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*Leveraging the human side of the brand using a sense of place: case studies of craft breweries*

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### Leveraging the human side of the brand using a sense of place: case studies of craft breweries

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# **Leveraging the human side of the brand using a sense of place: case studies of craft breweries**

## **Abstract**

In order for consumers to emotionally connect with brands, brands must be transformed from inanimate entities into the realm of acquiring human characteristics. Following a review of more than 1000 breweries from online sources and beer companion books, we explore how a sense of place, derived from myths, folklores and heroes, enables marketers and consumers to co-create narratives that humanise brands. We add to the theory on brand humanisation as we conclude that a sense of place offers a novel, and different, approach to humanisation strategies based on anthromorphisation, personification and user imagery, but can also operate in tandem with them. Further research is recommended to understand how and why consumers respond to branding strategies that use a sense of place to humanise brands.

## **Summary of statement of contribution**

This exploratory study adds to the body of knowledge on how brands are humanised. It demonstrates that, at least in relation to craft breweries, a sense of place offers rich material for the creative content for brand narratives. In addition, we suggest that a sense of place has the distinctive advantage of allowing both marketers and consumers to create narratives with potential to humanise brands.

**Key words:** brand humanisation, sense of place, brand narratives,  
anthromorphisation, anthromorphic marketing

## **Leveraging the human side of the brand using a sense of place: case studies of craft breweries**

Developing a relationship between a brand and consumers is achieved when consumers connect with brands in an emotional manner (Fournier, 1998). As brands are ostensibly inanimate objects, this can only occur when brands are humanised (Aaker, 1999). Thus far, the literature in this field of marketing suggests that brands are typically made human-like via anthropomorphisation, personification or user imagery (Aaker, 1999). For example, in the case of Trip Advisor, the brand is humanised via anthropomorphisation when physical human characteristics are overlaid onto the owl. In comparison, Jamie Oliver's personal attributes personify the Jamie Oliver brand, and in the case of Marlboro, images of the typical users of the brand are used in promotional collateral to help consumers identify with the brand.

Brand humanisation strategies around anthropomorphisation, personification and user imagery are, to a large extent, implemented and controlled by the marketer. In this context, consumers have a limited capacity to extend, or personalise, brand narratives. This contrasts sharply with the increasing levels of participation consumers now experience in consumption (Ahonen & Moore, 2005). In this paper, we explore how consumers can be included in brand humanisation strategies. In order to do this, we refer to a sense of place (SoP). A SoP describes 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). We suggest that a SoP can create and reinforce emotional attachments

between brands and consumers. As such, we are of the view that a SoP has potential to address the relationship-gap between brands and humans that may occur when anthromorphisation, personification and user imagery are used by marketers as the basis of their brand humanisation strategies.

We propose that a SoP can offer both marketers and consumers the rich content for 'brand poetics', or the means to co-create and embellish brand narratives which enable consumers to make sense of the world around them and of their consumption experiences (Ooi, 2002). While all brands risk being perceived as irrelevant to consumers if they pursue ultra-global strategies which make them forget their origins (Quelch & Jocz, 2012), we acknowledge that our proposition is likely to be most pertinent to those brands that shy away from multinational and global marketing strategies and operate within the antithesis of capitalistic systems and against oppressive forces (Penaloza & Price, 1993). Therefore, the research questions guiding our study are:

*Is a SoP a source of creative content for brand narratives aimed at humanising brands?*

*If so, what does a SoP offer that is different from brand humanisation strategies based on anthromorphisation, personification or user imagery?*

The paper proceeds in the following manner. We refer to the notion of storytelling in marketing and then examine the branding literature to understand the rationale for humanising brands. We then look at the notion of a SoP and explore how it can offer creative content to humanise brands. After providing background to the research context

– craft breweries – where we explore our proposition, we then provide the details of our research approach. Following this, we present our findings highlighting how craft brewery brands can be humanised using narratives around heroes, folklores and myths that originate from a SoP. We then discuss the implications of our findings for marketing management. Finally, we acknowledge the limitations of our research and put forward recommendations for further research on this topic.

### **Narratives: sense-making for brands and consumers**

Narratives are fundamental to humans who are compelled to tell stories. While Benjamin (1973) lamented on an apparent demise of storytelling and storytellers, storytelling is rife amongst brand managers and consumers alike. For example, Woodside, Sood and Miller (2008) note that brand managers use storytelling techniques to effectively develop relationships between brands and consumers. Hirschman (2010, p. 581) also suggests that brand narratives, like human narratives, are the product of human tendencies ‘to see causality in the world, to experience time (whether cyclical or linear) as an opportunity for change and challenge, and to project human-like traits onto external objects and those of external objects onto ourselves’. Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006) suggest that brand strategists should focus on telling stories that inspire and captivate consumers to engage them with the brand and the brand narrative that underlies them. These ‘brand poetics’ (Ooi, 2002) invent and present a unique and attractive brand story that enables consumers to make sense of their experiences. In this sense, verbal, textual, visual or performance devices are used by both brands and consumers (as storytellers of the brand narrative) to deliberately include, and exclude, aspects of the tale that are relevant to their

own objectives.

