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A sociocultural approach to craft beer production and consumption

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Abstract

This research attempts to examine, from an anthropological perspective, not a specific organization, but the craft beer market's institutional dynamics, namely its communication actions, which reflect the development of a craft beer culture. Limited to Rio de Janeiro, this study draws upon Anthropology of Consumption in order to assess the meanings and senses of craft beer in Rio de Janeiro as well as how brand positioning dialogues with specific values and behaviors of Rio de Janeiro's culture. By forging a beer culture, the craft beer market is playing a crucial role in developing this culture's material dimension, which can be perceived from three different standpoints: learning, sociability, and identity. This research focuses on the identity stance so as to make sense of local craft breweries' actions, behaviors, and gestures and how they serve to define a Carioca identity, around which they position their brands.

Keywords: Craft beer culture, culture's materiality, craft beer consumption, brand positioning.

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1. Introduction

This study sheds light on a rather recent phenomenon, simultaneously with economic, social, and cultural features. We refer to the promotion of a beer culture in Brazil by specific institutions and social actors, so as to stimulate the development of a fast-growing market in the country: craft beer.

In Brazil, the world's third largest beer producer, in 2013 overall beer production decreased for the first time since 2005 (Associação Brasileira da Indústria da Cerveja, 2014). However, if we consider only the craft beer segment, the growth is outstanding. It has already generated over US\$700 million a year in sales (Antunes, 2015) and expanded an average of 36% per year from 2011 to 2014 (Bouças, 2015). In 2015, craft beers already amounted to 1% of total sales and they may double their share by 2020 (Malta & Bouças, 2015).

Growth potential is indeed remarkable. In the United States the craft beer industry, which has been developing since the 1970s (Hindy, 2014), already accounts for over 108,000 jobs, 6.5% of the total volume produced, and 10.2% of total beer sales (Antunes, 2015). In fact, the Brazilian phenomenon reproduces the American movement in a number of aspects. Firstly, imports introduced Brazilian consumers to craft beer, as in the United States (Hindy, 2014). Moreover, craft breweries from both countries make extensive use of local ingredients (Hieronymus, 2016), giving birth to new styles and a subsequent vertical integration (local barley, wheat and hop production). Companies from these countries are remarkable innovators: as their American counterparts, Brazilian craft brewers reinterpreted the India Pale Ale (IPA) style, with an emphasis on bitterness, giving hops a celebrity status. As a result, several IPA spin-offs are now available, e.g., double-hopped IPA and Imperial IPA. However, their innovation transcends styles and recipes and also encompasses the conception of unusual equipment, e.g., Randall, a device that infuses the beer with flavor-enhancing ingredients (Calagione, 2011). Furthermore, craft breweries are making more use of metal cans instead of the more expensive glass bottles. Finally, some companies from both countries have similar marketing techniques, adamantly differentiating craft beers from mass-produced competitors (Koch, Wagner, & Clemens, 2011).

This research attempts to examine, from an anthropological perspective, not a specific organization, but rather the craft beer market's institutional dynamics, namely its

communication actions, which reflect the development of a craft beer culture. This study is limited to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's second-largest economy and, therefore, representative of the country's metropolitan areas. Moreover, from 2013 to 2015, Rio de Janeiro state presented the most outstanding growth rate in the number of small breweries – 138% – in comparison with other Brazilian states (Zobaran & Rosa, 2015), as illustrated in Chart 1. Mondial de la Bière, the greatest event dedicated to craft beer in Brazil, registered a 585% increase in brands from Rio de Janeiro state in just three years (Zobaran, 2015).

[Chart 1]

Our analysis draws upon the so-called Anthropology of Consumption, an approach which, since the beginning of the 20th century, highlights “extra-economic” factors regarding consumer behavior. This branch of Anthropology argues that: (1) taste, preferences, and human needs are socially constructed, hence, the ways how they manifest themselves are determined by culture; (2) consumption is able to create social identities, therefore, products and services not only play a practical, functional role (e.g., meeting our physiological and psychological needs), but they also have the potential to situate individuals and groups within the society; and (3) product value is not exclusively the result of a rational calculation involving economical wins and losses, but rather it responds predominantly to cultural, social, and collective logics (DiMaggio, 1990; Douglas & Isherwood, 2004; Sahlin, 2003; Simmel, 1957; Veblen, 1983; McCracken, 2003, 2007; Miller, 2003, 2007).

