

## Consumption subculture and taste formation: a case study on a brewpub in the south of Minas Gerais (MG)

Juliano Silva Cougo<sup>a</sup> Elisabeth Thaianie Tercino de Araújo<sup>b</sup> Daniel Carvalho de Rezende<sup>c</sup>

Universidade Federal de Lavras (UFLA), Lavras, MG, Brasil

### Abstract

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Corresponding author: Juliano Silva Cougo - [julianocougo00@gmail.com](mailto:julianocougo00@gmail.com)

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**Objective:** It is proposed to investigate how a brewpub from the south of Minas Gerais influences the formation and maintenance of taste in a subculture of craft beer consumers.

**Method:** Data collection consists of non-participant observation, in addition to the use of documents and semi-structured interviews with actors involved in this context.

**Originality/Relevance:** The study contributes to discussions about consumer behavior as it is dedicated to understanding how an establishment influences and is influenced by aspects of subculture and taste formation. The brewpub in question is considered a place where cultural practices are expressed.

**Results:** The brewpub promotes “eccentric” sensory experiences in the observed field, through numerous elements. It was observed that the preferences, choices and desires of these agents rescue sensory stimuli and assume common meanings and symbolism. Furthermore, the shared meanings are also the result of the organization's effort to be a point of connection. The relationships established and identified form a subculture, which directly influences the formation and maintenance of consumer tastes.

**Theoretical/methodological contributions:** The contributions highlight how taste can be improved and given new meaning based on the activities proposed by the brewpub and the elements that are part of this space. The countless possibilities are reiterated through a qualitative methodology, especially regarding the subjective aspects of the participants in this study.

**Keywords:** consumer subculture; taste formation; brewpub; craft beer

<sup>a</sup> PhD student in Business Administration at the Federal University of Lavras-MG (UFLA). Master in Business Administration from the Federal University of Lavras-MG (UFLA). Bachelor in Public Administration from the Federal University of Alfenas-MG (UNIFAL). Bachelor of Science and Economics from the Federal University of Alfenas-MG (UNIFAL). Member of the Center for Studies and Research in Management as Social Practice (NEGEP/UFLA). Develops research related to the areas of constructionist studies, alternative models of economy and diversity of organizations. [julianocougo00@gmail.com](mailto:julianocougo00@gmail.com)

<sup>b</sup> Doctoral student of the Graduate Program in Administration at the Federal University of Lavras (PPGA/UFLA) with emphasis on research in Organizations, Management and Society. Master in Business Administration by the Graduate Program in Business Administration at the Federal University of Lavras (PPGA/UFLA). Degree in Public Administration from the same institution (2012-2017). She is a member of the Center for Studies and Research in Management in Social Practice (NEGEP) and the Center for Studies in Organizations, Management and Society (NEORGS). She currently works as a tutor for face-to-face, blended and distance courses at the University Center of Lavras (MG), with emphasis on Administration and related courses. [elisabethercino@yahoo.com.br](mailto:elisabethercino@yahoo.com.br)

<sup>c</sup> He holds a degree in Production Engineering from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (1997), a Master's in Administration from the Federal University of Lavras (2000), a PhD in Development, Agriculture and Society from the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (2004) and a postgraduate degree in -PhD in Marketing - Lancaster University (2012). He has been a visiting professor at two foreign institutions: Northern Michigan University (2011) and Lancaster University (2011-2012). He is currently Full Professor at the Federal University of Lavras, CNPq Productivity Scholarship PQ-2 and one of the leaders of the theme "Construction and Dynamics of Markets" at Anpad. He was Coordinator of the Graduate Program in Administration (PPGA/UFLA) from 2016 to 2023, Deputy Dean of Lato Sensu Graduate Studies at UFLA (2013-2016), Editor of the journal Rural and Agroindustry Organizations (2013-2016) and Coordinator of the Center for Distance Learning at UFLA (2009-2011). He works in the area of Marketing, with emphasis on the following topics: social theory of taste, cultural consumption, building markets, consumption and food marketing. [danielerezende@ufla.br](mailto:danielerezende@ufla.br)



## Resumo

### A subcultura de consumo e formação de gosto: um estudo de caso sobre um *brewpub* no sul de Minas Gerais (MG)

**Objetivo:** Propõe-se investigar como um *brewpub* sul-mineiro, influência na formação e manutenção de gosto de uma subcultura de consumidores de cerveja artesanal.

**Método:** A coleta de dados conta com a observação não-participante, além da utilização de documentos e entrevistas semiestruturadas com atores envolvidos nesse contexto.

**Originalidade/Relevância:** O estudo contribui com discussões sobre o comportamento do consumidor na medida em que se dedica a compreender como uma organização influencia e é influenciada por aspectos da subcultura e da formação de gosto. Considera-se o *brewpub*, em questão, como um local onde práticas culturais são expressadas.

**Resultados:** O *brewpub* fomenta experiências sensoriais “excêntricas” no campo observado, por meio de inúmeros elementos. Observou-se que as preferências, escolhas e desejos desses agentes resgatam estímulos sensoriais e assumem significados e simbolismo comuns. Ademais, os significados compartilhados são também frutos do esforço da organização, em ser um ponto de conexão. As relações estabelecidas e identificadas configuram uma subcultura, a qual influencia diretamente na formação e manutenção do gosto dos consumidores.

**Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas:** As contribuições evidenciam como o gosto pode ser aprimorado e ressignificado a partir das atividades propostas pelo *brewpub* e dos elementos que fazem parte deste espaço. Reitera-se as inúmeras possibilidades através de uma metodologia qualitativa, sobretudo ao que tange os aspectos subjetivos dos participantes deste estudo.