While Hirschman (2010) concluded that both brand and consumer narratives follow similar patterns, there is the view that brand narratives are dynamic. Brown and Patterson (2010) note that various typologies of plots have been developed to decipher the structure of narratives. Like Booker (2004), who lauded the simultaneous use of multiple plots used in the Harry Potter books, Brown and Patterson (2010) suggest that brand narratives should be allowed to bloom and burgeon rather than remain stagnant. Indeed, Brown and Patterson (2010) note that more and more marketers need to incrementally build their brand narratives, even into ‘ripping yarns’, to enthrall consumers with the brand.

Narratives enable consumers to feel a connection or belonging with brands. Humans can both create and/or relay narratives to others, or add or exclude information from them. In this way, narratives have potential to engage consumers with brands as consumers can create and re-create the brand, and thus serve as the basis for interaction and social cohesion (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Brand narratives can therefore be co-created with the consumers, and can enable consumers to feel that they are in control, which is a basic human motivation (Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012), and may enhance consumers’ emotional attachment with brands.

### **Humanising the brand: rationale and typical strategies**

Brands have personalities (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998); identities and reputations (de Chernatony, 1999); images (Gummesson, 1998); emotions (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis,



1986); and relationships with consumers (Fournier, 1998). At the heart of all these metaphors is the notion that brands are human-like. Fournier (1998, p. 365) notes that the quality of brand relationships is based on meaningful actions of the brand and the consumer and ‘the reciprocity principle on which all relationships are grounded’, and goes so far as to suggest that brands are so human-like that consumers can have affairs, enslavements, flings and arranged marriages, among other relationships, with them. Similarly, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) note that consumers can love, and sometimes hate, brands. In this sense, brands are an active component of a brand-consumer relationship dyad (Fournier, 1998), where consumers emotionally attach to, detach from, and can even avoid, brands (Hogg, 1998; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009).

It is well-recognised that consumers prefer humanised brands (Brown, 2010). Firms aim to capitalise on this phenomenon. Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich and Iacobucci (2010), for example, demonstrate that brand attachment, or the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self, is linked with consumer behaviour, including purchase behaviour, purchase share, and need share. A review of the literature suggests that marketers use three key strategies to humanise their brands: anthromorphisation, personification and user imagery.

### *Anthromorphisation*

Brands are anthromorphised when mind, soul and emotional states, and behavioural features, are bestowed upon them (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2009). Brown (2010) notes that the most popular brands are those that use humans, or stylised icons of them,

and cites Ronald McDonald, Johnnie Walker's Strider and the Coppertone Girl, as examples. He highlights the way in which animal brand mascots, as stylised icons of brands, are anthropomorphised because physical characteristics are overlaid onto them. LeBel and Cooke (2008) highlight that firms often use spokespersons, whether they be real or manufactured, as part of a strategy to engage consumers with the brand in an emotional manner. In the case of Red Bull, for example, the logo anthropomorphises the brand as human attributes and abilities are bestowed onto the brand using the bull's iconic abilities of power, endurance and strength. Cadillac was similarly anthropomorphised when a fun-seeking and defiant Cadillac 'crashed' a party of luxury cars in one of its advertising campaigns (Aggarwa & McGill, 2007). These narratives and stories around the brand become the conduit to humanise the brand.

### *Personification*

Consumers often imbue brands with human personality traits (Aaker, 1997), and thus personify them. Brown (2010) explains this phenomenon using Guthrie's (1995) assertion that humans tend to view aspects of the world around them as human because they know more about humans than they do of anything else. This assertion concurs with that of Gilmore's (1919): that man's (as in humanity's) tendency to humanise the world around him helps him to make sense of the world and overcome any dissonance he may feel in his surrounding environment. Noticeably, consumers and marketers often refer to brands with adjectives (e.g. rugged, sophisticated) that are associated with human personality traits and can even attribute a gender to them (Grohmann, 2009). In a successful branding strategy (Baker & Bendel, 1998), Australia was personified, using

Paul Hogan, or 'Hoges' (later known for his role as Mick "Crocodile" Dundee). Hoges was rugged, affable, believable, and even humble, suggesting he would 'slip another shrimp on the barbie for ya [sic]'.

