



**Exploring the motivations behind a global brand consumer culture:
A netnographic study of Corona Extra consumers**

Ana Laura Alonso Rivera
152117026

Dissertation written under the supervision of Prof. Pedro Oliveira

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the MSc in Management with
Specialization in Corporate Finance, at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, June 2019.

Title: Exploring the motivations behind a global brand consumer culture: A netnographic study of Corona Extra consumers

Author: Ana Laura Alonso Rivera

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, consumers are no longer seeking for the functional benefits of buying a good or service. This change in consumer behavior can be observed in the beer industry where consumers are driven towards beers that create a unique and memorable drinking experience. A review of the literature reveals that companies who want to successfully make their brands perform beyond their functional role should engage in sensory or experiential marketing. In the current beer market, brands are trying to differentiate by enhancing the sensorial dimensions of beer enjoyment. Therefore, the present dissertation aims to understand the motives and attitudes of the consumer culture of the beer brand Corona Extra. A netnography approach was used to explore and collect data from Corona Extra consumers in online communities. Results shows that marketing influence and the sensory and experiential attributes of the beer are the success factors which motivate consumers into drinking Corona Extra. Surprisingly, despite the brand being popular and successful, it was observed that consumers constantly mark out feeling discouraged from drinking Corona Extra in online communities. Discouragement was expressed mainly about the criticism and negative stereotyping that consumers who like Corona Extra must face in online communities. Also, consumers disclose dissatisfaction regarding some intrinsic attributes, package and price of Corona Extra. These findings allowed to develop managerial implications regarding new product development, communications and online strategies for the brand Corona Extra.

Keywords: Corona Extra, Netnography, Online Communities, Beer Consumption, Sensory Marketing, Experiential Marketing, Global Brand

RESUMO

Atualmente, os consumidores já não estão à procura de benefícios funcionais quando compram um bem ou serviço. Esta mudança no comportamento do consumidor pode ser observada na indústria da cerveja, onde os consumidores são movidos pela experiência única e memorável de beber uma cerveja. Uma revisão da literatura revela que as empresas que pretendem obter sucesso com as suas marcas além do seu papel funcional devem dedicar-se ao marketing sensorial ou experiencial. No mercado atual da cerveja, as marcas estão a tentar diferenciar-se através do aprimoramento das dimensões sensoriais ligadas à apreciação de cerveja. Portanto, esta dissertação visa compreender os motivos e atitudes da cultura de consumo da marca de cerveja Corona Extra. Foi usada uma abordagem de Netnografia para explorar e coletar dados dos consumidores de Corona Extra em comunidades online. Os resultados mostram que a influência do marketing e os atributos sensoriais e experienciais da cerveja são fatores de sucesso que motivam os consumidores a beber Corona Extra. Surpreendentemente, apesar da marca ser popular e bem-sucedida, observou-se que os consumidores se sentem desencorajados de consumir Corona Extra em comunidades online. Este desânimo deve-se principalmente à crítica e estereótipo negativo que os consumidores de Corona Extra devem enfrentar em comunidades online. Além disso, os consumidores revelam alguma insatisfação em relação a alguns atributos intrínsecos, como a embalagem e o preço da Corona Extra. Estes resultados permitiram desenvolver implicações de gestão em relação ao desenvolvimento de novos produtos, comunicações e estratégias online para a marca Corona Extra.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Pedro Oliveira for his continuous support and encouragement along the whole process. Your excellent guidance was essential for the development of this thesis.

Secondly, I would like to thank all my close friends. Whether you were physically far or close from me, these past months you have always been there to motivate or help me.

Thirdly, I would like to thank my boyfriend Javier for being the best companion one could ask for during these past months. You have always encouraged me to be my best version. Without you this process would have been harder.

Finally, above all I would like to thank my parents. Without your effort, your love and your sacrifices I would not be where I am now. You have always guaranteed the best education for me and encouraged me to discover the world. There are not enough words to describe my gratitude and love for you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Problem Definition and Relevance	1
1.2 Objective and Research Questions	2
1.3 Dissertation Outline	3
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	4
2.1 Beer consumption	4
2.2 Global Consumer Culture	5
2.3 Sensory and Experiential Marketing	6
2.4 Online Communities	8
2.5 Corona Extra	9
3. METHODOLOGY	13
3.1 Netnography	13
3.2 Research planning	14
3.3 Entrée	15
3.4 Data collection	15
3.5 Ensuring ethical standards	16
3.6 Research representation and analysis	17
4. RESULTS ANALYSIS: ETHNOGRAPHIC THEMES	18
4.1 Discouragement	18
4.1.1 Criticism	19
4.1.2 Negative stereotyping	21
4.1.3 Dissatisfaction	23
4.2 Motivations	26
4.2.1 Marketing influence	27
4.2.2 Experiential and sensory drivers	28
5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	31
6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH	35
7. BIBLIOGRAPHY	37
8. APPENDIX	42

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Definition and Relevance

Until today, beer is still one of the most widely consumed alcoholic beverages around the world. The importance of beer in human life goes from an economic to a symbolic level and from a functional to an experiential level (Gómez-Corona, Escalona, García et al, 2016). Due to all these characteristics, beer has been considered a subject of interest for research in different academic areas such as economics, psychology, anthropology, medicine and marketing.

During the last decade, beer production and consumption habits have evolved all around the world. This evolution has been caused by reasons such as globalization, emerging craft beer industry, technology innovations, change in consumer demands and competition from other alcoholic beverages (Poelmans and Swinnen, 2011). An important issue that arises with the change in the beer industry is whether globalization has led to homogeneity or diversification in beer consumer behavior around the world. The same goods and services present in the global economy may have different meanings to consumers living in different localities (Burton, 2008). Therefore, to be successful in this competitive global marketplace, companies need to deeply understand customers: what they buy, how they buy and why they buy. Understanding the motives behind consumer behavior has always been important for companies as developed by Britt (1950), “an analysis of the strategy of consumer motivation imply a more thorough understanding of the basic motives of man when he behaves like a consumer” (p.666).

In the present contemporary society, the goal of consumption has switched from a functional approach to experiential one. Consumers no longer seek to collect mass-produced products but seek to collect experiences that are meaningful. These changes in the pattern of consumption must be understood from a cultural perspective where a culture of the aesthetic, unique and craft products are valued and sought (Gómez-Corona et al, 2017). This post-modern consumption society affects the beer industry and can be considered a motive why consumers shifted from mass-produced industrial beers to craft-micro-brewed beers in order to seek for more unique drinking experiences. In this industry, beer brands differentiate with each other through their sensory characteristics. Hence, sensory marketing is relevant in this industry as a strategy that triggers the consumer senses to create a supreme sensorial experience that can

affect perceived quality of the product and reach consumers at a deeper level to improve brand recognition, costumer engagement and enhanced brand loyalty (Hultén, Broweus & Van Dijk, 2009; Krishna, 2012; Lindstrom, 2008).

One beer brand which has been successful in becoming a well-known global brand and creating successful experiences for its consumers is Corona Extra. Currently, Corona Extra is considered as one of the ten top most valuable and consumed beer brands globally. Even though several articles and companies discuss and analyze Corona's successful marketing strategy there seems to be no literature that aims to understand the consumers motivations, attitudes and perceptions. Additionally, investigating consumer culture behind a global brand as Corona Extra can provide valuable insights for sensory and experiential marketing due to their current strategy that not only tries to sell a premium beer but a brand lifestyle and experience. Taking this into account, analyzing the consumers insights from the brand Corona Extra provides an interesting field for future research.

1.2 Objective and Research Questions

The purpose of the present dissertation is twofold: contribute to the existing experiential and sensory marketing literature regarding the consumer culture behind a global brand and contribute to the research methodology of netnography by showing its usefulness to explore consumer's motivations for a specific brand. With this in mind, the central research questions can be formulated as:

RQ1: What motivates a consumer to drink a Corona Extra beer?

RQ2: How is the Corona Extra consumer culture?

The first two research questions aim to understand the consumer's motives and attitudes towards the brand Corona Extra. Also, the questions aim to understand if sensorial dimensions do play an important role in the motivations and drinking experience of Corona Extra consumers.

RQ3: What can we learn about consumer's perception of Corona Extra by looking into beer-based online communities?

Due to the emerging online environments where consumers generate product content, online communities will be used to gain global consumer insights. Hence, the third research questions

aim to understand consumer's perception of the brand in online communities which the users are bounded by the common interest of beer consumption.

1.3 Dissertation Outline

The present dissertation is divided in six chapters. The first chapter presents the problem statement and relevance, along with the formulation of the research objectives. Chapter two reviews existing literature topics such as beer consumption, online communities, sensory and experiential marketing as well as a contextualization of the selected studied brand. The third chapter describes the research methodology and its procedural steps used in the study, while the fourth chapter presents the thematic findings and analysis. Finally, chapter five draws the main theoretical and managerial implications together with the limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces and reviews the existing literature regarding beer consumption, online communities, sensory and experiential marketing which are research areas crucial for a better understanding of the scope of this dissertation. Furthermore, there is a section regarding the brand Corona Extra history and marketing strategy to conceptualize the reader into the product selected for the analysis.

2.1 Beer consumption

Brief beer industry history

Beer constitutes one of the oldest and most consumed alcoholic beverages in the world. Beer consumption varies across countries and over time. One unique characteristic of beer which makes it the subject of interest is that beer “is not just any consumable item: it has strong historical and social links with community life” (Shanks and Tilly, 1992, p.208). Beer consumption can represent part of the lifestyle of a specific country and its culture. Not only beer consumption can vary from culture to culture but within the categories of gender, social class and age.

