 2018 at the Atlantic City Craft Beer and Music Festival. Slacktide mentioned winning several awards such as a bronze medal for their Avalon Amber and a silver medal for Angry Osprey beers. On the Glasstown website, it boasted about the Maurice Bourbon Brown Ale winning first place and the Nightcap Belgian Blonde winning third place at the 2015 Atlantic City Beer Fest. The most extensive award winner was Cape May Brewery which showcased a comprehensive list of awards dating back to 2015.

Larger Connection. All eight of the breweries in the study communicated some kind of larger connection to the world. Six of the eight breweries talked about their beer production systems and capacities, had diagrams and pictures of events as well as their connection to sourcing and use of local ingredients. Hidden Sands also discussed their connection to a local Ocean City, NJ Coffee

Company. Cape May mentioned that each beer is crafted with quality ingredients, many of them locally sourced in Southern NJ. The Hidden Sands, Glasstown, and Cape May websites also communicated the use of indigenous ingredients. Ludlam and 7 Mile mentioned the fact that they are a part of the NJ Brewer's Association and the Association for Independent Craft Brewers. Pinelands took particular care to mention that they make hand-crafted ales of historic character right from the edge of the Pines.

Indicator Four: Political

Overview. The fourth indicator of the MFPCE framework, political, includes examining all references to the laws that have impacted NJ craft breweries. In this highly regulated industry, politics and power play a role in the regulatory climate of business operations. Politics and place are entangled and often play a role in how business takes place. The websites reviewed looked at age access and NJ laws through the political lens for compliance and business impact.

Age. Cape May, Ludlam, and 7 mile Breweries all had an age verification protection system at the time of the study. All of the websites referenced changes to occupancy and service due to restrictive regulations imposed by the NJ state government during the pandemic. More specifically, breweries were limited to hosting 25 person on-premises special events at this time and Cape May specifically addressed this on their website.

Regulations. Current regulations do not allow NJ breweries to serve food. Pinelands and Cape May Breweries communicated this on their website. They both have policies that allow guests to "BYOF" (bring your own food). This regulation has been in existence since the start of craft breweries in NJ. State law also requires breweries to give patrons tours of their facilities before serving them. However, under recently revised regulations, repeat brewery consumers are only required to take a tour once a year, as long as the brewery maintains a record of previous consumer participation in tours to demonstrate compliance. The new rules also aim to make the tours more substantive and meaningful. Pinelands Brewery did address this regulation on their website at the time of the study. NJ regulations do not permit outside alcohol and Cape May Brewery addressed this on their website at the time of the study.

Indicator Five: Ecological

Overview. The fifth indicator of the MFPCE framework, ecological, identifies all references to agricultural products including ingredients used in production, animal references, the elements including earth, wind, fire, land formations, weather, and seasons. This indicator highlighted the differentiating strategy of using natural and native ingredients grown and produced in NJ. All of the eight breweries incorporated elements of this indicator on their websites through their logos, text, or photos.

Indigenous Ingredients. Six of the eight brewery websites identified indigenous ingredients or referred to using fresh and local ingredients in their beer descriptions. Hidden Sands, Slacktide, Pinelands, 7 Mile, Ludlam Island, and Cape May were among the websites which articulated agricultural products. Local ingredients included cranberries, Pine Barren needles, Harry & Bean Coffee, and NJ honey. Ludlam Island's website communicated the most detailed information

listing coffee beans, a variety of fruit, pumpkin, rye, malt, oats, yam, cinnamon, nutmeg, clove, and ginger ingredients in their craft beer selection. Slack Tide, Somers Point, and 7 Mile’s logos featured local ingredients such as fish, hops, grain, or wheat.

From a seasonal perspective, the websites featured ingredients for craft beers based on products harvested throughout the year. Pictures on the website captured summer images including the beach, sand, sun, and a bright blue sky. This may have been due to the data collection window in late summer and through early fall 2020. It is also noteworthy to mention that the pandemic may have delayed updates to reflect the fall or winter months.

Water. A predominant ingredient in beer, water, was the consistent element discussed on the website as four of the eight locations emphasized their water source or the quality of the water. Pinelands identified its “purest” water source from the Kirkwood-Cohansey Aquifer, which contains an estimated 17.7 trillion gallons of the “best all-natural drinking water in the world”. Hidden Sands website communicated “Recipes and styles are designed to complement our pristine water source and appeal to a wide range of tastes”. Hidden Sands also incorporated a water pump in their logo. Ludlam Island included water in their logo as they are 10 minutes away from the beach. Finally, Slack Tide’s website explained that “Slack water is a short period in a body of tidal water when the water is completely unstressed, and there is no movement.”