### *User imagery*

Consumers seek a match between their own personality and that of brands they consume (Belk & Coon, 1993; Kressmann et al., 2006). For example, Aaker's (1997) self-concept theory (actual self, ideal self, etc.) is based on this notion. Also, Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) note how packaging is often designed to be symbolic of the human body. Dior's J'adore provides a classic example, with the bottle designed to remind consumers of the shape of the female body - adorned with embellishments of a gold gown and collar. Similarly, Marlboro's rugged personality was conveyed via user imagery (Aaker, 1997). Automobile branding regularly employs user imagery to humanise brands with images. For example, images of a typical nuclear family outside their home are often used in automobile advertising.

### **A sense of place: opportunities to humanise brands**

Brand humanisation strategies, namely, anthromorphisation, personification and user imagery, appear to be marketer-driven, and tend to create narratives that are more static than dynamic in nature. In contrast, a SoP, which is a 'tried and tested' (Hassan, 2000, p. 242) approach to branding destinations, creates a closeness with consumers around local products (Schnell & Reese, 2003) through local history, heroes, stories and folklore (Flack, 1997), enriching the meaning of the 'invisible landscape' (Ryden, 1993).

Folklore, history and local knowledge, therefore, are made visible in the mind's eye (Schnell & Reese, 2003). A SoP incorporates concepts such as place identity, place dependence and place attachment (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), and focuses on people's own experiences and how they feel about places (Rantanen, 2003). It is, therefore, an alternative way of explaining the relationships people have with the world they live in (Relph, 1976). Through a SoP, place attachment, for example, can be strengthened through storytelling and heightened consciousness of local history (Tuan, 1991).

A SoP evokes feelings of belonging in consumers (Flack, 1997), and it is a rich source of fact and fiction, with its affective, cognitive and conative dimensions (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Low & Altman, 1992). It 'burrows into the heart of the symbolic place-consciousness' of the locality (Flack, 1997, p. 49), which is what Crang (1998) refers to as the *geography inside people's heads*. From a branding perspective, through storytelling originating from, or about, a particular place, consumers can connect with both the place and the products and services associated with it.

### **Narratives from place: folklores, myths and heroes**

Using narratives based on fact and/or fiction, a SoP can be derived and developed from local heroes, folklore and myths (Ryden, 1993; Seal, 2001). Heroes (real or imagined) abound in local narratives, can be used by brands to connect consumers with the symbolic place-consciousness of the region. In fact, the hero figure is one of the most powerful and universal Jungian archetypes and often embraced by marketers to connect brands with consumers (Forristal & Lehto, 2009). Today, man-of-action heroes straddle

the line between bread-winner and rebel models (Holt & Thompson, 2004). According to Heilbrunn (1998, p. 395), brands themselves have to be heroes in the sense that they have ‘to be perceived and accepted by the consumer as a valuable object of desire able to perform a narrative programme’.

Similarly, as communicative tools (Ben-Amos, 1971), folkloric narratives can provide the creative content for brand narratives aimed at humanising the brand. Local heritage and folkloric assets – things, narratives, melodies, beliefs, or material objects (Ben-Amos, 1971) – can convey a SoP while simultaneously assisting to humanise brands. Indeed, Sullenberger (1974) noted that ‘folklore’ has become part of a popular marketing tool for commercial enterprises. Firms are increasingly drawing upon traditional stories and history to create brand narratives (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008) - as a way of seeking comfort from the past and preparing themselves for the future (Hakala, Lätti, & Sandberg, 2011). As such, folklores have the potential to create an image of authenticity and integrity that is likely to appeal to today’s consumers (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003).

Folkloric traditions, including the use of economic and spiritual guardians, elves and fairies, and knights in shining armour, have all been used to build brand narratives (Sullenberger, 1974). Sullenberger (1974) refers to Ajax the Jolly Green Giant in the LeSueurValley, Minnesota, and the Keebler Elves of Keebler Bakeries in Elmhurst, Illinois. He highlights how the brand narratives are anchored in a SoP and that the brands are humanised via the use of these two folkloric characters. Hence, folklore, with its style

and content, presents a powerful and enviable marketing tool for a firm, and most firms aspire to such 'legendary' status (Solnet & Kandampully, 2008).

Myths are also a powerful means of communicating in the brand-sphere. According to Gehmann (2003), a myth is holy and therefore a true tale explaining the order of things. Myths are sacred narratives that explain how the world and mankind came to be in their present form (Dundes & Bronner, 2007). Levy (1981) reinforces the purpose of myths for marketing suggesting that they are ways of organising perceptions of realities, of indirectly expressing paradoxical human concerns that have relevance for consumers because they affect people's daily lives. Kniazeva and Belk (2007) argue that companies create myths via their packaging and often exploit mythical themes for marketing purposes.