During the past 20 years there have been developments in the global beer market with shifts in global beer consumption. There has been a more concentrated growth in the demand of beer in the emerging countries (Colen and Swinnen, 2011). The brewing industry has evolved from companies focusing only on selling in the domestic market to an industry seeing itself as part of a global market. There has been an internationalization of the beer industry promoted by increase in trade and other economics factors which has increased the availability of different domestic and foreign beers around the world. (Karrenbrock, 1990). Beer is not a homogenous product therefore internationalization has benefited the consumers since they can enjoy the attributes or characteristics from a beer which might not be produced domestically.

Internationalization of the beer industry proposes an interesting new scenario to further investigate whether motivations for beer consumption remained the same or evolved. A review of the literature reveals that there are abundant studies that focus on the beer consumer behavior through qualitative and quantitative methods. Literature on beer consumption varies from themes such as the influence of beer brand on taste (Allison & Uhl, 1964), beer choice attributes determinants (Aquilani, Laureti et al, 2015), cognitive and emotional differentiators for beer

and habits (Cardello et al, 2016), and attitudes and motivations of beer consumption (Gómez-Corona et al, 2016).

However, the studies are limited to consumers of one country and very few studies have been carried out considering consumers of different countries which uncovers the opportunity of further research understanding global consumers motivations for beer consumption.

Beer decision making process

Beer consumption behavior or cultural sentiment varies by country, hence, is important that the social setting is considered. When an individual goes through the decision-making process of selecting a beer brand to consume, the decision depends upon several factors. Firstly, image management is one of the consumer main concerns. The image management concept revolves around the idea that an individual conveys aspects of themselves through their beer choice of consumption. According to Pettigrew (2002), the stages of image management include “brand choices, location choices, posturing while consuming, and discussions with others regarding beer as a product category” (p.6). Furthermore, monitoring plays an important role in the decision-making process because an individual monitors external factors such as other consumer reactions to their choice of beer brand or the volume consumed (Pettigrew, 2002). Therefore, an individual choice is not only affected by his individual traits but also by what others are socially consuming.

Secondly, a consumer beer brand of choice conveys a social implication, therefore, consumers tend to accept the meaning of a brand as it comes based on the assumption that the meanings are pre-determined and same for everyone, hence they should only worry whether this is consistent with their social image and the one of their social group (Pettigrew, 2002). Nevertheless, consumers are constantly evolving into new ways of contemporary commercial societies who do not believe and resist meanings that are pre-determined by brands.

2.2 Global Consumer Culture

With the emergence of the developing countries in the global economy and the fast pace of globalization, consumers have evolved too. One of the biggest impacts is that culture is no longer static as the concept of culture has changed and become more complex (Burton, 2008). Phenomena like globalization caused cultures to interact blurring the boundaries between cultures. Also, in the present digital era cultures can arise in online communities that cannot be

characterized in terms of race, religion or country. Culture differences have an important impact in marketing since culture influences the mind of the consumer.

One of the marketing implications from the rapid expansion of the global marketplace is the emergence of new brand positioning strategies. By conceptualizing a global consumer culture positioning (GCCP), Alden, Steenkamp and Batra (1999) highlight the idea that there is an emerging global consumer culture with shared sets of consumption related symbols that are significant to the members of a growing global consumer segment. This global consumer segment associates similar meanings with certain places, peoples and things that allow the marketer to have the consumer identify the brand as a symbol of the global cosmopolitan world. Using a GCCP strengthens the brand equity if the brand represents a cultural element that is not associated with one single country but a larger group recognized internationally and transcending the individual national cultures. Hence, this is not the same approach as the standardization of marketing strategies.

For the present study, culture is an important factor to consider when analyzing beer consumption. Even though beer cultural consumption practices can be found in the global marketplace is important to study that the underlying values that explain motives for consuming beer are not global.

2.3 Sensory and Experiential Marketing

The way in which individuals have day-to-day interactions and these interactions become meaningful are shaped by the individual practices of sensory experience and cultural-specific concepts. In anthropology literature, sensory experience is viewed as a social interaction that integrates the individual with people, places and events (Hsu, 2008). Therefore, for anthropologists the senses are not inherited biologically to an individual but dependent on culture, meaning and context. De Waal Malefyt (2015) integrates in his ethnographic study the views of anthropologists and marketers to understand the importance of the senses in consumer behavior. By investigating men's consumer brand ritual of shaving, De Waal Malefyt is able to observe that considering cultural-specific concepts in daily consumptions contexts "illustrates the active, interpretive, and continuous engagement of the human sensorium with the process of meaning-making that occurs between consumers and brands, people and environments, memory and practice, and individual and community" (2015, p.24).

The sensory dimensions in the consumption process have become relevant for marketing research due to the importance they play in consumers consciousness and perception of firms, products and brands. Sensory marketing is defined by Krishna (2012, p.333) as marketing that “engages the consumer’s senses and affects their perception, judgement and behavior”. Marketing research about the human senses is beneficial not only for firms as a way for implementing successful marketing strategies that can increase consumer engagement and involvement but also for consumers as a more personalized sensorial experience. Hultén, Broweus and Van Dijk (2009) conceptualize sensory marketing as a strategy that involves consumers at a more personal level reaching their minds and hearts by targeting the five human senses. Hence, sensory marketing reaches consumers at a more individualized and deeper level than the mass marketing strategies.

Understanding consumer behavior from an experiential perspective has become important in the post-modern consumer culture. Nowadays, consumers constantly seek for more than the functional benefits of goods and services. Parting from Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) framework of experiential consumption, individuals are no longer agents of information processing but irrational and emotional individuals. In their paper they propose an experiential framework including the role of esthetic products, multisensory aspects of product enjoyment, product-related fantasies and imagery and feelings arising from consumption.

In the beer industry increasing competition from micro-brewed beers has made both micro and macro-brewed companies differentiate by their sensory attributes and brand image. However, beer differentiators attributes encompass a wider approach as consumer-based attitudinal, cognitive and emotional measures should be taken into account (Cardello et al, 2016). Reason why sensorial marketing has become relevant in the beer industry in order to define the consumer perceptions of abstract notions of the product such as perceived quality and enhance their emotions (Krishna, 2012). In their study Gómez-Corona, Escalona et al (2016) concluded that motivation for Mexicans to consume craft beer comes from an experience-based consumption rather than a functional one since consumers desire to acquire beer knowledge and new tasting experiences. Further research of the consumption experience of industrial and craft beer showed that the main building blocks giving meaning to the drinking experience are the affective, cognitive and sensory systems (Gómez-Corona et al, 2017). Gomez-Corona et al (2017) conclude that the cognitive system is more salient for the craft-beer drinkers while the sensory and affective systems is relevant for industrial beers consumers. On that account, the present study will try to clarify the impact of sensorial and experiential marketing strategies in

beer consumer motivations and how far the sensory and affective systems are salient factors in the drinking experience of an industrial beer brand.

2.4 Online Communities

The rapid increase of the availability of the internet worldwide has allowed consumers to share their ideas and opinions in growing online communities. Additionally, technological advances in computer networks have created a new marketing medium with the potential to change the way in which firms do business with customers (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Growth of internet and software has not only granted access for everyone but also allow them to create content in all the online platforms. Moreover, Hoffman and Novak (1996) also noted that “the most radical departure from traditional marketing environments is that consumers can put product-related content in the medium” (p.5).

Due to the possibility of consumers sharing content online to an unlimited amount of individuals worldwide, the emergence of online communities was inevitable since more people is willing to communicate through this medium. Therefore, internet has become a new social space where individuals create or join in virtual communities¹. A common focus for virtual communities is similar consumption activities of the individuals. These virtual communities of consumption are “affiliate groups whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm, for and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group activities” (Kozinets, 1999). In consequence, these common interests can generate brand based online communities. The virtual interaction of these communities creates informational value for consumers and companies, where the interactions among members can influence the choice of brands or impact in brand loyalty of the community.

In previous literature, marketers believed that technology advances could potentially create a final convergence of culturally different markets into a “one-world culture” that would facilitate globally standardized marketing activities (Levitt, 1983). Nevertheless, cultural differences across countries with respect to products and services bought on the Internet appear to mirror differences found in traditional shopping channels (Goodrich & De Mooij, 2011). Cultural influences in online platforms and social media can impact a consumer decision-

¹ A virtual community is a specialized, geographically dispersed community based on a structured and dynamic network of relationships among participants sharing a common focus (Dholakia et al., 2004).

making process depending on whether social media is seen as a source of information or information that influences opinion formation.

Taking everything into account, online platforms with virtual communities fit the aim of the present research as it can be considered today a valuable medium to extract information regarding the motivations and perceptions of consumers. As mentioned previously, research done on beer consumer behavior was limited to few countries, thus, online communities will allow to investigate geographically dispersed consumers with the commonality of beer consumption. This is relevant considering that the big brewing companies tend to operate in several locations worldwide with different cultural preferences and backgrounds.

2.5 Corona Extra

In their empirical analysis of consumer attitudes toward global and local products, Alden, Steenkamp and Batra (1999) noted that the beer company Anheuser-Busch InBev (AB InBev) has been successful in the craftsmen of its brand portfolio. Instead of an overemphasis on global brands, AB InBev contains a mix of global and local champions' brands which allows them to outstand in the global market place. Therefore, one of the most sold global brands from its portfolio was chosen for the purpose of understanding the consumer motives and perceptions in the underlying research.

