

Co-designing strategic rituals in craft beer: churches, denominations, sects, and mystics

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This paper employs case study methodology to explore how strategic rituals around tasting flights (samples of a brewery's beers presented or served on a small rack or tray) are co-designed in the craft beer industry of the US Pacific Northwest. Drawing on the Sociology of Religion we employ the Church – Denomination - Sect – Mystic Typology to illustrate how ritual, symbolism, ceremony, and mythology are strategically co-designed by consumers and organizations through a process of 'joint inquiry and imagination' whereby 'problem and solution co-evolve'. Specifically, we examine the role of beer tasting flights as a particular type of co-designed strategic ritual that serves to contrast Denominations, who see their offerings as one religion among many, and therefore, use ritual to attract converts through active evangelization and reinforce brand communities, against economically dominant mass market Churches who seek to assert market supremacy and monopoly as the "one true faith. Additionally, we describe how Sects who arise as reactionary protest movements co-design strategic rituals to reconnect themselves and their consumers to the original foundational roots of a Church that has lost its authenticity; and Mystics who consciously seek to separate themselves from the mainstream by using ritual and ceremony to focus inward on the purity and piety of personal beliefs. Our findings have implications for designers and brand managers struggling in business marketplaces that are becoming increasingly oversaturated and where the powerful relationships engendered through co-designed strategic rituals may provide a route to increased customer loyalty and competitive advantage.

Keywords: *co-design; strategic design; ritual consumption; research through design*

1 Introduction

From the low lighting and slightly too loud music to the heavy metal influenced logos emphasizing skulls, swords, and flames with Viking rune-like type fonts, the Grains of Wrath Brewery in Portland, Oregon USA doesn't look or feel like many other award-winning craft beer breweries. Indeed, some critics see the brand as heretical to the family-friendly and inclusive image that the industry is trying to develop. However, other groups of consumers have come to strongly identify with the brewery precisely because of its counter-culture identity. These adherents feel a visceral, deep-rooted sense of connection to the brand and devotedly collect and proudly display fabric patches designed to



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publicize each new beer release on denim jackets as sacramental markers of their allegiance. This powerful, almost religious, relationship is what consumer culture theorists describe as ritualized consumption (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991; Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Vohs, Wang, Gino, and Norton, 2013). As many business marketplaces have become increasingly oversaturated and driven towards commoditization the concept of ritualized consumption has emerged as a potentially powerful method for organizations to imbue their products and services with distinctive meaning and value (O'Sullivan, Richardson, and Collins, 2011). However, academic discussions of ritual consumption in the business strategy literature have been largely dominated by anecdotal descriptions of the phenomena, such as Harley Davidson motorcycle "HOGs" Harley Owners Group communities developing rituals around stylized dress, aesthetic preferences, and language terminology (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002) or the Reebok CrossFit fitness community using sacramental language and purified workout spaces to mark and reinforce in-group membership (Kuuru and Narvanen, 2019). Close reading of these depictions reveals a common framing in the literature on ritualized consumption as arising somehow spontaneously and at random. This suggests that ritual consumption is a 'black box', where contextual conditions and consumer identity reveal very little about how and why these behaviors occur.

Accordingly, this exploratory paper seeks to provide a broader perspective of ritualized consumption by integrating this literature with the concept of strategic co-design (Sanders and Stappers, 2008); Described as a specific instance of co-creation practice that allows users to become part of the design team as 'experts of their experience' as well as the area of ritual design (Ozenc and Hagan, 2019), defined as the, "designing the actions that a person or group does repeatedly, following a similar pattern or script, in which they've imbued symbolism and meaning" (p. 234). Co-design involves a processes of close collaboration and value creation between users (e.g., consumers, customers, residents) and organizations, particularly during the ideation stage of a service design process (Patrício and Fisk 2013). Co-design appears to align with broader shifts in business strategy as described by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) where, "The meaning of value and the process of value creation are rapidly shifting from a product- and firm-centric view to personalized consumer experiences. Informed, networked, empowered and active consumers are increasingly co-creating value with the firm". Indeed, the phenomenon of ritualized consumption appears to provide an interesting example of co-design through what Bell (1997) portrays as an ongoing process of ritual "invention and re-invention" (p.223) within societies, cultures, and organizations, where rituals are purposefully and deliberately developed "together" (p.225). Ritual design draws on perspectives from the Sociology of Religion such as Smith and Stewart (2011) who identify a variety of interdependent functions of ritual, with a particular focus on the provision and maintenance of meaning. Ritual design provides a process-oriented view of how rituals can foster and maintain shared identity to unite consumers in a community, develop products and services that are able to engender deep emotional meaning, emphasize shared beliefs, and preserve and revivify group membership over time (O'Sullivan, Richardson, and Collins, 2011). Importantly, this literature also emphasizes that these behaviors do not arise by happenchance, are not necessarily innate to a given context, and do not arise ex nihilo, but rather are created collaboratively by religious or societal bodies and their community members (O'Sullivan, Richardson, and Collins, 2011). Accordingly, co-design would appear to be a useful lens to clarify how ritualized consumption allows consumers to cooperate with businesses as 'experts of their experience' to construct strategic rituals that support shared identity, unite consumers in a

community, help develop products and services that engender deep emotional meaning, emphasize shared beliefs, and preserve and revivify group membership.