*Palavras-chave:* subcultura do consumo; gosto; brewpub; cerveja artesanal.

## Introduction

The number of microbreweries in Brazil has significantly increased, particularly in 2019, attracting new consumers to the craft beer market (Ferreira et al., 2018; Ramos & Pandolfi, 2019; MAPA, 2024). According to the Annual Beer Report (MAPA, 2024), there was a 6.8% annual growth in such establishments in 2023, totaling 1,847 registered breweries in the country. Over the past five years, this amount represents more than double the number of registered establishments in Brazil (MAPA, 2024).

Despite the craft beer sector's progress in attracting researchers from various fields (Baiano, 2021), discussions on the topic still have potential for academic advancements, especially concerning consumption and aspects related to taste and its representations. This opens a range of possibilities for research, especially regarding beer within the field of Applied Social Sciences (Ferreira et al., 2018; Filho et al., 2020). Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) responds to these demands by prioritizing the understanding of elements embedded in culture and consumption (Campos et al., 2018).

Ferreira et al. (2019), based on Aleti et al. (2016), emphasize that differences among craft beers are conducted by taste and the raw materials used, driving consumers to learn more about beer. In this regard, craft beer enthusiasts have emerged as a growing group in recent years, seeking to value the history, culture, and quality of the beverage (Ferreira et al., 2019). Consequently, research on this subject has been encouraged (Carvalho et al., 2018; Ferreira et al., 2019), since recognizing that appreciation for tradition, culture, and the identity of a people reinforces the bond between the individual and the beverage (Silva, Leite & De Paula, 2016).

Particularly regarding craft beers, Minas Gerais plays a prominent national role due to the number of registered breweries, brewing density (related to the number of breweries and inhabitants of Minas Gerais), product registrations, and other figures from the most recent Annual Beer Report (MAPA, 2024). In this context, the Southeast region is distinct in national beer production (Mac Leod et al., 2020).

A consumption subculture serves as an analytical category for understanding consumers, their relationships, and how they organize their lives and identities (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Koch & Sauerbronn, 2018). Taste, in turn, is observed through sociocultural aspects and various social practices (Ponte & Suarez, 2017; Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2017). According to Schouten and McAlexander (1995), the terminology "consumption subculture" refers to the relationship between consumers, their interactions, and their unity through consumption and product ownership. Moreover, the authors define a consumption subculture as a distinct subgroup of society that self-selects based on a shared commitment to a brand, product category, or consumption activity (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Segabinazzi (2015) adds that a consumption subculture involves an identifiable hierarchical structure, a set of attitudes, an ethos, and unique rituals, language, and symbolic expressions.

To understand taste formation within a consumption subculture, this case study seeks to answer the question: how do leisure establishments influence taste formation and practices within a consumption subculture? It aims to investigate how a brewpub in southern Minas Gerais influences the formation and maintenance of taste in a subculture of craft beer consumers. To achieve this, the study describes the place with an emphasis on its positioning strategies and consumer relationships. The research understands taste formation through the relationship between craft beer consumption and the leisure provided by the brewpub.

This study is justified by contributing to discussions on consumer behavior, as it focuses on understanding how an organization, such as the brewpub, can influence and be influenced by aspects of subculture and taste formation. These considerations are based on the findings of this study and the theoretical framework presented in the next section. The discussion addresses how spaces dedicated to craft beer production and consumption exchange influences related to rituals, practices, perceptions, and behaviors, impacting consumers' taste formation. Data collection included non-participant observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews with consumers and brewpub employees.

It consists of this introductory section, followed by the theoretical framework dedicated to elucidating aspects of consumption subculture and taste formation. Next, the research methodology is presented. Subsequently, the results and discussions of the empirical research are displayed. Finally, the conclusion is presented.

## Theoretical Review

### *Craft Beer*

The literature on craft beer highlights a significant increase in consumer preference for the beverage over industrialized versions. Discussions about market changes and the adoption of new consumption patterns have been conducted in various studies worldwide (Ferreira et al., 2018; Carvalho et al., 2018).

As pointed out by Baiano (2020), Garavaglia and Swinnen (2017), and Gewehr and Zaneti (2019), one of the primary reasons behind the global expansion of craft breweries is the "craft beer revolution," which began in the mid-1960s in the United States. This movement spread across various countries, leading to the emergence of small breweries as a response to large manufacturers' oligopolies and growing consumer demand for more diverse beer options (Garavaglia & Swinnen, 2017).

In the Brazilian context, data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Supply (MAPA) indicate a significant increase in the number of registered craft breweries over the past two decades (Brasil, 2020). In 2000, apart from informal producers, there were only 40 officially registered establishments, whereas in 2023, this number reached 1,847 (MAPA, 2024).

There is no unanimous definition contrasting "craft" from "industrial" beer, considering that in the production of a craft beer "you have to define a style, create a recipe, select the ingredients, and start the processes of malting, mashing crushed grains, lautering, brewing, cooling, fermenting, maturing and bottling. In other words, the general process is common to all brewers (...)" (Sebrae, 2021). However, some production guidelines are accepted as general criteria for differentiation. In Brazil, for example, the Brazilian Beverage Association (ABRABE) characterizes microbreweries by their low-scale production, with ingredients that differ from conventional production, and by the beverage with a higher concentration of malt per hectolitre (Sebrae, 2021).

Internationally, one of the main references is the definition by the Brewers Association, a representative entity with strong political influence in the sector. According to this association, a craft brewery produces up to 6 million barrels annually, is predominantly independent of non-craft organizations, and is certified by guarantee seals. The association emphasizes key characteristics of craft beer production, such as style creation, the reintroduction of historical styles, adherence to traditional production standards, engagement with the local community, and the presence of unique sensory aspects like distinct densities, flavors, and aromas (Brewers Association, 2021).

