

EXPLORING THE UK MICRO-BREWING INDUSTRY: FACTORS FACILITATING AND HINDERING MICRO-FIRMS' GROWTH AND INTERNATIONALISATION EFFORTS (ABSTRACT)

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ABSTRACT

The British brewing industry has experienced major changes in recent years due to the emergence of the micro-brewing movement, that is, a constant stream of new micro-firms producing craft beer and specialised ales that has also been met by a revitalised consumer interest to new flavours and to the locality of beer products. With a new brewery opening every other day, the outlook of the industry's future also seems positive; projections estimate that the value of the UK beer market will boost by 10.3% till 2019 (KeyNote, 2015). However, despite the fact that the phenomenon has received much media attention, and despite the commonly acclaimed changing nature of consumers' beer preferences, there is, quite surprisingly, a dearth of academic research on the micro-brewing sector; most previous studies [e.g. Cabras and Bamforth (2015), Swaminathan (1998)] have focused on the historical context and the factors that have facilitated the resurrection of the industry in the US and British contexts. This paper argues that we still have very limited understanding of the ways these micro-firms act within their local networks and increasingly competitive environments, and of their perceptions about the factors that enable and hinder their efforts to grow and internationalise. This study attempts to address this research gap, by building on existing literature in entrepreneurial network capabilities and export performance of small-medium enterprises.

The empirical investigation, which is currently ongoing, involves a series of on-site visits and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with micro-breweries in England and Scotland. Preliminary findings indicate that, overall, there seems to exist a lack of conscious realisation of the importance of network-related support. However, depending on their stage of internationalisation (non-exporters, new exporters, and well established exporters), micro-breweries seem to engage differently with their networks and have varying levels of involvement with them. What seems to emerge from this initial analysis is that this three-tier categorisation is meaningful in accounting for: i) the diversities in the types of network-related support micro-breweries generally seek; ii) their different perceptions of what 'noteworthy' or 'substantial' network-related support is; and ultimately, iii) the levels to which they use the network-related support available to them.

References Available Upon Request.