Therefore, instead of asking questions such as “why do consumers choose a brand over another”, we posed questions in accordance with the anthropological approach: (1) *What are the meanings and senses of craft beer in Rio de Janeiro?* (2) *How does brand positioning dialogue with specific values and behaviors of Rio de Janeiro's culture?* Thus, by observing how craft breweries and craft beer event organizers have been communicating through marketing campaigns, slogans, images, and product labels, we attempt to better understand the craft beer market's *social embeddedness* in Rio de Janeiro, in light of Anthropology of Consumption (Granovetter, 1985; Zelizer, 1997). We are then able to make sense of craft breweries' actions, behaviors, and gestures and how they serve to define a Carioca identity, around which they position their brands.

2. Theoretical background

As far as the first research question is concerned (i.e., what are the meanings and senses of craft beer in Rio de Janeiro), the observer's attention is drawn to how terms such as "brewing tradition" and "beer culture", among others, are recurrent in craft beer-related festivals, fairs, and awards, thus conveying the idea that both craft beer production and consumption in Rio de Janeiro are traditional, socially disseminated practices which refer to an ancient past. However, as Sousa (2004) states, beer production in Brazil only started in the end of the 19th century, in a discontinuous fashion, through the hands of European immigrant families. Thus, it did not constitute a practice generalized throughout the Brazilian society. The predominant beer culture in Brazil is, since the beginning of the 20th century, that which relates to mass-produced beer: an affordable, standardized, popular product.

In this context, Hobsbawm's (2013) concept of an "invented tradition" – i.e., "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm, 2013) applies to the craft beer movement. Nonetheless, it does not mean that this invention is the result of entirely deliberate marketing strategies on the part of craft brewing entrepreneurs. Rather, it is generally perceived that, for this local market to grow, local craft beer consumption as well as craft beer-related knowledge, values, and practices ought to be promoted.

Theoretically, the promotion of a beer culture may be interpreted in light of the creation of the so-called cultural heritage. In this regard, Anthropology offers good contributions when it discusses the similarity between culture and heritage. Both of them are inherited, such as the expression of a nation or a social group, as well as acquired by a conscious, deliberate, constant reconstruction effort. Supported by classic and contemporary anthropological studies, Gonçalves (2005) articulates and synthesizes three fundamental concepts so as to clarify institutional actions, discourses, and strategies in building a heritage: resonance, materiality, and subjectivity. Forging a heritage cannot be the result of a political decision or that of a governmental institution, since the effort of building collective identities and memories is obviously not a guaranteed success. In fact, it can be, in a number of ways, not made a reality whatsoever. Therefore, there must be resonance between that which such

heritage represents and its interest group. Moreover, the importance of culture's material dimension emerges because social life would not be possible without material objects and body techniques that ensue from them. Objects and techniques are not mere social life's props, but they can be thought of as the very substance of this social and cultural life. An object is inseparable from social, moral, and religious relations and exists as part of a cultural totality, playing a crucial mediating role. In sum, the notion of subjectivity seeks to explain that heritage is not just external emblems of groups or individuals but an internal, organic expression of their individual and collective consciences.

Miller (2003, 2007) refers to the importance of taking material culture into consideration when examining consumption phenomena. The author proposes two main agendas. The first one draws upon the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism to rearticulate the connection between exchange and production, i.e., to de-fetishize the commodity by recognizing the human relations created through the capitalist system. The second agenda perceives materiality as a dimension specific to the "humanity" of a consumer society. When it comes to the examined product – craft beer – the artisanal quality of the production process is what defines its symbolic value. It is what articulates beforehand both production and consumption. In fact, so as to refer to craft beer's material culture the researcher should rely on classic anthropological fundamentals on the concept of culture (e.g., Mauss (2003) examined this notion in light of the concepts of "techniques" and "techniques of the body", understood as the acquisition of knowledge which is learned and transmitted in social life), since "cultivation", "enhancement", "knowing how to do", and "knowing how to appreciate" are the elements which establish the central relationship between production and consumption of craft beer as a distinctive product in the Brazilian market in general and Rio de Janeiro's market in particular.