Despite the lack of consensus on what defines craft beer, the literature broadly agrees on the role of small organizations in maintaining production standards widely perceived as superior to industrial alternatives (Aquilani et al., 2015; Baiano, 2020; Garavaglia & Swinnen, 2017). This has significantly contributed to the emergence of consumption subcultures (Koch & Sauerbronn, 2018). While some studies describe factors influencing the structuring of consumption subcultures—such as identity construction (Ferreira et al., 2018), appreciation for local products (Gómez-Corona et al., 2016), and flavor preferences (Aquilani et al., 2015)—little has been discussed about craft beer consumers and the nuances of their consumption habits, which differ greatly from those who consume industrial beer (Koch & Sauerbronn, 2018).

### *Consumption Subcultures*

Research focused on consumer behavior has aimed at the symbolic relationships between groups, objects, and experiences (Segabinazzi, 2015). Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) stands as a field of consumer studies with an emphasis on alternative analyses of consumption, transcending

these perspectives (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Studies in this field focus on addressing and discussing the dynamic and intersubjective relationship between consumer actions, the market, the context and the meanings of consumption practices (Larsen & Patterson, 2018).

Within the CCT framework, consumption subcultures hold significant theoretical relevance. This field of study examines how products and experiences unite groups through shared consumption activities (Segabinazzi, 2015). Subcultures emerge from personal identification with objects or activities, which foster relationships among individuals with similar consumption behaviors. These consumption patterns are governed by shared values that define social interactions among the group (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

As a result, consumers tend to adopt activities, customs, and rituals that align with their identities while engaging with institutions that reinforce their characteristics (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; McWilliam, 2000). Consumption subcultures are typically marked by distinct social structures, unique ethos, beliefs, jargon, rituals, and symbolic expressions (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Thus, communities tend to be identified by their common aspects or even by their self-identification among their members, as argued by Barboza and Silva (2013), based on McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig (2002). In this sense, individuals tend to opt for activities aligned with the prominent aspects of their identities while supporting institutions that represent them (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Barboza & Silva, 2013). Additionally, when forming groups, individuals seek social interaction with others who share similar or compatible identity traits (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Solomon (2004) considers subcultures as groups whose members share common beliefs and experiences that distinguish them from the broader culture. However, Segabinazzi (2015) notes that this definition differs from the concept of consumption subcultures, as it does not explicitly address consumption behaviors, in addition to recognizing the need for a subgroup as different from the other members of a culture. Meanwhile, Ferreira et al. (2019) show that, when it comes to the subculture of craft beer consumption, consumers may have their favorite styles, but not be loyal to a specific brand. In addition, they are willing to pay for a distinctive product, in terms of aromas, flavors, colors and alcohol content (Ferreira et al., 2019).

In this sense, eating habits are loaded with symbolic components that reflect ideals, behaviors and values and, as such, help to compose social groups with similar consumption

behaviors (Mowen & Minor, 2003). Thus, the consumption of craft beer has been the subject of several studies aimed at understanding the relationships between consumers, identity issues, and “rituals” as particular activities that derive from the habit of having the beverage (Gómez-Corona et al., 2016; Koch & Sauerbronn, 2018; Aquilani et al., 2015; Carvalho et al., 2018).

### *Taste from a Consumer Behavior Perspective*

The concept of "taste" varies depending on the subject in which it is discussed. Fields such as philosophy, sociology, and psychology offer distinct theoretical foundations for understanding taste (Hoyer & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). Preferences and desires are not inherently biological but are socially constructed (Gowricharn, 2019). This is why “taste” can be understood from different perspectives. In consumer studies, there is instability when considering the differences in its conceptualization and application (Barcelos, 2015).

There are several studies exploring the objective and subjective nature of taste (Holbrook, 1981) and its formation process (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Bourdieu, 1984; Quintão et al., 2017). Literature defines taste as synonymous with preference (Holbrook, 2005), an expression of judgment (Charters, 2006), sensitivity (Berlyne, 1974), a product of social construction (Holt, 1998; Berger, 2005), a precursor to aesthetic experiences (Leder et al., 2004), or a result of those experiences (Hoyer & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). In other studies, taste appears as a social discourse that is part of consumers' aesthetic judgments, distinctions and self-representations in environments, markets and cultures (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Airoidi, 2021).

The concepts of habitus and fields, as proposed by Bourdieu (1984), are widely used in CCT discussions related to taste (Skandalis et al., 2016). Ponte and Suarez (2017) argue that the relevance of Bourdieu's framework in consumption studies lies in positioning taste as a mechanism of elite power and domination (Woodward & Emmison, 2001). In this view, taste is a classification mechanism that distinguishes individuals, objects, and consumption practices based on material culture (Ponte & Suarez, 2017; Barcelos, 2015). Cultural differences and forms of capital play a central role in structuring patterns of taste and consumption (Quintão et al., 2017).

In discussions related to consumer behavior, Morris Holbrook is frequently quoted by considering taste as a neutral term equivalent to preference. However, he defines "good taste" as what is prescribed by cultural experts within a particular domain (Holbrook, 2005). This view

aligns with Bourdieu's idea of taste as a social construct influenced by institutionalized authority. Barcelos (2015) emphasizes that while experts dictate standards of good taste, non-expert consumers also engage in aesthetic judgment processes.