Kapitany and Nielsen (2017) illustrate how rituals and ritualized consumption can be co-designed in their study where they provided consumer subjects with videotaped representations of fictitious, contrived, and causally opaque rituals and then surveying participant observers to assess their perceptions of the phenomenon. Their results demonstrated that despite the observer's lack of understanding of what they were seeing, participants perceived the rituals to be attention-grabbing, special, and important, and that viewing the rituals motivated viewers to fabricate complex meaning-making around what they saw. In addition, those rituals that appeared to include a greater number of steps, involved increased repetition, or were seen to be of higher sophistication or elaboration were seen to be more meaningful than simpler rituals. This appears to illustrate how the symbolic meaning of rituals is inherently subjective and is inherently co-designed by customers and an organization. Similarly, Levy (2015) employed a research-through-design (RtD) methodology (Zimmerman, Stolterman, and Forlizzi, 2010) where participants were provided with a selection of artifacts and asked to create a new and unique tea ceremony. Levy (2015) found that, "...through a few refining iterations, the team could reach very satisfying results, pointing out that the decisions on the ritual influenced the designing of artifact, and the other way around" (p. 10). This finding highlights the central role that physical artifacts, products, brands, and other element of an organization's design function may play in the deep emotional meaning co-designed into consumption rituals.

Building off these findings, our paper hopes to enlarge the conversation around ritualized consumption and co-design by grounding our discussion in the Sociology of Religion by offering an adaptation of Troeltsch's (1992) Church – Denomination - Sect – Mystic Typology (Steeman, 1975) as a structure to organize our exploratory case studies. This typology presents a continuum for how differing rituals, symbols, worship ceremonies, sacraments, and other elements of a religious belief system are developed and employed across different organizational structures, environmental conditions, and competitive positions (see Table 1). For our purposes the framework is a useful lens to contrast the highly- formalized, top-down practices of Churches, who emphasize tradition and orthodoxy, are resistant to change and seek to maintain hegemony and monopoly supremacy; from Denominations (Steeman, 1975), who view themselves as one religion or belief system among many in a broadly competitive marketplace and therefore must attract converts through vigorous evangelization; typically smaller niche Sects who see themselves as dissenters from a dominant Church that has somehow lost its way in order to position their organization and their adherents as outside the mainstream, yet possessing insight into the "true" and "correct" righteous path; and Mystics at the far end of the continuum who reject mainstream movements and consciously look inward to the cultivation of a personal spiritual life of "purity" and "piety" without much regard for the normative tradition of an original Church.

Further, our cases focus on the specific role of ritual in the Typology by following Rue (2005) who describes these actions as concrete, "... acts of repeated behavior, that engages individuals or groups in the meanings of a religious myth, and/or that facilitates a religious experience, such as prayers, pilgrimages, fasting, feasting, singing, dancing, chanting, and kneeling". These rituals serve to to clarify a culture, society, or organization's beliefs through symbolism, cosmological explanations, and interpretations; signaling group acceptance of values; and validating the importance of the activity.

Additionally, we use Ozenc and Hagan (2019) to describe the various outcome goals and benefits commonly associated with rituals such as Community; using ritual to help one feel connected to the group; the heightening of awareness and Intentionality in ways that make ritual different from habit or routine; and the role of ritual in Support of spirituality by being open to the irrational and the emotional.

Table 1. Analytical Framework for Strategic Rituals Across Churches, Denominations, Sects, and Mystics

Elements of Strategic Rituals (Rue, 2011)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Narratives, Stories, and Myths to provide meaning and manage anxiety • Experiential and Emotional rites of passage and renewal • Institutional Control Systems reinforcing social order and defining inclusion/exclusion 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectual Doctrine to enhance group solidarity and facilitate sense making • Aesthetic Symbols conveying important values and signaling commitment 	
			