Accordingly, by forging a beer culture the craft beer market is playing a crucial role in developing this culture's material dimension. Investments in bars, festivals, fairs, and events such as product launches materialize consumers' *sociability*. In turn, investments in schools, courses, lectures, recipe disclosure for homebrewing, and other information materialize the *learning* required for entering this consumption's symbolic universe. Lastly, the object of this research, communication and marketing initiatives materialize the *identity* of a beer culture in

a local context. Hence, the sociability, learning, and identity required for the promotion of a craft beer culture in Rio de Janeiro are materialized through the market's mediation.

Again we turn to Hobsbawm (2013), who discusses “the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes”. Correspondingly, this “invented” craft beer culture uses ancient materials – starting with the ancient drink itself – in combination with “official” rituals and symbols, absorbed by the market's social actors for a novel purpose, namely supporting the development of the incipient market's growth potential. What can be perceived as a powerful ritual complex is then formed, encompassing homebrewing courses and workshops promoted by craft brewers (related to the learning standpoint), festivals and festival-like product launches (regarding sociability), and a combination of opposing elements into a number of allusions to Rio de Janeiro and its culture (referring to identity).

3. Methodology

This study's inductive-exploratory nature is justified by the qualitative character of the research questions, which aim at assessing cultural meanings in a comprehensive and interpretive manner (McCracken, 2003, 2007). Thus, we did not intend to take the examined universe as a quantitative sample of all the craft breweries from Rio de Janeiro, even though the symbolic content analyzed herein might suggest a trend in the craft beer segment. As stated, this research is limited to Rio de Janeiro, a city not only representative of Brazil's metropolitan areas, but also the capital of the state with the most remarkable growth rate in the number of small breweries, as compared to other Brazilian states (Zobaran & Rosa, 2015).

Our observations focused on local craft breweries' visual communication features, encompassing marketing campaigns, slogans, and labels which refer to their brands and products. We selected six craft breweries which, in building their brand identity, repeatedly refer – in a direct, explicit fashion – to the city of Rio de Janeiro and its culture. As in hypothesis-testing research, where the triangulation made possible by multiple data collection methods provides stronger substantiation of constructs and hypotheses (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 538), we collected, from February 2015 to August 2016, a combination of data types comprising the breweries' social media posts, newspaper and magazine accounts, and

observations. The selected images, further discussed in the following sections, range from marketing campaigns during carnival festivities to advertisements to product labels.

The collected data was submitted to both semiotic analysis (Barthes, 1967; Peirce, 1987) and content analysis (Bardin, 1977). The former serves the purpose of comprehending the signs and messages contained in the examined images, whereas the latter is fit for interpreting these elements from a consumption as well as a material culture perspective and also in light of the process of building Brazilian and Carioca identities. Therefore, the markedly anthropological approach is inscribed in the interpretive line of thought (Geertz, 1989), inasmuch as it retrieves the “web of meanings” which constitute the cultural dimension, considering that the cognitive process of sign apprehension is not universally the same and it must take into account the symbolic system specific to certain local contexts.

4. Results

We organized our findings in two sections. First we illustrate the breweries’ efforts in differentiating craft beer from its standardized counterpart, depicting the former as a “superior” product which carries symbols of refinement, sophistication, civility, and high gastronomy. Then we present the breweries’ identity-building initiatives through the combination of opposing elements and in clear reference to Rio de Janeiro and its culture.

Distinction: a beer in a different class

In Exhibit 1, the image on the upper left corner shows Jeffrey brewery’s brand. It is personified as a cosmopolitan Carioca duck, who travels across the world and translates his experiences into new recipes and new ways of appreciating beer (Jeffrey, 2016). Jeffrey started its operations in 2013 with a single recipe. The company opened a concept store in Leblon, an upper-class neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, where it promotes several events intended to further position the brand within the realm of high gastronomy. The concept store is also home to a microbrewery, Jeffrey Lab, where the company experiments new recipes. Jeffrey’s products are distributed to over 130 sales points, including renowned chefs’ restaurants, some of which exclusively have its beers on their menus.

