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Audra E. Clodfelter

Eastern Illinois University

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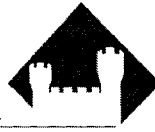
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

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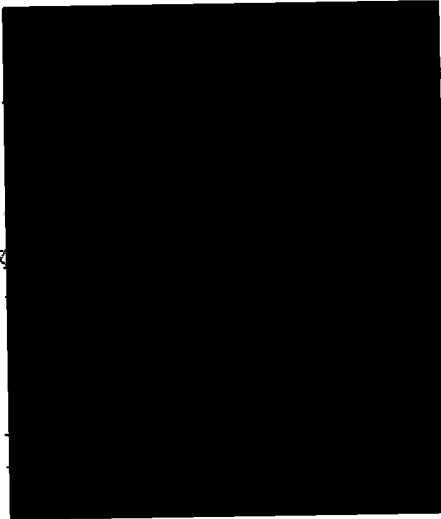
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Whose Beer is it, Anyway?

An Examination of the Constraints of Organizational Legitimacy within the Craft Beer

Industry

Audra E. Clodfelter

Eastern Illinois University

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Abstract

Previous research on organizational legitimacy has determined that legitimacy is necessary for organizational survival, but also places a constraint upon the organization's actions. This project examines the roles of authenticity and social identity as constraints of legitimacy in the craft beer through a case study of four craft breweries that merged with Anheuser-Busch InBev. This study examined the social media communication of four craft breweries prior to their merger announcement as well as the reactions from fans after the announcements were made. Analysis revealed that the breweries used social media to emphasize their authenticity prior to the merger announcement and to reaffirm it through a crisis response strategy after fans began to react negatively to the news of the sale. Theoretical and practical implications for organizations that rely on authenticity to determine legitimacy are discussed, and recommendations for future research are presented.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

Brewery fans can be very passionate about their favorite breweries. They experience memories and have stories that they can share with other fans. They have emotional experiences and deep connections with their brewery, and unfortunately, those experiences are not always positive as expressed by this fan's reaction to the merger announcement of Elysian Brewing Company and Anheuser-Busch-InBev:

You don't know me, but I love Elysian's beer and would always name you as #1 in my top 3. Not just regional, but nationally. I was super excited to pour the Perfessor at the OBF this summer and told everyone that came for a pour how awesome Elysian was. I was told by the previous shift person that Dick was there and that he might come by the table - I was looking forward to telling him thanks for all the great 22s. Seriously felt like a fan girl, but whatever, proud to get the chance. Anytime an Elysian was on tap here in pdx, I'd just be happy for everyone involved. This AB news actually hurt my feelings and although I'm still kind of laughing at myself a little that I'm *that* affected, the disappointment goes beyond sad to full on disgust to realize AB actively lobbies against craft brewing. There is absolutely no way that I would allow any of my \$ to funnel through to AB, kick ass brew or not. Even if the recipes and ingredients don't change (I have no idea how you say it won't, but jury's out) I can't contribute to the behemoths who want to make it difficult/impossible for my friends to succeed and have a fair shot. I know brewers, I love breweries, we brew at home. It's such a let down. I feel like I should run out and buy cases of local breweries before AB gets wind and swallow them whole. RIP Night Owl, Avatar Jasmine & Split Shot" (Kelly Jean, 2015, January 29).

This fan is upset at the news of AB InBev's purchase of Elysian because it is a perceived attack on the craft beer industry. For many beer enthusiasts, the status of a beer as being "craft" or "commercialized" is significant. People who choose craft beer over larger, corporate-owned brands usually do so because they are seeking something that is unique and special. What these individuals are seeking is an authentic craft beer experience.

For many years, the lines between "craft" and "commercialized" have been clearly drawn, but recently this divide has been blurred by large breweries. These

organizations have either developed their own lines of craft-style beer or have acquired small craft breweries in order to capitalize on the appeal of the craft beer market. For many of the purchased craft breweries, nothing about the beer-production process or labeling changes, but fans of these breweries become outraged that their brand of beer would “sell out” to a larger company. Therefore we must question if such breweries maintain their “craft” status.

This question is not as simple to answer as it may seem. First, one must understand what it means to be a craft brewery. One must also understand the social significance of the craft beer status. For some beer drinkers there is a hierarchy of beer choices often determined by cultural authenticity. A brewery that has “sold out” to a larger corporation will no longer be considered an authentic craft beer and therefore its organizational legitimacy will be called into question. As a result, these breweries need to repair their legitimacy with stakeholders through effective crisis communication.

A craft brewery’s authenticity is a central concern for its organization legitimacy. Craft breweries that have merged with larger breweries, such as AB InBev, must prove to stakeholders that nothing about their company or product has changed and that they are still a legitimate craft brewery. In the meantime, these breweries must also work to achieve legitimacy within the brewing industry from well-established breweries (Bitektine, 2011). This balancing act of whom to please is why organizational legitimacy is problematic for many researchers.

Organizational Legitimacy

Organizations rely on legitimacy in order to survive (Metzler, 2001), but legitimacy is difficult to obtain and maintain. Organizational legitimacy is based on the

“social norms and values” (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975, p. 125) of the society in which it is established. Organizations rely on discourse with stakeholders to earn, maintain, and repair their legitimacy and this discourse must be consistently in line with an organization’s original goals or mission statement. If an organization acts in a way that is inconsistent with the values of society, the organization can face a legitimacy crisis. For example, the legitimacy of a craft brewery is called into question when the decision is made to merge with a larger corporation because of the perceived loss of authenticity.

Crisis situations appear in a number of ways, but all crises are a threat to the legitimacy of an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Effective crisis response messages will defuse a crisis situation and restore the organization to its previous status. There are many types of crisis situations and effective managers will be able to recognize a crisis type and develop an appropriate response.

For every crisis, the public will attribute blame. Coombs and Holladay (1996) used previous theories of crisis communication, including attribution theory and neoinstitutionalism, to develop a symbolic approach to crisis communication. This approach places an emphasis on strategic messages meant to persuade the public that no crisis exists and to see the organization in a more positive perspective (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). From this approach, Coombs (2004; 2006) eventually developed a process of matching crisis types to appropriate messages, known as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). To effectively manage a crisis, organizations must first determine the crisis type. According to Coombs (2004), “SCCT specifies 10 crisis types or frames: natural disaster, rumor, product tampering, workplace violence, challenges, technical-error, product recall, technical-error accident, human-error product recall,

human-error accident, and organizational misdeed” (p. 269). Once this determination is made, crisis managers can determine where the fault lies and begin to attribute blame. Once responsibility has been established for a crisis, managers can draft the most effective crisis message to repair an organization’s legitimacy. To do so effectively, one must also understand the social context of the organization.

The Craft Beer Movement

According to The Brewers Association, a craft brewery must be “small, independent, and traditional” (Brewers Association, 2014b, para. 1-3). Specifically, a craft brewery will produce no more than six million barrels of beer each year, will be independently owned with less than 25 percent of the brewery being owned by “an alcoholic beverage industry member that is not itself a craft brewer” (Brewers Association, 2014b, para. 2) and the beer production must rely on traditional, yet innovative, brewing ingredients. The Brewers Association site is also clear that “craft brewers maintain integrity by what they brew and their general independence, free from a substantial interest by a non-craft brewer” (Brewers Association, 2014b, para. 4). From the perspective of the Brewers Association, the message is quite clear: craft breweries are to be independently owned and operated. The insistence of these criteria and focus on brewing techniques has roots in the cultural history of the craft beer industry.

The craft beer (and microbrewery)¹ industry is currently booming and researchers posit that this success is attributed to the local connection these breweries have with their

¹ The Brewers Association defines breweries by the appropriate industry market segments. According to the Brewers Association, a microbrewery is “a brewery that produces less than 15,000 barrels (17,600 hectoliters) of beer per year with 75 percent or more of its beer sold off-site. Microbreweries sell to the public by one or more of the following methods: the traditional three-tier system (brewer to wholesaler to retailer to consumer); the two-tier system (brewer acting as wholesaler to retailer to consumer); and, directly to the consumer through carry-outs and/or on-site tap-room or restaurant sales.” A craft brewery (or, regional craft brewery) is “an independent regional brewery with a majority of volume in “traditional” or “innovative” beer(s)” (Brewers Association, 2014a).

communities. In his study of the cultural geography of the craft brew industry, Flack (1997) found that the breweries which experience the most success are those that keep ties with their communities. In his study, he explains that beer brewing came to the United States with the first settlers who relied on the beverage because water was not safe to drink. Because of its necessity, brewing houses were established and most beers were brewed using traditional English techniques. These techniques were maintained until the late 1800s when an increase of German immigration to the United States caused a change in popular brewing techniques. Rather than the English stouts and ales produced through a process of top-fermenting yeast, German beer relied on a bottom-fermenting yeast process that produced the lager and pilsner-style beers still popular today (Flack, 1997). With the increasing popularity of German-style beer came the establishment of the United States' largest brewer: Anheuser-Busch (Brewers Association, 2014c).

Since the rise in popularity of German beer, the industry has been dominated by German brewing giants and while they are a popular choice for many American beer consumers, they do not monopolize the entire market. Plenty of beer consumers appreciate the variety of flavors and brewing techniques offered by craft and microbreweries. And there are also those consumers who prefer to choose locally produced beer, rather than beer produced in large multi-plant operations (Schnell & Reese, 2009). For these consumers, beer selection is equated with connection to a “sense of place” (Schnell & Reese, p. 47) in a society that has been rendered indistinguishable by large corporations and multiple franchises which have become so common in every community. Microbreweries, local restaurants, and local shops provide unique offerings for anyone seeking to escape the mass-production in our society.

Because of the desire for connection, microbreweries have experienced major growth in society, but early booms in the microbrewing and craft beer industry eventually led to a bust in the market in the mid-1990s. The market became oversaturated with breweries trying to compete and expand on a regional and national level. What Schnell and Reese (2009) discovered is that those craft and microbreweries that survived the bust did so by maintaining their local-ness.

While some beer consumers choose their beverages based on connection to local ties, other consumers are concerned with the impression their choice of beer makes to others. These consumers are concerned with the connection between the beer they drink and their social identities. A person's social identity is the recognition that he or she fits in with a social group (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). According to Stets and Burke (2000),

A social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category. Through a social comparison process, persons who are similar to the self are categorized with the self and are labeled the in-group; persons who differ from the self are categorized as the out-group (p. 225).

While flavor and brewing technique may be a factor in selecting a beer, craft beer consumers can also be concerned with beer as a social group status symbol. These consumers consider themselves to be in the "in-group" while those who select mass-produced, or macro-brewed, beers to be a part of the "out-group" (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 261). Because so much emphasis is placed on a beer's craft status as a means of being a part of the "in-group," consumers often react negatively to news that the brewery has made the decision to merge with a larger brewing company. This decision damages

the brewery's identity, raises concerns over its authenticity, and consumers begin to question the legitimacy of the offending organization.

Legitimacy, Authenticity, and Craft Breweries

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how messages are used to repair legitimacy in a crisis situation when authenticity is challenged. The craft brewing industry provides an excellent case study for this thesis, especially with the current trend of craft breweries merging with large, macrobreweries. Although the purchased breweries are perceived to have lost their status as a craft or microbrewery, that status can be regained. This is possible because both organizational legitimacy and authenticity are rhetorical in nature, providing organizations with the ability to repair their legitimacy through the use of discourse. Crisis communication messages offer organizations, such as these small breweries, several options for creating messages that will effectively repair their legitimacy as a craft or microbrewery.

A major brewing company currently acquiring several craft and microbreweries is Anheuser-Busch InBev. The brewery has recently acquired several breweries including Goose Island Beer Company (legally known as Fulton Street Brewery LLC, or FSB), Blue Point Brewing Company, 10 Barrel Brewing Company, and Elysian Brewing Company. Press releases from each brewery and social media reactions from fans can be used in order to understand the process of how discourse (statement and counter statement) can be used to address legitimacy concerns (Heath, 2001).

The next chapter of this thesis provides an overview of the rhetorical approach to public relations, which is helpful for understanding how organizations negotiate organizational legitimacy and authenticity. The concepts of legitimacy and authenticity,

as well as crisis communication and social identity will also be explored and connected to issues in the craft beer industry. Chapter three provides a brief history of the five brewing companies being examined in this study and provides an explanation for its research questions and methodology. Chapter four provides an analysis of the data and discusses findings and conclusions. Lastly, chapter five presents the impact of the findings, the limitations of the research, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

This literature review examines five theories and concepts: a rhetorical approach to public relations, organizational legitimacy, crisis communication, authenticity, and the craft beer movement. First, it will provide an overview of a rhetorical approach to public relations because it provides the greatest insight for practitioners who seek to understand organizational legitimacy and authenticity as both phenomena are considered to be rhetorically situated and socially constructed (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; King, 2006).

Public Relations: A Rhetorical Approach

While many definitions of the public relations practice exist, the most comprehensive explanation of the field is offered by Heath and Coombs (2006) who state that:

Public relations is the management function that entails planning, research, publicity, promotion, and collaborative decision making to help any organization's ability to listen to, appreciate, and respond appropriately to those persons and groups whose mutually beneficial relationships the organizations needs to foster as it strives to achieve its mission and vision (p. 7).

While this definition of public relations seems inclusive of public relations' role and the two-way flow of communication between an organization and the public, it does not clearly address the way in which organizations and publics create shared meaning with one another (Heath, 2001). To address this gap, Heath (2001) recommends a rhetorical approach to public relations. A rhetorical approach focuses on "the good organization communicating well" (Heath, 2000, p. 70) and is built upon the concept of dialogue,

statement and counterstatement, and co-created meanings to effectively transmit messages to appropriate publics.

Rhetoric assumes that people communicate through discourse, or dialogue, and that discourse is used to create meaning (Saluschev, 2014; Heath, 2000). Discourse shapes values and social norms and it also allows the public the opportunity to listen, evaluate, and decide whether a message is appropriate, valuable, or honest. The public is then provided with the opportunity to respond accordingly. This back-and-forth process of statement and counterstatement is at the heart of the rhetorical process (Heath, 2001). It is also the process that forces organizational speakers to speak well and use arguments that must sustain public scrutiny (Heath, 2000). As Heath (2001) explains, “rhetoric cannot sustain itself with hollow words spoken or written by persons who have no commitment to truth and no desire to help key publics to make informed and ethical decisions” (p. 32).