Church	Denomination	Sect	Mystic
<p>Claim universality and have a strong tendency to equate "citizenship" with "membership". Work strenuously to exercise religious monopoly and try to eliminate religious competition. Extensively organized as a top-down hierarchical bureaucratic institution with complex division of labor. (Steeman, 1975)</p>	<p>Lies between the church and the sect on the continuum. Denominations come into existence when churches lose their religious monopoly in a society. A denomination recognizes that they are one religion among many– representing brand pluralism. Rely primarily on birth for membership, although it will also accept converts; some actively pursue evangelization. (Steeman, 1975)</p>	<p>Newly formed religious group that typically emerges as a dissent or protest element within its parent religion-- motivation tends to be situated in accusations of apostasy or heresy in the parent denomination or church; they often decry liberal trends in denominational development and advocate a return to so-called "true" religion. When sect formation involves social class distinctions, they may also reflect an attempt to compensate for deficiencies in lower social status. (Steeman, 1975)</p>	<p>In contrast to hierarchical/ organized Churches, Mystical movements are splinter movements associated with the divine elements of the individual, "chosen few" or "true self". Focus is on transcendent, spiritual, ephemeral and loosely organized doctrines. Exceptions arise when Mystics are centered around a significant relationship with a "divine" founder or founders. (Steeman, 1975)</p>
Outcomes of Strategic Rituals (Ozenc and Hagan, 2019)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community by helping one feel connected to the group • Heightening of Intentionality in ways that make a ritual different from routine • Support of spirituality by being open to the irrational and the emotional 			

2 Research methodology

The context we have chosen for this exploratory study is the craft beer industry of the Pacific Northwest of the USA. The craft beer industry has frequently been described using quasi-religious language, such as when Papazian (2017) pronounced that, “the term ‘independent’ helps define the essence of true craft brewers... [it] is about establishing a vision for a company that is rooted in beliefs and values”; as the righteous standard-bearer of the ‘David’ artisanal revolution vying against the ‘Goliath’ of globalist capitalism and as an exemplar of American’s search for rootedness and sense of belonging which has, “spawned a cultural countercurrent of ‘neolocalism’” (Flack, 1997 p. 38); and how craft beer drinkers themselves are a, “self-conscious religious community” of “self-styled experts” (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000). We propose that this marketplace context provides a uniquely appropriate setting for our study of the co-design of strategic rituals by craft breweries and their customers within the Church – Denomination - Sect – Mystic Typology for three key reasons; Firstly, since the mid-1980s the number of craft breweries in the USA has increased dramatically (Elzinga, Horton, and Tremblay, 2015), this creates a highly-competitive environment that forces breweries to find ways to differentiate themselves from rivals. Secondly, while the locus of this competition had traditionally centered around the beer itself as brewers strived to emphasize the quality, purity, flavors, and styles of their offerings increasingly consumers are attracted to products that reflect their values, lifestyle, and personality by offering diversity authenticity, creativity, and individualism (Gomez-Corona, Escalona-Buendía, García, Chollet, and Valentin, 2016). Third, this causes beers and breweries to devise ways to foster strong feelings of loyalty and attachment among consumers although the industry is characterized by the powerful influence of peer-level recommendations of friends, rather than traditional marketing promotions or advertising methods (McCluskey and Shrey, 2011). Within this competitive landscape, the term “craft brewery” has emerged as a righteous totem to represent smaller and independent organizations that deploy traditional production processes, as opposed to the industrial practices of larger macro breweries (Gatrell, Reid, and Steiger, 2018). For these reasons, we propose that craft breweries provide an appropriate setting for what Yin (1994) describes as an extreme case, suggesting that it may benefit from qualitative case study methodology in order to build theory for wider generalization.

More formally, our paper presents a series of exploratory case studies offering illustrations of how the craft beer tasting flight represents the strategic co-design of ritualized consumption practices within a Church and Denomination [Widmer Brothers Brewing], a Sect [Oakshire Brewing], and a Mystic [Cascade Brewing]. These illustrations broadly frame the craft brewery marketplace from the perspective of the Church – Denomination - Sect – Mystic Typology (Steeman, 1975), with a particular focus on the co-designed ritual of a beer tasting flight using Rue’s (2011) models of religio-cultural “strategies” (p. 125) made up of: Core Narratives, Stories, and Myths; Experiential and Emotional; Institutional Control Systems; Intellectual Doctrine; and Aesthetic Symbols (see Table 2). Beer tasting flights are based on the increasingly popular menu type, the tasting menu which derives its name from the French term *degustation*, referring to a stylized collection of small portions. Tasting menus and beer flights provide consumers with a range of offerings (typically between six and ten) that are intended to showcase the types of cuisine or beers offered by the chef or brewer (Barabon and Durocher, 2010). A key element of tasting flights is the interplay between the producing organization and the consumer to create the experience and prevent it from becoming an unmemorable (or worse still, potentially bewildering) progression of the chef or brewer’s greatest hits (Spence and Piqueras-