The image on the upper right corner advertises a special tasting at a fancy wine boutique. 3Cariocas, a brewery formed by three Rio de Janeiro natives, names its products after internationally known neighborhoods (e.g., Ipanema, Leblon, and Copacabana), all of which are shown in the image. The occasion also marked the launch of a fourth beer named after a famous neighborhood – Lapa, a pun involving this beer style, American Pale Ale (APA).

On the center row we see one of 3Cariocas' beer labels, used as a cover photo at the company's Facebook page. This was the two-year-old brewery's first product, a session India Pale Ale (IPA) named after the famous neighborhood. Apart from Rio de Janeiro's mountainous skyline, a feature of 3Cariocas' visual identity, the label brings a testament to the beer's quality: a platinum medal in 2014 Mondial de la Bière, the greatest craft beer event in Brazil.

The image on the lower left corner again refers to Jeffrey's concept store, exemplifying one of the aforementioned events. The digital flyer announces a classical chamber orchestra concert, a symbol of tradition and sophistication within the street art-like painted walls of Jeffrey Store.

In the final image we see one of Rio Carioca brewery's marketing campaigns. As opposed to most craft breweries, Rio Carioca uses not only its social media pages but also conventional media, such as billboards, radio, and TV. In this particular case, the humorous ad reads "Beware of the beer you drink. White collar crimes do not go unpunished anymore", in a clear analogy to the greatest corruption scandal in Brazilian history, which resulted in a number of arrests and is still ongoing. In Portuguese, collar is also the word used to describe the beer's head. Therefore, the expression "white collar crimes" refers to drinking mass-produced beers. Rio Carioca is also the name of Rio de Janeiro's first source of drinkable water known to European explorers. Moreover, the brewery's visual identity purposefully reminisces traditional Portuguese ceramics.

[Exhibit 1]

A Carioca identity: informality

In Exhibit 2, the image on the upper left corner is the label of one of Beertoon brewery's products, *Delação Premiada* (plea agreement in English), which also alludes to the previously mentioned corruption scandal. The humorous label, designed by cartoonist and Beertoon's partner Ique Woitschach, portrays a prisoner, supposedly involved in the scandal, denouncing his partners in crime. Beertoon is an association of Leonardo Botto, a pioneering homebrewer who has 19 commercially produced recipes, the prize-winning cartoonist, and Léo Cerqueira, a businessman. The company also participates in the food truck trend with its KomBeerToon, an adapted van for events and product distribution in Rio de Janeiro (Rodrigues, 2015).

Acid humor is also present in the image to the right, a Rio Carioca marketing campaign. It depicts a carnival parade in downtown Rio de Janeiro, most of which are sponsored by one of the majors in the beer industry. The ad reads "Is this a parade or a protest against bad beer? Great beer is Rio Carioca. The bottled Carioca spirit".

The image on the center row again refers to humor. Ampolis brewery's visual identity portrays Mussum, the beer-loving comedian famous in the 1980s. Moreover, the company's products are named according to the peculiar way in which the charismatic comedian spoke. Unlike many craft breweries, which target beer connoisseurs, Ampolis attempts to reach the general public with beers not nearly as complex as those created by its local counterparts.

Albeit spelled differently, Praya brewery refers to the beach (*praia* in Portuguese) in its very name. The company visual identity is entirely inspired by Rio de Janeiro's beaches and sea creatures, such as the mermaid on their only product's label, as well as a beach culture.

The image on the lower right corner shows Irada! brewery's brand. The company, whose name is a local slang meaning "awesome!", is distinguished by its unique point of sales: Leblon beach. Furthermore, Irada!'s salespeople carry a custom-made backpack where the beer is stored, in a clear allusion to *mate*, the local iced tea traditionally found on Rio de Janeiro's beaches, and how it is sold.