The expected outcome of this approach is not only ethical communication on the part of the public speaker, but also that a shared meaning will develop between the organization and society. Heath (2001) posits that shared meaning is “a vital outcome of public relations” which “results when each market, audience, or public that has a stake in some matter co-creates meaning through dialogue” (p. 31). Shared meanings between organizations and audiences will create mutually beneficial relationships for both parties and are necessary for organizational survival. Through the rhetorical approach to public relations, Heath (2001) refines the definition of public relations as “the management function that rhetorically adapts organizations to people’s interests and people’s interests to organizations by co-creating meaning and co-managing cultures to achieve mutually

beneficial relationships” (p. 36). The co-creation and co-management function of public relations is essential for organizations to gain and preserve legitimacy with their stakeholders which is crucial to the existence of any organization.

Organizational Legitimacy

Organizations rely on the support of the public for their existence. An organization needs investors, clients, support staff, and stakeholders to keep the organization running. It also relies on societal resources, such as funding, networking, and word-of-mouth marketing to secure its place within the market. In order to receive those resources, it must prove to society that it is worthy of being in operation; that it is a *legitimate* organization. Organizations seek legitimacy for a number of reasons, including the right to exist, but Suchman (1995) identified that motivations for legitimacy include “continuity and credibility” (p. 574) and “passive and active support” (p. 575). Organizations require a secure foundation in order to gain access to stakeholder resources. They also depend on public perceptions and understandings of the organization. The more an audience understands an organization, the more trustworthy and meaningful it becomes to them. With these qualities an organization can become indispensable to its audience members, ensuring its continued existence. An organization must demonstrate its legitimacy in order to create mutually beneficial relationships between itself and the public. This can be demonstrated through a rhetorical approach to public relations with which an organization can achieve support from the public by communicating that it will “focus attention not narrowly on the self-interest and opinions of the organization but on the persons whose goodwill is needed for the organization to succeed” (Heath, 2009, p. 19). By communicating that the organization is putting the

interests of the public first, the public may be more willing to give its support to the organization, thereby securing its legitimacy.

Organizations can also achieve various levels of support from their stakeholders. Organizations may either seek active or passive support from society, depending on its needs (Suchman, 1995). An organization may only require passive support if its only motivation is to conduct business. However, an organization that is seeking support from its publics in order to survive challenges brought forth from other organizations (such as two rival businesses providing similar services in a small community) will have to defend its legitimacy and prove its worthiness. Suchman (1995) explains the distinction between the two levels of support: “To avoid questioning, an organization need only ‘make sense.’ To mobilize affirmative commitments, however, it must also ‘have value’ – either substantively, or as a crucial safeguard against impending *non-sense*” (p. 575, original emphasis).

All organizations must prove their right to exist with stakeholders (Metzler, 2001) because “audiences are most likely to supply resources to organizations that appear desirable, proper, or appropriate” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574; see also Parson, 1960). An organization that successfully argues that right is said to have gained legitimacy. Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) describe this process as achieving congruency “with social values associated with or implied by their [organizations] activities and norms of acceptable behavior in the larger social system which they are apart” (p. 122; see also Parsons, 1960). According to Suchman (1995), legitimacy is “a general perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (p. 574). Metzler (2001) goes on to explain that

legitimacy is “established, maintained, challenged, and defended through dialogues between an organization and various publics regarding organizational activities and their relation to social norms and values” (p. 322). A rhetorical approach to public relations can guide an organization in developing shared values between the organization and society. Heath (2001) explains that the public develops its own expectations for values and acceptable behaviors and “organizations can adopt or seek to influence the narratives of society by what they say and do” (p. 42). Organizational messages that are adopted to societal values will help in laying a foundation for an organization’s identity.

Legitimacy places a constraint on organizations (Boyd, 2009; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975) because “it is socially constructed and controlled by publics, and a significant portion of interested stakeholders must confer for it to exist” (Boyd, 2000, p. 346). If stakeholders deem an organization to be illegitimate, the effects can be damaging. Organizational legitimacy can be gained or lost through the actions of the organization. The process of achieving, maintaining, and repairing legitimacy is rhetorical and organizations must be cognizant of the constraints in which they exist and what measures need to be taken in order to maintain this coveted status.

Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) provide three actions that an organization can take to gain legitimacy (p. 127):

1. ...the organization can adapt its output, goals, and methods of operation to conform to prevailing definitions of legitimacy.
2. ...the organization can attempt, through communication, to alter the definition of social legitimacy so that it conforms to the organization’s present practices, output, and values.

3. ...the organization can attempt, again through communication, to become identified with symbols, values, or institutions which have a strong base of social legitimacy.

Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) place an emphasis on the use of symbols to establish an organization's commitment to the norms and values of a society. An organization can use strategic messages, such as a mission statement or statement of goals, to re-affirm its commitment to societal expectations.

The recommendations of Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) for achieving organizational legitimacy provide a foundation for organizations, but organizations cannot rest easy once this status is achieved. Because of its constraining quality, legitimacy must be maintained by organizations. Legitimacy is dynamic and in flux, so organizations must always be aware of changes in social values and willing to adapt to those changes in order to maintain their status as legitimate. Because of the emphasis placed on dialogue, practitioners can rely on a rhetorical approach to public relations in order to keep up with the ever changing demands on an organization to adapt. Heath (2000) posits that “a rhetorical perspective assumes that matters of importance—thoughts, opinions, and actions—are in a flux that is subject to constant change and reinterpretation. The effort and incentive of the dialogue are toward continual improvement, even if it falls short of that goal” (p. 71). Dialogue is essential for creating and adapting shared meanings in society.

Based on the research of Massey (2001; see also Sonpar, Pazzaglia, & Kornijenko, 2010), there are two approaches to maintaining legitimacy. For Massey (2001), organizational legitimacy can be categorized as being either “strategic or

institutional” (p. 155; see also Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Suchman, 1995). The strategic approach refers to the ways in which organizations strategically use symbols, “through communication behavior, to achieve legitimacy” (p. 155). Organizations can use dialogue to create meaning with stakeholders. This co-creation of meaning allows the public to make assessments of the ethics and legitimacy of the organization. Heath (2000) reasons that it is only through public discourse that these assessments can be made. Bitektine (2011) suggests that cognitive legitimacy, which is “the spread of knowledge about an organization” (p. 157), mirrors the strategic approach, with an emphasis placed on communication. Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) emphasized the need for organizations to establish their legitimacy by “taking action” (p. 122). This implies that there are steps to be taken that will ensure organizational legitimacy and that practitioners have control over an organization’s status as legitimate (Suchman, 1995).

The second approach that Massey (2001) refers to is the institutional approach which “focuses attention on the cultural environment in which organizations exist and on the pressure that this environment exerts on organizations to engage in expected, normative behaviors” (p. 155). The institutional approach, based on institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), “adopts an inherently normative approach in which it views legitimacy as something that is ‘virtually synonymous with institutionalization’” (Sonpar, Pazzaglia, & Kornijenko, 2010, p. 2; Suchman, 1995, p. 576). Institutionalization is a process which leads to the creation of beliefs and myths as taken-for-granted facts (Sonpar, Pazzaglia, & Kornijenko, 2010; see also Berger & Luckman, 1966; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Westphal, Gulati, & Shortell, 1997; Zucker, 1977). To establish institutional legitimacy, organizations must take their cues from the

cultural norms of the society in which they operate. An organization controls their legitimacy by assimilating to the culture around them because “cultural definitions determine how the organization is built, how it is run, and simultaneously, how it is understood and evaluated” (Suchman, 1995, p. 576). Stakeholders can judge the legitimacy of an organization based on the values it holds and whether they align with them. A similar approach to institutional legitimacy, known as sociopolitical legitimacy (Bitektine, 2011; Aldrich & Fiol, 1994), also suggests that organizational legitimacy relies on cultural expectations of society to determine legitimacy.

To further complicate the process of establishing and maintaining organizational legitimacy, organizations must consider with which key stakeholders they are seeking to cultivate legitimacy. Bitektine (2011) emphasizes the importance of being able to recognize key stakeholders as many audiences may make evaluations of an organization’s legitimacy but that “not all audiences are equally important, which provides the organization with a strategic choice as to which audiences it should attend to” (p. 154; see also Clemens & Cook; 1999; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Meyer & Scott, 1983; Oliver, 1991; Suchman, 1995). Bitektine’s observation is closely linked with stakeholder theory, which focuses on “the relationship between a business and the groups and individuals who can affect or are affected by it” (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & de Colle, 2010, p. 5). It is rhetorically-based and provides organizations with a framework with identifying and connecting with those who are directly affected by an organization (Smudde & Courtright, 2011). Smudde and Courtright (2011) provide organizations with three key questions to stakeholder management. The first, “How are stakeholders created?,” (p. 137) emphasizes the necessity of being recognized by certain

audiences that an organization is going to depend upon for support. Organizations must be identifiable (Burke, 1937/1984), but audience members must also be able to identify with the organization and see its value before making a decision to give their support (Freeman 1984/2010; Freeman et al., 2010).

The second question, “How are stakeholder relationships maintained?,” (Smudde & Courtright, p. 139) implies that organizations must take steps to ensure their continued support. Relationships with stakeholders cannot be taken for granted once they are established. Because these relationships are based on familiarity and dependency, organizations must be cognizant of the perceptions that stakeholders have of them. This requires constant communication on the part of the organization to inform its stakeholders that it is adhering to the values and social norms that shape its legitimacy and keep it in favor with its audience.

Finally, the third question, “How are stakeholder relationships improved?” (Smudde & Courtright, p. 140), also requires communication from the organization, but usually in situations in which the organization has taken an action that offends stakeholders. Through the statement and counterstatement function of the rhetorical approach to public relations (Heath, 2001), stakeholders can contest the actions of an organization and communicate that an offense has occurred. There may be instances in which an organization does something that is legally or morally wrong, or the organization makes a decision that is unpopular with stakeholders. In either situation, the organization must communicate with stakeholders to inform them of what is being done to correct the offense. Smudde and Courtright (2011) offer three actions as choices for organizations which are: “to accept blame for what happened (mortification) (see Burke,

1961/1970); find someone on whom blame should be assigned (scapegoating) (see Burke, 1935/1984); or reinterpret or change which symbols are deemed most important in a purified order proffered by the organization (transcendence) (see Burke, 1935/1984; Burke, 1937/1984; Burke, 1961/1970)” (p. 141). Organizations can rely on the options provided by Smudde and Courtright (2011), or they can use one of the many crisis communication or image repair techniques provided by public relations practitioners. It is important for practitioners to remember to communicate with stakeholders, address their issues, and provide communicative proof that the organization is taking action to avoid another offensive situation.

Organizations must be aware that there are consequences for when they fail to meet stakeholder expectations. Meyers and Rowan (1991, as cited in Suchman, 1995, p. 575) explain that “organizations that...lack acceptable legitimated accounts of their activities...are more vulnerable to claims that they are negligent, irrational or unnecessary” (p. 50). If those stakeholders decide an organization does not meet their standards, they will take what is deemed to be appropriate action against the organization. But, legitimacy is also a balancing act for an organization. Organizations must keep in mind that different stakeholders will have varying expectations of legitimacy which could hinder an organization. On the one hand, organizations rely on cognitive legitimacy for security in the early process of establishing themselves, but on the other hand, organizations must continuously prove their sociopolitical legitimacy (Bitektine, 2011). Bitektine explains that:

In the case of cognitive legitimacy, the evaluation stops when the organization is classified as a member of some already known and already legitimacy class of

organizations, whereas in the case of sociopolitical legitimacy, the evaluation continues and the organization is subject to further scrutiny and questioning in order to establish if it is beneficial to the actor(s), their social group, and/or the whole society (p. 157, see also Barron, 1998).

But Bitektine is not the only theorist who implies that this constraint exists. Massey (2001) surmises that “the strategic approach views legitimacy as a resource and the institutional approach views legitimacy as a constraint” (p. 155) which echoes the view of Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) who also view legitimacy as a constraint on the behavior of an organization. In the same way that legitimacy must be established, it must be continuously maintained and organizations face pressure from their stakeholders to stay in line with the constraints of the different types of legitimacy.

Massey (2011) furthered the research concerning organizational legitimacy by expanding the work of niche width theory. He explains that a niche “refers to an organization’s position or role within its market or field -- the space occupied by an organization within its environment” (p. 160). He also explains that organizations may take up more or less space, depending on what an organization does and how specific it is in its product and services. Massey ultimately surmises that the legitimacy status of an organization is dependent on whether the organization is “generalist” or “specialist” and that “generalist organizations are perceived as more legitimate than specialist organizations...” (p. 168). A specialist organization has to work harder to achieve legitimacy because it has a smaller audience from which to gain approval. It has to meet the expectations of the niche marketplace, such as the craft beer movement, that are stringently constructed by those within the marketplace. An organization must understand

what the values and social norms of that small audience are and adhere to them in order to gain acceptance while at the same time working to gain legitimacy from other similar organizations. This emphasizes the constraint of legitimacy and the demands placed on organizations by their stakeholders. When an organization does not meet those demands and perceived organizational legitimacy is damaged, a crisis situation can emerge. This point is demonstrated by the crisis situations that arise in the craft beer industry. In order to understand how organizations must respond, we must examine crisis communication strategies.