### **Research approach**

To explore the proposition that a SoP offers both marketers and consumers the rich content co-create and embellish brand narratives, we adopted a qualitative and discovery-oriented research approach (Wells, 1993) which was set within the context of craft breweries. Craft breweries were deemed to be an appropriate research context for this study because they are most often in opposition to the national and international 'mass brewery' brands (G. R. Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000). Indeed, Schnell and Reese (2003) argue that, increasingly, beer consumers are breaking away from national beer brands because of their overwhelming homogeneity. Beer consumers may be beginning to perceive that their space is being invaded by global brewers, similar to those perceptions

experienced in the growing scepticism and anti-consumption movements (Lee et al., 2009) against large companies such as Wal-Mart (Sobel & Dean, 2008). As such, consumers may be avoiding and boycotting the large global brands (Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006). It may also be said that craft breweries are not just piggybacking on the boycotting of multi-national brands. They are driving the trend as they create a unique local SoP for consumers (Flack, 1997; Schnell & Reese, 2003). In consideration of these variables, we were of the view that the craft beer context is highly suited to the research questions, and thus we follow Arnould, Price, and Moisio's (2006) suggestion to ensure that the research context is appropriate to the theory being examined.

Using the American Brewers' Association definition of a craft brewery ([www.brewersassociation.org](http://www.brewersassociation.org)), which encompasses small, independent and traditional, both authors identified craft breweries from around the world for inclusion in this study. While this definition is not articulated universally, it embraces the ethos of craft breweries and provided realistic parameters to scope our analysis. Using this definition, after a review of industry-related websites and publications, we initially identified over 1,000 craft breweries mainly in North America, Northern Europe and Australasia. We then scanned for data that was available from brewery websites, blogs, various beer companion books (mainly; Hampson, 2008; McFarland, 2009; Simpson, 2009) and social media websites. We focussed our analysis on their textual and visual data available and using the information derived from the literature, we searched for breweries that were

drawing on a SoP for their creative content to humanise their brands using narratives around heroes, folklores and myths.

### **Findings and discussion**

We identified that a SoP is evident in many of the craft breweries' brand narratives and that this appears to assist them to humanise their brands. We provide examples from different continents to demonstrate our findings, and to particularly demonstrate how a SoP, via myths, heroes and folklores, is used in brand narratives that assist to humanise the brand.

#### *Heroes from a SoP*

Just as Kniazeva and Belk (2007) found that many food brands are presented via a personal brand biography, we found this to also be the case for a number of craft breweries. However, rather than finding that the brands were warm and sympathetic as in the case of food brands (Kniazeva & Belk, 2007), the craft beer brands were generally presented as entrepreneurial and creative. We found man-of-action heroes who, according to Holt and Thompson (2004, p. 429), are 'supremely confident men [sic] who pay no mind to industry conventions, invent a new way of doing things, struggle tenaciously against seemingly insurmountable forces, and improbably conquer the establishment to found new industries'.

The heroes we found were either prominent historical persons connected with a place, or were sometimes the brewers themselves. The brand of Bridge Road Brewers in Australia



is humanised as it draws upon stories about the local ‘bushranger’, Ned Kelly. To many, Ned Kelly is a hero and a symbol of Irish-Australians’ resistance against the Anglo-Australian ruling class (Tranter & Donoghue, 2010). Ned Kelly’s fight against the ruling class is central to the brand narrative. This is evidenced, not only in the logo and beer labels which portray Kelly’s iconic appearance and home-made armour, but because the brewery, via the brand narrative, is seen to be fighting for the ‘craft brewery cause’ as it articulates its collaborations with other craft breweries.

Similar to Bridge Road Brewers, the Wellington Brewery in Wellington county, Ontario, Canada, owes its name to Arthur Wellesley, the first Duke of Wellington, and commander of the British army who defeated Napoleon’s French army. While Kelly and Wellesley are both very different characters, it is their place-situated life stories and heroic deeds, which are used to humanise the brand. The narrative around the Wellington Brewery brand links the brand with consumers who view the consumption of beer as a ‘right’. This is much the same as Wellesley himself who, as Prime Minister of Britain, presided over the passing of the *Beerhouse Act 1830* which ensured that the working class had access to beer at a fair and reasonable price.

In the case of Bridge Road Brewers, the hero is connected to the brewery in a physical manner. In contrast, for the Wellington Brewery, while the SoP is physical, it is not nearby and is more akin to Crang’s (1998) notion of a SoP. The emotions of nostalgia – or a yearning for the past or another land – emerges in the Wellington narrative, as the heart of the brewery, or its SoP, is traced back to Britain via Wellesley’s personal history.