[Exhibit 2]

5. Discussion

Beer industry, as well as the culture that supports it, is neither recent nor incipient in Brazil. In fact, the country is the world's third largest beer producer (Associação Brasileira da Indústria da Cerveja, 2014) and is home of the world's largest brewery, with nearly 30% market share after divestitures (Mickle, 2015). Nonetheless, such reality applies only to mass-produced beer, a product deemed inferior according to the craft beer market's cultural codes. Having studied the emerging craft beer segment from a consumer preference perspective, Aquilani, Laureti, Poponi, and Secondi (2015, p. 214) have found that craft beer is perceived to be of higher quality in comparison with mass-produced beer due to the raw materials used for brewing as well as its overall quality.

From a supply standpoint, Brazilian craft breweries are positioning their brands in accordance with an "invented" local tradition (Hobsbawm, 2013) in the industry so as to emphasize a regional personality. From a business strategy perspective, such "invention" reminds us of the country-of-origin effects, according to which consumers use stereotype images as information cues in judging products from different origins (Lotz & Hu, 2001).

The anthropological perspective explains that food and drink do not only play practical roles (e.g., nutritional functions), but they also carry a number of symbols used to classify and differentiate people and groups, as discussed hereafter.

Distinction: a beer in a different class

Historically, cultures as disparate as Pharaonic Egypt and Neolithic Scotland made a special place for alcohol, whether as food, as an intoxicant, as a medicine, or as a status symbol (Gately, 2008). In colonial Brazil, imported wine was the chosen drink for the wealthy, whereas national cachaça was drunk by slaves and society's lower levels (Sousa, 2004).

Our analysis reveal that such distinctions are also present in Rio de Janeiro's craft beer market. Some craft brewers' communication actions showcase craft beer as the complete opposite of mass-produced beer, thus positioning their products as more refined, sophisticated, and civilized. Behind these concepts lie the value of knowledge, both the value of fully appreciating beer's sensory features and the value of understanding the brewing

process. In this sense, beer culture gives rise to culture's most recurrent meanings, i.e., cultivation, enhancement, and formation.

The images conveying beer as a distinctive product clearly demonstrate how the utility of any consumption product does not simply derive from its technical and esthetic qualities, but also from its ability to situate the individuals in the social world and in the cultural and symbolic codes of social classes (Douglas & Isherwood, 2004; DiMaggio, 1990; Bourdieu, 2007).

A Carioca identity: informality

Three elements are recognized as characteristic of a Carioca identity: humor, informality, and a lifestyle revolving around Rio de Janeiro's beaches. On the one hand, some brands attempt to convey this identity by using a synthesis of one or more of these elements. For instance, the brewery formed by three Rio de Janeiro natives, 3Cariocas, names its products after internationally known neighborhoods, e.g., Ipanema, Leblon, Copacabana, and Lapa. In fact, Ipanema is perceived as a synthesis of the Carioca lifestyle and is usually associated with features such as those regarding a beach culture, informality, spontaneity, bohemia, artistic creativity, freedom, custom transgression, avant-garde, and sophistication (Goia, 2007, p. 56). On the other hand, some breweries focus on fewer elements, e.g., humor or a beach lifestyle.

As far as beer labels and marketing campaigns are concerned, these meanings are transmitted through images of elegance, rejection – usually humorous – to mainstream beer, and an aspiration to be associated with Rio de Janeiro's most noble neighborhoods, e.g., Ipanema, Leblon, and Copacabana.

Furthermore, we observe, in communication actions developed by social actors in Rio de Janeiro's craft beer market (e.g., breweries, bars, and event organizers), a rescue of ethics and esthetics of cultural and artistic movements, which since the 1920s merged opposing elements as a form of identity affirmation: modern and traditional, civilized and primitive, and erudite and popular. The Brazilian modernist movement stands out among them, when the literate elite of a country then only 34 years free of slavery started criticizing the subjection to foreign cultural standards and recognizing the possibility of affirming their identity by merging the erudite and the popular (Wisnik, 2007).

This combination of Brazil's different cultural influences left its mark in fields as diverse as fine arts, literature, music, architecture, and even Brazilian anthropology, which has in Gilberto Freyre's (2012) work a positive testament to miscegenation as an important element of national identity.