Fizman, 2014). Tasting flights are a clear example of participatory design (Sanders and Stappers, 2008), where consumers act as ‘experts of their experience’ and their active participation is required to define the beers or dishes to be included in the tasting sequence as well as contribute their intellectual and emotional engagement. For example, Opazo (2012) describes the famous tasting menu at the famous restaurant El Bulli with over 49 courses (many that require patrons to inhale flavored smoke, crack candied quail eggs into soup, and break crab shells with special mallets) that stretches for more than 6 hours. These experiences appears to closely align with depictions of ritual design (Ozenc and Hagan, 2019), where consumers engage with producers as, “designing the actions that a person or group does repeatedly, following a similar pattern or script, in which they’ve imbued symbolism and meaning” (p. 234). However, as Sanders (2006) importantly observes, because of the active role played by consumers themselves in co-creating the symbolism and meaning associated with strategic rituals, their motivations, enthusiasm, and engagement in the experience can vary widely. Accordingly, an emphasis of our case studies is to highlight the differing levels of participatory design identified by Sanders (2006) from Doing (consumers motivated by productivity or getting a job done), Adapting (motivated by appropriation or ‘making something their own’), Making (motivated by assertion, ability, and skill), and Creating (motivated by inspiration and expressing individual creativity). These different levels of consumer co-design within the strategic rituals of craft breweries further reinforces that the case study methodology is an appropriate lens from which to build theory within a context. As Spinuzzi (2005) describes co-design is, “... situated in complex artifacts, practices, interactions which are essentially interpretive, and therefore cannot be deconstructed, decontextualized, broken into discrete elements, not totally optimized”.

Table 2. Beer Tasting Flights as an Artifact of Strategic Rituals Across Churches, Denominations, Sects, and Mystics



Church	Denomination	Sect	Mystic
<p>“This is the tasting flight.”</p> <p>The tasting flight ritual is fixed, invariable, and predefined by the brewery to showcase their ‘best’ beers. Emphasis is on top-down formalized structure to highlight the ‘correctness’ of the offerings and attention is paid to instructing consumers as to recognizing the ‘right’ flavors in differing types of beer. Consumers are offered no choice other than prescribed options (e.g., IPA Flight India Pale Ale, Double IPA, Triple IPA, New England</p>	<p>“The tasting flight is how we express ourselves.”</p> <p>The tasting flight ritual provides a stage to demonstrate the brewery’s skills, expertise, and creativity to reinforce differentiation from competitors and attract customers. Because consumers are assumed to be familiar/ highly educated about beer and understood to have many brewery choices available to them tasting flights are strategically employed to deliver variety and whimsy. Broad product</p>	<p>“Create your own tasting experience.”</p> <p>The tasting flight ritual is a vehicle for consumers to curate their own experience with the brewery’s offerings. Reflecting the original intentions of tasting menus as a method to expose consumers to the variety of beer styles and varieties available in accessible serving sizes. Tastings are exploratory and consumers are free to select the beers they wish to make up the flight. Tasting flights represent a democratizing force and rejection of perceived</p>	<p>“We don’t even offer tasting flights.”</p> <p>The tasting flight ritual is defined by its absence. The constraints of a preordained listing of beers to be tasted, the conventional sequence of tasting (e.g., darker beers to lighter beers), and the implied obligation to try a defined number of beers to “finish” a tasting is rejected and seen to be false. Consumers are invited to purchase as many tasting-sized samples as they would like, but there is no formal structure or defined organizational role in directing the</p>

IPA or Oktoberfest Flight: Marzen, Festbier, Schwarzbier, Rauchbier). Physical elements of the tasting flight experience are standardized and strongly communicate the branding and identify of the brewery.

lines of typically small-batch, limited release beers made up of many fermenting styles, ingredients, and flavor profiles are offered to consumers. Physical artifacts of the tasting experience are designed to be visually appealing and provide memorable and engaging experiences (encouraged to be shared on social media).

overly autocratic denominational and Church tasting flight structures. The organization does not presume to hold the answers or proscribe a 'correct' way of acting or belief. Physical elements of the experience are idiosyncratic, highly original and evocative of the brand personality of the brewery.

experience. Emphasis is on respecting the preferences of the consumer. Breweries choose not cater to fads/trends in their offerings, nor do they pander to consumers with gimmicky limited-time or seasonal offerings. Physical artifacts of tastings are no different than any other type of consumption experience at the brewery.

Role of Consumer in Ritual Co-Creation (Sanders, 2006): To be Led by the organization at the Doing level of productivity, getting a job done.

Role of Consumer in Ritual Co-Creation (Sanders, 2006): To be Guided by the organization at the Adapting level of appropriating or making something their own.

Role of Consumer in Ritual Co-Creation (Sanders, 2006): To be Scaffolded by the organization at the Making level of demonstrating individual skill/expertise.

Role of Consumer in Ritual Co-Creation (Sanders, 2006): To be provided a Clean Slate by the organization at the Creating level of inspiration/ self-expression

2.1 Case study I. Widmer Brothers Brewing (Denomination)



Figure 1. Widmer Brewing Company headquarters - Portland, Oregon.JPG, used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic.