Geography. Seven of eight breweries used land formations in their name or web presence. Cape May and Somers Point breweries featured geographic branding. NJ beach photo images were prominent in Ludlam Island, Hidden Sands, and 7 Mile. Glasstown’s logo features the state shape of NJ with a star indicating its location in Millville. Pinelands’ logo incorporated the natural surroundings in its logo with three pine trees and a seagull.

Indicator Six: Temporal

Overview. The sixth indicator of the MFPCE framework, temporal, focuses on specific perceptions of seasonality and time in the travel and transport of food. References to events, holidays, hours of operation and tours, age of operation, production, or historical references of the business were considered as related to the conceptualization of time. Temporal indicators are ideal for marketing communications as the product is matched with holidays and annual traditions. Appealing to the seasonality of time influences the consumer to connect craft beverages with their daily activities.

Seasonality. The eight craft brewery websites presented content images of summer including the beach and sunshine, as observed in the first two phases of the data collection, which capitalizes on the seasonal nature of the state of NJ. This visual storytelling appeals to the perception of summertime as a more relaxed season that includes vacations and outdoor gatherings. Furthermore, Ludlam Island, Hidden Sands, Glasstown, and Cape May highlighted beer gardens or space available for rental during the summer season.

Likewise, the websites have the option to update their content (including images) to reflect holidays or seasonal changes. Seasonality changes were noted in the January 2022 data collection where Cape May, Ludlam Island, and SlackTide had holiday or winter images on their homepage.

The images included snow, a snowman, and a reindeer on a beer can, respectively. Seasonality is also observed in the beer names, as discussed in Indicator One: Perceptual. The updated menus reflect the change in season and any corresponding holidays.

Time. All of the eight websites included their hours of operation. Three of the sites, Slack Tide, 7 Mile, and Hidden Sands, specifically mentioned COVID business hours or regulations. Ludlam Island posted their 2021 Holiday Hours on their homepage. Additionally, Glasstown, Pinelands, and Cape May’s websites provide historical references about the origin of their businesses. For example, Cape May communicated the following on their website.

In July 2011, we found our home at the Cape May Airport, excitedly purchased our forklift, and delivered our first keg of Cape May IPA to Cabanas Beach Bar and Grill. Since then, we’ve proudly crafted balanced and flavorful ales and lagers for thousands of happy locals and visitors. Throughout the year, hundreds of our beers can be found throughout New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania, and Delaware. We are proud to distribute our beers to hundreds of bars, restaurants, and liquor stores, on draft and in cans, ensuring premium freshness and excellent service. Our Tasting Room is one of the largest and most accessible in the state, with a spacious and sunny Beer Garden. You can visit our gift shop, “The Brewtique,” and take our interactive, self-guided tour. While many production breweries are only open a few hours per week, we are open daily from 12 PM–7 PM for tours and tastings. (Cape May Brewery, 2020)

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to analyze how eight craft breweries in Southern NJ communicated SOP to build brand identity through their websites. The study used Content Analysis to evaluate how SOP is communicated to build brand identity through these websites. This research focused on how the website can be used as a vehicle, versus other marketing techniques, to build brand identity and connect people to engage with local places. By examining the website impressions and contextual meaning of how the breweries communicated SOP, the authors were able to study each brand to assess their messaging to create a connection to the brewery’s experience, product, location, mission, and more. As seen in Table 2, Cape May Brewery and Hidden Sands Brewery websites include the most MFPCE Indicator criteria promoting SOP. These websites demonstrate best practices modeling SOP and brand identity. On the contrary, the Somers Point website has fewer MFPCE Indicator criteria. However, based on the authors’ experience, Somers Point is known to have a strong local reputation with quality products. Therefore, website content may not be reflective of a brewery's products and services. An outcome of this study is to argue website communication is one persuasive element of brand promotion. It reaches an unknown audience as opposed to a local word-of-mouth or social media endorsement to get people through the door. Both strategies are effective but website communication has a broader and accessible reach for experience-driven consumers. Layering images of SOP through the MFPCE Framework Indicators provides an inviting visual allure for prospective customers, making the brewery more enticing.