Similarly, the craft beer movement follows a trend which started in high gastronomy circles in the beginning of the 21st century, when renowned chefs rediscovered Brazilian typical ingredients and cooking traditions. As a result, this phenomenon promotes a resignification of local aspects, which are symbolically elevated to a new status and given more visibility, importance, and value.

In this context Rio de Janeiro's craft beer market resorted to an "invented tradition" in order to fully develop the market's growth potential. Moreover, in this particular case these "traditions" emerge "in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity" (Hobsbawm, 2013). Still according to Hobsbawm (2013), the "invention" of traditions in this sense – such as the craft beer culture – should be expected to occur more frequently, since there are sufficiently large changes on the demand as well as the supply side. In addition, Rio de Janeiro's breweries make use of several elements, illustrated in the previous section, in their efforts to forge a recognizable Carioca identity within the craft beer culture.

In order to interpret the images concerning a Carioca identity, we should understand them as part of the same locally apprehensible symbolic system. Dichotomies such as traditional versus modern, public versus private, formality versus informality, urban versus rural, popular versus erudite, and civilized versus primitive permeate not only the classic social studies on the formation of the Brazilian people (Freyre, 2012; Ianni, 2002; DaMatta, 1997; Hollanda, 1995), but also the analyses of their cultural and artistic manifestations, as modernism and music (Araújo, 2000; Neder, 2010; Naves, 1998; Wisnik, 2007).

We understand the symbology employed by craft breweries is located precisely within this symbolic system, which conjugates dualities into local identities. Craft beer is a product consumed by a very small portion of the Brazilian population, however, the idea of distinction could not exclusively exhaust the symbolic possibilities of representing a local identity. Therefore, it is necessary to resort to popular elements so as to find "resonance" (Gonçalves,

2005) and “symbolic efficacy” (Lévi-Strauss, 2003) both among local consumers and outside the craft beer segment.

6. Conclusion

The fast-growing craft beer market in Rio de Janeiro has been contributing to the development of what we presented as an “invented” tradition. This market’s characteristics suggest that its growth (3Cariocas, 2014) with requires the promotion of the local product as well as a set of knowledge, values, and practices which gravitate around it. In this regard we argue that the market has been playing a pivotal role in materializing the beer culture. *Sociability*, which is materialized through investments in bars, festivals, fairs, events such as product launches, among others, involves different situations in which social relations, either directly or indirectly connected to craft beer production or consumption, are established. Furthermore, *learning* refers to the transmission of beer-related knowledge, ranging from the full appreciation of beer’s sensory traits to brewing techniques to the many specificities of raw materials such as barley malt, hops, and yeast. Investments in schools, courses, lectures, recipe disclosure for homebrewing, and other information materialize the learning required for entering this consumption’s symbolic universe. Finally, *identity* reflects the way how, through beer, classifications and representations of certain people or groups are created. Identity’s material dimension is mirrored in a number of visual artifacts discussed herein.

While it is true that the images that help construct local identities for Carioca craft beer brands are produced in a symbolic fashion, the meanings, as discussed, directly refer to very specific elements and, it could be said, trademarks of Rio de Janeiro. These images mobilize names and maps of the city’s neighborhoods, the habit of going to the beach, local slangs, and characters present in the city’s and the country’s collective memory. By printing these messages on their artefacts’ labels, Carioca craft breweries build an identity positioning which attempts to consolidate a shared feeling of local community and of a beer culture. In sum, they find in this strategy, simultaneously symbolic and material, a way to compete in a growing market.