Castro, Rezende, and Brito (2021) suggest that taste is shaped by physical spaces that are seen as appropriate to create experiences, particularly aesthetic ones. Skandalis et al. (2016) refer to this phenomenon as "spatiality of taste," in which shared environments promote ritualistic experiences and the development of cultural competencies. Consequently, consumption practices involve an interplay between taste and the physical space where aesthetic experiences occur (Castro, Rezende & Brito, 2021).

Broadly, while some scholars link taste to sociocultural factors and social consumption practices (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998; Ponte & Suarez, 2017), others focus on the sensory aspects and psychological responses to aesthetic stimuli (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

The subjective and objective elements of taste corroborate the idea that judgments can be nearly objective. In other words, judgments are based on criteria that can be objectively determined (Hoyer & Sauer, 2012). In agreement with Ponte and Campos (2018), in the theory of consumer culture (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), taste is the result of a social construction, which involves not only its structural dimension, but also the consumer's agency in the process of transforming taste.

Given this framework, ritualistic aspects play a critical role in taste formation, especially within consumption subcultures (Quintão et al., 2017). Although this study does not focus explicitly on Ritual Theory (McCracken, 1986), it acknowledges that ritualistic activities serve as opportunities to establish, reinforce, or reinterpret shared symbols and meanings (McCracken, 1986), which are fundamental to the constitution of consumption subcultures (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Therefore, this study is committed to understanding how the influences of a particular context - brewpub, as an environment endowed with situated practices and rituals, and the subcultures present there - impact on the formation of taste. In this regard, eating habits, as activities loaded with symbolic components, help to bring together people who have similar consumption behaviors (Mowen & Minor, 2003). From studies on the formation of taste (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2017; Quintão et al., 2017; Skandalis et al., 2015; Ponte &



Campos, 2018), researchers are interested in how taste is delineated from shared exchanges, rites, customs, practices and other aspects in this locus of research.

### Methodology

This study follows a qualitative and descriptive approach. The qualitative method was chosen due to its interpretative nature of reality. Considering the context of craft beer, a case study methodology was deemed appropriate, as it allows the construction and refinement of theoretical advancements based on contextual evidence (Yin, 2005). The analysis technique was based on explanation building, which seeks to establish information about the studied phenomenon through multiple data collection methods (Yin, 2005).

Data was collected in the following methods:

a. **Non-participant observation:** one of the researchers observed the operational routine of the business for eleven months. A field diary was used to keep records, which included: the dynamics between the establishment and its customers, the interaction between regulars, practices, values and common customs. The researcher focused on visually observing the phenomena and behaviors relevant to the study, recording these aspects in detail. During the months of observation, there were at least two visits a week, predominantly on Fridays and Saturdays, between 5pm and 11pm. The same researcher also took part in a workshop on craft beer production held by the venue's managers in November 2021, lasting three days and a total of 15 hours. Non-participant observation, of a descriptive nature, provided additional information to the interviews carried out, as described below. The process came to an end when no new information was obtained.

b. **Document collection:** meeting minutes, customer spreadsheets, product reports, operating procedure records, strategic guidance documents, market research, etc. were analyzed. Based on this data, it was possible to learn about the brewpub's history, production structure, market positioning and the organization's moments of evolution and inflection, in order to subsequently select the consumers taking part in the study.

c. **Semi-structured interviews:** 23 interviews were conducted. 21 with brewpub regular customers, and two with the owner and brewmaster, fictitiously and respectively referred to as Carlos and Pablo.

Two semi-structured scripts were used. The first was applied to the organizational actors, with the aim of clarifying questions about the place from a historical, cultural and marketing point of view. The interview took place in September, 2021. The organization studied has 4 permanent employees, as well as other freelance service providers. However, for the purpose of this study, we sought to select those directly involved in consumer experiences.

In accordance with Filho et al. (2020, p. 385) “it is believed that the monthly consumption of craft beers, at the stipulated frequency and period, characterizes the habit of periodic consumption of this product, thus excluding occasional consumers of the drink”. Adopting this criteria, contact with consumers was based on a list of regular customers provided by Carlos. Participants were selected according to their frequency at the brewpub over a period of 2 years and 6 months, which varied from 30 to 100 times, checked on a case-by-case basis.

Potential participants were selected, firstly, on the basis of a significant frequency of visits to the establishment and that they were perceived as actors who “participate in social interactions and share common values that are sustained by consumption” (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Regarding this second aspect, the participants included in the study would have the approval of the researchers. In the end, 28 people who fulfilled the study criteria were contacted and 21 were willing to be interviewed.

Adapted from Ferreira et al. (2019), the consumer script was divided into 3 parts. Part I dealt with sociodemographic characterization and the participants' relationships with craft beer. Part II emphasized considerations about the pub, experiences, practices shared in the environment, and related aspects. Part III focused on consumer experiences such as motivations, preferences in relation to types of beer, and the rituals of consumption practices.

The customers interviews took place between September and November 2021, online, and were recorded and transcribed in full using Nvivo® software. All the participants in this study allowed the data to be recorded and used, in the knowledge that the obtained data was confidential and secure. Their names have been omitted in order to ensure the confidentiality of the information. Table 1 shows the characterization of the participants. The total interviews took 10 hours and 45 minutes.