The authors defined SOP as a connection between people, place, and product. SOP is also a collective term describing an experience, interaction, relationships, memories, and attachment within a particular setting (Rajala, et.al. 2020). The eight craft brewery websites demonstrated the persuasive nature of SOP through language, landmarks, and images. The MFPCE framework served as the criteria to evaluate SOP consistently across all the brewery websites.

SOP is a powerful brand identity strategy as it provides an opportunity for businesses to differentiate their unique product features, stories, and historical roots. Brand identity includes an emotional element that conveys the user experience. Consumers connect with the affective appeal, experiential essence, and descriptive content included on the website. The goal is to create brand attachment with the consumer base. Brand identity breaks through the clutter of and differentiates itself through distinct graphics, fonts, colors, images, and recognizable logos.

The research shows that place attachment is suggested to be influenced by factors such as destination image, destination attractiveness, personal involvement, and visitor satisfaction (Altman & Low, 1992). It also shows websites provide a platform to promote brand identity. Breweries can communicate on their websites SOP as a brand differentiator to inform, and to create attachment and affection toward the brand (LeCompte et al, 2017; Madhavaram et al., 2005; Phelan et al., 2019). The literature provides clarity on place meaning, place elements, and place attachment (Insch & Walters, 2018).

The practical implications for the breweries to use SOP to build brand identity stress the importance of a well-designed website. The prominent and recurring appealing elements that communicate the brand's distinct characteristics include geographic local or indigenous names and logos, powerful perceptual connections, and consumer attachment to the physical location, mission, and brand. These differentiating symbolic elements that capture the local nuance promote SOP and the user experience as communicated via the website.

Websites are storytelling platforms and the ideal communication channel to maintain updated menus, promotions, announcements, and essential business information. Consumers search for content by name or keywords and website designers build the technical infrastructure for search engine optimization (SEO), as well as web design including graphics, content, and interactivity. The website presence is a central hub of information, reaching multiple target audiences. The literature emphasizes that consumers are most likely to view websites that are visually appealing and informative (Foroudi et al., 2019). Websites provide a consistent and dynamic presence for the brand. Consumers, particularly digital natives, refer to websites through mobile devices and other apps such as Yelp, Open Table, or Untappd (geosocial networking app dedicated to beer). Thus, websites are strategic communication platforms to build brand identity (Phillips et al., 2004).

This study utilized the MFPCE Framework indicators as a way to evaluate SOP on the craft brewery websites. The six MFPCE indicators included: perceptual, sociological, ideological, ecological, political, and temporal. The perceptual, sociological, and ideological indicators seemed to have the most content from all or most of the breweries. The perceptual indicator can be easily conveyed through text and images. The sensory experience is a common strategy for food and beverage marketing. An attractive photo invites the consumer to taste and smell the beer through

sight, hear the sounds of beer filling a mug, and feel the momentary chill from touching a frosted mug. The sociological indicator can persuade people to think about social gatherings, fond memories, social identity, and folklore. These indicators promote the user experience. A small business can upload images, videos, and graphics that demonstrate how people interact with the brand. The ideological indicator, allows the brewery to showcase important information such as awards, indigenous ingredients, and social relations. Communicating awards won for beer competitions allows consumers to recognize the achievement and communicates prestige.

Most of the craft brewery websites managed to elaborate on the ecological indicators. The ecological indicator communicates natural and native ingredients which allows consumers to gain knowledge about how the brewery incorporates local ingredients into their products and how they support their local economy. Ecological factors including raw ingredients appear through website images, including the logos, that are included on menus. Water, as a primary ingredient in beer, represents the description of natural elements. Geography was also key for these breweries as seven of eight captured the location through the marketing efforts.

This resonates with patrons who care about supporting the local community which can translate into loyal consumers.

Additionally, most of the craft brewery websites focused on the temporal indicator as it allows incorporation of the seasons and dates of production. The change in seasons is a perfect time to refresh the menu of available craft beers and remind consumers that something new is available for them to enjoy. Seasonal updates of website material are a natural time marker for a business to upload new photos and updated text (such as menus, holiday hours, etc.). In this study, seasonality was a factor as all eight breweries located in Southern, NJ with four distinct seasons. Communicating hours of operation on the website is a basic and critical component that every brewery provided. Breweries can expand their communication to include event information, rental capabilities, seasonal beers, and more.