Corona Extra History

Corona Extra is a Mexican beer brand created in 1925 by the Group Modelo. The success of the brand made it become the most sold beer in Mexico just after 10 years of this creation. In 1976 the Group Modelo started exporting the brand to the USA which pushed further its success and nowadays the beer is present in more than 120 countries (Cerveza Corona España, n.d.). Corona Extra has become the best-selling Mexican beer in the world and the fourth most sold beer globally. The beer industry is a very concentrated industry with only a few big corporations holding the majority of the market share. Hence, it was just a matter of time for a big corporation to show interest in the potential of Corona. In 2012, Anheuser-Busch InBev acquired 49% of Grupo Modelo shares and this was of great benefit for the Corona Extra brand because AB InBev is the top leader in the beer industry. Until today, Corona leads AB InBev portfolio with, "revenues up by 10.6% globally and by 18.0% outside of Mexico driven by China, Colombia and the UK" (AB InBev Quarterly Reports, 2018).

Today, the challenge that AB InBev must face is the growing demand for craft beer rather than for industrial commercial beers. Consumers are becoming interested in consuming more unique, better quality, tastier, premium beers and they are willing to pay higher prices than for the traditional commercial beers (Gómez-Corona et al, 2017). AB InBev recognizes this threat of the premiumization trend and bets for Corona as they believe it is still far from reaching its full potential and see the brand as an opportunity to capture growth within this trend (AB InBev Annual Report, 2018).

Corona Extra Marketing Strategy

Corona Extra brand success can be associated with its marketing strategy. The brand strategy consists in its positioning as a go-to-beer for relaxation. One of the most representative slogans of the brand is “Find your beach” where the strategy revolves around the idea of “beach state of mind”. Beaches, and the powerful imagery and emotion they evoke, have long been part of Corona’s DNA. The positioning of the brand is a lifestyle brand, designed to be inviting to men and women in the escape moment (AB InBev Annual Report, 2013; AB InBev Annual Report, 2018). This is consistent with a global consumer culture positioning noted by Alden, Steenkamp and Batra (1999) as the brand aims for consumer segments that share similar attitudes, lifestyles, and aspirations around the world.

Placing their product consistently in a desirable location makes the product desirable by association. Therefore, all the different local brand Instagram pages as shown in Image 1 contain images related with escape moments as being in the beach, being outdoors, relaxing or being with friends. Through their constant brand image they create a brand symbolism where the first thing that comes to the consumer mind when thinking about Corona Extra is the beach or sunset. Hede and Watne (2013) noted that many beer brands create an identity for themselves by evoking a sense of both time and place.

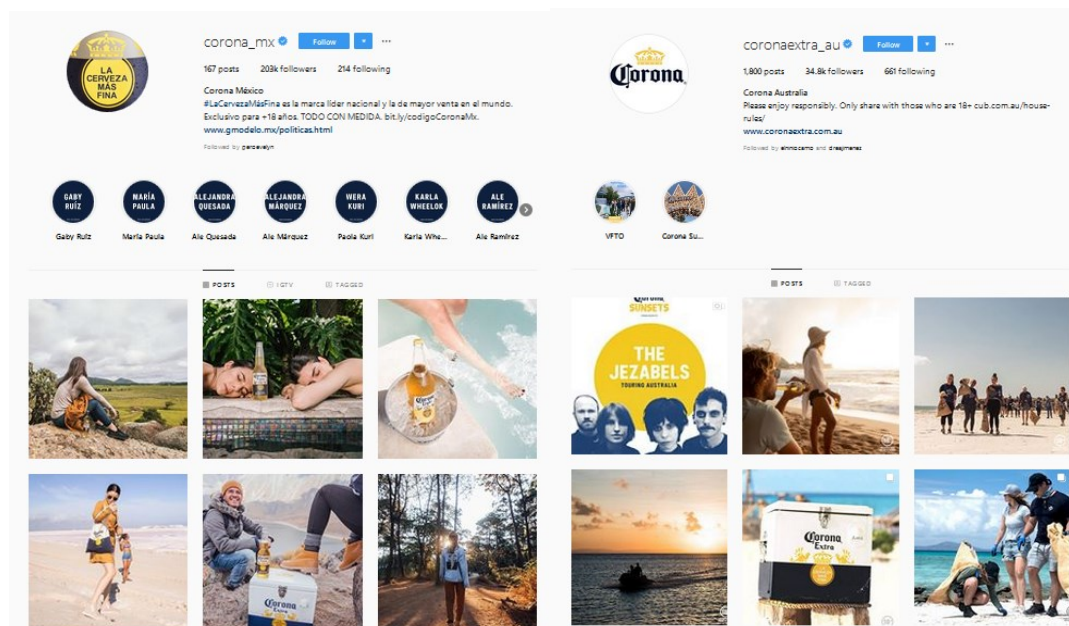


Image 1. Corona Extra Mexican and Australian official Instagram page

The product characteristics are also connected with the brand strategy. Even though the product package is a clear bottle which can affect the taste and quality of beer, they convey their brand message through it. The label and logo on the bottle relate to the idea of yellow like the sun and blue like the ocean (Cerveza Corona España, n.d.). Additionally, Corona Extra brand awareness strategy tries to connect with its customer through “culturally relevant movements and the passion points of music, sports and entertainment” (AB InBev Annual Report, 2018, p.3). In various countries they organize events known as Corona Sunsets which are worldwide series of musical festivals and they also sponsor the World Surf League.

As mentioned before, during the last past decade there has been a shift in culture and consumer behavior due to the process of globalization and emergence of the digital era. In the current capitalist consumption societies, consumers avoid mass-produced products and look for products that bring them a unique emotional and personal “experience”. A review of the sensory and experiential marketing literature reveals that understanding how consumers experience products and services is critical for developing successful strategies. Moreover, experiences are bounded in context and cultural-specific contexts so when dealing with global products one must consider the cultural differences of consumers. Therefore, the present dissertation aims to understand the consumer culture behind a global macro-brewed beer brand that faces the challenges of consumers shifting to craft-beer due to their more unique sensorial dimensions. Corona Extra brand was selected as the case study for the present research because it has achieved to become successful in the current beer market despite being an industrial beer.

Consumers insights can help to clarify to what extent Corona Extra consumers are motivated to consume this beer due to the enhanced sensorial dimensions and supreme experience provided by the brand. To take advantage of the rich information from consumers minds generated in online platforms, the present issue will be explored through a netnography study of Corona Extra.

3. METHODOLOGY

The subsequent chapter presents the methodological approach adopted in this study to answer the research questions. Additionally, the reasoning why this approach is the most suitable for the present dissertation will be explained and a description of the procedural steps of the methodological approach selected.

3.1 Netnography

In order to uncover underlying needs, motives and attitudes of consumers in today's growing online and computer-mediated spaces is suitable to use a qualitative research approach. As noted by Kapoulas and Mitic, qualitative research is a "conscious search for meaning and understanding and a quest for in-depth comprehension and awareness of the problems and phenomena" (2012, p.360). Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter two, online customer's content and online communities are an important medium to retrieve valuable customer information. A research approach that fits better for the collection and analysis of online information is netnography. As defined by the Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods, netnography is a "qualitative interpretive research methodology that adapts the traditional, in-person ethnographic research techniques of anthropology to study of the online cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications" (Netnography, 2006).

This methodology was developed by Kozinets (1997) in order to investigate the contemporary consumer behavior found in subcultures of consumption present in new communication technologies as the internet. During the past decade the internet has evolved and Kozinets (2015) has redefined netnography to adapt to the new forms of digital and network data collection from emerging social platforms as YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Netnography has proven to be of great relevance as an academic research approach since social media and internet has become recognized for affecting politics, business and social life therefore becoming an area of great interest for diverse academic fields (Kozinets, 2015).

Although marketing research is dominated by approaches such as focus groups, surveys and data models, netnography advantage is that is both naturalistic and unobtrusive which generates observations in a context not created by the researcher (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography differentiates from other methodologies by treating online social interactions as an embedded expression of meaning while placing importance in the context it was generated so as to focus in the cultural insights (Kozinets, 2010). Moreover, netnography is less time consuming and expensive for in-depth research. This is of great importance for cross-cultural research that aims

to investigate geographically distant places and online communities from different cultural groups (Burton, 2008). Therefore, netnography seems like the appropriate methodology for developing insightful understanding of the consumer culture of the global brand Corona Extra. However, one limitation of netnography is that is difficult to make generalizations of the findings to consumers outside the online platforms due to the narrow focus on online communities, the difficulty to establish demographics of informants and the researcher interpretive skills (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Kozinets 2002).

In order to conduct a netnography Kozinets (2010) provides researchers a procedure with six steps to follow: research planning, entrée, data collection, interpretation, ensuring ethical standards and research representation. The following sections will address and describe how each step was used in the present research.

3.2 Research planning

Firstly, to conduct a netnography the appropriate research questions and topics must be identified. Based on the novel context of Internet cultures and communities, Kozinets (2010) suggests choosing broader research questions starting with ‘what’ or ‘how’ for a more open exploratory approach. One reason for this is that in a netnography approach the original research questions can evolve and change during the investigation process. The topic selected in the present research was Corona Extra brand and the research questions revolve around understanding its consumer culture. The research questions and their relevance are detailed in chapter one. Once research questions were identified, these questions suggest who the participants for the research are going to be (beer consumers) and help to narrow the possible online sites appropriate for the study.