**Table 1**

*Participants Characterization*

Description/ Consumer	Gender	Age (years old)	Professional Activity	Lv. of Education	Income (minimum wage)	Weekly Consumption
Carlos	M	39	Entrepreneur	Doctorate	*	6 times
Pablo	M	26	Brewmaster	Higher Educ.	*	6 times
1	M	36	Administrative Agent	Postgraduate	3 to 5	2 times
2	F	30	Attorney	Postgraduate	1 to 3	1-3 times
3	F	33	Architect	Higher Educ.	1 to 3	1-3 times
4	F	36	College professor	Doctorate	7 to 10	Once
5	M	52	Systems Analyst	Higher Educ.	1 to 3	3 times
6	F	41	Entrepreneur	Secondary Educ.	3 to 5	3 times
7	F	37	Entrepreneur	Secondary Educ.	1 to 3	Once
8	M	36	TI	Postgraduate	7 to 10	Once
9	M	33	Systems Analyst	Postgraduate	3 to 5	3 times
10	M	37	Public Employee	Postgraduate	+ 10	Once
11	M	31	Coffee Broker	Higher Educ.	3 to 5	Once
12	F	34	Nutritionist	Postgraduate	3 to 5	4 times
13	F	28	Entrepreneur	Higher Educ.	1 to 3	Once
14	M	30	Architect	Higher Educ.	7 to 10	3 times
15	F	31	Teacher	Higher Educ.	1 to 3	Once
16	M	39	Coffee Export Manager	Higher Educ.	7 a 8	5 times
17	M	30	<i>Coffee Trader</i>	Higher Educ.	7 a 8	5 times
18	F	31	Gestora universitária	Master	1 a 3	Once
19	M	35	Entrepreneur	Higher Educ.	5 a 7	Once
20	F	33	Teacher	Master	+10	3 times
21	F	54	College professor	Doctorate	5 a 7	4 times

Source: Research data (2024).

The obtained data was analyzed using the content analysis technique from Bardin's (2011) thematic categorical perspective. The material was first read and separated into units with similar

patterns. Subsequently, these patterns were analyzed individually, categorizing them in order to establish common ground between the information. Finally, the patterns were grouped into themes for interpretation. In this way, it became possible to establish relationships, verify contradictions and understand phenomena (Bardin, 2011).

## Result and discussion

### *The brewpub*

Although there are no strict conceptual differences, a brewpub is generally distinguished from traditional bars or restaurants for at least two reasons. The first is its ability to provide authentic sensory experiences through its own craft beer recipes (Limberger & Tulla, 2017). The second is that these business models are often anchored in narratives and symbols tied to local traditions and histories (Rojak & Cole, 2016).

When it comes to an Irish brewpub, for example, the environment differentiates itself by incorporating elements of Irish culture into the organization's structure, operational routines, and services offered. As described by Asitimbay and Parrales (2019), Irish pubs date back to the 11th century when Ireland, still under British colonial rule, faced government restrictions on alcohol consumption. During this period, Irish homes hosted revolutionaries and travelers, serving them alcoholic beverages. Some characteristics from that era remain in contemporary pubs that stay true to their origins. Examples include St. Patrick's Day celebrations, the widespread use of wooden decor, traditional Irish cuisine, and an appreciation for Celtic music (Asitimbay & Parrales, 2019).

According to the analyzed documents, the establishment opened in July 2018, initially operating as a craft beer shop. At the time, producing and selling its own beverages was not part of its business model. However, market segmentation was later developed based on Carlos's observations of consumer habits.

[...] it had more of a shop profile, and as people started coming in, I began to notice that customers, in fact, hardly ever took anything home; they wanted to consume here, and then the profile shifted to a pub [...]. (Carlos).

The idea of an Irish brewpub, according to the owner, stemmed from a preliminary analysis of the craft beer consumer market in the region and the proposal to "offer something 'different'

from anything else around here (in the region), and also because it's in a residence, right?! Because of the type of space." (Carlos).

The aspect of "authenticity" of the place in the regional context attracts attention, as emphasized by some customers (Consumers 5, 6, 7, 12, 13). Even those who have lived in Ireland and experienced authentic Irish pubs recognize that the establishment possesses very similar characteristics (Consumers 1, 11, and 20).

**Figure 1**

*Venue's interior*



**Source:** Brewpub's social media (2021).

Carlos points out that the most significant differences between a pub and a traditional bar relate to welcoming customers into a "home-like" environment, the distinctiveness of the menu—which predominantly follows Irish gastronomic traditions—and the house-brewed craft beers. These aspects are frequently referenced and discussed in the establishment's meeting minutes.

Materially, the atmosphere is composed of artifacts that evoke Irish culture, such as rustic décor and various decorative elements associated with the country. The establishment also maintains contracts with a Celtic music band that periodically performs exclusive events at the pub and opens the St. Patrick's Day celebrations

Until 2020, beer production was outsourced to a local brewery. With the increasing sales of craft beer and a growing customer base, in early 2020, the owner, along with a partner, opened their own brewery.

Pablo describes the brewpub as a unique environment with a loyal clientele that recognizes the high quality of the beer offered. According to him, factors such as quality, the brewing process, and the freedom to choose ingredients and brewing styles attract consumers to craft beer. As the master brewer states:

[...] large breweries focus their production on one or just a few beer styles, the ones that appeal to most Brazilians, but they are limited to those characteristics. So... yeah... they don't have much freedom to incorporate different flavors into beer, other styles, to bring back traditional styles or introduce new ones. I think microbreweries and the craft beer market have more freedom in that matter. (Pablo).

The brewpub challenges the prevailing logic in the sector by opposing the oligopoly of large breweries (Baiano, 2020; Garavaglia & Swinnen, 2017) and emphasizing sensory and production-specific characteristics. In this sense, the establishment contributes to the creation of a new market while also engaging in a political movement aimed at strengthening local commerce and democratizing the consumption of various beer styles.

[...] Today, the market trend... is the microbrewery culture or the brewpub concept, right?! A pub that produces its own beer, which is often consumed on-site. That... That to me is the best business model because it guarantees fresh beer and, if the brewpub does a good job, it offers higher quality beer. (Pablo).