Crisis Communication

When organizations act outside of the expectations of what is considered to be legitimate, a crisis situation can emerge. To resolve a crisis, an organization must respond appropriately. Boyd (2000) explains that “the practice of crisis communication recognizes the broadest sense of legitimacy – that is, an institution’s need for publics to recognize its authority to operate and exercise authority in a broader social context” (p. 342, see also Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Epstein & Votaw, 1978). When organizations damage their reputations with stakeholders, a crisis situation can emerge. Massey (2001) describes a crisis as “a major, unpredictable event that threatens to harm the organization and its stakeholders” (p. 157). Coombs (2009) defines a crisis as “an event that threatens important stakeholder expectations about an organization and can significantly affect an organization’s performance” (p. 238). When a crisis situation occurs, the public will demand information from the organization about the cause of the crisis and they will begin to attribute responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Stakeholders want to know why and how the crisis occurred and they want to know where to attribute blame. The

manner in which an organization responds to a crisis is critical as a way of persuading the public to attribute a low-level of blame or to find the organization completely innocent of blame for a crisis situation. There are many ways for an organization to respond to a crisis situation. Selecting the correct crisis response strategy can save an organization from further reputational damage and help an organization repair its legitimacy which is the foundation of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2004, 2006). Coombs (2004; 2006) developed SCCT as a method for crisis communication practitioners to match a crisis situation with an appropriate crisis response. When determining the crisis type, researchers must consider a number of dimensions, but Coombs (1995) narrowed down these dimensions into a “crisis-type matrix” (p. 454) and within the matrix, four crisis categories emerge and can encompass most crisis situations. These categories include unintentional/external; unintentional/internal; intentional/external; intentional/internal (Coombs, 1995). Placed within this matrix are the crisis types: faux pas, accident, intentional acts, and acts of terrorism (Coombs, 1995). By understanding the crisis types that exist, a crisis manager can draft an appropriate crisis response for stakeholders. To fully understand the type of crisis in a situation, one must fully understand the context of a situation. By examining the craft beer industry and its associated issues of authenticity, one can gain the proper understanding of how a legitimacy crisis may exist and how to draft the most effective crisis response message.

Authenticity, Social Identity, and Craft Beer

Organizations face potential crisis situations any time their stakeholders question their legitimacy (Massey, 2001). One such crisis can occur when an organization makes a decision that challenges the authenticity of its products or services. The authenticity of

products and services is sought for a variety of reasons. Rose and Wood (2005) explain one motivation for seeking authenticity by stating “philosophically, the drive for authenticity may be conceived as a reaction to threats of inauthenticity inherent of postmodernism” (p. 286; see also Firant & Venkatesh, 1995). Social actors may turn to organizations that offer a reprieve from the mass-production inherent in modern society. Multiple research studies have been conducted on motivations for authentic products and services. In those studies, researchers have determined that typologies of authenticity exist and provide explanations of how consumers determine authenticity.

Grayson and Martinec (2004) based their understanding of authenticity on the concepts of “genuineness,” “reality,” and “truth” (p. 297; see also Bendix, 1992, p. 104; Costa & Bamossy, 1995, p. 300; Goldman & Papson, 1997, p. 209; Peterson, 1997, p. 209; Phillips, 1997, p. 209; see *Webster’s New World Dictionary of American English*, 3rd ed., s.v. “authentic”). However, they realize that the concepts of “truth” and “genuine” have a variety of meanings, depending on the context in which they are used. Therefore, they identified two types of authenticity: indexical and iconic (Grayson & Martinec, pp. 297-298). “Index” in reference to authenticity was coined by Peirce (1998) to “refer to cues that...are thought to have a factual and spatio-temporal link with something else” (Grayson & Martinec, p. 298). With an index, there is a connection between an object and its cultural authenticity. Conversely, iconic authenticity refers to the time in which the term “‘authentic’ is sometimes used to describe something whose physical manifestation resembles something that is indexically authentic” (p. 298). This could refer to a reproduction item that is meant to look like the original, but is known to be a reproduction. The key point with an icon is that a consumer must have the existing

knowledge of the original item to know if the reproduction looks and feels like the original (Grays & Martinec, 2004; Peirce, 1998).

Authenticity is troublesome because it is a rhetorical concept that is socially constructed by dominant social actors. According to this constructivist view, authenticity is “purely a rhetorical construction” (King, p. 240, 2006). King (2006) further argues that from this perspective, “all authenticity is, in one sense or another, an invented and manufactured phenomenon” (p. 241). The authenticity of a brand, landmark, product, or service is a co-created message between brand marketers and consumers that is given precedence through the narratives individuals share with one another. As these narratives are passed on over time, the concept is given greater strength until it becomes hegemonic, taken-for-granted information that is perceived to be fact, rather than opinion.

Seeking Authenticity

Social actors seek out authentic experiences for a variety of reasons. Beverland and Farrelly (2010) identified three reasons individuals seek authenticity: “control, connection, and virtue” (p. 841). Control refers to an individual’s desire for “mastery over their environment” (p. 841) in which individuals will seek experiences that they perceive to be authentic in order to gain control of their situation. For example, a person may choose to do their shopping at a locally owned craft store rather than a large franchise because they feel that the products at the smaller store are handmade and well-crafted and therefore more authentic. They may also have the satisfaction of knowing that the money they are spending in the local store is going to stay local. This gives the shopper a feeling of control through the products they purchase. The manifestation of

control over the self and such decision making leads to self-satisfaction in the authentic experience (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010).

In a similar manner, individuals seek authentic experiences to feel a connection. Beverland and Farrelly (2010) determined from their informants that authenticity is associated with a feeling of connection “to important others, to community, place, culture, or to society in general” and according to their informants “key benefits associated with feeling connected were an idealization of community, personal enrichment through being part of something, and being proximate to like-minded others – consistent with the desire to develop an authentic self as an active member of the community” (p. 842). Individuals seek out opportunities to become involved in their communities in an attempt to feel connected. These attempts can be as structured as joining a religious organization or a sports team or something more casual such as visiting a local farmer’s market or meeting friends at a local bar on a regular basis. In a globalized society, it can at times seem difficult to fit in and find acceptance. By seeking out authentic connections with others and with the community in which one lives, one can feel more grounded and significant.

Hede and Wante (2013) note that “developing a relationship between a brand and consumers is achieved when consumers connect with brands in an emotional manner” (p. 207; see also Fournier, 1998). To enable consumers to have a connection with a brand, these brands must be given human-like characteristics that give consumers a greater connection with that product. Many marketing specialists rely on “anthropomorphisation, personification, and user imagery” (p. 207; see also Aaker, 1999) to make this possible. Through each of these processes, a brand is given characteristics that make it more

accessible, allowing an emotional connection to be made with consumers. Through their research, Hede and Watne (2013) recognize that brand managers can include consumers in this process by focusing on creating a “sense of place” (p. 208) for consumers. This refers to “relationships between people and social settings (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), and human-place bonding (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004), with its rootedness, insidedness, and environmental embeddedness (Low & Altman, 1992)” (p. 208). The sense of place that one develops from a brand is a co-created message between the brand and the consumer and the emotional attachment towards a brand would increase with the sense of belonging associated with it.

Research points to the use of storytelling techniques employed by brand managers to cultivate relationships between brands and consumers (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). Hede and Wante (2013) found that the use of narratives, anthropomorphisation, personification, user imagery, folklores, myths, and heroes all have a use in the process of creating this connection, or sense of place, in the mind of the consumer.

The final reason for seeking authenticity that Beverland and Farrelly (2010) identified from their informants is virtue (p. 846). This refers to the “self by making judgments based on purity of motive” (p. 846). Virtue as a factor for authenticity is two-fold, according to the informants of Beverland and Farrelly's research. First, it can be related to spirituality. Authenticity, in this case, could refer to making pilgrimages to religious or spiritual places in order to feel that one has had a true spiritual encounter. It can also refer to the virtue of particular brands. Individuals may judge brands by their “suspect motives” (p. 847) or “false pretenses” (p. 847). The authenticity of a brand can

be maintained by its perceived virtuous behavior. If that behavior is perceived as unvirtuous in some way, individuals may turn against it.

One specific consequence of the desire for connection, control, and virtue as outlined by Beverland and Farrelly (2010) is the movement known as “neolocalism” (Schnell, 2013). This term refers “the conscious attempt of individuals and groups to establish, rebuild, and cultivate local ties, local identities, and increasingly local economies” (Shortridge, 1996, p. 11, as cited in Schnell, 2013, p. 56) to explain the need that individuals have to return to the local after being disillusioned by globalization. This desire to embrace the local can be reflected in a consumer’s choice to buy local food, to shop at locally-owned stores, or to pursue locally made products, such as the beer produced by microbreweries (Schnell, 2013). Social actors use this local movement to feel that they have some grasp on their lives and to perceive themselves as being distinct in an increasingly oversaturated society. This can be further explained through social identity theory, which is related to self-definitions of how one fits into those larger social categories. An individual’s social identity is also a means of improving one’s image among others. There is a desire for individuals to associate with a group, and to enhance the perception of that group to those who are not associated with it (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).

When an individual’s social identity is associated with a particular brand and something about that brand changes then that social identity is threatened. As a result, the individual will respond to this change, trying to regain their lost sense of identity. Schnell (2013) explains why individuals cling so tightly to these facets of their identity:

We are, in part, defined (and define ourselves) by what we eat, what we wear, and where we shop. The microbrewed beer, the locally grown tomato, and the small local bookshop have become the equivalent of the flag or the national anthem of this new localism, symbols of this new local identity (p. 65).

There is a desire to be authentic and to be local in response to the overwhelming homogenization of a globalized society, but the search for authenticity and the desire for “local” can cause its own set of frustrations because of the vagueness of the term. Schell’s (2013) concern with the vagueness of the concept “local” relates to the ever-changing cultural meaning of the phrase. What may be “local” for some may not fit the cultural definition of “local” for others. One’s social identity as “local” becomes complicated. That complication increases when the object of one’s social identity changes in some way.

The Rhetorical Authenticity of Craft Beer

A person’s social identity and desire for authenticity can determine the products one chooses to buy or the places where they shop. This includes the brand of beer that one chooses to consume. Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) provide an explanation of why consumers seek specific brands or “brewing styles” (such as craft or locally brewed) of beer. They offer “four theoretical speculations” (p. 729). Their first speculation is that “consumers might place great faith in the ability of small organizations to produce and deliver high-quality specialty products” (p. 729). There are those who have been disenchanted by large businesses for various reasons, but that disenchantment has led to a distrust that motivates the consumer to seek out smaller, perhaps even more local, purchasing options. They believe that the smaller business is more capable of producing a

high quality product. The second assumption is that “by choosing products made by traditional methods, consumers might be reacting against mass society” (p. 729). This relates back to an individual’s desire to be set apart in the “in-group” (Terry, Hogg & White, 1995) and the desire to connect with those who are like-minded consumers. The third speculation of Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) is that “consumers may be enacting a form of self-expression in purchasing products of small, obscure producers” (pp. 729-730). Finally, they speculate that “consumers may be using specialty brewing as a forum for status generation” (p. 730). These speculations are closely linked to the social identity of the consumer. The distinction of the individual as separate from the “out-group” is evident in each of the explanations for consumers who purchase specialty (craft or microbrewed) beers.

There is currently a resurgence of the microbrewery movement, as evidenced by the large number of active brewery permits in 2014 (America’s Beer Distributors, 2014, August 12), but the microbrewing/craft beer industry seems doomed to repeat its previous fate by continuing down the path that led to the demise of many during the initial boom (Flack, 1997; Schnell & Reese, 2009). Large-scale breweries are increasingly aware of the popularity of the microbrewery/craft beer industries and they want to be involved. As a result of the resurgence of the microbrewery movement, many large breweries have responded by adapting the techniques used by small breweries to create distinctive flavors and unique label designs that mimic those of the smaller breweries. Some of these examples are quite obvious, such as Budweiser’s “Project 12” (Anheuser-Busch, 2012, July 20), which is meant to appeal to a regional audience. There are also examples of large breweries creating brands that are given a separate name and separate brewing

location to hide the fact that the perceived smaller brewery is actually owned by a large brewery. Examples of this include the Blue Moon, Leinenkugel, and Shock Top brands of beer. These brands are perceived as craft beer brands, but are owned by larger brewing corporations. Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) explain how this process can be successful for a short time, but not all beer consumers are fooled by this tactic. Large breweries do not allow this failure to stop them from other attempts at gaining access to the craft beer and microbrewery market:

Consequently, the robust identity strategies attempted by the major breweries and the illusory authenticity of the contract brewers are effective only for short periods, if at all. We believe that the ineffectiveness of these strategies explains why many major brewers and some contract brewers have now adopted approaches that minimize (if not avoid) these problems. For major breweries, the most viable route apparently involves strategic alliances with microbreweries based on large equity investments (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000, p. 732).

Craft and micro-beer fans, for the most part, know when they are being played by large breweries. If they are unaware that the beer they are purchasing is, in fact, brewed by a large brewery, they will potentially be angry because they feel that they have been fooled in their beer selection. In response, Carroll and Swaminathan (2000), argue large breweries will seek out opportunities to merge or unite with smaller craft or microbreweries to share in the smaller, more specific market of beer consumers. This solution is complicated because while it may not disrupt the marketing and production of the beer created by these smaller breweries, it does pose a crisis of legitimacy to their craft beer or microbrewery status. Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) explain:

The solution is perhaps best available, but it is not perfect. Microbrewers who enter into these alliances are frequently criticized for “selling out” and their products lose some appeal to hard-core microbrew drinkers...With time and integration into the larger company there will also likely be some real change in these companies’ products and their approaches to the market (p. 732, note 18).

The authenticity of these breweries is called into question by their consumers, causing the legitimacy of the organization to be threatened. This crisis emerges because of the social identity of beer consumers and its connection to the authenticity of microbrewed and craft beer. The organization must understand how these two concepts are linked to organizational legitimacy when drafting the most appropriate response to this potential crisis (whether a faux pas or an actual crisis) situation.

Chapter 3:

Methodology

The purpose of this thesis was to explore messages used by craft and microbreweries to rebuild legitimacy with stakeholders after experiencing a legitimacy crisis. In order to examine those messages, this thesis looked specifically at messages from Goose Island Brewery, Blue Point Brewery, 10 Barrel Brewery, and Elysian Brewing Company as case studies for rebuilding organizational legitimacy after the breweries made the decision to merge with Anheuser-Busch InBev. In doing so, it was perceived that these four organizations lost their status as authentic craft breweries. Therefore, the legitimacy of the breweries was called into question and crisis situations emerged. This chapter provides an overview of these organizations as well as the research methodology employed for this study.