Founded in 1984, at the infancy of the movement, Widmer Brothers Brewing of Portland, Oregon USA played a pivotal role in the early growth of craft beer (Maltby, 2020). Indeed, many of the central Core Narratives, Stories, and Myths that become commonplace to distinguish “craft” from previously dominant big beer Churches were developed by Kurt and Rob Widmer. Widmer Brothers Brewery pioneered the Intellectual Doctrine that became common to craft breweries including an emphasis on intellectual culture and the appreciation of small-scale and handmade artisanal production methods, and tradition (Fillis, 2012). These elements of Doctrine largely provided the foundation for much of the founding mythology of what would evolve into the American craft beer movement. The large-scale standardized producers who controlled the US beer industry since the mid-1980s closely resemble the depictions of Churches in the Steeman (1975) typology with their emphasis on tradition and orthodoxy, hierarchical structures, strong resistance to change, and desires to seek and maintain hegemony and monopoly supremacy. The typical product offered by these Churches was a light lager beer (Elzinga, Tremblay, and Tremblay, 2015), so when Widmer Brothers introduced an Hefeweizen, an unfiltered wheat beer it was a radical departure for the marketplace. However, unlike German wheat beers, which had a slight flavor of bananas and cloves, the Widmer recipe produced a less noticeable aftertaste. Thereby, the brewery instrumentalized the Core Narrative and Doctrine of craft beer that paired traditional ingredients and artisanal methods with innovative recipes. Additionally, Widmer employed Aesthetic Symbols to further distinguish the meaning and value of their products (and customers) from the offerings of “regular” beer such as choosing to leave their Hefeweizen beer unfiltered (not removing the wheat proteins and yeast particles common to that style of beer) causing it to have a distinctive cloudy, golden hazy appearance that when served with a lemon wedge was instantly recognizable and entirely unlike anything else on the market at the time. These behaviors seem to align Widmer with depictions in literature of Denominations (Steeman, 1975), who view themselves as one religion or belief system among many in a broadly competitive marketplace and therefore must attract converts through vigorous evangelization. To further proselytize themselves and their offerings to customers, Widmer made the decision to house their brewery in two adjoining historic buildings in Portland that were slated for demolition. This facility became emblematic of the values of the brewery and reinforced the role of ritual in the brewery’s Support of Spirituality by being open to the irrational and the emotional that was strongly embraced by their customers. The century-old Italianate and Romanesque Revival brickwork and cast-iron storefront was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which made renovation costs of the building significantly higher than constructing a new brewing facility, but embodied the craft, tradition, artisanal values of the organization. These actions concretized the symbolism and ceremony around the offerings that co-created Intentionality with their customers in ways that made the ritual of drinking Widmer beer different from habit or routine. Because customers could only find Widmer’s products in bars, restaurants, and other public spaces consumption of the beer was imbued with deeply emotional meaning of Community, solidarity and fellowship that emphasized the shared beliefs held by customers and the brewery, revived group membership over time and strongly reinforced belonging to the Widmer ‘tribe’ (Maltby, 2020).



Figure 2 Widmer Brewing tasting flight.JPG, used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic.

“This is the tasting flight.”

However, perhaps even more interestingly, Widmer Brother Brewery is also an example of how seemingly vibrant and successful Denominations may unwittingly become ossified and dogmatic in their beliefs, engendering the very same type of reactions that they had to the domineering Churches that they initially decried. An illustration of this evolution can be found in the strategic ritual of the brewery’s tasting flight. As the organization grew and matured Widmer Brothers Brewery became a victim of their own successes; their beers were showered with awards and the brewery received adulation in the popular press. Craft beer-seeking tourists to Portland Oregon knew that their visits would not be complete without a pilgrimage to Widmer Brothers Brewery. Perversely, the Denomination was so effective at attracting converts that the historic Italianate brewpub quickly became overcrowded. In the late 2010’s a shift was made to streamline operations and serve as many customers as possible to change tasting flights from a loose, easy-going, free-for-all reflecting the original Core Narrative of the brewery to a standardized structure offering only three pre-defined samplers centered on the different styles of beer offered by the brewery: IPAs, Hefeweizens, and Lager/ Pilsners ((Meunier, 2019). While this decision aligns with what Smart (1996) describes as the instrumental function of rituals as a pedagogical device for instructing less knowledgeable or novice adherents as to “correct” courses of action and to reinforcing beliefs. Widmer appeared to be employing the tasting flights ritual from Sanders’ (2006) perspective in the Role of Consumer in Ritual Co-Creation as to be autocratically Led and by the designer of the ritual in an instrumental educational experience. However, an unforeseen consequence of the brewery leading consumers through the tasting flights ritual was that the experience lost the Heightening of Intentionality previously embedded in the experience. By standardizing the ritual, stripping the co-designed interactive elements out of the experience, making tastings feel regimented and monotonously the same for each and every customer the tasting flights lost all Experiential and Emotional value. Indeed, despite the pioneering success of the brewery the decision was made to close the historic Widmer pub in 2019. “Widmer closed the tasting room because it couldn’t turn a profit there’, said Kevin Bland, Widmer’s

local marketing manager... ‘with so many breweries and tap rooms in Portland now, the competition is fierce’, he said... ‘We see where things are opportunities, and we see when things are a challenge’, Bland said. ‘Widmer as a brand, we’re doing fine. ... But the future of craft is that everybody is adapting’” (Meunier, 2019). The loss of Denominational authenticity of Widmer Brothers Brewery embodied in the decision to standardize their tasting flight ritual contributed to the emergence of new factional Sects in the brewery marketplace. These new breweries accused the established order of failing to uphold the “true” beliefs of craft beer. Motivated by a return to the pure roots of the movement breweries, such as Oakshire Brewing, employed the co-designed strategic ritual of the tasting flight in new ways to democratize the experience and reflect new values of community, connection, and independence.