Both the owner and the brewmaster observe that the local craft beer consumer base has grown as access to the product has become easier. From this perspective, even with the emergence of other beer producers in the micro-region, the brewpub has contributed significantly, particularly by offering a unique space that opens doors to new consumption experiences. In this sense, the organization seeks to serve diverse beer options, often introducing them to an unaccustomed audience by fostering common consumption practices and collective identification through business model-specific rituals or diverse activities such as brewing courses, workshops, and lectures.

For consumers, the brewpub is perceived as an alternative consumption experience.

The pub manages to offer different experiences, right?! People who like being around others who share this way of thinking, a little unorthodox, isn't it? Folks who are more connected to cultural movements, who have a distinct musical taste. It's very different from what we usually see in the interior of Minas. (Consumer 8).

Today, this is the place that best matches my preferences... an atmosphere closer to the classic pub, let's say: the classic pub style, right?! Because it also has something to do with my experiences in Europe. It's nostalgic! (Consumer 11).

It is underlined that the business model is not exclusive and incorporates some "Brazilianized" adaptations for the local context. However, its segmentation potential is significant due to its perception as an alternative structure, its pioneering role in the local craft beer scene, and its in-house production. These factors contribute to shaping and maintaining tastes, as well as establishing common identity aspects that extend beyond beer consumption to include the ambiance/environment, appreciation of Celtic music, cuisine, and other elements embedded in the pub's culture.

#### *Environment and consumption as elements of social status*

A significant part of studies on consumption and taste formation is based on the idea that consumption practices perform as markers of social status (Skandalis et al., 2016; Ponte & Suarez, 2017; Woodward & Emmison, 2001). Most of these studies draw upon Bourdieu's theoretical construct of distinction. According to Bourdieu (2002), "lifestyles" are elements of the habitus system and work as categorizers of social agents, helping to separate actors within a broad social spectrum. Extending this discussion to the intersection of leisure consumption at the brewpub and craft beer, it is emphasized that taste in food and beverages is not autonomous but connects to other dimensions of one's relationship with the world (Bourdieu, 2002).

From this perspective, the brewpub is perceived as an environment of "good taste" and "distinct" in terms of its target audience. Consumers tend to describe the clientele as "more selective," "more educated," or "with higher levels of education." These arguments align with Bourdieu's (2002) theory.

[...] it's a more elite audience, a loyal audience... that's basically it. I notice that the level of education of the people here is higher. (Consumer 2).

There's this thing about the more selected audience, right?! It's people who share an ideology more aligned with ours and with the pub's, right? Of course, sometimes some unfamiliar people show up, but I think that's because the pub is becoming more well-known in town [...]. (Consumer 3).

[...] These are people who are willing to pay the price, who seek quality service, a high-quality beer. Now... they are certainly more educated, more evolved, for sure! (Consumer 6).

It is important to consider that other symbolic aspects may be involved in the "status of taste" regarding craft beer consumption at the brewpub. For instance, while other bars analyzed in the documentary review are located in areas with a concentration of nightlife options, the brewpub is situated in a residential neighborhood with a high concentration of medical offices, in a region perceived as an area of affluent residents. Some research participants highlighted these aspects in their statements:

So, I think I might be a completely different person from the others (interviewees) because, although it's a welcoming place, it's not the kind of audience I usually see in the places where I live. I think maybe it's because of the neighborhood a little... So, it's a completely different public, right?! It's a higher-income audience! Even because the beer has a higher cost. But at the same time, it's a welcoming audience. (Consumer 18).

In summary, as pointed out by some scholars in the field, there are sociocultural factors (Campbell, 2001) and classification patterns in the choice and consumption of goods (Douglas & Isherwood, 2004; Hall, 2005; McCracken, 2003), which can create mechanisms of discrimination. It is important to emphasize that such discriminatory classification assumes a differentiation between people and/or groups (Ramalho & Ayrosa, 2009). Consequently, the pursuit of social status by consumers is undeniable, highlighting the significant evocative power of the product, making it a meaningful and symbolic item (Ramalho & Ayrosa, 2009).

### *Taste as a Product of Technical Knowledge*

While the experience of frequenting the brewpub assumes a social distinction character, it also serves as a means for consumers to access products that align with their preferences, in order to maintain and refine their tastes. In fact, these observations are interconnected. The notion of



habitus is not solely based on distinction but refers to a complex system of socially established schemes and preferences.

Habitus also provides mechanisms to explain how individuals engage in particular practices in their daily lives (Holt, 1988). In practices involving sensory aspects, mastery is achieved through the development of evaluation systems, combining bodily senses with institutionally provided discourses (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2017).

On this matter, some consumers demonstrate an understanding of the brewing process. Notably, some of them even brew their own beer at home (Consumers 2, 8, 12, 21), emphasizing craft beer production as an activity that adds value to the beverage.

Craft beer always offers a different experience, right?! Every type of beer you try is a completely different experience, right?! It's... it's a sensory thing, isn't it?! There's no comparison with regular beers. You know there's an entire process behind it, right?! It's a craft product, there's almost a magic to it, a whole magic behind it, that's why it has quality. (Consumer 8).

When I like something, I want to know about it, I want to understand it, I want to dive deep into it. So I think beer gave me that. It's so much better to drink something when you know how it's made, what its composition is. (Consumer 21).

It can be noticed that many consumers effectively understand the beer styles that differentiate craft beer from industrial beer. This prior knowledge enables them to create opportunities for activities of experience-sharing. They report being able to distinguish between styles and flavor nuances.

Craft beer "hits" more on the palate, because it is more complex, you know? It's about the explosion of sensory notes like orange, cinnamon, and pepper. Traditional beer is more linked to the basic barley flavor, to the water they use. (Consumer 11).