Unlike Ned Kelly and the Duke of Wellington, Mikkel Borg Bjergsø is the owner and hero behind the Danish Mikkeller craft brewery brand. He acts as the hero in the brand narrative, but the SoP, in this context, is phenomenological. According to the brewery's website, Bjergsø aims to challenge the Danes' taste buds for beer with intense taste adventures. Bjergsø is positioned as a champion of the craft beer revolution in Denmark, and arguably in Northern Europe, producing his crafted and rather distinctive goods. In contrast, because Bjergsø is positioned as a leader of a movement away from the mainstream beers; he personifies the brand (Fournier, 1998). Consumers 'get to know' Mikkeller, which enables consumers to understand and relate to the brand..

Mikkeller's SoP is, however, abstract. As Bjergsø defines himself as a 'Gypsy Brewer' and much of the information on the company website features this point, this definition highlights how he realised his dream of moving from home brewer to craft brewer. For many years, Mikkeller travelled the world and produced collaborative brews with other brewers, without actually owning his own brewing facilities. This may also be the dream of many home brewers, which gives Bjergsø the ultimate hero status in their headspace. The case study highlights how a SoP can be phenomenological, or inside people's heads (Crang, 1998), and how the story around him is leveraged to connect the brand with consumers (Belk & Coon, 1993; Kressmann et al., 2006).

Similarly, we found Nøgne Ø, in Grimstad Norway, drawing upon heroes of a cultural kind, namely Henrik Ibsen and Terje Vigen. Ibsen, one of Norway's most distinguished

poets was said to be living in Grimstad when he wrote a famous poem, *Terje Vigen*. The connections to these heroes are both explicit and subtle, yet culturally powerful. First, Nøgne Ø translates to “Barren Island” - the first line of *Terje Vigen*. Second, the owners are likened to Terje Vigen who lived during England’s 1809 blockade of Norway. Like Terje Vigen, who tried to run the English blockade of Norway by rowing to Denmark to smuggle food back home to his starving family, the owners are bringing craft beers to a remote part of Norway with their ‘unbearable’ urge to ‘share their passion of good beer’ as the website states. This is evident on the website:

*What Terje Vigen did when he decided to cross the rough sea was against all odds. Starting a brewery in 2002 offering the pretty conservative Norwegian beer-market uncompromising real ale can also be described as “against all odds”. We admire the courage and positive energy Terje Vigen possessed, and decided to bring some of this with us by giving the brewery its name “Nøgne Ø”.*

Here, a storytelling technique (Hsu, Dehuang, & Woodside, 2009) is used to develop a relationship between the brand and consumers. While the narrative is focussed on the folkloric hero, it also draws the owners into the brand narrative as heroes to humanise the brand. Beverland and colleagues (2008) might suggest that the brand narrative capitalises on stories from local Norwegian heritage, similar to what the French have done in the case of luxury wines. This approach delves into the emotions from place and offers both

the marketers and consumers the opportunity to make meaning of the brand because the brand is humanised in this way.

*Folklores: 'beers', bulls, gnomes and gods*

Folklore, as local stories and tales that can be passed on for generations, as well as new stories with folkloric attributes and place connections, is an integral component of a SoP. In California, the Anderson Valley Brewing Company (AVBC) in Boonville features the company mascot, Barkley, the “Legendary Boonville Beer”. As a stylised icon (Brown, 2010), Barkley is part marketing collateral. Statues of him can also be found around the brewery. However, there is more to Barkley than merely a stylised icon. AVBC’s brand narrative implies that Barkley is native of Anderson Valley. There is, of course, no such animal as a ‘beer’, just like there is no such animal as a Jackalope<sup>1</sup>. While Barkley the beer is entirely invented, he makes and creates a SoP for the brewery because consumers can emotionally engage with him; he captures both the ruggedness of Boonville, as well as the humour of its people.

Similarly, brands may also be personalised through specific folkloric traditions and stories related to a particular area. Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) would likely suggest that the craft brewery, La Chouffe in the Vallée des Fées, or the Valley of Fairies, in the Ardennes in Belgium, is indeed a brand with a personality. The name, La Chouffe, is a play on the Walloonian dialect word for dwarf or gnome. On La Chouffe’s official website (<http://www.achouffe.be>), the brand’s mascots are described as ‘friendly’, and

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<sup>1</sup> There is however, a Jackalope Brewery in Nashville, Tennessee. They are using the folkloric character Jackalope; a rabbit with deer horns, as a mascot for their brewery. Instead of inventing a character like AVBC, they use one that exists in American folk tales.

are animated as being somewhat mischievous, but hard-working characters rolling beer barrels and carrying bottles of beer across the valley on the screen. Like Sullenberger's (1974) analysis of the use of Green Giant's Ajax the 'Jolly Giant' and Keebler Bakery's 'Keebler Elves', La Chouffe's gnomes and Barkley the Beer, to some extent, are protecting the breweries and ensuring the continued production of beer. Thus, these brand narratives make a connection between the SoP via the icons, while bestowing the brands with human characteristics (Puzakova et al., 2009).