Secondly, particular online forums that help to answer the selected research questions were identified. To begin with, Google was used as the main search engine where different search keywords were entered at three levels of abstraction: beer (product level), beer consumption or beer drinking (activity level) and Corona Extra (brand levels). Using research words such as ‘beer’, ‘beer consumption’, ‘beer drinking’, ‘beer reviews’ and ‘beer online communities’ allowed discovering various social online websites exclusively topic-related with beer. Once inside these websites, they were used as search engines for content related with Corona Extra. In addition to this, social media platforms such as Facebook were also used for searching specific brand online communities. Due to the international scope of the brand and for a better

cross-cultural approach, the search keywords mentioned before were also searched in Spanish in different online forums.

3.3 Entrée

Combining and using broader research engines generated multiple different online communities. Therefore, the chosen online communities used for the present research were selected based on Kozinets (2010) criteria that the community should be: relevant, active, interactive, substantial, heterogeneous and/or rich data. The online platforms that contained the most relevant postings regarding beer consumption and Corona Extra were ‘r/beer’ in Reddit, Beer Advocate and RateBeer. These platforms were selected due to the largest amount of users that generated higher traffic as people post and comment every day. For instance, at the time of the writing the ‘r/beer’ community in Reddit had over 366k members and in Beer Advocate more than 200k users. The demographics in Reddit and Beer Advocate contain in great majority users from English-speaking countries but there is a heterogeneous sample. Other forums selected were Taringa and ForoCoches which are popular for the Spanish-speaking users. For all these communities there were no boundaries to enter the community, one could join without asking for access therefore everyone can read the postings and discussions. However, in order to be able to comment or talk to another member one must subscribe into the forum.

3.4 Data collection

Data collection occurred over the period of three months from February 2019 to May 2019 in multiple online communities. However, the data collected represents a longer time span by including threads posted between the years 2016 and 2019. After familiarization with the general themes in the online forums, any threads mentioning Corona Extra in the comments or having Corona Extra as the main theme were downloaded. Hence, a total of 45 discussion threads were read and analyzed. Postings were predominantly all text based with a minority of postings containing images of the product or gifs. Threads themes varied from titles such as “I never understood Corona”, “What do people who live in Mexico think of Corona?”, “Beer according weather”, “20 most delicious and popular beers in all the world”, etc. Threads that were mainly about craft-beers themes were considered not relevant as they did not belong to the same beer category of Corona Extra.

From the beer review websites (Beer Advocate and RateBeer), the reviews under the product Corona Extra were downloaded and only reviews which included a written comment were selected. In order to keep the amount of data limited to a manageable scale, only 30 postings were considered relevant for the present research questions due to their rich content by having

detailed descriptions, direct relation with the topic and comments from different types of community members. For this reason, to avoid threads that only contained unrepresentative members a relevant post needed to have conversational participation of experienced and unexperienced beer consumers to avoid any type of bias.

3.5 Ensuring ethical standards

Due to the naturalistic characteristics of gathering online data which is not originally intended for research purposes, researches must comply with certain ethical standards (Kozinets, 2002). Firstly, the researcher should disclose the intentions of the investigation to the community members. In the present research, data was collected in a participative and a non-participative way. Due to the non-existent restrictions to enter in any of the selected online communities there was no gateway keeper to introduce the research intentions. On the one hand, participative observation emerged from the researched social interactions with the online communities that turned into co-created data. In some of the discussion threads, disclosure of the research purpose was made through comments in the community discussions. On the other hand, non-participative observation was present when threads were already archived and no further comments could be posted. Secondly, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured to the community members. This was of special importance when using direct quotations in the research as permission should be obtained from the user and if requested the quotations were maintained under anonymity (Kozinets, 2002).

Another procedure to ensure ethical standards is to seek and incorporate feedback from members of the online communities. This can be done through the process of member checks where the researcher shares some or all the researcher findings to several community members studied so as to request for their feedback (Kozinets, 2002). This process allows less objectification of the participants as the feedback process enables a more collaborative interpretation in the research (Catterall and Maclaran, 2001). Additionally, it allows the research to elicit more specific insights into consumer's meanings and to establish an ongoing information exchange with the consumer groups (Kozinets, 2002). In the present research, three member checks were conducted by asking members about the validity of the research findings. These member checks were useful to clarify the dynamics of the online communities and the assumptions taken when analyzing the user's insights regarding Corona Extra.

3.6 Research representation and analysis

As mentioned by Kozinets (2015) in netnography, data collection does not happen in isolation from data analysis. Firstly, the gathered archival data was saved manually in different Word documents each one corresponding to different discussion threads. In the same document, field notes were written down in order to record the observations and reflections made unobtrusively by the researcher of the phenomenon being studied (Kozinets, 2015). Secondly, another round of data analysis was done by coding the data. Although coding could be done through qualitative data analysis software programs in which they use theory-building functions and expedite coding, due to the period and small amount of data collected in the study, data coding was done manually.

The process through which the researcher constructs a meaningful representation of the phenomenon observed is by using an induction process where individual observations are built up to make more general statements about a phenomenon (Catterall and Maclaran, 2001; Kozinets, 2015). The first step of induction was to read again relevant online communities' member quotations which were used to identify different relevant codes. This was an iterative process since data collection continued as long as new insights were still emerging from the important topics (Glasser and Strauss, 1967). Therefore, codes and categories were reorganized and refined several times throughout the analysis. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a grounded theory framework was used for the coding procedure where themes emerged from the data itself and not from the existing theory. Firstly, from the selected codes higher levels of abstraction were identified to form categories. Secondly, by examining emerging patterns and relationships between the codes and categories it allowed to identify several recurring themes across the data. The integration of these categories into a thematic network can be found in a visual representation in Appendix 1.

4. RESULTS ANALYSIS: ETHNOGRAPHIC THEMES

The following chapter presents the thematic findings that emerged throughout a careful analysis of the data collected from the online platforms.

4.1 Discouragement

Amongst all observed online communities, there seems to prevail negative posts and reviews regarding the brand Corona Extra. This is contrary from what is expected from a successful brand that has increased its sales in various countries during the past year. The data found in the online communities shows that there seems to be a central theme around discouragement for the Corona Extra consumers. Firstly, in the online communities there seems to be a negative behavior towards the consumers of Corona Extra that causes a loss of enthusiasm towards the brand. Secondly, some attributes of the products itself create dissatisfaction in the consumers that discourage their consumption of Corona Extra.

For a better understanding of the theme of discouragement first we must understand the dynamics in the online communities. In the online communities being studied, specially the beer-based communities, users could be divided into categories such as beer snobs which have a greater knowledge about beer and can be considered as devotees.² These users are characterized by having a more exquisite taste for beers where the love for craft beer and micro-brews is predominant. Another user category is beer novice which are users who have basic beer knowledge and are beginners in the beer world, most of them can be considered as tourists³. These users turn to online communities to educate themselves on beer styles and seek for advice from more experienced beer consumers. Also, when dealing with beer communities there is a familiarization process with specific language used such as technical terms regarding beer production and characteristics. For instance, Corona Extra is commonly referred as an American Adjunct Lager⁴, pale lager, premium lager or light beer. As described in Beer Advocate, this beer style is produced by macro-breweries (large breweries) that focus less on flavor and more on mass-production and consumption (American Adjunct Lager, n.d.)

² "Devotees" have strong consumption interests but few attachments to the online group (Kozinets, 2002, p.6)

³ "Tourists" lack strong social ties and deep interest in the activity (Kozinets, 2002, p.6)

⁴ This beer style is characterized by its light body, brewed with some amount of cereal grains, fizzy and pale. (American Adjunct Lager, n.d.)

4.1.1 Criticism

Exploring different threads showed that the beer enthusiasts in these online communities are less keen towards the consumption of macro-brewed brands and specially the brand of our analysis. Consumers of Corona Extra are aware of this criticism and hatred towards the brand which generates in them a sense of disincentive and confusion. Member 1 portrays these feelings by posting:

“Will never understand the Corona hatred. Everyone I know loves it as their cheapo beer then I go anywhere on the internet and suddenly my beer turns into literal piss in my mouth”.

Despite of the consumer likeness towards the brand, once they go into the online communities, they become part of the minority of users that like Corona Extra. The confusion felt by some of the users relates with the ratings or critiques the beer receives as they believe it should not be qualified so low, it does not deserve the bad ratings and it is not as bad as people claim it to be. There is a disagreement towards the reviews and comments online since consumers believe the beer is not portrayed accurately, even though some consumers might consider Corona Extra is a bad quality beer is not as terrible as shown in this online “hatred” towards the brand. This concern is stated in the data several times as for example:

“I’m honestly a bit surprised so many of these beers are only rated as “okay” on here, and though it’s definitely not on the level of the others I mentioned Corona really doesn’t deserve to be rated that low.”

Additionally, when users post positive comments about the brand there are some consequences as noted by the following member:

“I’ll probably be downvoted for this, but Corona for the beach, with a tiny lime slice!”

In the online forum Reddit, there an option for users to downvote or upvote a comment. The effect of a downvote is to signal disapproval or try to downgrade a post and its content. Hence, being downvoted is a negative consequence for the users and this shows a reason why people might feel discouraged of showing their love for the brand. Some members who genuinely like the brand have posted that they feel like and outcast, outliers, stupid, or retarded for liking this beer. Although not all online communities have the downvoted option, the consequences are felt by negative feedback when posting a positive comment about Corona Extra.

However, when analyzing this situation into the context of the beer enthusiast online communities we must remember that experienced beer consumers do not appreciate macro-brews. The dynamics of these communities can be seen in the following members reactions:

Member 4: *"I love Corona and Heineken, Sh** [vulgarism] ... Am I retarded?"*

Member 5 response: *"No, your not a douche. Reddit is full of beer snob d*** [vulgarism] heads."*

Therefore, criticism towards the brand or users who consume it will come principally from members considered as beer snobs. But this criticism does not exist only to Corona Extra itself but there seems to be a common hate towards the adjunct lagers' beer style. Reactions towards this criticism involve making members be more open-minded to other users' beer preferences and to consider that when reviewing Corona Extra it should be compared to beers such as Budweiser and not local or micro-brews. Member 6 reaction towards the criticism is mentioned as follow:

"For real. Personally I prefer landshark on a beach, but a Corona is a tasty second. And honestly, even if you hate it, why downvote? Everyone's entitled to their preferences for beer."