Anheuser-Busch InBev

Anheuser-Busch InBev is currently the largest brewing company in the United States (Brewers Association, 2014c). The history of the brewery is helpful in understanding how it gained that status and maintained it over the course of its history. German immigrants came to the Midwest in the mid-1800s to avoid conflicts in Germany and Bohemia. They brought with them a new style of beer called lager. One such German immigrant was Eberhard Anheuser, a soap manufacturer, who became part owner of the Bavarian Brewery in 1854. Anheuser eventually bought out all other investors of the brewery and in 1860 he changed the name to E. Anheuser & Company. Adolphus Busch joined Anheuser in 1861 after he married Anheuser's daughter and immediately began work that would have a lasting impact on the brewery. In 1876, Busch and a friend, Carl

Conrad, created an American-style lager beer and named it “Budweiser” which would eventually become the company’s flagship brand. Busch was rewarded by Anheuser for his work to improve the brewery by renaming the brewery to include his son-in-law in 1879, changing the name to Anheuser-Busch Brewing Association (Anheuser-Busch, 2014).

The brewery attributes its success to its early innovations such as pasteurization, the development of refrigerated railway cars, and other techniques that allowed the brewery to spread its product across the United States which allowed the company to grow and expand. The company survived the country’s prohibition on alcohol sales from 1920-1933 through the sales of numerous non-alcoholic products (such as soft drinks, cereal, and ice cream) and eventually recovered from the decline of beer sales during the era of World War II. By 1957, Anheuser-Busch was the leading U.S. brewer, a status it maintains 2014 (Anheuser-Busch, 2014).

Anheuser-Busch made international news in 2008 when it was acquired by the Belgium-based brewing company, InBev. InBev was formed by a series of mergers and acquisitions including the merger of Interbrew and Ambrew in 2004, which led to the company’s title of InBev. Anheuser-Busch joined InBev in 2008, which changed the company’s title to AB InBev (AB InBev, 2014b). In 2013, AB InBev brought in 43.2 billion U.S. dollars in revenue (AB InBev, 2014a) and the company boasts of being “one of the world’s top five consumer products companies” with company locations in 25 countries, employing more than 150,000 people (AB InBev, 2014a). The mergers and acquisitions that led to the 2008 formation of AB InBev have not ceased and over the past six years, the company has expanded its market by acquiring several craft breweries.

These include, but are certainly not limited to: Goose Island Brewery, Blue Point Brewing Company, 10 Barrel Brewing Company, and Elysian Brewing Company.

Goose Island Brewery

The Chicago-based brewery, Goose Island (legally known as Fulton Street Brewery LLC, or FSB) is well-known for producing Goose Island 312, an urban wheat ale named after the telephone area code for the City of Chicago, and other beers named with references to the city of Chicago. The brewery was established in 1988 by John Hall with the intent of providing consumers with more varieties and flavors of beer. Hall was influenced by a trip through Europe in which he explored different beers and desired to have something similar in the United States. In 1995, Hall opened a larger brewery and bottling operation and in 1999, he opened a second brewpub to accommodate the growth of the brewery (Goose Island Beer Company, 2014b). The Goose Island Brewery packing line boasts the ability to produce “500 cases [of bottled beer] an hour, with our keg line at a rate of 50 kegs every 60 minutes” (Goose Island Beer Company, 2014a).

On March 28, 2011, Goose Island Brewery and Anheuser-Busch InBev announced a merger. Anheuser-Busch purchased the brewery for \$38.8 million (York & Noel, 2011, March 28) and the acquisition of Goose Island was motivated by the company to “bring additional capital into Goose Island’s operations to meet growing consumer demand for its brands and deepen its Chicago and Midwest distribution” (Anheuser-Busch, 2011, March 28, para. 1).

Blue Point Brewing Company

Mark Burford and Peter Cotter met in a small, local bar in Patchogue, Long Island, New York. They made their acquaintance over a shared appreciation of beer.

They were each involved in homebrewing and, eventually, the duo decided to team together to start their own microbrewery. This led to the establishment of the Blue Point Brewing Company in 1998. Blue Point was Long Island's first microbrewery and was named after the "blue point oysters" which were commonly found off the coast of Long Island. The brewery, which resides in a renovated ice factory, consists of a 30-barrel brew house in which all of its beers are created. The brew house also holds all the original equipment used to start the brewery which was purchased from auctions or foreclosure sales. The brewery has concentrated on sales in the East Coast and has developed more than 40 beers (Blue Point Brewing Company, 2014).

Blue Point made a short statement on February 5, 2014 on its blog: "the tasting room will be open this week. Same hours. Same beer. Same folks brewing and pouring it" (Potter, 2014, February 5). This statement was followed by the announcement that Blue Point had agreed to sell to Anheuser-Busch. The terms and conditions of the sale were not made known to the public at the time of the announcement.

10 Barrel Brewing Company

Twin brothers and co-owners of 10 Barrel Brewing Company, Jeremy and Chris Cox, used their experience as restaurant owners and their passion for beer as motivation to make their own mark in the craft beer industry. In 2006, they opened Wildfire Brewing and focused their attention on sales to bars and restaurants in Bend, Oregon. Three years later, the brothers changed the name of the brewery to 10 Barrel Brewing Company and in 2011, they hired Jimmy Seifrit of Deschutes Brewery and Tonya Cornett of Bend Brewing to expand their production (Craft Beer Club, 2014). 10 Barrel Brewing has three brewpubs. One is located in Bend, one in Portland, Oregon, and the last in Boise, Idaho

(10 Barrel Brewing Company, 2014). Its Apocalypse IPA is the brewery's best selling beer and the company "was one of only four U.S. breweries to win three medals and tied for most medals won at this year's Great American Beer Festival, the largest beer competition in the world" (Anheuser-Busch, 2014, November 5, para. 1).

The announcement of the merger between Anheuser-Busch and 10 Barrel Brewing Company was made on November 5, 2014 via a press release from Anheuser-Busch and a video from 10 Barrel Brewing posted on its website and Facebook page. In the acquisition of 10 Barrel, Anheuser-Busch gained the brewery and all three brewpub locations, but the terms and conditions of the sale were not released on the announcement. The decision to sell to Anheuser-Busch was made by brewery co-owners Jeffrey and Chris Cox and Garrett Wales with the intention that the brewery could continue to focus on producing more beer and, as Jeffrey Cox explains, to take advantage of the "operational and distribution expertise of Anheuser-Busch" (Anheuser-Busch, 2014, November 11, para. 2). The current distribution of 10 Barrel reaches Oregon, Idaho, and Washington and the partnership with Anheuser-Busch will allow for greater distribution across the country.

Elysian Brewing Company

Elysian Brewing Company was established in 1995 by Dick Cantwell, Joe Bisacca and David Buhler. In 1996, the trio opened their first location in Capitol Hill, a neighborhood in Seattle. In the past, Elysian has collaborated with Universal Studios, Dreamworks, and Sega to operate a pub and small brewery in the large entertainment complex, Gameworks. That partnership ended in 2002 when the initial five-year contract came to an end. Since that time, the brewery has opened several additional brewpubs and

has collaborated with New Belgium Brewing to produce some of Elysian's more popular beers in larger quantities at the New Belgium brewery in Fort Collins, Colorado. This partnership lasted from 2008 until 2011 (Elysian Brewing, 2014).

It was announced via press release and social media on January 23, 2015 that Elysian Brewing Company had reached a merger agreement with AB InBev. The details of this merger were not released, but the statement explained that the purchase was expected to be completed by the end of the first quarter in 2015 (Anheuser-Busch, 2015, January 23).

Method

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the ways in which organizations rebuild their legitimacy through communication. Examining these messages as a case study provides a lens for understanding the way that the rhetorical approach to public relations can rebuild organizational legitimacy. Case studies are necessary for understanding contemporary events (Yin, 2003), such as the current study of legitimacy in the craft beer industry. In this study, brewery messages, merger announcements, and fan reactions are examined to understand how organizational legitimacy is damaged and then repaired. Case studies are also well-suited to studying "operational links needing to be traced over time" (Yin, p. 6), which is beneficial for this project because the brewery case studies occur over a period of four years (2011-2015).

Multiple documents from multiple sources were studied for this case. This provides more reason for employing the case study method. As Yin (2003) explains, case studies have their strength in the "ability to deal with a full variety of evidence –

documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations – beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study” (p. 8).

Specific messages from the brewery were collected. In each individual merger, the press releases distributed from AB InBev and the acquired brewery were examined. Additionally, all Facebook posts from the brewery six months prior to the sale announcement, the post(s) made on the day of the sale announcement, and posts that occurred six months after the sale were analyzed. Messages from fans were collected from two sources to determine whether or not a legitimacy crisis existed for the purchased brewery. The first source was the brewery sale announcement on Facebook. All of the comments made on that post were collected and examined. The second source was the Facebook rating system for each brewery. All of the ratings made on the day of the sale announcement to six months after the announcement were collected and the comments attached to these ratings were examined. The exception for this data collection is Goose Island whose Facebook page does not offer users a rating system for the company.

Organizational and consumer messages were analyzed in order to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How is the organizational legitimacy of a craft or microbrewery threatened when it is purchased by a larger operation?

RQ2: How are crisis communication strategies used to respond to stakeholder concerns regarding legitimacy?

RQ3: How do breweries argue for their organizational legitimacy through the use of press releases, blog posts, and other forms of social media?

In order to address the research questions, a thematic analysis was employed to examine the messages for emerging patterns. A thematic analysis is concerned with the in-depth explanations of codes by focusing on the identification and description of “both implicit and explicit ideas within the data” (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p. 10). This approach is best suited, not only for recognizing themes as they emerge, but for providing an explanation for those themes.

In order to initiate the process of a thematic analysis, Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest beginning with open coding and examining messages for themes and developing categories in which to place those messages. This requires reading the collected data and commenting on the broad themes that begin to emerge, based on Owen’s (1984) criteria. According to Owen (1984), a theme requires three criteria: (1) recurrence, (2) repetition, and (3) forcefulness” (p. 275). Recurrence is associated with meaning and is implicit (as in two or more words or phrases with a similar meaning being used) while repetition focuses on “an explicit repeated use of the same wording...” (p. 275). The final criterion, forcefulness “refers to vocal inflection...[and] it also refers to the underlining of words and phrases, the increased size of print or use of colored marks circling or otherwise focusing on passages in the written reports” (pp. 275-276). Facebook posts and comments can be coded by noting the reoccurring messages and repetitive terms as well the emphasis placed on certain words and phrases. Words that are typed in capital letters are perceived to have more emphasis than those written with standard capitalization use. Also, by taking note of the use of italics, bolding, and underlining, one can determine the forcefulness being used in a textual social media message in which vocal inflection cannot be taken into consideration.

Coding messages also requires a second step, referred to as axial coding (Corbin & Straus, 2008). Axial coding requires taking the codes found in the first step and refining them until broad themes are narrowed down into more specific themes for each code to fall under. The patterns and themes that emerged will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter 4:

Analysis

This thesis examined data from multiple media outlets from six months prior to Anheuser-Busch's purchase announcement of each brewery to six months after the announcement was made (except in the case of Elysian Brewing Company, for which only three months of post-acquisition data was collected due to its date of purchase). Data included press releases, Facebook posts and comments, Facebook ratings, and blog posts.

Facebook Statements Prior to Announcement of Sale

One reason why consumers choose to drink craft beer is the brewery's tie to local culture (Flack, 1997; Schnell & Reese, 2009). Each of the four breweries turned to Facebook as a social media outlet to promote its localness during the six months prior to the sale announcement. These connections were made through promotions of local charity events, promotional events at area bars known as "tap takeovers," and promotion of local and national sports. These messages serve to concurrently emphasize the innovative identity of the breweries as "craft" by promoting the use of local and non-traditional ingredients, awards received, and the specialty beers produced by each brewery. The messages coincide with the conceptual definitions of a craft brewery, according to the Brewers Association (Brewers Association, 2014b).

Local Events

Each brewery used Facebook to promote its events, as well as the local events in which they participated. These posts encouraged fans to shop local and attend local events, which promotes a local connection between the brewery, its fans, and the

community. This is an important step in creating an authentic identity (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). For example, one message stated:

Support buying local (especially at Blue Point Brewery) and we'll take 10% off all merchandise orders of \$25 or more for Small Business Saturday today! We're open from 12-7PM (Blue Point Brewery, 2013, November 30).

In this example, Blue Point Brewery is encouraging its fans to keep their business local and to spend their money in small, locally owned businesses. Blue Point also utilized Facebook to promote several local music festivals:

Here's your chance to really let your hair down. This Friday at Mr. Beerys is the Hair Metal Bands & Beer Fest! Live music with \$5 pints from Harpoon Brewery, Blue Point Brewery, Long Ireland Beer Company, Victory Brewing Company, Goose Island Beer Co., and more. Our own Mark "Rocker" will be representing in true 80's glam band fashion (Blue Point Brewery, 2013, August 21).

In this post, Blue Point Brewery is promoting a local event that would introduce its fans to other area breweries and bands. Promotion of this event also emphasizes Blue Point's active presence in the Long Island area. Similarly, 10 Barrel Brewing utilized social media to promote local events that it was participating in, but also to demonstrate further connections to the local community. For example, one post encouraged its followers to use a 10 Barrel event as an opportunity to learn more about the work of a local artist:

[Bend, OR] If you're downtown doing the First Friday Beer Walk tonight, come join us at the Patagonia store on Wall St. We'll be pouring beer from 5-8pm, and Mike Putnam will be showing his Landscape Photography (10 Barrel Brewing, 2014, May 2).

By promoting this event, 10 Barrel Brewing is showing support for a local artist, which demonstrates to its fans that it is immersed in the Bend, Oregon community. These examples provide insight to the ways craft breweries can utilize Facebook to develop their identities as being local through the promotion of, and involvement with, local events. It demonstrates that the brewery has a connection with its community and that by supporting the brewery, individuals can have control over where their money is spent and the knowledge that those resources will stay within the local community (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Schnell & Reese, 2005). Breweries also encourage these local connections with fans by partnering with area bars and restaurants to promote their specialty beers. These events are referred to as “tap takeovers.”