In addition, La Chouffe's brand narrative delves into the folkloric traditions of the Ardennes to operationalise a SoP. The folkloric traditions tell the story of fairies, gnomes and elves travelling to the valley to drink the natural spring water. Once mute, they were able to speak after drinking the Ardennes spring water. Hence, the valley itself has magical powers, and the valley's fairies, gnomes and elves are mystical. These powers are extended to the narratives around the flavour of the beers. These are stories that people from the Ardennes are proud of and which help them to understand how they feel about their world (Rantanen, 2003). Even though the place is real, the stories are fantastical. La Chouffe cleverly borrows from these narratives from a SoP to bestow the brand with human-like characteristics derived from the friendly, but hard-working characteristics of the gnomes. The narratives provide the conduit to make sense of the world that consumers live in and their experiences.

One of the benefits of using imagined characters is that consumers can take away what they want from the stories, add or remove narratives, to make them personally

meaningful. For example, Barkley the Beer from the AVBC functions as an icon of, and index, for Boonville. He can capture the ruggedness of Boonville, as well as the humour of its people. La Chouffe's gnomes capture the industrious nature of the Ardennes. The imagined, yet to be believed, nature of the folklores can be elaborated upon and personalised. As Flack (1997) would suggest, this is a way that AVBC and La Chouffe delve into the symbolic place-consciousness of Boonville and the Ardennes, and thus humanise the brands.

Folkloric elements can also be built around the brewer. For example, Holgate Brewhouse in regional Victoria, Australia, is named after the owners, Paul and Natasha Holgate. Paul Holgate's parents migrated to Australia from England in 1965, and the Holgate Brewery has created its SoP and humanised the brand using the Holgate's family folklore. Taken from the family coat of arms, a bull's head and horns form part of the Holgate Brewhouse logo and label design. Folklore suggests that a bull's head on a coat of arms represents bravery, valour and generosity, and its horns represent strength and fortitude. These attributes personify the brand through the connection with the brewer. At the same time, the bull resonates with the farming area that surrounds the brewery, thus communicating the story about the physical place where the brewery is located as well as the owner's family traditions. Hence, the brand is situated in an historical folktale about the Holgate family and a real place, which both humanise the brand. While Sullenberger (1974) suggests that "fakelure" has emerged from non-truths being construed as folklore by marketers, Holgate Brewhouse's narrative is based on the family's folkloric tradition, rather than non-truths. Consumers may thus connect with the narrative around the

brewer's British background and the many British style ales it brews, or simply to the brewery location. Either way, it allows the consumers to 'pick and choose' the elements that have a unique meaning for them, hence allowing co-creation of the brand narrative.

Finally, folklore may also relate to smaller aspects of larger storytelling traditions. The 'Ægir Bryggeri og Pub' is located in the small town of Flåm which is situated at the inner end of the Aurlandsfjord, an arm of the Sognefjord, in Norway. The SoP for this brand is derived from a particular story in Norse Mythology. This is a local strategy which would likely not be as effective in Norway's capital, Oslo, since much of Norse mythology is based around Western Norway's unique landscape with its fjords and mountains.

According to Norse Mythology, Ægir is described as a giant, the brother of Kári (Wind) and Logi (Fire) and the master of the ocean. Each year Ægir invites the Norse gods to a great feast in his hall, Brime, where the beer and the food are magically transported to guests and the drinking-horns fill themselves. According to Odin (the mayor God), Ægir brews the best ale, and has the world's biggest brewing kettle - a mile deep - which Tor (Odin's son) stole from the giant Hyme and gave to Ægir (Lindow, 2001). In Ægir's hall, the gods were never allowed to fight; anyone making trouble was banished for all eternity. This Norwegian tale is embedded into the brand narrative, which humanises the brand via a connection with Norwegian heritage. How much various consumers take away from this story may also vary; beer tourists foreign to Norway may simply perceive a Viking-theme, while local consumers are more likely to know the story about Ægir.

Consumers are then free to connect with the brand and the place in ways that are meaningful to them.

While Ægir Bryggeri uses local folklore to humanise the brand, there are also elements of myth in this strategy since the story is based on Norse Mythology - the ancient belief system in Scandinavia before Christianity (Lindow, 2001). Nevertheless, the folkloric narrative described above is not really a myth because, as Dundes and Bronner (2007) might suggest, it does not reflect a story that seeks to explain the order or manner of things, rather it is just a story about a beer brewing god.

*Myths: the order of things, religions, local and extra-terrestrial beings*

We also found that myths about a place or mythical aspects of the brewer's background were used to provide the creative content to humanise brands. As mentioned, a myth is distinguished from a tale of folklore with respect to what it seeks to accomplish.

