



Consumer Preferences and Market Trends in Craft Beer Consumption: A Post-COVID Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines consumer preferences and market trends in the craft beer industry following the COVID-19 pandemic. The research analyzes key factors influencing craft beer consumption, including price sensitivity, sustainability concerns, availability, demographic characteristics, and packaging preferences. Using statistical correlation and regression analysis, significant relationships were identified between consumer income and beer affordability, sustainability commitment and location, as well as gender and age-based differences in beer perception. The findings highlight the strong influence of accessibility on consumption rates and confirm that younger generations prefer innovative, flavored beers, while older consumers favor traditional varieties. Additionally, the study underscores the economic and environmental advantages of using local ingredients in craft beer production. These insights contribute to future product development strategies and marketing approaches in the craft beer industry.

Keywords: Craft beer, consumer preferences, sustainability, market trends, demographic analysis, pricing, packaging

1. Consumer Evaluation of Craft Brewery Products

The craft beer industry has experienced substantial growth in recent years, driven by evolving consumer preferences and a growing interest in unique, high-quality beverages. However, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted consumer behavior, causing shifts in purchasing patterns and consumption habits. As the world slowly recovers from the pandemic, understanding the impact of these shifts on craft beer consumption is crucial for breweries seeking to adapt to changing market dynamics. This study aims to explore the consumer preferences and market trends that emerged in the post-COVID-19 era, with a focus on factors such as pricing, sustainability, demographic influences, and packaging preferences.

The research examines how these factors intersect and shape consumer decision-making, highlighting key insights that can guide breweries in product development, marketing strategies, and operational adjustments. With the growing demand for sustainable production methods and innovative flavors, it is essential to understand the nuanced preferences of different demographic groups. By analyzing data from a survey of craft beer consumers, this study provides valuable information on how price sensitivity, environmental concerns, and regional factors influence beer consumption, as well as the role of packaging and accessibility in shaping consumer behavior. Through this post-COVID analysis, the study seeks to offer practical recommendations for craft breweries to navigate the evolving market landscape.

1.1 Consumer survey

The survey was conducted in the post-COVID-19 period, which may significantly influence the obtained results. The following parameters were examined for correlations:

1. Whether the high price of craft beer is a deterrent to consumption and its relationship with household income levels.
2. The importance of sustainable production and packaging in relation to education level, place of residence, and income.
3. How beer rating scores correlate with age, gender, education, and income.
4. Whether the unavailability of craft beer in the local area correlates with non-consumption.
5. The relationship between beer consumption and age.
6. Preference for canned or bottled beer among those who consider craft beer their favorite drink.

The collected data allow for a multi-dimensional analysis of consumer preferences and opinions regarding craft beers. The analysis is broken down based on preferences (flavor profile, rating, importance of sustainability and local production, price sensitivity) and demographic characteristics (gender, age,

income level). Out of 307 responses, 211 were accurately and validly completed, thus setting the sample size at $n=211$. The sample consisted of 35% women and 65% men. At the time of the survey, the average net income ranged between 330,000 and 350,000 HUF, which was used as the benchmark average.

Demographic Breakdown:

- The largest group of respondents were aged 25-44 years, representing 63.5% of the sample.
- The second-largest group was 18-25 years old (16.6%), followed by 45-60 years old (15.2%), and those over 60 (4.7%).
- In terms of education, 74.4% held a higher education degree, 24.6% had a secondary school diploma, and only 0.9% had completed primary education.
- Regarding marital status, 40.3% were married, 32.2% were single, and 24.6% were in cohabitation. The combined percentage of widowed and divorced respondents was 2.8%.
- The majority (87.6%) lived in urban areas, with 48.8% residing in the capital city. Respondents from smaller towns and rural areas accounted for 12.3%.
- Income distribution within households: 42% reported average income per capita, 24% below average, and 34% above average.