Tap Takeovers

“Tap takeovers” provide the brewery an opportunity to control a portion of the beer taps at a bar or restaurant for an evening. This allows further local presence and the continued building of community. Blue Point Brewery was especially active in the promotion of these events:

Catch the gang for Blue Point Night at Healy's Corner Restaurant & Bar in Carmel, NY tonight from 6-9PM! They'll be pouring Toasted Lager, Blueberry Ale, RastafaRye and Summer Ale on draft (Blue Point Brewery, 2013. August 3).

Blue Point Brewery hosted several tap takeovers in the six months prior to its merger with AB InBev. Through these events, Blue Point Brewery showcased a variety of innovative beers that went beyond its standard flagship selection. The brewery included its seasonal varieties and specialty beers to promote its unique selection and remind

stakeholders of its place in the local community. 10 Barrel Brewing Company was also active in hosting tap takeovers that included several unique beers:

[Olympia, WA] Promo at the Westside Tavern tonight, 6-10 pm. We're pouring Apocalypse IPA, OG Wheat IPA, Cherry Tart, and Night Ryed'r Porter. Giving away some cool prices, it's 90 outside, come cool down with some frosty beers! Cheers! #thewestsidetavern. (10 Barrel Brewing Company, 2014, May 1).

In addition to promoting the unique styles of beer, 10 Barrel also made sure to incorporate messages of connection when promoting tap takeovers:

[Seattle, WA] Hello Seattle Beer Week!!! We have 2 amazing events coming up tonight and tomorrow around town. Starting @ 6 tonight we will be at Naked City Brewery & Taphouse for Oregon Legends night where we will be pouring some awesome beer with the a lot of other of our friends from OR ☺. And tomorrow we will be at Brouwer's Café for Sour Fest starting at 11am, we will be pouring German Sparkle Sparty Berliner, Cucumber Crush & Apricot Crush! Hope to see ya'll out Cheers! (10 Barrel Brewing Company, 2014, May 14).

In this post, 10 Barrel is promoting an identity with which others can connect. The brewery is not just pouring beer for customers with other breweries. Instead those involved are “their friends,” implying a deeper connection with other breweries and fans of the brewery. This gives fans the sense that they can connect with the brewery’s staff, become friends with them, and get to know them on a personal level beyond that of a bartender and beer drinker. The close connections that these bartenders make with their “friends” creates a deeper sense of authenticity for the brewery as a whole (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010) and tap takeovers are a simple way to facilitate this process.

Charity Events

The Brewers Association conceptualizes a craft brewery as tending “to be very involved in their communities through philanthropy, product donations, volunteerism and sponsorship events” (Brewers Association, 2014b, para. 4). Craft brewers engage in local philanthropic events to support their communities and these engagements increase the breweries’ perception of virtue. The increase in virtue increases the authentic experience of brewery patrons (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). In the six months prior to the merger announcement, each brewery was involved in at least one charity event:

Last night Goose Island was at Chicago’s Tallest Tailgate on the 80th floor of The Mid-America Club to benefit three great charities: Augie’s Quest, Rainbows, and ClubCorps Employee Partners Care Foundation. Everyone enjoyed 312, Green Line, Matilda and Sofie while watching the Chicago Bears defeat the Miami Dolphins. Go Bears! (Goose Island Beer Company, 2010, November 19).

Goose Island’s post actually performs two tasks. First, it demonstrates the care and virtue of the brewery by being involved in a fundraising event supporting three different charities. Second, it emphasized its local tie to Chicago by showing its support for the city’s NFL organization, the Chicago Bears. With one post, the brewery fulfills two motivations for seeking authenticity. Blue Point Brewery has also been involved with local philanthropic activities, as evidenced by the following charity promotion:

If you like tennis and beer then this event is for you! Help Chef Bill Telepan of Telepan Restaurant support Wellness in the Schools in their tennis pro-am and Telepan picnic this Saturday in East Hampton. Good food, Blue Point beer, and some excellent tennis all for a great cause (Blue Point Brewery, 2013, August 6).

Blue Point is engaging in philanthropic work through the sponsorship of this charity event. In doing so, it is cultivating a positive relationship and stronger connection with the Long Island community. Elysian Brewing was also involved in its share of community charity events. From supporting local avalanche rescue dogs (Elysian Brewing, 2014) to supporting charity bike rides, Elysian used Facebook to encourage fans and patrons to contribute:

Join us in celebrating all the Obliteride riders for Fred Hutch this weekend at Gasworks Park! Michael Franti and Spearhead will be kicking off the event on Friday. #immortalipa and #mensroomred will be served all weekend. (Elysian Brewing, 2014, August 5).

The Obliteride is an annual bike-riding fundraiser for the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center of Seattle, Washington (Fred Hutch Obliteride, 2015). By participating in this fundraiser, Elysian is demonstrating philanthropy and strengthening its local connection with patrons, thus reinforcing its authentic craft status (Brewers Association, 2014b; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). The promotion of local charity events does more than encourage philanthropy. It reaffirms the notion that an authentic craft brewery has virtue and that a patron of such an establishment vicariously shares in that brewery's virtue (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010).

Sporting Events

In addition to charity events, the breweries also demonstrated their local involvement by promoting sporting events in their community. For example,

Congratulations to each and every runner of the 2010 Bank of America Chicago Marathon! Goose Island Beer Co. was at the finish line with pints of 312 Urban

Wheat Ale to celebrate. Thank you to all the volunteers and everyone who made the marathon a success! (Goose Island Beer Company, 2010, October 12).

The annual Bank of America Chicago Marathon is a major event which generates quite a bit of buzz for the city and the marathon sponsors. Through its involvement with the marathon (and by celebrating at the finish line), Goose Island reinforces its community ties. Blue Point Brewery was likewise involved in a well-known local sporting event:

Are you headed to the North Fork Craft Beer, BBQ & Wine Festival or Cedar Beach Disc Golf Course's Long Island Open Tourney tomorrow? It's gonna be a big weekend of beer on The Island – let us know what/where you're drinkin'!

(Blue Point Brewery, 2013, August 9).

Actually, Blue Point Brewery promoted several disc golf events through its social media page. Disc golf has grown to such popularity in the Long Island area that there is a non-profit organization used to promote and maintain the sport (Long Island Disc Golf, 2015). Brewery fans would recognize the popularity of the sport in the area, furthering the connection between the brewery and its local community.

In addition to local sporting events, breweries such as Goose Island and Elysian supported national sporting teams from their cities. Elysian Brewing made a number of posts, including photos, in support of Seattle's NFL team, the Seattle Seahawks:

Elysian Tailgate at Rhein Haus! Join us this morning for some pre-game nosh and brews! We'll be serving up Chili Dogs and Sloppy Hans sandwiches along with Elysian of BOOM!!! IPA! Go Hawks! (Elysian Brewing, 2014, November 23).

Elysian relied upon feelings of local pride associated with the Seahawks throughout the NFL season. The brewery posted several pictures of staff in Seahawks memorabilia and

made several posts in support of the team. These posts work to continually ingrain the notion of Elysian's local identity into the minds of its fans, reminding them that Elysian is just as much a part of Seattle as the Seahawks.

Other Local Projects

In addition to the promotion of local events and support of local organizations, the breweries also used Facebook to promote their use of local ingredients. For example, Elysian Brewing posted the following:

Working on a colorful new market-inspired brew that will debut at the Sunset Supper coming up on August 15 at the Pike Market: Busker Blonde is an ale made with Washington apricots, fresh mint, flowers and long pepper, all sourced from the Pike market. Nice picks, Steve! (Elysian Brewing, 2014, July 29).

In this post, Elysian is making a strong connection to its community by emphasizing that the ingredients used in its beer are local. It goes a step further by indicating where the ingredients were grown (such as apricots from Washington) and specifically where they were purchased. Any brewery fan in the Pike Market area would recognize this cultural reference and realize that they shop in the same market as their favorite brewery. Just like its support for the Seattle Seahawks, Elysian is demonstrating its local identity through its choice of ingredients and patronage of a local farmer's market.

Goose Island Beer Company used its Facebook page to promote its eco-friendly initiative, the Green Line Project:

Happy Saint Patrick's Day! If you're looking for a tasty pint that is green- but not in color – check out the Green Line Project website for a list of bars in Chicago with Green Line Pale Ale on tap. Green Line is available only on draft in Chicago

to reduce the environmental impact of bottling and shipping. Have a safe and fun St. Paddy's, cheers! (Goose Island Beer Company, 2011, March 17).

Promotion of this Chicago-specific initiative demonstrates to consumers that Goose Island Beer Company is working to improve the environmental quality of the community in which it is established. This beer is only available in the city of Chicago and is only available on draft. This process eliminates wastes from used bottles and cans and is also environmentally-friendly by limiting the transportation waste associated with a wider distribution. Additionally, it emphasizes Goose Island's local identity by only being available within in the city of Chicago.

Specialty/Rare Beer

In addition to establishing a local identity, the breweries used Facebook to showcase their uniqueness by highlighting specialty beers they produced. This strengthens their identities as craft breweries by emphasizing the innovative techniques, recipes, and production styles that define each brewery. According to the Brewers Association (2014b),

The hallmark of craft beer and craft brewers is innovation. Craft brewers interpret historic styles with unique twists and develop new styles that have no precedent... Craft beer is generally made with traditional ingredients like malted barley; interesting and sometimes non-traditional ingredients are often added for distinctiveness (para. 4).

Goose Island and Blue Point Brewery were especially active in this capacity. Throughout the six months prior to the sale announcement, Goose Island posted several pictures of brewers adding specialty ingredients such as raspberries and blackberries to wine barrels

and fermentation tanks to produce its Lolita and Juliet brands of beer. The brewery also emphasized the rareness of its specialty brews, especially the rareness of its barrel program. In the description of its photo album titled “Bottling day at Goose Island for Rare Bourbon County Brand Stout” Goose Island wrote:

This stout was aged for two years in the finest old barrels Goose Island has used in its 18 years of bourbon barrel-aging beers. A true rarity—savor and share it only with those you hold dear, as it will never be made again. Cheers to all the brewers on a very special beer! (Goose Island Beer Company, 2011, November 20).

The rarity of the barrel programs and the innovative ingredients highlighted in this post are examples of the concepts that give a brewery its “craft” status, thereby solidifying Goose Island’s craft identity.

Many of the beers produced at Blue Point Brewery are also produced using experimental techniques and innovative ingredients. Blue Point uses Facebook to highlight these aspects:

Winter has returned. No, not the polar vortex. Winter Ale is back on tap in the tasting room. Get it while you can and try the experimental cask that is so secret we can't even call it by name. Tasting room is open today and tomorrow 3-7 and Saturday 12-7. See you around the brewery! (Blue Point Brewery, 2014, January 9).

The brewery calls attention to the experimental status of the cask used to age this beer. It adds to the intrigue of the beer and highlights the innovative style of the brewery, which increases the craft identity. Not only is this beer experimental, but it is rare and patrons

who visited the brewery's tasting room were the only fans able to enjoy it. They are now the select few who have had a one-of-a-kind experience.

The breweries utilized social media to highlight their local connections and the qualities that gave them status as a craft brewery. This was achieved by promoting local festivals, charity events, and sporting events, highlighting specialty beers, and providing details of the breweries' use of local ingredients. The details provided by the breweries allowed fans to find the connection, control, and virtue (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010) they are seeking in a craft beer. When the breweries reached a point that they were ready to announce their mergers with AB InBev, the breweries and AB InBev used similar messages to remind fans of the attributes that gave these breweries their craft status.

Brewery Press Releases

With each acquisition, Anheuser-Busch released a statement outlining the details of the merger. Each press release followed a similar format and included similar messages. The most reoccurring messages emphasized the fact that no changes would be made to the brewery or the production of beer.

Anheuser-Busch complimented each brewery as highly successful and fast growing. The statements then went on to praise the breweries as great additions to AB InBev's "high end beer segment" (Anheuser-Busch, 2011, March 28, para. 9). The following statements were used to announce the merger between Anheuser-Busch and two of the breweries:

Chicago-based Goose Island, one of the nation's most respected and fastest-growing small brewers with sales concentrated throughout the Midwest, today announced it had agreed to be acquired by Anheuser-Busch, its current

distribution partner, in a move that will bring additional capital into Goose Island's operations to meet growing consumer demand for its brands and deepen its Chicago and Midwest distribution (Anheuser-Busch, 2011, March 28, para. 1).

In a similar message regarding Blue Point Brewing Company, Anheuser-Busch stated:

Anheuser-Busch today announced it has agreed to purchase Blue Point Brewing Co., one of the nation's top craft brewers with more than 40 beers and sales concentrated along the East Coast, in a move that will bring additional resources to Blue Point's operations, allowing it to meet growing consumer demand for its award-winning brands (2014, February 5, para. 1).

In both of these messages, Anheuser-Busch focuses on the success of the breweries involved in the merger. The press releases also emphasize that the merger will help the brewery in meeting the increasing demands for its products. These statements are meant to reinforce the idea that AB InBev's acquisition of the brewery will benefit fans of the brewery. The breweries also directly address such issues. For example, Elysian Brewing Company explained,

With the support of Anheuser-Busch, we will build on past successes and share our beers with more beer lovers moving forward...By joining with Anheuser-Busch we'll be able to take the next steps to bring that energy and commitment to a larger audience (Anheuser-Busch, 2015, January 23, para. 2-3).

Overall, the press release messages were meant to reassure stakeholders that no significant changes would be made to the brewery and that only positive things would come as the result of these mergers. The breweries' comments reinforced this belief for example, Goose Island's CEO, John Hall, stated:

‘The new structure will preserve the qualities that make Goose Island’s beers unique, strictly maintain our recipes and brewing processes,’ Hall said. ‘We had several options, but we decided to go with Anheuser-Busch because it was the best’ (Anheuser-Busch, 2011, March 28, para. 6).

In addition, each press release emphasized that the original founders and CEOs would maintain their leadership positions at the breweries. They expressed that each brewery would maintain control over the unique brewing processes and flavors that made them successful and that most changes would only affect access to larger facilities and a wider distribution audience.

This is an important process for the acquired breweries which are trying to maintain their craft status with fans, even after the acquisition announcement was made. Once AB InBev made the merger announcement with each brewery, fans were given the opportunity to respond and react via the social media pages (specifically, blogs and Facebook) of the individual breweries. While some responses from brewery fans were accepting of this information, many fans reacted negatively to the merger announcements.