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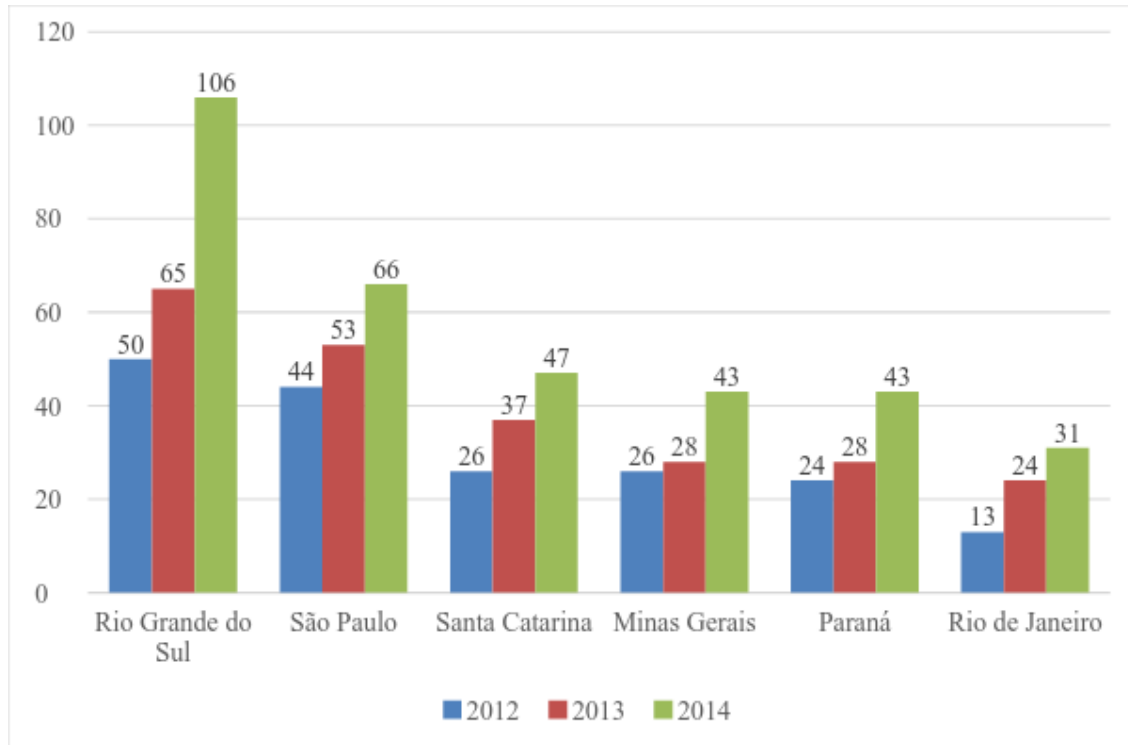
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Chart 1. Small breweries from Rio de Janeiro state.



Source: Zobarán & Rosa, 2015.

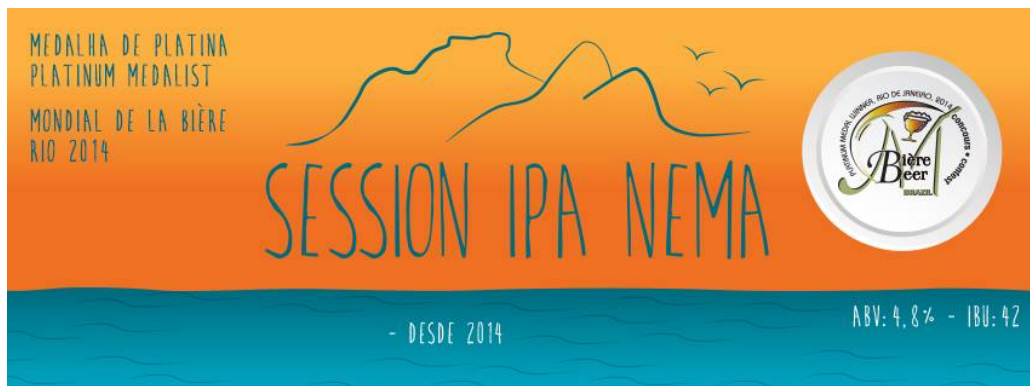
Exhibit 1. A combination of opposing elements results in a “superior” product: refinement, sophistication, and civility.



Source: Gomes & Neves, 2013.



Source: 3Cariocas, 2016.



Source: 3Cariocas, 2014.



Source: Jeffrey, 2015.



Source: Cerveja Rio Carioca, 2015.

Exhibit 2. A Carioca identity: informality, humor, and beach culture.



Source: Gomes & Neves, 2015.



Source: Cerveja Rio Carioca, 2016.



Source: Brassaria Ampolis, 2016.



Source: Cerveja Praya, 2016.



Source: A Perua da Cerveja, 2014.