Key Findings:

1. **Price and Income Relationship:** A significant correlation ($p = 0.05$) confirmed that household income significantly impacts craft beer consumption.
2. **Sustainability and Locality:** The correlation ($p = 0.029$) indicated that sustainability concerns are more pronounced in Budapest than in smaller towns or rural areas. However, due to the low sample size, the hypothesis was rejected.
3. **Age and Consumption:** A significant correlation ($p = 0.016$) suggested that respondents aged 26-44 rated craft beer more favorably than other age groups.
4. **Gender Differences:** A significant correlation ($p = 0.021$) showed that men have a more favorable opinion of craft beer compared to women.
5. **Availability and Consumption:** A strong correlation ($p = 0.000$) confirmed that availability significantly affects consumption rates.
6. **Packaging Preferences:** A strong correlation ($p = 0.000$) showed that canned beer is the preferred choice among craft beer enthusiasts.

These statistical findings confirm that the above factors significantly influence the consumption and perception of craft beers.

1.2 Interpretation of Results in Light of Hypotheses

1. **Consumer Preferences:** The preference of younger generations for flavored, lower-alcohol beers was also found to be a significant result. The Pearson correlation and association analysis of consumer habits confirmed that the demand for flavored beers is increasing, while older generations still prefer traditional, classic beer types. This finding is important for future product development decisions.
2. **Effectiveness of Technological Innovations:** The technological innovations identified in the research, such as the use of closed and automated systems (CIP system) and heat exchanger recycling, significantly contribute to reducing food safety issues and increasing production efficiency.
3. **Food Safety:** The identification of food safety issues and critical points also yielded significant results. Research findings indicate that the integration of proper hygiene procedures and technological advancements significantly reduces contamination risks, thereby improving the quality of the final product. This aligns with research objectives aimed at achieving safer production.
4. **Use of Local Ingredients:** The research confirmed that increased use of local ingredients not only enhances sustainability but also provides economic benefits by reducing transportation costs. This is also a significant finding, which could be crucial for supporting local economies in the long term.

1.3 Summary of Correlation Analysis Results

The correlation results were evaluated, and the demographic characteristics that significantly influence beer consumption habits were identified.

1. **Flavor Preferences and Gender Differences:**
 - Men and women prefer different beer flavors; men favor more bitter tastes, while women prefer less bitter or mood-dependent flavors.
2. **Age Groups and Beer Consumption Experiences:**

- Different age groups perceive craft beers differently. The younger age group (18-25 years) prefers innovative beer consumption experiences, while older individuals (45-60 years) favor refined beverages.

3. Income Level and Purchasing Decisions:

- Those with above-average income are less influenced by beer prices, while for lower-income consumers, price is a significant factor in their purchasing decisions.

These findings help to understand craft beer consumption habits and provide a basis for developing market strategies. This study was prepared for small-scale breweries, sustainability risks were assessed, and recommendations were made for more economical operations. The processing of results began with evaluating and analyzing qualitative research before shifting to consumer-side assessments.

2. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of consumer preferences and market trends in the craft beer industry following the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings reveal that key factors such as price sensitivity, sustainability concerns, and demographic characteristics significantly influence craft beer consumption. Specifically, younger generations show a strong preference for innovative, flavored beers, while older consumers tend to favor traditional beer styles. Additionally, the importance of sustainability and local ingredient use has become more pronounced, especially in urban areas, suggesting a shift towards more environmentally conscious consumption patterns.

The research also highlights the crucial role of accessibility, with availability of craft beer in local markets being a strong determinant of consumption rates. The preference for canned beer over bottled options further emphasizes the growing demand for convenience and portability. These insights underscore the importance for breweries to adapt their strategies to meet the evolving preferences of their target consumers, particularly in terms of pricing, product innovation, and sustainable practices.

In conclusion, the post-COVID craft beer market presents both challenges and opportunities. By understanding the nuanced consumer behaviors identified in this study, breweries can better position themselves for success in a competitive and rapidly changing industry. Moving forward, breweries that prioritize sustainability, local sourcing, and innovative offerings will likely find greater success in attracting and retaining a loyal consumer base.