Brewery Fan Reactions

The breweries made sure to reaffirm their presence within their communities through social media messages. Such messages revolved around local events (including charity and sporting events) and made references to local culture, landmarks, and history. These messages were used to establish the “social norms and values” (Metzler, 2001, p. 322) of the brewery and connect them to the community. However, these messages were not completely effective. Although there were some fans who accepted the news of the

merger with statements of support or conditional support (“I accept this, as long as my conditions are met”), the overwhelming majority of responses came from fans who expressed no support of the merger.

Negative Reactions

At the news of Goose Island’s merger with Anheuser-Busch, Facebook user Jason Bledsoe expressed his disappointment by stating that “AB is like the Death Star destroying breweries throughout the galaxy” (Bledsoe, 2011, March 30). Many other Facebook users responded with similarly negative messages. Fans expressed their anger, dislike, and disappointment in the merger. Overall, three themes emerged from the negative responses: boycott, sell outs, and concerns of loss. These themes demonstrate that the legitimacy of the breweries’ craft status was called into question.

Boycott

The news of the AB InBev merger had a negative impact on many brewery fans. These fans expressed their frustration and disappointment with the news and claimed that they would enact a boycott against the brewery:

Can't say I blame you guys for taking the \$\$\$ and running...but from now on I'll pass on your offerings. There are too many small, independent, craft breweries worth supporting. (Alexander Dacey, 2014, February 5).

Jim Vorel responded to Alexander Dacey with a similar sentiment:

That’s the great thing about the craft beer industry these days, that no brewery is “indispensable.” There are so many amazing choices that if any one brewery sells out, there’s probably a dozen equal or better options you can move on to supporting (Jim Vorel, 2014, February 6).

Other fans expressed the same calls for boycotts of the breweries that merged with AB InBev. Facebook user Travis McDonnell responded to the merger news by giving 10 Barrel a one-star rating and making the comment that 10 Barrel “is now on my Do Not Buy list” (McDonnell, 2014, April 29). Some fans chose to boycott the breweries because they felt they could not support AB InBev for moral or ethical reasons:

I'm not angry, nor am I even really disappointed. You guys run a business, and I can grasp that idea, and the reasons behind this decision, pretty easily. AB/InBev is not 'evil' any more than Elysian or Goose Island or whoever is 'good'. You're all just companies, trying to make money doing something you love, and I can respect that. But at the end of the day, the fact remains: AB/InBev actively does everything they can to shut down craft breweries, take away their taps in bars, and squeeze them out of the shelves in stores. Any money I give to you, would in turn be going to them, and then be used to lobby against the craft scene. Will I turn my nose up at an Elysian if someone offers it to me? Never. But not another dollar of my own money will ever go towards the products you guys make. I can't do it in good conscience (Bill Walje, 2015, January 29).

This fan perceives AB InBev as anti-craft beer and considers a merger with it as a betrayal to the craft beer industry. Therefore, this fan expresses that he must boycott the brewery because he can no longer support Elysian. Local small business owners also expressed their disappointment, viewing the merger as a betrayal to other small businesses, and vowed to no longer do business with Elysian as a result of its merger with Anheuser-Busch:

As the general manager of a very popular craft beer joint, I can honestly say that I will never carry your beer again. Yes. I do carry bud and bud light simply out of market demand. I HATE it! But I do it. Elysian does not carry such a demand.

With so many amazing craft beers available there is no need for me to give AB anymore of my money. I also find it very funny that "educational opportunities" were used as a reason to be bought out. Really?! What could AB possibly teach you about brewing beer? How dumb do you think NW beer drinker is? This all being said, I hope you all sleep well on your money stuffed pillows. Cheers!

(Nathan Robert Kollman, 2015, January 29).

This business owner admits that he carries Anheuser-Busch products due to customer demands, but does so unwillingly. Because he does not want to support AB InBev anymore than necessary, he has decided to boycott carrying Elysian products. He denies Elysian's status as a craft brewery and would rather promote breweries that are not associated with AB InBev. Another Elysian fan shared the sentiment that the brewery was a sellout:

Elysian, I am upset that you sold out. I find that I cannot ethically buy your beer anymore. I am a small farmer with a small direct to consumer business. A business that I cannot keep pushing and marketing on behalf of, while purchasing and supporting products from a business that does not have the tenacity or drive to help maintain and build the small business sector in this country. This sellout cuts the deepest, along with 10 Barrel's sellout, because I thought I was supporting a thriving small business. Instead I supported those who, at the very least, had

ambiguous motivations. I don't wish you ill will, I'm just truly disappointed (Phil Blankenship, 2015, January 29).

This fan declares a boycott against Elysian because he feels that it betrayed small businesses and the craft industry. As a farmer with a small business, he no longer feels that he can support a business that has merged with a large corporation. Blankenship's response to the merger announcement touches on an additional theme besides the promise to boycott Elysian Brewery. He refers to the brewery as a "sell out," which was a common response from fans with each brewery announcement.

Sell Outs

By merging with AB InBev, these breweries are perceived to have replaced their established values with the values of the larger corporation. This process is known as "selling out" for money (Merriam-Webster, 2015). In this case, fans are accusing the craft brewery of selling out to AB InBev for monetary gain and abandoning their values and their patrons who shared those values. Fans used Facebook as a means of expressing that frustration:

We really loved your beer when we traveled through Oregon this past July, so this news is very disappointing. I think you'll find this a mistake. Many craft beer drinkers covet the little guy, the local guy... Sellouts (Katie English, 2014, November 5).

In this comment, the fan is expressing the sentiment that craft breweries are supposed to support "the little guy" but merging with a large corporation goes against that philosophy. For those fans who support small local businesses, a merger between a small brewery and a larger corporate brewery seems like a betrayal of the values held by other small

business owners. As a result, what may be considered a monumental event for the brewery is seen as a disappointment for fans:

Exciting news?!?!? Yeah, because someone just made A LOT of money. It's called SELLING OUT!!! Goose Island has been a favorite brewery of mine for many years. Now, I am done. I will NOT support that behemoth Anheuser-Busch (or any MillerCoors brewery for that matter)! I don't care if the quality remains the same, because there are plenty of small, INDEPENDENT breweries that need our support much more. I knew you guys has some kind of deal with CBA, which in turn had some sort of deal with AB going on, but I was hoping it didn't go too deep. Now, you made it easier for me and other beer lovers that care about the whole of a company. There are plenty of breweries that found a way to produce and distribute more with selling out. I believe it was just for the money. Goose Island will never touch these lips again nor many others I know. Very disappointing (Adam Keele, 2011, March 28).

If a brewery is perceived to have sold out, it can lose its organizational legitimacy because of the perceived loss of shared values (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). The breweries worked to establish that they shared the values of their community through their philanthropic efforts, support of other local businesses and artists, and their commitment to their community. However, the merger with AB InBev is perceived as an immediate dismissal of those established values. Fans not only feel betrayal of their shared values, they also feel a certain sense of loss over the local-ness, quality, and craft status of the acquired breweries.

Loss

The reactions of fans that came as a result of the merger – the boycotts and the accusations of selling out – may have been motivated by the fear of loss and uncertainty for the future. For example,

I'm sure from a financial standpoint this is great for you guys (I mean that in the nicest possible way), aside from product quality, I'm more concerned about what this means for your local community... will being owned by a bigger company mean you guys will be less involved locally, have less control, and become more a nuisance than a gem? Let's hope not... (Heylen Ec Thienes, 2014, November 5).

Facebook users expressed their fear and frustration over the “loss” signified by the merger with AB InBev. These fans expressed a number of different “losses” which included the “loss of” quality/local ingredients, control over business and production decisions, local identity, and “craft” status.

Loss of Quality/Local Ingredients

There are those fans who believed that the news of the merger meant the loss of the brewery’s use of quality and/or local ingredients:

There goes the integrity and quality of this brewery. This is terrible news. The fact that it's being sold as "exciting," furthermore, is almost insulting to those of us who respect the art of craft brewing (Amy Grady-Troia, 2011, March 28).

This fan’s comment expresses that a merger with a larger corporation shows a lack of integrity and a loss of quality in the brewery because this decision goes against traditional notions of a craft brewery. Even for those fans who did not express their anger with the merger they were still suspicious of the brewery’s future:

It's one thing for GI to be more available around the country (because of this deal) - and I could end up finding it more easily around Boston (I moved here from Chicago a little more than a year ago), but Greg Hall is stepping down as Brewmaster. If A-B puts their own people in, the quality is going to suffer and I'm not going to care where I can buy it (Slugs Aiello, 2011, March 28).

This fan does not express anger at the news of the merger. In fact, he was optimistic that he would now have access to the beer he enjoys due to the resulting increased distribution. However, this fan was not convinced that Goose Island would be able to maintain its original quality, and he was not alone. Many fans noted that the merger with AB InBev meant that the acquired breweries would lose the organic and non-Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) ingredients they relied on, as noted in this comment:

Get ready for some GMO corn in your toasted lager! (Doreen Lobelle, 2014, February 5).

This Elysian Brewing fan also shared his concern over the quality of ingredients that would be used once the merger was complete:

Hopefully access to "new ingredients" doesn't mean you guys are going to start using the same GMO garbage Busch puts in their beers (Spencer Blosl, 2015, January 29).

As with the earlier fan who did not express anger towards the news of Goose Island's merger, the following fan was not angry with Blue Point's acquisition announcement:

Congrats to you guys. You gave us some amazing beers. Life is pulling you in another direction then you must go. Sadly you will be missed. Budweiser will not keep to your quality standards and will probably stop certain beers from being

made. They also will be using more genetically modified ingredients. Truly enjoyed your beers. Best of luck in your next adventure (Daniel Hennessy, 2014, February 5).

Although he does not hold ill will towards Blue Point Brewery, Hennessy explains that he believes the quality of ingredients will suffer and that Blue Point will begin using GMO ingredients in its beers and he does not feel that he could support a brewery that used non-organic ingredients.

Loss of Control

Fans also expressed that by merging with Anheuser-Busch, the breweries would lose control over business decisions and production processes unique to the breweries. These fans expressed their concern that AB InBev would make internal changes to the breweries and that employees would lose their jobs and be replaced by new hires chosen by Anheuser-Busch:

We don't hate YOU. We detest Inbev. We detest what they stand for. We detest the loss of your independence - but do appreciate your owners being able to, well, cash in. God love 'em. But I saw what Inbev did to AB plants...they roared in, blew up the offices, blew up the staffing, shoved their way of doing things down the plants' throats...just like one would expect a large multinational shareholder-driven corporation to do. And not one driven by quality of product. That's what I detest, what I expect many of us detest. Yeah, they may not change things now. But wait until InBev share prices fall. It will get ugly then. You watch (Craig Zeenii, 2015, January 30).

This brewery fan was certain that a merger with AB InBev would only lead to negative changes to Elysian, despite the messages delivered through the press releases. Goose Island fan Chris McJunkin feared the same thing when the merger announcement was made:

Boo hiss. Why not sell to North American Breweries or some other craft investment group. Hell, maybe contract brew Boston Beer would have been better. Guess we get to look forward to Michelob 312 and Shock Top Honkers Ale. Not to mention anyone working there without a degree automatically gets let go, AB policy. Happened to the original In Beverly crew when AB took over US sales before the buyout (Chris McJunkin, 2011, March 28).

In this fan's opinion, Goose Island had other options that would have provided it with the ability to grow and expand without a merger. In his opinion, by agreeing to an acquisition, Goose Island relinquished control over the employment and production decisions of the original brewery.

Fans did not only fear that the breweries would lose internal control over the breweries, they also feared that Anheuser-Busch would change the brewing recipes and techniques originally used by the breweries. In response to Blue Point Brewery's announcement of the sale on its blog, this fan expressed his fear that AB InBev could have control over the production of Blue Point beer:

PLEASE DO NOT LET them touch your recipes...they will ruin it !!!! learn from Rolling Rock...once AB touch that brewery there taste was never the same !!! let them sell your merch. but dont let them change your taste !!!!! I love BP and all of

its beers, but I do not and have never liked AB/bud products !!!! PLEASE stay true !! (Bob Godfrey, 2014, February 10).

For this fan, an acquisition means a change in the unique flavor of the brewery. This opinion was shared by many fans as noted by the following “conversation” which took place on Facebook between two fans and Blue Point Brewery:

Fan: PLEASE DONT MESS WITH THE WET HOPS!!!!!! (Jason Long, 2014, February 5).

Blue Point Brewery: We're not going to mess with any of the beers in the lineup. And hope to bring on some new ones before too long! (Blue Point Brewery, 2014, February 8a).

To which a cynical fan responded:

Fan: Not unless their new boss tells them to. (Philip Dalton, 2014, February 13).

Dalton’s comment is his own way of reminding others that the brewery has been acquired by a larger corporation and may no longer be in control of making its own decisions. He does not believe that Blue Point can remain control over its business practices now that it has been acquired by AB InBev. He believes that AB InBev could demand that Blue Point make any changes it deems necessary and as the acquired brewery, Blue Point would have to follow its instruction.

Loss of Local Identity

Some fans perceived the mergers as a loss of the brewery’s local identity. In their opinion, all of the local ties that the breweries had established were eliminated when the brewery agreed to the sale:

- 1 star [Rating] Consider my family lost customers. Buy local, support local. That means not u anymore! Thanks for giving those who helped make your business successful the middle finger!! Well, here's one right back at ya!! (Mandie Blankenship Bennett, 2014, November 6).
- 1 star [Rating] Very disappointed in your decision to sell out. I'll have to go elsewhere for local beer. I'd recommend relocating, Bend's not your home anymore (Kimberly Medlock, 2014, November 7).
- 1 star [Rating] Shop local, shop small. That idea goes both ways. The public supported 10 Barrel in that concept, but 10 Barrel chooses not to support its loyal customers. Adios (Bryan Wilkins, 2014, November 22).