[...] Lager beer is actually a difficult beer to make, even though people think otherwise. It's challenging to get it just right, to create a light, well-filtered beer with the necessary aromas and characteristic flavors of that beer style [...] (Consumer 12).

For these customers, the brewpub serves as a space where information exchanges regarding the peculiarities of taste are facilitated. The establishment has a WhatsApp group where the most frequent customers participate and exchange information with each other. Through this platform,

the establishment communicates the introduction of new beer styles. Additionally, customers suggest different beer labels, recommend food pairings with specific beer styles, and discuss various aspects of craft brewing. According to Consumer 2, the dynamics within the group help sustain an interest in craft beer and encourage shared practices. The messaging group fosters a sense of closeness between customers and the brewpub, strengthening connections among participants

Thus, the brewpub establishes itself as both a material and immaterial environment for sustaining the consumption and appreciation of craft beer. The "space", the environment assembled by the establishment is composed of individuals committed to expanding the craft beer market and influencing others to discover and appreciate it.

### *Main Activities for Taste Formation*

Another segment of consumers has been identified as being fundamentally influenced by the brewpub in their consumption of craft beers (Consumers 5, 6, 7, 15, and 18). These customers define their palates with relatively low levels of prior references on the subject. That is, while they can differentiate basic beer styles, their experiences are not (or were not, before frequenting the brewpub) deep enough to recognize nuances of flavors or aromas.

From this perspective, these consumers report their craft beer consumption experiences as being strictly linked to the pub. Although they had consumed craft beer before, the brewpub became a gateway to actively engaging in the practice, as it facilitated knowledge about the beverage and provided resources for them to create consumption practices based on taste formation.

I've been drinking beer for a long time. [...] You start trying different beers, and then they started having more distinct beers there... and you get into that vibe... it was cool! (Consumer 5).

Periodically, the establishment promotes beer brewing workshops and courses for consumers. These courses are aimed at individuals interested in entering the craft beer market, whether as producers or sommeliers. Many consumers specialize in brewing beer by adding specific sensory elements or recreating classic styles as part of the experience of participating in a

consumer subculture (Ponte & Suarez, 2017). Others take these courses to learn about the brewing process and identify elements that characterize beer quality. This is the case for Consumer 21, as she explains:

I don't take courses to brew beer. I take them to understand how it's made and to learn how to drink better! I've taken several courses. (Consumer 21).

In this aspect, the brewpub supports movements aimed at breaking the beer oligopoly in Brazil. Although encouraging homebrewing may run against local market control and allow greater autonomy in production and consumption, such activities serve as a political practice in which new consumption habits are being introduced, at least within the local context.

**Figure 2**

*Craft Beer Workshop Promoted by the Establishment*



Source: Brewpub management (2021).

The brewpub also seeks to reinforce a discourse supporting the strengthening of local commerce. During customer interactions, it is common to emphasize the craftsmanship involved in producing regional craft beer, the potential market value the sector can generate locally, and how beer production is interconnected with other sectors. The perception of the value of craft beer production was evident in several consumer statements (Consumers 3, 6, 9, 15, 16, 20). Additionally, brewpub employees frequently use material elements that reinforce the idea of

supporting local businesses (Gómez-Corona et al., 2016), which in turn encourages craft beer consumption.

Another aspect of taste formation is the operational procedure of the brewpub. For example, when a new customer enters the establishment, they are offered a tasting of the available house beers. Each sample comes with a brief explanation of the beer style, aromatic notes, and flavor nuances. Additionally, the customer is informed about the International Bitter Units (IBU), which measures hop content in the beer style, and Alcohol by Volume (ABV), which indicates the alcoholic strength of the beer.

Providing such information stimulates consumers' interest in expanding their knowledge of craft beer. Often, when this procedure is carried out, customers are surprised by the complexity and quality of beer characteristics. These insights are typically unfamiliar to industrial beer drinkers, making the tasting experience a first step toward a deeper understanding of the beverage.

Even for more experienced consumers, the brewpub follows a standard procedure of offering samples of newly introduced beers. This engagement with the establishment provides them a different perspective on the beer, enhancing their appreciation of what they consume. As Solomon (2004) suggests, there is a difference between those who like industrial beers, for example. That said, although consumers can opt for certain styles of beer, they are willing to pay for a distinct product, in terms of flavors, aromas and other aspects, as Ferreira et al. (2019) point out.

Carlos' reluctance in searching for new things, bringing in exciting things for the crowd, that's really cool, isn't it?! It stimulates people's desire to be in a place like this, to try new things, right?! To experience new flavors and new experiences! (Consumer 8).

It is observed that the brewpub engages in actions that contribute both to taste formation and its maturation. These aspects were particularly noted in the introduction of new products and the efforts behind these processes, which encourage the consumption of new labels with unconventional ingredients and/or brewing techniques.

#### *Other practices connected to consumption*

Although the brewpub welcomes a diverse clientele, a significant portion of its customers share common habits and practices. As described in previous sections, elements such as the

attribution of social status and the development of a more "refined" palate are directly linked to consumer practices, as some rituals extend beyond the mere act of consumption.