According to Gehmann (2003) and Dundes and Bronner (2007), myths seek to explain the order and nature of things and are commonly accepted by followers as the truth. Thus, we suggest that myths can be a very powerful way of using SoP to humanise the brand.

For example, the Shmaltz Brewing Company, San Francisco, is known for blurring beer styles and using puns, art, history, and pop culture. With product lines such as HE'BREW Beer and 'Messiah Bold', the owner, Cowan, (2010) writes in "Craft Beer Bar Mitzvah", that a component of his marketing is "shtick" – the Yiddish word for gimmick. For example, 'Genesis Ale' is aptly named because it was the first HE'BREW creation, and



the tagline to 'Messiah Bold' is 'the beer you've been waiting for' (Cowan, 2010, p. 238). As a contract brewer, the SoP for HE'BREW Beer will necessarily be inside one's head (Crang, 1998), and invisible rather than visible (Ryden, 1993). Without a visible SoP to draw upon, Cowan capitalises on a blend of the scriptures and shtick, just as [Jewish] comedians have long used their shtick to personify their comedic characters. Consumers may relate superficially or deeply to Jewish traditions, and thus feel emotionally, and even spiritually, connected with the brand.

In New Mexico, the Rio Grande & Sierra Blanca Brewery uses stories in the form of myths about aliens to humanise the brand. According to the brewery's official website ([www.sierrablancabrewery.com](http://www.sierrablancabrewery.com)), their 'craft beer is brewed in the Wild West and is out of this world!'. This description alludes to the Roswell UFO Incident in 1947 when it was reported that a mysterious, or unidentified flying object, crashed on a ranch 30 miles north of the town. Roswell is well known because of this incident, and like all myths, this myth expresses an essential paradox (Levy, 1981) between what can be explained and what cannot be explained. To reinforce the relationship between the Rio Grande & Sierra Blanca Brewery and Roswell's identity, the brewery produces the Roswell Alien Amber Ale and Alien Wheat and various alien-themed merchandise. Hence, the brewery embraces the SoP through its psyche. In addition, the brewery's website and marketing collateral convey the brand's personality through the SoP and reinforces the humanisation of the brand. Whether consumers believe in UFOs or not, it is up to them to connect with the brand in the way they relate to it - through a SoP.

Finally, brands may also be humanised through long running religious traditions specific to a particular region. In Belgium and the Netherlands, seven breweries are authorised to produce and label their beers with the ‘Authentic Trappist Product’ logo, with six of them located in Belgium. The SoP for the Trappist Breweries is derived from both the monasteries where, according to Trappist policies, the beers must be brewed, and from the sense of order that the Trappist ethos espouses. The strict rules related to the production and the operations of the breweries, and their religious settings, offer the Trappist breweries a unique mythical position in the world of beer.

The Trappist branding strategy is well regarded to the point that it is imitated, even though the usage of the ‘Authentic Trappist Product’ logo is strictly controlled. Imitations of European religion and Trappist brewing tradition can be observed elsewhere and even as culturally distinct as in Japanese craft breweries. Japanese Sankt Gallen Brewery borrows the Trappist traditions with its name, and is also featuring Saint Gall on the label. This grants the Japanese brewery a degree of authenticity (Beverland et al., 2008) and perhaps a fictional pseudo-European SoP in a Japanese context. It also bestows the brands with humanising abilities. Despite the approach to how the place is used, the connections between the place of production, the producer and the SoP are inextricable. Again, this unique SoP humanisation may involve different feelings in consumers depending on their connection to the place; whether that is Europe or the physical location of Sankt Gallen Brewery. What Sankt Gallen means to the Japanese consumer and foreign tourists visiting the brewery is thus likely to evolve and develop between the brand, the place and the consumer.

In summarising our findings, Table 1 presents an overview of how myths, heroes and folklores derived from a SoP are used to humanise craft brewery brands and to establish an emotional connection with consumers, and lists the examples of breweries used in this study.