For these former fans of Elysian Brewing Company, the decision to merge with Anheuser-Busch meant the immediate loss of local connections, which damages the perception of the brewery's authenticity. One Blue Point Brewing Company fan expressed similar thoughts after announcement, feeling that Blue Point was no longer a "real Long Island beer":

Really sad. You guys were a real Long Island pioneer for craft brewing. Sad sad sad. It may be good for BP's pockets and Bud's pockets, but I like to keep my \$\$\$\$ here on Long Island, and it would have been so much better if the true craft companies said "screw off" to Bud and let them squander and keep Craft truly craft. Goose changed, they all change. But mostly it's not a real LI beer anymore, and THAT is a sad sad day (Rob Dickson, 2014, February 5).

Once again, the authenticity of the acquired brewery is being challenged with statements that the brewery no longer belongs to the local culture where the brewery initially found

success. This authenticity is also called into question by fans who compare Anheuser-Busch to the retail giant, Wal-Mart and explained that shopping at Wal-Mart does not count as shopping locally:

I try to spend my money on local products. I don't know that I can call you that anymore than I can call Wal-Mart local just because it's in the same city (John Trouble Williams, 2011, March 28).

And to these fans, giving business to a large corporation, such as Anheuser-Busch and Wal-Mart, damages the local economy:

By buying GI you will be supporting big business [A-B] that buys out or suffocates main street businesses. Its like if Wal-Mart moved in and shut down local businesses that set up shop and established itself years before. By buying GI products you are supporting A-B and their tightening control of niche markets (Joseph Jenson, 2011, March 30).

According to this fan, buying from an Anheuser-Busch owned brewery is bad for the local economy because the money does not stay in the community, but goes directly to the large corporation. "Control" is a motivating factor for those who are seeking authentic experiences (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010) and the loss of control of where their money is spent leads patrons to perceive that the brewery has lost its "craft" status.

Loss of "Craft" Status

The Brewers Association (2014b) has created a conceptual definition of what it means to be a craft brewery. For some fans, that definition is meaningful and important when selecting a beer and for them, the merger decision results in the immediate loss of "craft" status. For example,

People who celebrate craft beer are in it for the love of the craft, the independence, the variety, the imperfections. These things aren't compatible with faceless international syndicates most interested in market share and returns. Congrats on the payday, but it'll never be the same (Richard Camarda, 2014, February 5).

What gives a “craft beer” its status is meaningful to brewery patrons because it affects their social identity. For the craft beer community, the in-group/out-group (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995) distinction is determined by “craft” status, or lack thereof:

Craft beer drinkers and craft brewers have always had an 'us vs. them' mentality ; a David vs. Goliath scenario. Now you're a 'them' (Joe Pelle, 2014, February 6).

By referring to Blue Point Brewing as a “them,” this fan has evaluated Blue Point as no longer being a member of the “in-group” and has cast them into the less superior “out-group” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). Schnell (2013) explains that social actors are defined by a number of decisions they make, including what they eat and drink. Craft beer can be a part of a person’s social identity as a way of being set apart from non-craft beer drinkers. Those who rely on specific craft beer brands will feel a loss of their social in-group identity as craft beer enthusiasts if their craft label is suddenly perceived to be a macro beer. This loss of identity can lead to frustration and disappointment (Schnell, 2013; Carol & Swaminathan, 2000).

Once again, the genuineness, or authenticity, of the brewery is called into question when it loses its “craft” status. Rather than being its own independent brewery, it is now just a branch of a corporation. Fans often expressed this sentiment:

No.. you are going. you are now part of a giant corporation and will no longer be a genuine craft brewery. Just like Goose Island and Magic Hat before you.

Welcome to being a corporate sell out Blue Point (David Schwartz, 2014, February 5).

This comment demonstrates that there is a perception that acquired breweries are no longer deemed “genuine,” and are therefore no longer authentic craft breweries but are branches of the large corporate brewer, AB InBev.

The decision to merge with AB InBev was met with many negative remarks and calls for boycotts of the brewery. Throughout these messages, the authentic identity of the acquired brewery was called into question, but the greater issue for the brewery is the questioning of its legitimacy. A crisis situation occurs any time that an organization faces a challenge to its legitimacy (Massey, 2001). Throughout these remarks, fans challenged that the organizational values are no longer shared with the community, therefore challenging the legitimacy of the acquired breweries (Suchman, 1995; Metzler, 2001).

Responding to the Crisis

Once the examined breweries announced that they were merging with AB InBev, the breweries were perceived to lose their craft beer status, which meant that they were no longer considered an authentic craft brewery. This loss of craft status threatened the organizational legitimacy of the brewery. Any time an organization’s legitimacy is threatened, it can rely on crisis response strategies to repair its legitimacy with stakeholders (Massey, 2001). However, before an organization can respond to a crisis, it must narrow down the appropriate crisis type. Coombs and Holladay (1996) provide four crisis types, based on Attribution theory (p. 284):

1. Accidents: unintentional and internal
2. Transgression: intentional and internal
3. Faux pas: unintentional and external
4. Terrorism: intentional and external

Based on the responses from brewery fans, it is unclear whether a crisis exists as some responses were positive while others were negative, which classifies these crises as a faux pas. Coombs explains that “a faux pas is ambiguous as to whether or not a crisis exists. Some external group claims the organization has done something wrong. The ambiguity provides an opportunity to “convince stakeholders that there is no crisis” (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, p. 285). Not every brewery fan was upset by the news of the merger between AB InBev and the breweries. For example, in response to Blue Point Brewery’s blog post regarding the sale, local business owners expressed their support:

As small business owners we can only applaud Blue Point Brewery for how hard they have worked over the past decade to reach this milestone when America’s largest producer of beer likes your product that much they want to invest in it. Every small business owner would love to be in your shoes regardless of the product you sell and those who do not own a small business will never understand. This is a change for the ownership group, not the quality of the beer. Congratulations and nothing but continued success!

Chris & Michelle Kelly

Ms. Michelle’s Urban Gourmet (2014, February 5).

In a similar manner this 10 Barrel Brewing fan used Facebook’s rating system to express his support for the merger:

[5 Star Rating]...if I was in their shoes, I would've sold too! It's the American Dream...small town biz sells to corporate giants for big bucks and still get to have their brewery + a lot of \$\$\$\$. What's wrong with that? I think all the boycotters are just jealous that they weren't so lucky! Congrats 10 Barrel guys for making your American Dream come true! You are NOT sell outs!! (Jeff Lewis, 2014, November, 6).

In his post, Lewis is addressing all of those individuals who reacted negatively to the news of the merger announcement by explaining that this merger is a part of the “American Dream” that anyone else would take advantage of. Because there were so many fans willing to defend the actions of the breweries, it is unclear if the breweries faced a crisis situation. However, each of the breweries used crisis response strategies to reaffirm their legitimacy as an authentic craft brewery.

There are three key steps in to many approaches of crisis communication. Two of these steps involve convincing the public that there is no crisis and “have stakeholders see the organization more positively” (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, p. 238). In the case of a faux pas, Coombs and Holladay (1996) suggest using denial response strategies. Denial responses include attacking the accuser, denying that a crisis exists, and scapegoating or blaming someone outside of the organization. Denial strategies are present in the messages released by the breweries, but aspects of the “diminish” and “deal” responses strategies are also communicated by the breweries. Strategies of justification and ingratiation are also present in brewery messages. Justification is used by crisis managers to minimize “the perceived damage caused by the crisis” (p. 248) while ingratiation “praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization” (p.

248). Each brewery used a combination of the three responses in messages after the AB InBev merger, but ingratiation messages were used most often to emphasize that the same processes that gave the breweries their success would be the same processes used by the breweries in the future.

For Blue Point Brewery, the press release announcing the merger with AB InBev was accompanied by a post on the brewery's blog and Facebook page:

The tasting room will be open this week. Same hours. Same beer. Same folks brewing and pouring it. The new relationship with Anheuser-Busch is a huge step for Blue Point Brewing Company and everyone here is on board and looking forward to the future. We've always focused on our employees, the community, and, of course, the beer – and that will not change. Stay tuned for big things to come from Blue Point Brewing Company. Right here in Patchogue.

Cheers...

Mark & Pete (Potter, 2014, February 5).

This initial message is intended to reassure fans that although some aspects of the brewery would change, fans could be confident that nothing about the standards or values of the brewery owners (Mark and Pete) would change. In addition to this message, Blue Point also responded to comments received on Facebook. Overall, the messages follow the same pattern of the blog post. The comments were positive, optimistic about the future, and encouraged fans to “stick around for the ride!” (Blue Point Brewery, 2014, February 8b). The responses from Blue Point Brewery were not aimed at those who referred to the brewery as a “sell out” or to those promising to boycott the brewery. The brewery focused most of its responses to comments about changes made to the beer in an

attempt to alleviate the fears that brewery fans expressed in regards to changes being made to the brewery. Blue Point Brewery is trying to change the conversation surrounding the merger by alleviating fears of change to make the conversation a positive one. This can lead to a change in attitude regarding the merger and reduce the perception of a legitimacy crisis.

Elysian Brewing Company also provided its fans with a similar statement complementing the press release provided by Anheuser-Busch. This statement was released on the brewery's website as well as its Facebook page. However, Elysian waited six days to post this statement:

Yes, we were bought.

On Friday 23, it was announced that Elysian Brewing was going to be acquired by Anheuser-Busch. Since the moment that news hit, we've heard from our fans and customers, friends and advocates, industry partners and fellow brewers. The response on our social media platforms and in the comments of many articles has been a mixed bag of anger, support, questions, and disappointment. We want to acknowledge that we hear you — all of you — and have been reading all of your comments. For those with questions and concerns, we are trying to respond as quickly as possible.

The employees of Elysian found out on Friday morning, just like everyone else. While there are certainly mixed feelings within the company, our three original owners and co-founders, Joe, Dick, and Dave, are all on board and committed to leading us through what's next. A couple quick facts that we do know, and that we'd like to share:

- AB does not, and will not, decide our beer recipes or dictate changes to our beer. AB is not sending in people to take over, and our current teams are staying intact.
- We will probably see some changes at the brewery in the form of new equipment, access to new (quality) ingredients, and educational opportunities for our brewers.
- Our restaurants will stay exactly where they are and our beer will still be brewed in Seattle.
- Great Pumpkin Beer Festival is happening.
- Loser, with the tagline Corporate Beer Still Sucks, will continue to be brewed and packaged. Yes, we still think corporate beer still sucks. Yes, we get the joke.
- Some of our employees are excited about new opportunities, some are upset, and some are waiting for more information.

- We have a big, weird family of people who've worked their asses off and dedicated their time and energy to get Elysian to where it is today.
- No, this message did not get approved by AB. Unless there are any typos... then, it's their fault.

So, what next? Well, this week has been oddly similar to last week with the notable exception that a lot more people hate us. As employees, we get it. But, we're taking it one day at a time and looking forward to finding out for ourselves what the future holds. We're going to keep doing our jobs, and drinking our beer made by the same people with the same ingredients as they were last week. We're going to keep being creative and weird and inventive and whatever other pre-Friday-the-23rd adjective you would have ascribed to us. We're going to keep talking to people, and partners, and customers. We're going to listen. We're going to continue to support the charitable endeavors we believe in. And, after that, we will figure it out (Elysian Brewing, 2015, January 29).

This message acknowledges the negative reactions that brewery fans have had and attempts to alleviate the concerns of major changes in the brewery as a result of the merger. It seeks to remind fans of their pre-merger feelings towards the brewery and encourages them to have confidence in the brewery's future. In addition to this message, Elysian also responded to fans through Facebook in the same way that Blue Point Brewery responded to Facebook comments. These messages have a clear purpose: to communicate that no crisis exists (Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

Seattle-based 10 Barrel Brewing Company used crisis response tactics to distance itself from the Brewers Association (2014b) and its definition of craft beer in order to distinguish itself as a craft brewery. In an interview with Brewpublic, 10 Barrel and AB InBev staff sat down to discuss the merger and its implications for the future. When asked about the Brewers Association's guidelines for craft beer, Craft Division CEO, Andy Goeler made the point regarding the definition of craft beer as conceptualized by the Brewers Association, saying:

A polite way to put it is "Does it really matter?" It's the consumer that matters.

So, the definition that the Brewers Association or anybody puts on what a craft is

isn't really important. What's important is how consumers perceive the beer. Any beer that is well-crafted goes to the passion of the brewmaster writing a recipe, Using [sic] quality ingredients, And [sic] a quality process to ensure it's top-notch. That's what a great beer is, whether it's considered "craft" by a definition from the BA or anyone else is definitely secondary. It's really up to the consumer (De Ieso, 2014, November, 8).

Goeler is denying that the Brewers Association's (2014b) definition of craft beer is the only standard for determining the status of craft beer. In doing so, he denies that 10 Barrel is experiencing a legitimacy crisis. He is also calling attention to the importance of the consumers and their perceptions of the quality of beer. This ingratiates the consumers and lets them decide whether or not 10 Barrel's beer is still a craft beer, based on the quality of the product.

In a similar interview, Elysian Brewing co-founder Dick Cantwell explained that while his brewery may no longer be considered "craft," the beer produced by Elysian still falls within the craft category. He explains (Noel, 2015, February 2),

Q: Do you still consider Elysian craft beer?

Cantwell: The definition of craft beer has never been at issue. Craft beer is a broad category, and there's a lot of latitude for what craft beer is. Blue Moon is craft beer, there's no doubt about that even though it's made by MillerCoors. Thirty years ago I'd have been delighted to know that a major brewer was making a beer of that quality.

Q: So Elysian isn't a craft brewery anymore, but it still makes craft beer?

Cantwell: Absolutely.

Cantwell is justifying his brewery's merger with AB InBev as well as its beer's status as craft. He acknowledges that his brewery is no longer considered to be a craft brewery, but defends the beer's status as craft.

Goose Island employed similar ingratiation messages to defend its decision to merge with AB InBev. Goose Island brewer Brian Taylor explained in an interview that the brewery received a lot of "pushback" from brewery fans, but he defends the decision by saying that it has increased its ability to focus on specialty beers. Since the merger of Goose Island with AB InBev, the most significant change is the handling of certain flagship beers and the increased production of Goose Island's Bourbon County barrel program. The program, which involves aging beer in liquor barrels, was started in 1992 but the production process takes so much time that the brewery had to limit its production. Because of the merger with AB InBev, the brewery has increased its production of these specialty beers (Dzen, 2013, June 5). Taylor uses the increased production of the barrel program to justify the brewery's decision to merge with AB InBev.