2.2 Case study II. Oakshire Brewing (Sect)



Figure 3. Oakshire Taps.JPG, used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic.

As Widmer Brothers Brewery was shedding their Denominational roots and increasingly taking on the form and behavior of a Church through a merger with Redhook Ale Brewery, Inc. of Seattle, Washington USA (of which 25% was owned by big beer behemoth Anheuser-Busch) to create the publicly traded stock market corporation of the Craft Brew Alliance (CBA) a variety of Sect breweries emerged decrying this trend and advocating to a return to the “pure” foundations of craft beer. These new breweries accused Widmer, and many other original pioneers of the industry, of apostasy. According to Hindy (2014) the partnership between Widmer and Redhook earned the company vitriolic scorn from their peers, referring to the alliance as “Budhook” (a derisive combination of the Anheuser Bush brand “Bud”-weiser and Red “hook”).

An example of these new Sects is Oakshire Brewing of Eugene, Oregon USA., the brewery is centered on a founding myth of strength, independence, and community for a blue-collar post-industrial town that had lost its way. The area farming community that had been the heart of the community were

failing, and the citizens of Eugene, Oregon increasingly looked elsewhere for a sense of place and meaning. Founded by two brothers, who's informal homebrewing had quickly outgrown Jeff's kitchen and garage with an operation that was so large it was technically illegal, disillusioned with the cynically inauthentic established brewery institutions around them. In Oakshire the brothers consciously set out to set out to build a small, protest brand around their amber ale (far from the most popular style at the time) and to focus on creating local jobs built upon the joy of creation and community.

The Oakshire Sect grew out of a commitment to a set of core principles and values in stark rejection of Churches, as well as the Denominations that surrounded them. The organization was established with no consideration of a market orientation or desire for financial success as well as a strong distrust of the prevailing business principles of the craft beer industry. The brewers were adamant that, in contrast to the impure motivations of competitors, they would return to the core principles of Oregon craft beer created with four simple ingredients (water, malted barley, hops and yeast). Initially, the brothers even gave away their beer for free, which only increased their popularity among the homebrewing community. Indeed, mirroring the behavior of splinter religious movements, they began passing around a collection plate (or pint glass) for donations. Rather than expensive, commercially produced tap handles the owners provided bars and restaurants with rough, handmade dispensers that had their logo burnt into the wood to show stress and resilience, plus survival. While Widmer Brothers Brewing and other larger Denominations around them changed ingredients to make their products more shelf stable (and thereby easier to sell through retail channels), Oakshire experimented with fruit purees, whiskey barrels, dark malts, and citrus infusions in the West Coast IPA. Oakshire actually reduced its geographic footprint and told its disciples they must come to the brewery so "they could taste the beer at its peak perfection" (Korn, 2016). The organization embodied their Intellectual Doctrine of, "Humble brewers of delicious beer" who would rather make a fragile beer that would spoil quickly than a shelf stable beer that was more profitable. In these ways, Oakshire represents the conceptualization of Sect formation enmeshed with social class distinctions that both reinforces their own purity and embraced their lower social and economic status relative Churches and Denominations.



Figure 4. Oakshire flight.JPG, used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic.

“Create your own tasting experience.”

The tasting flight at Oakshire Brewing is marked by an absence of formalism and structure. Consumers actively participate by co-designing their ritual of ‘rites of passage’ which enables an individual to transition from one state, through a ‘liminal stage’, and toward a new state or identity (Schouten, 1991). Rituals of rites of passage are a feature of many traditional societies where a person must consciously leave behind or break with some old identity (typically childhood) in order to transition to a new, preferred position or role (Schouten, 1991). In contrast to the stale, standardized rituals of Widmer and other Denominations and Churches, Sects such as Oakshire saw their tasting flights as a ritual of journey of transformation. The tasting flight is not prescriptive or imposed upon a consumer; There is no one, single “correct” course or any hierarchical structure imposed. Each ritualized interaction is unique to each consumer as they progress through their journey of learning about craft beer; “Talk to a bartender, discuss what you like and what you’d like to try, what have you never tried before? what is new and what is different?” Consumers are free to choose as many, or as few, tasting as they’d like to try in each flight. Each curated tasting flight comes with a handwritten note from the brewery employee setting out the beers on sample. This personal touch to the brewery’s Aesthetic Symbols echoes what Levy (2015) found in that interactions with physical artifacts significantly impacts the value and meaningfulness perceived in a ritual. These rich and complex interactions reflect the stark contrast Sects perceive in their offerings relative the oppressive state of Denominations or Churches. The return to the pure roots of craft beer support what Ozenc and Hagan (2019) describe as the strategic benefits of rituals such as Community; using ritual to help one feel connected to the group; the heightening of awareness and Intentionality in ways that make ritual different from habit or routine; and the role of ritual in Support of spirituality by being open to the irrational and the emotional. Further, the co-design of these strategic rituals appears to align with broader shifts in business strategy as described by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) from a product- and firm-centric view of value creation to personalized consumer experiences empowered by consumers Guided by designers or an organization to demonstrate their individual skill/ expertise and make something their own (Sanders, 2006).