The members of these beer-based online communities are very opinionated which makes it hard for them to agree which are the characteristics that make a beer enjoyable, and thus, criticism emerges in the discussions. A followed-up member check with a user from Beer Advocate brings lights to our previous findings regarding the general beer perceptions in these communities:

"Many of the mass produced adjunct lagers you see on the market today are popular not so much because of the quality of the beverage produced, but because of the huge amount of money spent by the big boys on advertising and marketing (convincing consumers that drinking their beverage will make them attractive, smart, successful with chicks, and better able to get in touch with their inner beach)."

"If you buy into that mindset (and I'll freely admit that I do), then of course you're going to harbor a certain degree of skepticism when you hear someone touting the charms of a beer like corona."

4.1.2 Negative stereotyping

Further analysis of the members postings and comments reveals that being criticized is not the only factor that constrains the consumers of Corona Extra to post about the brand but also being negatively stereotyped. Stereotypes is the way individuals process faster their environment with little information by categorizing relevant attitudes and behaviors associated with certain groups (Thomas & Peterson, 2014). The problem with stereotypes is that they might not represent the reality or individuals might not feel part represented by these categories. The most common stereotypes found when talking about consumers of Corona Extra are woman, gays, novice and showing off. Less frequently but also present in the discussions, are consumers categorized as individuals who are young or do not like beer.

Due to the way beer is perceived in beer-based online communities, Corona Extra falls into the category of “bad” quality commercial beers. Therefore, the users that consume this type of beer are stereotyped as novice or inexperienced drinkers. One of the online community members refers to Corona Extra as *“the beer for the people that do not drink beer. Its like the vegan/vegetarian friend that eats salads when you are in a barbeque”*. Through this metaphor the member conveys that a person that drinks Corona Extra it’s the “weird” one from a group of friends that does not value drinking what is on the menu, meaning he/she does not appreciate the better-quality beers present in the beer market. More experienced members also describe their experience with the brand by saying

“this is one of the first beers I really liked when I was first trying beer” or *“back when I was a novice beer drinker, I really enjoyed this ubiquitous Mexican corn lager”*.

These members acknowledge their likeness toward the beer brand but make clear that it was due to their inexperience in the beer world.

Additionally, consumers of Corona Extra are categorized as individuals that like to show off. From the data it can be induced that when showing off, consumers try to give the impression that they have a certain kind of lifestyle that they really don’t have. Corona Extra is considered a lifestyle brand described as a care-free, leisure and aspirational lifestyle. Also, is considered a premium brand and hence associated with a more “premium” lifestyle. Example of this is a thread titled ‘I never understood corona’ and where the user started the discussion by saying *“The only reason I would see buying Corona would be to show off for buying the brand.”* The member express that he does not understand the hype of the brand because he does not consider it a quality beer hence, he sees it as a brand for people that only consume it to show off to prove

their premium lifestyle. Furthermore, this showing off seems to become an important factor related with the social norms of drinking. A member acknowledges this by saying:

“For me Corona is the beer for people who do not like beer but due to certain social norm it is obliged to drink it to not look stupid”

Therefore, the Corona Extra consumer characteristics as described by the online community members, portray them as being highly influenced by the social setting and using this brand to convey that they are part of the society who drinks beer and have a premium lifestyle.

Furthermore, when exploring Spanish-speaking online communities, it revealed two stereotypes that were highly associated with the consumption of Corona Extra: gender and sexual orientation. Since the beginning of beer history, beer and chauvinism has been intertwined. Beer has been originally considered as an alcoholic beverage for men and despite the recent feminist trends and changes in consumption patterns, this connotation is still present in current beer consumption. For instance, Corona Extra belongs to the light-beer category which makes it fall into the category of feminine beer since real men only drink harder/more alcohol content beers. Gender stereotyping do not only affect woman but also gays as their sexual orientation is sometimes related with resembling the feminine gender and therefore, they are given the same attributes as women. A consequence of this categorization is that automatic stereotype activation leads to stereotype-congruent or prejudice-like responses (Devine, 1989). The gender stereotyping is often expressed through postings like the following:

*“Its sh***, and the ones who drink it are women or homosexuals”, or “I love warm beers, the way men have drink it since the prehistory. Only gays drink cold beers like you two that drink Corona”*

Corona Extra categorized as a feminine beer is considered culturally illegitimate or not real beer in this masculinized beer world. Also, the negative stereotyping observed in the online communities reinforces Chapman, Nanney, Slade & Mikles-Schluterman (2018) study that outline how men who “transgressed gender norms and drank feminine beers bore the brunt of their failed heterosexuality and masculinity” (2018, p.301).

All in all, the idea described by Pettrigrew (2002), of individual conveying aspects of themselves through their beer choice can be seen also in the online platforms. Through the observed feelings of being stereotyped and criticized in online communities it suggests that the

discouragement to consume or post positive comments of Corona Extra arise as a social negative consequence of liking a certain type of beer.

4.1.3 Dissatisfaction

Throughout the data analysis members continually raise their concerns regarding different intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of Corona Extra. These concerns create a sense of dissatisfaction with the actual consumption of the beer which is best summed up as a condition of discouragement.

Firstly, one intrinsic characteristics of Corona Extra that mostly causes dissatisfaction on consumers is its taste and smell. The data in the online communities makes apparent that there are two aspects that seem to influence the taste of this beer: the use of lime and the package. One term highly used in the community to depict the taste or smell of Corona extra is 'skunk'. To understand this term one must be familiarized with the beer world language. Several comments in the threads mention that various consumers of mass-produced beers (assumed to be inexperienced) are not aware of the term or that this kind of taste is present in their beers. One of the members illustrate that Corona Extra can help educate the inexperienced consumers as follow:

"Corona is perfect for 'skunk' or 'lightstruck' character education. You get a 12 pack (all enclosed in a box so the beer hasn't been exposed to light), pull a couple of bottles out and set them in sunlight for 5-10 minutes, leaving the other beers closed in the box. Crack open one of the beers that was left in the box next to one of the beers set in the sunlight. Congrats, now you know what 'skunked' or 'lightstruck' means."

This term is particular of the English language as there is no exact term for it in other languages like Spanish however some Spanish comments mentioning an off-flavor /smell can be related to this term. As Corona Extra is only being produced in Mexico and imported to the other countries, this attribute can be felt by any global consumer as seen in the comments of users from various countries.

Skunk is a predominant word found when describing Corona Extra's taste and it is mentioned as a negative association. High dissatisfaction towards the brand can be exemplify by comments such as *"Skunkiest f***** beer. It gets warm and tastes like racoon a** [Vulgarisms]"*. As discussed in the online communities, being skunked is not what you would want when

consuming a beer. Consequently, consumers blame this negative trait of the beer Corona Extra on the design of the package. A user remark this:

“One of it’s only major problems is the clear bottle. The clear bottles doesn’t preserve beer as well so its more likely possible to get/purchase a bad Corona that has been in direct sunlight”.

Packaging therefore becomes a reason for consumer dissatisfaction as it does not guarantee the best beer conditions.

Thus, consumer concerns also extend to dissatisfaction with the company producing the beer. The lack of intentions from the company to change the package creates some skepticism in online communities’ users as they believe companies are not willing to make changes that can potentially harm their image or profits as claimed by the following members:

“the marketers of those brands are well aware of it and they are willing to sell the beers in packages that allow the beer to become ‘damaged’, trading protection for image” and “so many of the brands using green or clear packaging will never change because of this – the people who drink it now love it for what it is.”

Most of the marketing campaigns show the beer in a clear bottle with a lime inside of it. Hence, the barrier to change the packaging relates with how the product is being presented and the sensory experience of consuming it. A member outlines this by saying: *“They made lime part of the brand, part of the experience. I can’t imagine a Corona lover going for packaging option that leaves that out”*. In this way, the user implies that the lime slice visual/flavor in the clear bottle is all part of the allure of this beer. Adding the lime has become kind of a ritual essential when consuming a Corona Extra in any part of the world. However, the use of the lime causes diverging positions in online communities whether lime is used to enhance beer flavor or to hide its bad taste.

The arguments against adding lime in a Corona Extra denote that lime is meant to cover the skunked taste and aroma and for some users even if it is not skunked it needs the lime to not taste gross. However, for the beer enthusiasts a beer shouldn’t need a lime to be drinkable. For this reason, some users say is not even worth to try it without the lime A member illustrate that if the beer already tastes badly, trying to mask the flavor will have almost no effect:

“If it needs fresh fruit or vegetables it’s trying to hide something. It reminds me of dudes who douse themselves in Axe instead of taking a shower; they still stink. Not as bad, but make no mistake, they still stink.”

The comments in favor of the lime are not only present when users mention how lime enhances flavor but also when users describe their positive drinking experience. One member put forth that *“put a lime wedge in with the juice and some pulp from the lime while its ice cold... and its wonderful”*. Another member portrays that without the lime something is missing, and it is enhance nicely with it:

“I think 1 lime adds a good flavor to it. Without it, I really don’t enjoy the taste. It’s like having unsalted French fries or peanuts. It’s just not the same.”