Additionally, Blue Point Brewery has rebranded its website and made notable changes to the messages presented on each page in order to praise the brewery's previous work and ingenuity as a craft brewery. Blue Point maintains that it is still a craft brewery, as expressed in the "About Us" page of its website:

What started as two beer nuts chatting over a few pints quickly grew into Long Island's first and finest craft brewery. Mark and Pete's shared passion for beer comes through with every recipe, barrel and pint. Pour yourself our flagship Toasted Lager alongside a platter of oysters on the half-shell. Then take home a

six-pack of Hoptical Illusion or Mosaic to remind yourself and your friends what really, really good beer tastes like. Our job is simple—keep brewing good beer that we like to drink. If you don't like it, well... to each his own (Blue Point Brewing Company, 2015).

Blue Point Brewing Company is challenging the Brewers Association (2014b) definition of a craft brewery while also using ingratiation rhetoric to demonstrate a local connection and a dedication to continuing to brew beer on its own terms.

The use of crisis communication strategies are necessary in situations in which stakeholders perceive that a crisis exists, even if the organization claims that there is no crisis. However, it is important to remember that these communicative strategies must be consistent and long-term. The next chapter will conclude by explaining the implications of this case study and how other organizations can learn from these brewery mergers.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

This study explored threats to organizational legitimacy in the craft beer industry by examining the exchange of messages between craft breweries and their stakeholders. Using a rhetorical approach to public relations as a lens, this study provided insight into the ways in which organizations use authenticity to create and maintain their legitimacy and how that legitimacy can be threatened. It also provides insight for organizations can deal with such legitimacy threats.

The organizations studied here used social media messages to create their organizational identities as craft breweries by focusing on the characteristics of the brewery concurrent with the conceptual definition of a craft brewery provided by the Brewers Association (2014b). The breweries relied upon social media posts (specifically Facebook), blogs, and press releases to convey their legitimacy as craft breweries by calling attention to the local ingredients used in their beers and the local stories that gave those beers their names. They also used social media to increase their local ties to the community by highlighting local charity events, concerts, and sporting events. Through the use of social media, a stakeholder can get a sense of a brewery's connection to its community as well as its values through the charities and causes it supports. It is important that organizations convey those beliefs and values through their messages to build organizational legitimacy because it is in part measured by an organization's ability to meet the cultural expectations of its stakeholders. Social media also provided a way for brewery fans to perceive the breweries as authentic, based on Beverland and Farrelly's (2010) criteria for an authentic experience. The posts allowed fans to connect with

brewery staff members and gain insight into the unique ingredients and brewing processes that make their favorite beers so special. Because social media allows fans to interact with the brewery, they perceive a stronger connection to it and the brewery becomes a part of their identity. As a result, when the brewery makes a decision that fans may not agree with, fan identity can be threatened or damaged, sparking outrage on social media.

As a result, social media poses a threat for organizations because of its two-way communicative nature. Organizational followers have the ability to respond to original content, mention the organization in their Facebook and Twitter posts, and give their opinion through the organization's social media rating system. Brewery fans posed this threat to the legitimacy of the acquired breweries by expressing their anger and disappointment regarding the sale announcement with AB InBev. These social media messages threatened the legitimacy of the organizations, resulting in crisis situations for the breweries. Although fan responses were a mix of positive and negative reactions, the breweries must respond to the negative responses.

Implications

The merged craft breweries faced a legitimacy crisis because their authenticity was called into question by fans, but the craft brewing industry is not the only one that could face this type of legitimacy issue. Other organizations that rely on perceptions of authenticity may find themselves in a similar legitimacy crisis if they stray from the core values that act as a foundation for their authenticity within society. The case study of the craft brewery/AB InBev mergers provides implications for those organizations preparing for a similar transition.

Countless examples can be found throughout many industries. The music industry serves as an example of an industry that has numerous authenticity and legitimacy issues. Authenticity is critical for artists who want to succeed within their genre. This can be seen in the Blues movement in Austin, Texas (Gatchet, 2012) and the “outlaw” country subgenre (King, 2014). The country music subgenre “bro country” (Carlson, 2014, October 14) is currently facing authenticity issues with country music fans who reject it as “real” country music. Folk artists (Fine, 2003) and winemakers (Beverland, 2003) struggle with issues of neolocalism and authenticity as they try to find success within their industry. These artisans must prove that their craft is qualified to meet the expectations of consumers who are seeking an authentic experience.

The method of crisis response will have to be established uniquely for each organization. While other authenticity crises may provide guidance for similar events, an organization must be mindful that it is facing such a crisis because it has taken an action that challenged its original core values. Therefore, the organization must determine which crisis response will be most effective at restoring those organizational values with the public. This was the case for Disneyland during the 1984 employee strike. The strike occurred as a result of changes in Disneyland’s management of its staff. In the time leading up to this strike, Disneyland employed the metaphor that staff members were “family” but the park experienced a number of problems that led to wage freezes and a growing dissatisfaction between management and staff. The result of which was a 22-day strike by Disneyland employees. When the crisis was resolved, the “family” metaphor was lost, but the park developed a new metaphor for its staff (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987).

An organization that has diverged from its original core values, such as Disneyland or a merged brewery, can recover from a crisis, but it will take time and a consistent message.

Organizations must consider the reactions of stakeholders when preparing for any event in which it may be perceived that the organization has abandoned its original values. Stakeholders may vary in their importance to the organization and so it must consider how each stakeholder will be affected and how to minimize the negative impact the event will have with each stakeholder. In the case of the brewery mergers, brewery fans are considered to be stakeholders. There are several different “types” of brewery fans and those fans will have multiple levels of dedication to that brewery. As organizations develop, they establish a set of core values that act as a guide for their business practices. It can be assumed that the “top tier” or “most dedicated” fans are those connected to the values of the craft brewery. They are the fans whose social identities are most intertwined with a brewery’s values. For craft breweries, these values may be associated with those as outlined by the Brewers Association (2014b).

For the “top tier” fans, organizations must develop a communication strategy that will convey how the organization is maintaining its core values. In the case of the merged breweries, social media played a role in reaffirming the values of the breweries before the mergers took place. Social media was used strategically in the six months prior to the merger between the breweries and AB InBev in order to reinforce the local connections, values, and virtuous philanthropic work maintained by the brewery. These qualities were emphasized because they are aligned with the definition of a craft brewery, as outlined by the Brewers Association (2014b). For example, Elysian Brewing Company announced its merger to AB InBev in a manner that reaffirmed its commitment to its original values and

production process. The statement recognized that its actions made its fans angry, but it used the remainder of the announcement to inform concerned stakeholders of the details regarding the merger. Elysian managers wanted their stakeholders to understand that the brewing process and business operations would remain the same as they had before the merger was announced. This statement, in addition to its social media campaign, was meant to reaffirm the organization's values. Organizations that are in the process of a significant change to their structures and values systems can begin social media campaigns prior to an authenticity crisis in order to reinforce their core values with fans. This process strengthens the foundation for the organization's crisis response strategy when case stakeholders react negatively.

Other stakeholders may not be as concerned with the core values of the organization, but instead, are concerned with the quality of the organization's work. In this case, stakeholders were concerned with the quality of the ingredients and finished product. The messages of conditional support from brewery fans demonstrated that some fans were more concerned with the quality of the product they consumed rather than the values associated with the brewery. Many fans were angry about the news of the merger and expressed fears that the product would change. They associated AB InBev with a lower quality product, made with genetically-modified ingredients, that results in a lower quality taste. Therefore, they concluded that any brewery – macro or micro – associated with AB InBev must lose its quality. The fans that lend their conditional support to the breweries do so on the hope that nothing about the product changes. Conditional support is tentative and has stipulations. These stakeholders are giving the brewery a chance to prove that they will follow through with the promises outlined in their crisis response

messages. If they fail to maintain their original quality ingredients, unique recipes, and innovative practices, stakeholders will revoke their support. These situations imply that some stakeholders are more concerned with the quality of the product rather than the values of the organization itself. Organizations must consider that the initial negative reactions from stakeholders may be related to a fear of change. If these organizations can be consistent in their messages and in the production of their product, it may alleviate those negative reactions.

Organizations must also consider that such communication strategies will become permanent for the organization. Releasing one statement and one social media post will not be sufficient in easing the emotions of disgruntled stakeholders. Replying to comments on social media will only work to an extent. What is necessary is a long-term, consistent strategy that ingratiate the stakeholder with the positive works of the organization. The data from this study demonstrates that the conversation after the major event is on-going. For example, representatives of Goose Island are still discussing the merger with AB InBev, which occurred in 2011 and its messages are consistent. In much the same way, organizations must develop a communicative response to incorporate into interviews, press releases, and other content to be consistent throughout this process. These organizations can consistently use ingratiation tactics to remind stakeholders of the original core values the organization was established with and the ways in which those values are still present, even after an event such as a merger.

Theoretical Contributions

This thesis demonstrated the way in which authenticity negatively affects an organization's legitimacy by placing rhetorically constructed constraints upon it.

Organizations must demonstrate that their identity is in line with the cultural expectations of their stakeholders and authenticity is a part of organizational identity (Boyd, 2000; Boyd, 2009; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975), as demonstrated in the case of these acquired breweries.

Previous literature has examined the motivations that social actors have for choosing specific products, services, and venues based on the desire for an authentic experience. Beverland and Farrelly (2010) posit that individuals seek authenticity for reasons of connection, control, and virtue. Craft breweries fulfill those expectations for beer fans, especially when the breweries meet the definition of a craft brewery provided by the Brewers Association. Craft breweries are meant to be small, locally owned, and philanthropic (Brewers Association, 2014b.) which is then the criteria for an authentic experience. When a craft brewery loses an aspect of what makes it authentic, it may also lose aspects of its organizational legitimacy. This in turn causes a crisis for the organization.

Building on previous research, this study examine how organizations repair their legitimacy after a disruption of authenticity caused a crisis situation. By examining the reactions of brewery fans, it became clear that crisis situations emerged from the mergers with AB InBev. And so, by recognizing that crisis exists, it is then possible to identify the type of crisis situation and a draft and appropriate crisis response message.

However, these breweries maintained that their products were not affected by the merger and that no crisis actually existed. The breweries may lose legitimacy with their stakeholders, but are gaining legitimacy within the broader brewing industry. This case further demonstrated the constraint that multiple audiences place on organizations.

Multiple audiences have different cultural expectations for an organization, causing an organization to give priority to one set of expectations over another. The acquired breweries argued that they were concerned with their consumers' expectations but were less concerned with the expectations of the Brewers Association. The breweries disregarded the Brewers Association's conceptual definition of a craft brewery and defended their craft status by relying on the perceptions of consumers and other brewers in the craft beer industry. By doing so, they lose their legitimacy with the Brewers Association, but may gain institutional legitimacy with craft beer drinkers who have a cultural definition of craft beer (Suchman, 1995).

Authenticity and organizational legitimacy are intertwined in an organization's identity. For example, in order to remain an authentic craft brewery and maintain legitimacy, a craft brewery needs to construct messages that demonstrate that its local ties, commitment to quality ingredients, and production of unique beers will be unaffected by a merger with a larger company, such as AB InBev. Other organizations that make claims which rely on authenticity to determine legitimacy can use the example set by the craft beer industry if they plan a similar transaction. However, they must develop communicative strategies specific to their organization. Over time, a consistent message may rebuild any damaged legitimacy that the organization has experienced.

Limitations and Future Research

This case study has examined four breweries acquired by Anheuser-Busch InBev and the messages used to convey and repair organizational legitimacy. It is limited to the organizations' social media content and press releases and the stakeholder messages associated with this content. There are other sources of content outside of the data sample

that could have been examined in order to further understand the issues of legitimacy and authenticity associated with the sale announcements. This could include message board conversations, news stories and comment threads, and opinion blogs on the topic of craft beer. This additional content could determine if the crisis type were different than originally indicated, or if the content supported the original conclusion: that no crisis exists.

Another limitation of this study concerns the overall trend towards locally or regionally produced products. Rather than studying the issues of organizational legitimacy and image repair, another study could examine the motivation leading the trend of individuals to explore regionally-based food products, such as farm-to-plate restaurants, farmers markets, the push for non-GMO ingredients, and regional cookbooks that allow readers to create regionally-inspired cuisine. This “push” may further explain where craft beers fit into a larger scale movement for local ingredients and products. This would further extend research exploring authenticity and connection to local places as outlined by Flack (1997) and Schnell and Reese (2009).

It is also important to consider whether this study is limited by the concept of organizational legitimacy. Once a craft brewery merges with a larger brewery, it is no longer an independent organization, even if it maintains its brand and autonomy in decision-making and production. Rather than focusing on organizational legitimacy, further research regarding craft brewery mergers should focus on a study of brand legitimacy. Expanding the research of organizational legitimacy into branding legitimacy can lead to a greater understanding of how merged organizations can repair their brand’s reputation.

Conclusion

Legitimacy is a balancing act for organizations. Those that are seeking to grow and expand beyond their original structure must be aware of the difficulty in making significant changes to their identity without creating a legitimacy crisis for themselves. Expansion for the Goose Island, Blue Point, 10 Barrel, and Elysian breweries meant merging with AB InBev in order to gain access to increased production and distribution resources. However, these benefits came at a cost. Many consumers specifically chose beers produced by these breweries because of their authentic craft status, and that authenticity was questioned once the merger between the brewery and AB InBev was announced. This authenticity is connected to the fan's social identity and that social identity was also questioned when the merger announcements were made, sparking the comments of outrage and disappointment made on social media. All of these factors led to a legitimacy crisis for the breweries who then utilized social media and interviews to defend their decisions to merge and their "craft" status. These breweries maintained that the production process and quality of their product would not change, despite the merger. Other organizations seeking a similar change can learn how to address stakeholder concerns and repair any legitimacy damage they face by following a similar process of addressing concerns head-on and maintaining a consistent message until the crisis has passed.

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