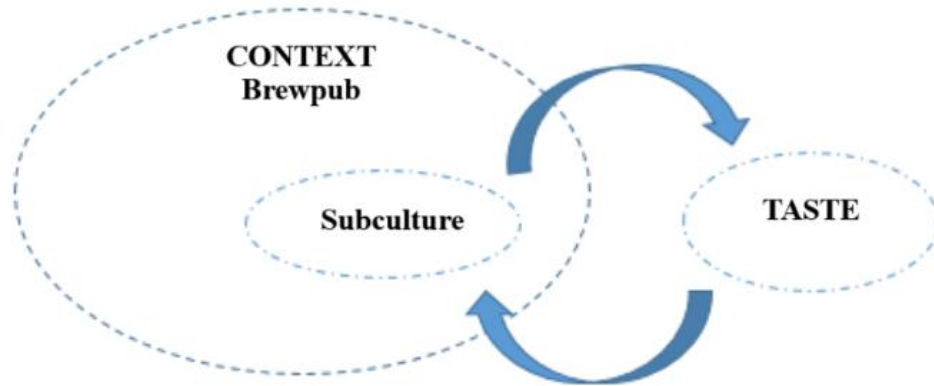
Specifically within the craft beer culture, consumers exchange information about beer styles, suggest new varieties to be tasted or sold by the establishment, participate in courses to enhance their knowledge of the beverage, create their own beer styles, and share their experiences with others. These characteristics collectively form a subculture influenced by the establishment. The combination of these elements and the space offered by the brewpub shapes distinct identity aspects, reinforcing them while also helping to establish the atmosphere of the venue.

The establishment's proposal to provide a space for social connections aligns with ones perception of the environment and the experiences shared in the context. The physical space contributes to taste formation activities, as it is perceived as a place for exchange. As highlighted by Castro, Rezende, and Brito (2021), physical spaces can be seen as appropriate settings for creating experiences, including aesthetic ones.

The consumption subculture identified in this specific context shares experiences, preferences, values, and other aspects that go beyond beer consumption itself. The appreciation for gourmet and artisanal products, for example, reflects the exchanges established among consumers within this subculture. This aspect was unanimously recognized in all interviews.

This subculture influences its members while also being shaped by external factors, such as the establishment itself, which directly contributes to taste formation and even its refinement. However, taste is not limited to beer consumption, considering that ritualistic practices, the attribution of meanings, and even the re-signification of symbols are collectively established within the group, as argued by McCracken (1986). The relationship between taste and subculture is a two-way street: as taste is formed, refined, and re-signified through new experiences, it also enables new exchanges within this subculture.

Figure 3 presents a simplified graphical representation aimed at illustrating the discussions and findings from previous sections. The circular representation highlights the continuity of these elements, while the dotted lines indicate the permeability of all these aspects. In summary, the findings suggest that a subculture has been established and strengthened within the brewpub. There is also a direct influence of the brewpub on taste formation—an influence that extends beyond the physical space of the venue and the beer itself.

**Figure 3***Graphical representation of thematic axes*

Source: Created by the authors (2024).

### Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how a brewpub, in a given local context, contributes to the formation of taste and the maintenance of a craft beer subculture. To achieve this, the research proposed to describe and characterize the brewpub while emphasizing the relationships established among consumers and their interactions with the space. Furthermore, it aimed to discuss how the identified subculture influences the formation and refinement of taste.

Results indicate that the brewpub fosters "eccentric" sensory experiences in the observed field through various elements, such as the beers produced, the spatial design, the music, the service, interpersonal experiences, and the exchange of information through different channels and individuals. The discourse and practices adopted by the brewpub reference Irish traditions, history, and aesthetics, which are legitimized by consumers. Additionally, it was observed that the preferences, choices, and desires of these consumers evoke sensory stimuli and assume shared meanings and symbolism, emerging from a common experience as visitors of the space.

The exchange of experiences forms a subculture influenced by the market segmentation of the brewpub and the consumers who integrate into this segment. Generally, the pub's actions reinforce the creation of bonds, maintenance of relationships, sharing of knowledge related to beer

production and consumption, and the familiarization of experiences within this context. The beer consumed at the brewpub provides a common foundation for consumers to interact, make judgments, share meanings, and find their place in the social world (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Koch & Sauerbronn, 2018).

This consideration is based on the understanding that this space is perceived as a location where cultural practices are expressed and as an environment where visitors identify with one another, as argued by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) regarding consumer subcultures. These practices manifest in different forms connected to craft beer consumption, grounded in the understanding of what constitutes a consumer subculture and taste formation. Regarding taste, it was observed that the consumer's aesthetic preference constitutes a hedonic, personal, and consistent response to their sensory experience with the aesthetic stimuli of consumption objects (Barcelos, 2015).

The limitations of this research are directly related to the choice of a case study, which does not allow for generalized arguments. The participants represent a small portion of the brewpub's visitors and maintain relationships among themselves, which may have led to significant common points in their statements. A more heterogeneous sample from a sociodemographic perspective, for example, could have provided different insights. However, in attempting to understand a consumer subculture, a broader view of the sample was preferred.

As suggestions for future studies, it would be relevant to conduct research emphasizing symbolic and identity aspects, particularly through studies on self-representation in the field of craft beer consumption. Furthermore, given the growing expansion of the craft beer market and its role in shaping more discerning consumers (Silva & Frizon, 2021), a deeper understanding of this sector's subjectivities through additional studies is recommended. Finally, it is suggested that future research explores discussions related to market segmentation and differentiation strategies, considering that these aspects could provide further insights into establishments like the one examined in this study.

**Authors' contribution**

Contribution	Cougo, J. S.	Araújo, E. T. T. de	Rezende, D. C. de
Conceptualization	X	---	---
Methodology	X	X	---
Software	---	---	---
Validation	---	---	---
Formal analysis	X	X	X
Investigation	X	X	---
Resources	X	---	---
Data Curation	X	X	X
Writing - Original Draft	X	X	X
Writing - Review & Editing	X	X	X
Visualization	X	X	X
Supervision	X	X	X
Project administration	X	---	---
Funding acquisition	---	---	---

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