Table 1: A SoP and humanisation of the brand: craft beer brands

	Narrative elements		
	Heroes	Folklores	Myths
Nature of SoP	<p>Local hero physically related to a location or 'imported' hero added to a location. Hero could also be the owner which may create a physical or abstract SoP.</p> <p>Hero used on labels or brand names; related to a physical location or added to create a 'fictional' location.</p>	<p>Often based on local history or a new story added that fits with the local community. Folklore can also be woven around the brewer.</p> <p>Based on particular local heritage, storytelling around the brewery location or the brewer or histories that local consumers can relate to.</p>	<p>Old myths and stories unique to an area or to the brewer, 'borrowed' myths or new mythical stories added to a location, to the brewer or the products.</p> <p>Could also be related to long lasting religious traditions specific to an area or even to imitations of such traditions to create mythical elements around the products.</p>
Connection via humanisation	<p>Consumers are connected to the hero through a common place (real or phenomenologically). May evoke feelings of admiration (of the hero) and pride (for being connected to the hero).</p>	<p>Connecting consumers with unique local stories related to a specific location. The brewery does not 'own' the stories; consumers can add or remove parts of it in folkloric traditions.</p>	<p>Connecting consumers with a sense of the divine, the unknown and mystical, often derived locally or connected to the owner. Consumers add to the myth based on their understanding.</p>
Brewery examples	<p>Bridge Road Brewers (Australia), Mikkeller (Denmark), Wellington Brewery (Canada), Nøgne Ø (Norway)</p>	<p>Anderson Valley Brewing Co (USA), Holgate Brewhouse (Australia), La Chouffe (Belgium), Ægir Bryggeri og Pub (Norway)</p>	<p>Shmaltz Brewing Company (USA), Rio Grande &amp; Sierra Blanca Brewery (USA), The Trappist Breweries (Belgium/Holland), Sankt Gallen Brewery (Japan)</p>

## **Conclusion**

Brand humanisation is now an almost essential element of a branding strategy.

While a SoP has been used within the context of destination branding, to the best of our knowledge, it has not yet been explored as a source for the creative content for brand narratives to humanise brands. In this paper, we examined this issue with a qualitative inquiry into craft breweries from around the world. We add to the theory on brand humanisation as we found that a SoP offers a novel approach to anthromorphisation, personification and user imagery, and while different from these well-accepted brand humanisation strategies, a SoP can also operate in tandem with them to humanise brands. In addition, we suggest that a sense of place has the distinctive advantage of allowing both marketers and consumers to create narratives that have potential to humanise brands meaning that consumers can ultimately develop emotional attachments with the humanised brand.

Three conclusions, therefore, can be made as a result of this research, namely: 1) in addition to anthromorphisation, personification and user imagery, a SoP - via real or imagined heroes, folklores and myths - is a rich source for the creative content to humanise brands; 2) a SoP offers the opportunity for marketers and consumers to continually co-create, and as required re-create, brand narratives that humanise the brand; and 3) a SoP appears to be a suitable concept for craft breweries in preference to a country of origin for their brand narratives because of its local appeal. These conclusions have both theoretical and managerial implications.

### **Theoretical implications**

Since the seminal work of Fournier (1998) and Aaker (1997) on brand personality, a stream of research has emerged on how brands are humanised. To some extent, the humanisation strategies that marketers and scholars have examined have been focussed on anthromorphisation, personification or user imagery. In this paper, we have extended the theory on brand humanisation to integrate a SoP into a framework for humanising brands. We found that a SoP borrows human elements attached to a location, and serves as a powerful addition to the traditional brand humanisation strategies of anthromorphisation, personification and user imagery.

In addition, our analysis and findings suggest that a SoP is a valid construct within this theoretical framework and that it has potential to be both an independent brand humanisation strategy as well as one that operate in tandem with anthromorphisation, personification or user imagery. In this study, we make the first steps towards de-constructing a SoP from an abstract construct for brand humanisation strategies into a more concrete construct with reference to myths, heroes and folklores.

### **Managerial implications**

Our research highlights that within the context of craft brewing, reality reflects a discourse in the literature - marketers tend to humanise brands. While the notion of a country of origin and its associated national hegemonic imagery and narratives may continue to be useful for brand narratives for the global beer brands, craft brewers and other similarly locally-positioned brands aiming to emotionally and personally connect

with consumers will likely have greater success delving into their SoP for their brand narratives. A SoP, with its myths, heroes and folklore, connects with the heritage of a locale and with consumers. It has potential to bridge a gap between brand and consumer and thus create an emotional connection between them.

### **Limitations and further research**

While it is not possible to generalise the findings of this study beyond the scope of the research context, we suggest that this study provides insights into how brands can be humanised using an innovative, yet powerful, source for the creative content for brand narratives. Hence, the opportunities for research on this topic are immense. Research beyond the scope of craft breweries, in contexts such as local arts and craft movements or farmers' markets where consumers are breaking away from a global orientation towards local orientations may provide further insights into the dynamics of a SoP in brand humanisation strategies.

Not canvassing the views of the craft breweries is one of the limitations of this research. However, future studies could address this issue with primary research. Data could be collected from craft breweries to determine whether they deliberately set out to humanise their brands, and if so, how they set out to do this. As Heilbrunn (1998) states a brand 'only gains existence, identity and visibility through its appropriation and description by the various actors'. Thus, gaining information from consumers of craft beers regarding their perceptions as to whether craft brewery brands are human would help to gain a

comprehensive understanding of the dynamic relationship between these brands and their consumers.



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