All in all, Corona Extra taste is intertwined with its package and the usage of the lime in it. However, for beer enthusiasts or beer snobs, these two factors combined makes them lose the incentive to drink a Corona Extra. This is made clear by one of the members comments:

“With a wedge of lime is the only way I could tolerate a Corona. Without the clear bottle detribute, maybe I could without the lime. I don’t fancy testing it”.

Another term that is widely used in the online communities to refer to Corona Extra is: piss water and derivates from this expression. The terms is used as a negative connotation illustrated in the following examples: *“Don’t know what cat piss tastes like but I can imagine its probably similar to Corona with no lime”* or *“I always thought it was called ‘Mexican piss water’ because it is a terrible beer.”* The use of the word ‘piss’ comes from two beer characteristics: the color of the beer being light yellow which resembles the color of piss and the taste of piss which users consider has a bad taste like the taste of Corona Extra. This metaphor of piss water is commonly used in beer-based online communities with other commercial beer brands. For instance, a thread showed that people also called Heineken as Dutch piss water.

Apart from the intrinsic attributes discussed above, an extrinsic attribute that causes dissatisfaction for the Corona Extra consumers is price. As stated by AB InBev, Corona Extra is a premium brand in their portfolio and thus they charge a premium price for it. However, in the online communities there seems to be a disagreement towards the premium price as members believe it is overpriced. The reasons why members believe Corona extra is overpriced are exemplified by the following comments:

“In my opinion it is a cheap beer being sold at a premium price” and “they are charging an outrageous price for a poorly brewed AAL because their customers are willing to pay to ‘Find your beach’”

In the first comment the user makes apparent that price is not congruent with the quality of the beer. In the current beer market, higher prices are associated often with craft or micro-brew beers. Therefore, for a macro brewed beer to have a high price it must be due to its high quality which does not seem to be the case for Corona as is consider a cheaply processed or poorly brewed AAL. Users often express that Corona high price should not be associated with a better quality and people only pay the high price due to other “qualities”. As outlined in the second comment, customers are willing to pay this price because of the quality of the experience. Members critique this reasoning as they think it is not rational to believe in marketing. Hence, for people that do not fall into the experiential marketing, price becomes a discouragement when deciding to buy a Corona Extra as mentioned by one member: *“I for one will sparing my liver and wallet by sticking to Pacifico or craft Mexican style lagers which are far superior quality at a better price”*.

Through a member check, the member insights support the previous findings that lime, package and price create dissatisfaction in the consumption of a Corona Extra:

“Needless to say I am an outlier but when it comes to Corona the whole concept of putting in beer into a clear bottle (which is less ideal from a brown bottle as regards skunking), shoving a piece of fruit into and simultaneously charging more for it is a ‘bridge too far’ for me.”

Even though the user identifies itself as an outlier meaning he/she is not an experienced beer consumer, the attributes mentioned before in the analysis do become a disincentive when choosing to consumer or not the brand. The metaphor used by the member ‘bridge too far’ denote that these attributes are difficulties too big for him/she to overcome in order to enjoy or consume the beer.

4.2 Motivations

So far, the data analysis has contributed to understand the different reasons why consumers feel discouraged to drink Corona Extra. The general feeling of discouragement observed in online communities comes from the criticism, the negative stereotyping and dissatisfaction from the consumers. Beyond that, Corona Extra is still one of most consumed beers globally. So, what

draws people to drink a Corona Extra? What motivates a consumer to choose this brand? Consumer insights reveal that while there might be different reasons why each consumer chooses the brand, the most common factors of success for Corona Extra are: marketing influence, the experiential and sensorial attributes.

4.2.1 Marketing influence

Corona Extra is a well-known brand because of their successful marketing campaigns which convey the idea of relaxation, enjoying life and being in a beach. Online communities' members are aware of the impact from their marketing strategies as they mention marketing influence as one of the main success factors of the brand. Marketing and advertisements have an important role in the beer industry and members in the online communities consider that most of the macro-brewed beers have higher fortunes since they spend more in marketing which is effective for beer value and popularity.

When talking about Corona Extra, some users argue that the brand is *“Famous because of its marketing not because of its taste”*. Due to all the criticism present in online communities, taste is disregarded as the reason for its success but rather to how effective the marketing campaigns are in the consumer mind. This thinking can be proven through a member comment disclosing that he is self-aware of the marketing influence that makes him associate Corona Extra with the beach and that's the reason for choosing to drink it:

“100% undrinkable without a lime, but great with a lime. Also it has to be in a bottle or I don't feel like I'm on a vacation. Am I an idiot influenced by stupid advertising? The answer is yes”

Another factor of success for Corona Extra is the impact of the product placement in one of the Fast and Furious movies. The movies are mentioned not only in the online communities' discussions but also as the main theme of some threads. Corona Extra is shown in the movies as the beer of choice of one of the main characters (Vin Diesel) and this has influenced consumers to follow his tastes and try the beer brand. Whether at the end, people like or dislike the beer they acknowledge that the movies were an effective mechanism to encourage them to try it as exemplified by the following members:

Member 1: *“I never cared much for beer when I was younger but the marketing in those movies made my early 20s mind decide Corona was a cool beer so when asked “What do you drink?” I'd say Corona. In my 30s now and as it usually goes I enjoy most beer but still prefer Corona all thanks to the product placement and my younger impressionable mind.”*

Member 2: *“Ugh! Never again. Fast and furious made me try one. Smells like walking into a nursing home. Not a day on the beach”*

Thereby, Corona Extra brand visibility and awareness is constantly portrayed in different online communities. The marketing strategy goals can be clearly described by most users of the online communities with comments that outline that Corona Extra is not selling a beer but a lifestyle. What is more, marketing is present as one of the most important drivers for motivating the consumption of Corona Extra and finding their “relaxation/beach” moment.

4.2.2 Experiential and sensory drivers

Corona Extra is not only being consumed for its functional value of thirst quenching, but consumers are also drawn into the brand due to the whole experience of consuming it. The type of experiences most associated with the consumption of the brand are: feeling like in the beach, relaxed or care-free moments. In addition to this, what makes the consumption experience of Corona Extra unique is that some of its intrinsic attributes enhance the whole sensorial experience.

To begin with, weather is a driver for consuming a Corona Extra. Apart from the enticing commercials that place Corona Extra in the beach, there are intrinsic attributes of the beer which motivates consumers to drink it in specific weather conditions. Common words used to describe the weather that is more suitable for drinking Corona Extra are: hot, heat and summer. The enthusiasm felt by consumers are expressed through comments like: *“An ice cold Corona with a wedge of lima on a hot summer day is absolutely gorgeous”*. Therefore, for beer enthusiasts’ weather is definitely one factor that motivates what style of beer they will choose, as confirmed by one member:

“Weather does influence my beer choices... winter is for the heavy and “dark” beers, while summer is IPA and lighter beers”.

As Corona Extra falls into the light beer styles, then its better suited for this weather. Online members agree that the following intrinsic attributes of Corona Extra that appeal for warm weather are: its crisp taste, its lack of character, no strong hop, light, refreshing and watery taste. These attributes become charming and persuade even the experienced beer consumers as denoted by one member: *“I’m spoiled by having tons of great craft breweries locally and my absolute favorite just few minutes away, but I still reach for a cold corona after a day of work on the farm or job site.”*

It is also important to highlight, that some users feel that in warm/hot conditions is the only way to drink Corona Extra. Members denote there is something off when consumed in the winter by stating: *“I probably could not drink it unless it was sunny and/or warm outside. Would feel weird having one of these while in the cold”*. Moreover, summer weather immediately becomes associated by members to the beach; hence, Corona Extra is a popular online response when people ask what their favorite beach beer is.

For most consumers Corona Extra is all about the experience, is having the beer at certain moments that enhances the whole consumption experience. Insights from the online communities showed that the moments where users feel more incline to have a Corona Extra are: during vacations, being in a barbeque, after a hard day of work or being outdoors. All these experiences are laid back experiences that go beyond the beach, is all about a relaxation moment. A member illustrates the way drinking a Corona Extra creates an experience for him/she by commenting:

“I did some major home renovations and yardwork this past summer that involved hand digging 15 or so feet of trench and after a day of doing that jumping in the lake to cool off and then chilling with a corona was pretty much bliss. It doesn’t get much more laid back than that. Its perfect for unwind, chillout, and relax time.”

Overall there is a general feeling in the online communities that when Corona Extra is being consumed it creates a moment of relaxation and enjoyment. Again, it can be observed how effectively Corona Extra brand has achieved to target the niche of care-free situations by bringing a brand experience. The outdoor setting and activities relate well with this brand experience and specially when shared with others. Example of this, is being with friends outdoors in a barbeque.

This premise to create a closer bond between the consumer and the brand can be clearly seen in a user that describes vividly his positive experience while drinking a Corona Extra: *“Corona with a lime shoved in it at a beach with a good view, the ocean breeze in your face, oh man. Takes me far way ☺”*. As stated by de Waal Malefyt (2015), the meaningful symbolism attributed to drinking a Corona Extra and its sensory experience together create a ritual exertion for the consumers. Therefore, adding the lime to beer has become the ritual which makes the complete Corona Extra experience. The experience is enhanced by sensory dimensions such as the visuals from the clear bottle, the touch of adding a lime, the smell of the citric plus the taste

of a fresh, cold beer. All these sensory dimensions act as triggers to inspire those carefree moments associated with Corona Extra.