2.3 Case study III. Cascade Brewing (Mystic)



Figure 5. Cascade Barrels.jpg, used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic.

Completing Troeltsch's (1992) Typology are Mystic breweries who reject mainstream movements, fads, and trends to consciously look inward to the cultivation of a personal spiritual life. Cascade Brewing of Portland, Oregon USA appears to be an example of a dissenting splinter doctrine guided by rejection of orthodoxy in favor of transcendent, spiritual, ephemeral, and loosely organized structures. Started by a disillusioned brewer who had previously founded a successful Denominational brewery, initially Cascade's offerings were traditional ales like what you would find at any craft brewery. The owners, "...followed the trends of traditional ales and were growing tired of what they referred to as the 'hops arms race' of ever-hoppier beers, especially in the Northwest. Cascade rejected these styles and wanted to focus instead on beers that they themselves preferred offering an intense sensory experience other than hops" (Maltby, 2020). By intentionally prioritizing the Emotional and Experiential qualities of their offerings as well as seeking a way to separate themselves from the larger herd of craft beer, the result was a shift in focus to the production of a markedly un-commercial variety of craft beer; creating its own "Northwest Sour Ales."

As such, Cascade sought to differentiate itself, although not by returning to a purer form of tradition as a Sect, but by following an idiosyncratic path that embraced a unique Pacific Northwest identity combined with artisanal methods of sour beer production. "We're not bound by stylistic guidelines, just our own imagination and the ingredients we can access" (Maltby, 2020). Unlike Denominations who are primarily interested in organizing themselves to attract consumers in order to evangelize and grow, Cascade Brewing operates like a Mystic who looks internally to their own motivations without regard for popular acceptance; in this case by seeking to connect with the local Oregon environment (e.g. local fruit orchards, barrels from neighboring wineries, etc.) in an effort to cultivate authenticity. By relying heavily on Aesthetic Symbols such as the wine barrels and 750ml cork and cage bottles, Cascade intentionally establishes an image and identity as a brewery that offers something other than the IPA's consumers have come to expect.



Figure 6. Cascade Barrel House tasters.jpg, used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic

“We don’t even offer tasting flights.”

A clear example of the Mystic’s conscious rejection of convention is found in Cascade Barrel House eschewing of the tasting flight ritual completely. Mystics deem that true belief is only achievable through individual contemplative self-reflection. The imposition of any structure (stipulating that tasting be made up of six exact beers, tasted in a particular sequence, made up of gimmicky or fad beers) on that quest for enlightenment would be anathema to their philosophies. Accordingly, Cascade does not offer tasting flights. Consumers are invited to taste as many samples they would like, but there is no formal structure or defined organizational role in orchestrating the experience. Emphasis is on supporting the consumer on their spiritual exploration of craft beer. The Aesthetic Symbols of tastings are no different than any other type of consumption experience at the brewery. This co-design ritual structure (or lack thereof) reflects Sanders (2006) view of the role of consumers to be provided a Clean Slate by designers or an organization, allowing them freedom for inspiration/self-expression.

However, importantly, this is not to say that Mystics such as Cascade Barrel House are devoid of strategic rituals. Indeed, at a weekly event at the brewery termed ‘Tap It Tuesdays’ the bartenders unfurl massive tarps covering the bar and all the neatly stacked glassware, palpable excitement grows as the crowd congregates closer and closer to the bar, where a few of elected consumers are handed a huge wooden mallet and a wooden handled a tap. Using these implements imbued with powerful meaning and symbolism the consumers themselves hammer the taps into this week’s varietal; a barrel of a beer called “Manhattan,” a blend of aged sour ales designed to imitate the flavor profile of a Manhattan cocktail. As the consumers clumsily, yet joyfully, pound the taps into the barrels a shared cheer erupts from the crowd and beer sprays the gathered followers until the tap is eventually secured in place. Laughter and applause ring out mingled with the smell of acidic, fruity beer. The first two glasses of the newly tapped barrel are ceremoniously presented to the two consumers and only then is a beer given to the brewer, the bartenders, and shared with the rest of the assembly. Once the excitement dies down towels and buckets of water are passed around for the entire group of consumers and brewery staff to help clean the pub as they enjoy a unique beverage provided through a ritual experience that could not be found anywhere else. Undeniably this vignette captures what O’Sullivan, Richardson, and Collins (2011) describe as the performative value of rituals to foster and maintain shared identity to unite consumers in a community, develop products and services that can engender deep emotional meaning, emphasize shared beliefs, and preserve and revivify group membership over time. Additionally, this appears to echo Kapitany and Nielsen (2017) who found that those rituals that included a greater number of steps, involved increased repetition, or were seen to be of higher sophistication or elaboration were seen to be more meaningful than simpler rituals. A key element of this strategic ritual is the breaking down of the brewery staff-consumer paradigm itself; Consumers are invited behind the bar, to touch and experience the product before even the staff does. The customers join the brewers and bartenders on the other side of the bar and take the responsibility for the product into their own hands. This co-designed ritual communicates a Core Narrative of the Mystic: the sour beers of Cascade Brewing are not the unique or sole purview of a separate or distinct class of high-priesthood experts who control every detail. The shared experience of ritualized consumption, as described in Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) and Bonsu and Belk (2003) razes these artificial barriers in order to provide what Ozenc and Hagan (2019) to cultivate Community; using ritual to help one feel connected to the group; heightening Intentionality in ways that make the ‘Tap it