The political indicator had the fewest details identified. Because craft breweries in NJ are highly regulated, and every state has its specific laws regulating the craft breweries, messaging about age, tours, and food not only communicates compliance on behalf of the brewery but informs the consumer what to expect when visiting the destination. Five of the eight brewery websites mentioned the legal drinking age or COVID updates as it related to business operations. At the time of this study, none of the eight websites noted any historical information or geopolitical boundaries/natural geographic features like a river to form a border or barrier between areas within the state of NJ. The political indicator information tends to be the least visual of the six indicators. It is important to include political and historical information in storytelling although it may not be the most engaging for the target audience.

The website acts as the primary platform where consumers can connect to other branded communication platforms including social media channels, advertisements, and word-of-mouth. Thus, a professional and informative website is an essential tool for promoting brand identity. A website is a cost-effective platform to promote brand identity. Once the initial investment for infrastructure and content development is made, the website has a minimal maintenance cost. The website is always available for consumers with access to the internet.

Recommendations for the Breweries

The craft beer landscape in NJ has exponentially grown over the last 10 years totaling over 127 breweries (Bobal, 2020). The breweries in this study have the ability to capitalize on every element in the MFPCE framework to communicate SOP on their website. The breweries can use the framework as a lens to cultivate content to tell the story of their brewery to resonate with website visitors.

Of the eight breweries, Cape May had the most comprehensive storytelling in all six indicators. Their website communication was comprehensive, descriptive, effective, and visually appealing. Each brewery can do an internal audit of each indicator to decisively pinpoint their unique content to tell their story. This is a powerful branding tool that attracts consumers using the website as a vehicle to learn about their product, location, story, and experience at the brewery. Because no two stories can be the same, the use of SOP to communicate the brewery's brand is a differentiator and can help each brewery appeal to its target audience. The SOP storytelling allows the brewery to create interesting, memorable, and engaging content on the website that has the potential to drive the audience to their location to experience the place and product.

Website updates reflect the dynamic nature of new products, user experiences, and information. This communication tool provides a natural connection to reach loyal patrons and consumers who are interested in a new experience. SOP maintains itself as a natural storytelling frame via the website when the material is fresh. The authors recommend a strong web presence that contains visually appealing images, branded material, and updated content. Additionally, continuous content creation on the website through the use of (but not limited to) blogs, video, or infographics to connect with consumers and stay relevant is a best practice for website brand management.

This study focused on website communication for the eight breweries, although some of the breweries used social media as their primary tool for introducing new products or events. A website provides an opportunity to inform the target market of new products, events, and SOP elements. A well-developed IMC campaign includes intentional and consistent communication across all communication channels. While social media channels can provide up-to-date content and promote user interactivity, website communication is sometimes overlooked when it comes to updating content and images. A poorly designed or outdated website will undervalue the brewery. The website is the tool that may entice a new consumer to visit a location. If the consumer is not motivated by the content or design of a website, they may miss the opportunity to learn what the craft brewery has to offer. The idea of "the consumer will not know what they don't know" applies to website communication. Communicating brand identity through the website makes the brewery more accessible, engages consumers, and helps increase sales and consumer loyalty.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size was limited and only evaluated eight craft breweries in one geographical location. Future research might consider expanding the sample size and geographic location. Second, only websites were used as the means to collect data to evaluate

how craft breweries communicated SOP to consumers. Furthermore, since websites should be evergreen, websites are constantly being updated and the data collected from September to November 2020 for this study may no longer reflect information on the current brewery websites. Third, since SOP is a multidisciplinary concept, additional research could assess SOP as it relates to the range of connections between people and places based on place meaning and attachments for a particular setting. Areas such as biophysical attributes, functional meaning related to actual or desired use, experiential meaning based on individual experiences, and interpersonal meaning that comes from social aspects of interactions with other individuals or the place could be evaluated. This could be accomplished via onsite visitations through field interviews or participant observations with consumers in craft breweries.

Future Research

Future research could evaluate how a craft brewery's physical space and employees communicate SOP to create personal experiences, cultural values, and shared meanings for consumers. Finally, since there are several mechanisms to communicate brand identity, future research could evaluate breweries' use of social media platforms and how they are used in communicating SOP to consumers.

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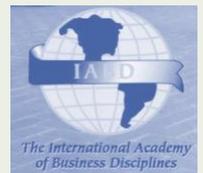
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