Through the netnographic research it was observed that the Facebook official Corona Extra page was one of the online communities where members constantly shared their brand experience using visual images. The shared visual images mostly included the product placed with a nice background such as an outdoor landscape or during an outside barbeque. By sharing their personal photos, members put into images the positive moment lived while consuming Corona Extra and encourage other users to have the same experience. These photographs then become a source of motivation for other users. Below are examples of the visual images shared:

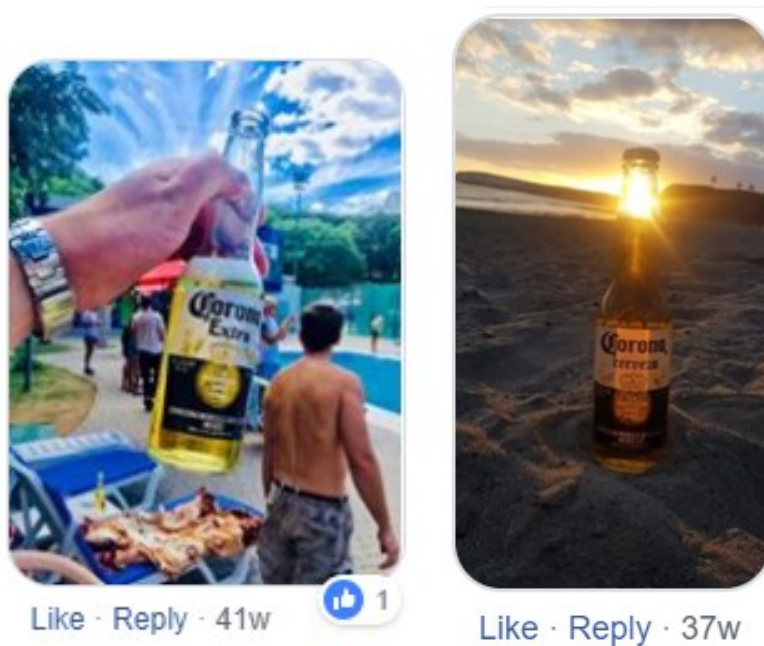


Image 2. Corona Extra Official Facebook Page

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conclusions that emerged from the analysis of the data. Parting from the conclusions and analysis of this research, the theoretical and managerial implications will also be developed.

The aim of the present thesis is the cultural understanding of the consumers of the brand Corona Extra in the online communities. Therefore, the following research questions were answered with this study:

RQ1: What motivates a consumer to drink a Corona Extra beer?

RQ2: How is the Corona Extra consumer culture?

The results do not show the demographics or segments of the consumers of Corona Extra but rather the shared needs, desires, meanings and choice of these consumers (Kozinets, 2002).

The findings from this study help to shed light on why the consumers choose to drink a Corona Extra. From the data analysis, it becomes visible that the consumers feel motivated to drink Corona Extra due to the brand marketing influence and the experiential and sensorial dimensions of the beer.

Consumers mark out that brand marketing strategy is effective and has been influential in their decision-making process. Primarily, they acknowledge that they are passive consumers of this marketing campaigns. In addition to this, consumer insights reveal that the experience consumption becomes meaningful to the consumers of Corona Extra when associated with the sensory dimensions and specific moments. As a result, sensory dimensions such as the freshness and adding a lime to the Corona Extra become the most desired attributes and this brand can be used as an example of how effective the sensory marketing of these dimensions resulted in increased engagement and involvement with the product (Krishna, 2011). Also, the true representation of the brand comes from the consumers sharing their positive experiences visually or textually depicting how they enjoy the sensorial attributes of the beer which make the experience meaningful.

The Corona Extra sensory dimensions and associations is what has led the brand to increase its marketplace recognition. Apart from this, the results also show that despite the popularity

of Corona Extra brand this does not happen as often in the beer-based online communities. Hence, these results help to answer the third research question:

RQ3: What can we learn about consumer's perception of Corona Extra by looking into beer-based online communities?

Drawing on the opinions and experiences of users in beer-based online communities underlying notions of negative perceptions about Corona Extra become apparent. There are several reasons why this behavior is triggered by some of the members of the community. Firstly, the most experienced members (beer snobs) express dissatisfaction towards the brand as they do not believe the beer quality or intrinsic attributes are good. Results show that the attributes that creates most dissatisfaction are the flavor, package and price of Corona Extra. Secondly, other members associate the brand with certain social parameters as being too light in alcohol and thus, it does not fit into the category of proper beer for a man. This negative perception of the brand is exemplified in negative behaviors against the users that show likeness towards the brand by being criticized or stereotyped which discourages these consumers to express themselves in favor of the brand. Other stereotypes being present are being novice, too young or just wanting to show off. All in all, not all users in this beer-based online communities have such negative perceptions of Corona Extra, some of them believe that this criticism is exaggerated and the brand is not as terrible as it is portrayed in this communities. However, members insights disclose that when looking into beer-based online communities is easy to observe how the craft-beer boom has changed the way consumers perceive beer and hence have more negative views of commercial and macro-brewed beers.

Theoretical implications

Throughout the study, it became apparent that the sensory dimensions of Corona Extra are one of the main reasons why consumers enjoy consuming this beer. In addition to this, results show that not only sensory dimensions are important but also the context when the beer was being consumed such as summer, a barbeque or with friends. This study adds up with the sensory marketing research as the study also confirms like in previous studies that “applying contextual features to sensory inputs expands our knowledge of what perceptual features make a beverage enjoyable, and under what social situations they occur” (De Waal Malefyt, 2015, p.10).

Previous authors researched the relationship of sensory, affective and cognitive dimension as the experiential measurement of consumption of foods and beverages (Gómez-Corona,

Escalona-Buendía, et al., 2017). The present study contributes to clarify this relationship since consumers insights suggest that the consumption experience of the brand triggers the affective and sensory dimension for the lovers of Corona Extra, whereas for the more experienced beer consumers the less triggered dimension is the cognitive. Hence, beer snobs do not desire to acquire more knowledge of the beer when they drink a Corona Extra.

Furthermore, this study confirms the conclusions from Darwin (2017) empirical study where different flavor profiles and alcohol types are associated with gendered behaviors. In Darwin study, individuals consider feminine beers as the ones with lighter level of alcohol and fruity flavors. Despite Darwin study being on craft-beer consumption, these findings can be applied to commercial beers like Corona Extra. In our study, Corona Extra is considered a feminine beer in online communities and this gendering of beer leads consumers to believe that is not a real beer and hence regarded as inferior in comparison with craft-beer. Recurrent comments in our study refer to Corona Extra as a beer for women and gays which further confirms this gendered hierarchy and stereotyping in beer consumption literature.

Moreover, this study contributes to the literature on the usefulness of netnography for marketing research purposes. As mentioned by Heinonen & Medberg (2018), there has been a rapid growth in the use of netnography as a methodology for marketing academia and almost half of the present literature is related with consumer research studies. The flexibility of the methodology allows to study any type of product such as a beer brand like in this study and explore its consumers behavior. Hence, this study also highlights the benefits for marketers, market researchers and managers who wish to obtain consumer insights regarding a specific brand or product. Like in this study, netnography becomes a useful way of acquiring consumers insights and knowledge into the opportunities and threats of the brand which are important for the company as future actionable implications in their marketing strategy.

Managerial Implications

The consumer insights extracted from the online communities showed a threat for the brand Corona Extra that is the dissatisfaction towards the ‘skunkiness’ of the beer. Hence, the company needs to investigate whether this chemical process is happening once the beer is light-struck. If this effect does happen, then the company should aim to reduce it. Whether ‘skunkiness’ is true or not, the company should have a clear communication strategy to consumers regarding the production process. In the official brand website there should be detailed information regarding the whole production process of the beer to make clear that this

negative intrinsic is being treated or non-existent. Through this strategy, the company can reduce the level of dissatisfaction of the most experienced consumers.

Aesthetics of the package play an important role for the lovers of the brand, however as mentioned before this also causes dissatisfaction to other consumers. A darker package version of Corona Extra already exists but this is not well known by all consumers as the product is not placed in all the countries where the brand is being sold. To try to attract consumers that are more skeptical about the clear bottle, the dark bottle version should be promoted more and placed in more countries. However, some changes are suggested. Firstly, the Corona Familiar packaging has different typography and logo colors than the original Corona Extra package so they should be modified to make them aesthetically equal. Secondly, the smaller size of Corona Familiar should be used (12ml) and advertising should be increased about this new version using the same aesthetics of the Corona Extra advertisements. The added lime should be also included in advertisements due to its importance in the mentioned consumers sensorial experience. To effectively encourage the skeptical consumers to try this version, advertisements should highlight the benefits of having a dark bottle which enhances further the sensorial attributes of the beer.

Consumers of Corona Extra usually tend to associate the brand to summer or warm weather and recognize that is 'weird' to consume it in winter conditions. However, the positive brand experience associated with Corona Extra shows a potential opportunity to convince and attract more consumers into buying the brand also in winter or colder conditions. The company has already tried to change the brand positioning by "moving beyond the beach as its homeland to evoke authentic moments lived outdoors". (AB InBev Annual Report, 2016, p.18). Besides the existing Corona Sunsets being held at winter ski locations, another possible promotion strategy is to get sports sponsorship in winter games and competitions to increase the brand presence during winter season.