Tuesdays' ritual vividly different from habit or routine; and the role of ritual in Support of spirituality by being open to the irrational and the emotional, and downright messy.

3 Conclusions and discussion

This study describes the co-design of strategic rituals by craft breweries and their customers from the perspective of the Sociology of Religion to present an exploratory discussion of the role played by ritual in firm strategy and value creation. Strategic rituals in general, and our chosen context of craft brewery tasting flights specifically, appear to present a fertile context for investigating aspects of new product and service development including the impact of lead users (von Hippel, 1986), open innovation (West and Bogers, 2014), and what has been broadly termed the fuzzy front end of innovation (Sanders, 2006). Indeed, the potentially powerful benefits of co-design illustrated in strategic rituals may represent a new and novel conceptualization of using collaboration, gameplay, participatory design, and the voice of the customer in product and service development (Brandt, 2001; Binder, Brandt, Halse, Foverskov, and Olander, 2011). Additionally, our view of ritual co-design appears to align with an ongoing shift to portray strategic design as a process for capturing, codifying, understanding, and translating user needs into value for an organization (Borja de Mozota and Kim, 2009; Veryzer and Borja de Mozota, 2005), rather than the more hierarchical view of design as 'problem-solving'. More specifically, strategic design management characterizes how design translates overall firm strategy into distinctive elements of an organization's products and services such as aesthetics, shape, material, texture, color, as well as the more holistic 'meaning making' of offerings that helps them stand out from those of rivals (Verganti and Oberg 2013). Strategic ritual co-design would seem to be a particularly powerful type of strategic design management focused on imbuing products and services with meaning and value derived from strategic rituals co-created alongside consumers. For example, as Apple Chief Designer Jonathan Ive argued, "Steve (Jobs) and I spent a lot of time talking about the packaging ... Users love the process of un-packing something. You design a ritual of unpacking to make the product feel special. Packaging can be theater. It can create a story" (Isaacson, 2011, p. 451). Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel (2006) suggest that brand strategists should focus on telling stories that inspire and captivate consumers to engage them with the brand and the brand narrative that underlies them. Ritual consumption appears to provide an opportunity to provide 'brand poetics' (Ooi, 2004) that present a unique and engaging brand stories that enable consumers to make sense of and actively participate in their consumption experiences.

Our case studies using Troeltsch's (1992) Church – Denomination - Sect – Mystic Typology (Steeman, 1975) demonstrate that craft breweries act in ways similar to religions as they seek to engage consumers in a complex co-design process that employs a variety of underlying "strategies" of ritual, symbolism, and ceremony including Core Narratives, Stories, and Myths; Experiential and Emotional; Institutional Control Systems; Intellectual Doctrine; and Aesthetic Symbols in order to create meaning and value. As Johnson (1992) describes, rituals provide the foundation for cultures and societies to create shared meaning through "strategies", "without which people would have to 'reinvent their world for different experiences that they face" (p.199). Further, we show how the form and structure of these co-designed strategic rituals vary according to a brewery's marketplace position; from Churches who offer set, prescribed rituals focused on instructing consumers in the "correct" way of acting, to Denominations who view ritual as a strategic tool to differentiate themselves from competitive rivals; splinter Sects that denounce the oppressive structure and orthodoxy of Churches

as well as Denominations to offer consumers efficacy in their “pure” ritual consumption; to Mystics who consciously reject the very edifice of tasting flights to embrace inward-focused self-reflection and community building through alternative strategic rituals. These findings may be helpful for both designers looking to justify the importance of rituals as an element of their organization’s competitive strategies as well as academics interested in building theory around contextual examples of participatory design in practice—particularly as ‘design’ shifts from an emphasis on design-led projects, products, and artifacts to co-designed services, experiences, and transformations (Pine and Gilmore, 2011).

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