Due to the motivation found in consumers to share their own images of their experience with Corona Extra specially on social media, this proposes an opportunity for the brand to create an online brand-based platform. In this platform they will be able to share their images, experiences or tips of how to do a proper 'michelada' or other beverages with Corona Extra beer. The advantages of brand online communities are that it fosters brand engagement, brand satisfaction and brand loyalty (Wirtz, Den Ambtman, Bloemer et al, 2013). For this community to correctly address the discouragement of consumption felt in other online communities, there

should be a control in the negative content that might arise from the members. Therefore, is important to establish clear communities' norms where the brand core values are represented and fosters an environment that discourages stereotyping or criticism. If there is a clear behavior guideline, then consumers should be aware of the consequences they will face if they engage in negative behavior in the community.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the present netnographic research was able to gain rich and useful consumer insights from the consumer culture of the brand Corona Extra, one must consider its methodological limitations. As previously discussed in the methodology chapter, data was only obtained from online communities therefore the findings of this study cannot be generalizable to offline consumers without firstly evaluating similarities of behavior with other offline groups and using other qualitative or quantitative methods for triangulation (Kozinets, 2002). Moreover, due to the qualitative nature of the methodology used for the analysis this requires the researcher interpretative skills which can cause some level of subjectivity in the interpretations

The online communities being studied are composed mainly by English-speaking users and secondly Spanish-speaking users; therefore, findings might be limited to western or some traits of Latin consumer behaviour culture. Due to the global scope of the brand, further research needs to include consumers from other languages to get a full picture of the brand consumer culture. For example, Asian consumers should be studied since last year China has become the number one export market for the brand (AB InBev Annual Report, 2018).

Due to time constraints, the study was conducted on online communities which were mainly forums and niche towards beer consumption. This may pose a limitation in the findings as some consumers of the brand may not be part of these communities since they do not use this type of online forums. Also, it could be possible, that most members of this communities have higher beer experience when compared to other social media members. Therefore, it would be interesting to amplify the research scope towards social media platforms such as Instagram or Twitter where consumers share through visual images their experience and relationship with the brand without having that much beer knowledge.

The present research is exploratory in nature and focuses on obtaining qualitative information that succeeds in answering the mentioned research questions. However, the actual strength of the negative effects of negative stereotyping and/or criticism on individuals and how it affects their buying decisions of the brand should be determined by means of quantitative studies.

Additionally, findings from the online communities suggest that members who are more influenced by the extrinsic attributes of Corona Extra such as the brand and package, are the ones with less experience in the consumption of beer. To validate these findings, further research should be carried through a quantitative study that measures the effect of extrinsic attributes of Corona Extra in the decision-making process of less experienced consumers.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AB InBev Annual Report 2013: The Annual Report. (2013, March 01) Retrieved March 9th, 2019 from https://www.ab-inbev.com/content/dam/universaltemplate/ab-inbev/investors/reports-and-filings/annual-and-hy-reports/2013/ABI_AR13_EN_Narrative.pdf
- AB InBev Annual Report 2016: The Annual Report. (2017, March 01) Retrieved May 4th, 2019 from https://www.ab-inbev.com/content/dam/universaltemplate/ab-inbev/investors/reports-and-filings/annual-and-hy-reports/2017/03/ABI_AR16_Complete_ENG_v13.pdf
- AB InBev Annual Report 2018: The Annual Report. (2019, February 28) Retrieved March 9th, 2019 from https://www.ab-inbev.com/content/dam/universaltemplate/ab-inbev/investors/reports-and-filings/annual-and-hy-reports/2019/190227_AB%20InBev_RA2018_3.pdf
- AB InBev Quarterly reports 2018. (2018, October 25) Retrieved February 18th, 2019 from <https://www.ab-inbev.com/content/dam/universaltemplate/ab-inbev/investors/reports-and-filings/quaterly-reports/2018/10/ABI%20-%203Q18%20Results%20-%20ENGLISH.pdf>
- American Adjunct Lager (n.d.). Retrieved April 18th, 2019 from <https://www.beeradvocate.com/beer/styles/38/>
- Alden, D. L., Steenkamp, J. B. E., & Batra, R. (1999). Brand positioning through advertising in Asia, North America, and Europe: The role of global consumer culture. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(1), 75-87
- Allison, R. I., & Uhl, K. P. (1964). Influence of beer brand identification on taste perception. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1(3), 36–39.
- Aquilani, B., Laureti, T., Poponi, S., & Secondi, L. (2015). Beer choice and consumption determinants when craft beers are tasted: an exploratory study of consumer preferences. *Food Quality and Preference*, 41, 214-224.
- Britt, S. H. (1950). The strategy of consumer motivation. *Journal of Marketing*, 14(5), 666-674.

- Burton, D. (2008). *Cross-cultural marketing: Theory, practice and relevance*. Routledge, London
- Cardello, A. V., Pineau, B., et al (2016). Cognitive and emotional differentiators for beer: An exploratory study focusing on “uniqueness”. *Food quality and preference*, 54, 23-38
- Catterall, M. and Maclaran, P. (2001). Researching Consumers in Virtual Worlds: A Cyberspace Odyssey. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 1(3): 228-237.
- Chapman, N. G., Nanney, M., Slade Lellock, J., & Mikles-Schluterman, J. (2018). Bottling gender: accomplishing gender through craft beer consumption. *Food, Culture & Society*, 21(3), 296-313.
- Colen, L. and Swinnen, J.F.M. (2011). Beer drinking nations: the determinants of global beer consumption. In: Swinnen, J.F.M. (Ed.), *The Economics of Beer* (pp. 123-140). Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Cerveza Corona España. (n.d.). Retrieved February 17th, 2019 from <https://cervezacorona.es/producto/gama>
- Darwin, H. (2017). You Are What You Drink: Gender Stereotypes and Craft Beer Preferences within the Craft Beer Scene of New York City. *Untapped: Exploring the Cultural Dimensions of Craft Beer*, 222-235.
- de Waal Malefyt, T. (2015). The senses in anthropological and marketing research: investigating a consumer-brand ritual holistically. *Journal of Business Anthropology*, 4(1), 5-30.
- Devine, P. G. (1989). Stereotypes and prejudice: Their automatic and controlled components. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 56(1), 5.
- Dholakia, U.M., Bagozzi, R.P. and Pearo, L.K. (2004). A social influence model of consumer participation in network- and small-group-based virtual communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 21, 241-263.
- Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

- Gómez-Corona, C., Escalona-Buendía, H. B., García, M., Chollet, S., & Valentin, D. (2016). Craft vs. industrial: Habits, attitudes and motivations towards beer consumption in Mexico. *Appetite*, 96, 358–367.
- Gómez-Corona, C., Valentin, D., Escalona-Buendía, H. B., & Chollet, S. (2017). The role of gender and product consumption in the mental representation of industrial and craft beers: An exploratory study with Mexican consumers. *Food quality and preference*, 60, 31-39
- Gómez-Corona, C., Chollet, S., Escalona-Buendía, H. B., & Valentin, D. (2017). Measuring the drinking experience of beer in real context situations. The impact of affects, senses, and cognition. *Food quality and preference*, 60, 113-122.
- Goodrich, K., & De Mooij, M. (2011). New Technology Mirrors Old Habits: Online Buying Mirrors Cross-National Variance of Conventional Buying. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 23 (3/4), 246–259.
- Hede, A. M., & Watne, T. (2013). Leveraging the human side of the brand using a sense of place: Case studies of craft breweries. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(1-2), 207-224.
- Heinonen, K., & Medberg, G. (2018). Netnography as a tool for understanding customers: implications for service research and practice. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 32(6), 657-679.
- Hoffman, D. L., & Novak, T. P. (1996). Marketing in hypermedia computer-mediated environments: Conceptual foundations. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(3), 50-68.
- Holbrook, M. B., & Hirschman, E. C. (1982). The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun. *Journal of consumer research*, 9(2), 132-140.
- Hultén, B., Broweus, N., & Van Dijk, M. (2009). What is sensory marketing?. *Sensory marketing*, Palgrave Macmillan, London. pp. 1-23.
- Hsu, E. 2008 “The Senses and the Social: an Introduction,” *Ethnos*, 73 (4):433–443.
- Kapoulas, A., & Mitic, M. (2012). Understanding challenges of qualitative research: Rhetorical issues and reality traps. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 15(4), 354-368.

- Karrenbrock, J. D. (1990). The internationalization of the beer brewing industry. *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review*, 72(6), 3-19.
- Kozinets, R.V. (1997), I want to believe: a netnography of X-philes' subculture of consumption, *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 24No. 1, 470-475.
- Kozinets, R. V. (1999). E-tribalized marketing?: The strategic implications of virtual communities of consumption. *European Management Journal*, 17(3), 252-264.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61-72.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*. Sage, London.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: redefined* (2nd ed.). Sage, London.
- Krishna, A. (Ed.). (2011). *Sensory marketing: Research on the sensuality of products*. Routledge.
- Krishna, A. (2012). An integrative review of sensory marketing: Engaging the senses to affect perception, judgment and behavior. *Journal of consumer psychology*, 22(3), 332-351.
- Levitt, T. (1983). *The globalization of markets*. Harvard Business Review, 61(3), 92–102.
- Lindstrom, M. (2008). *Brand sense: Sensory secrets behind the stuff we buy*. Simon and Schuster.
- Netnography (2006). In *The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods*. Sage Publications.
- Pettigrew, S. (2002). A grounded theory of beer consumption in Australia. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 5(2), 112-122.
- Poelmans, E., & Swinnen, J. F. (2011). A brief economic history of beer. *The economics of beer*, 3-28.
- Shanks, M. & Tilley, C. (1992). *Re-constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice*. Routledge, London
- Thomas, D. C., & Peterson, M. F. (2017). *Cross-cultural management: Essential concepts*. Sage Publications.

Wirtz, J., Den Ambtman, A., Bloemer, J., Horváth, C., Ramaseshan, B., Van De Klundert, J., Gurhan, Z. & Kandampully, J. (2013). Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(3), 223-244

8. APPENDIX

THEMATIC NETWORK

