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What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

Illuminating craft brewers' experiences of dealing with Covid-19 and making fresh sense of what Covid-19 can do to/for craft beer: An integrative approach

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James Bowden, Strathclyde Business School, Scotland, is a Lecturer in Finance. He is currently course director for the MSc Financial Technology and teaches Corporate Financing at undergraduate level. His research primarily focuses on the application of textual analysis techniques to the finance domain, and seeks to evaluate the extent to which the content, presentation and delivery of textual information influences financial markets. More recently, his research seeks to address the impact of sentiment, influence and misinformation within social media platforms on investor behaviour. James' research has previously been published in the *European Journal of Finance* and *Journal of Comparative Economics*, and he has previously reviewed for journals such as *Qualitative Research in Financial Markets*.

Keith Dinnie, University of Dundee School of Business, Scotland, is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing. He is Head of the Management & Marketing discipline at UDSB. He has extensive experience of public engagement with food and drink producers as well as with public sector bodies such as the United Kingdom Government's Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and Brand Scotland. His Master's dissertation was funded by William Grant & Sons Ltd and focused on the branding of Scotch whisky in the Greek market. His research has been published in leading journals such as *Marketing Theory*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, and *Tourism Management*. In addition to his academic work, he is also a Non-Executive Director on the Board of Visit Dundee Ltd.

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

ABSTRACT:

In this chapter we explore the impact of Covid-19 on craft beer in the here-and-now of the pandemic by examining responses of Scottish (UK) brewers to it. Our aim is to organize their responses to the situation in which they find themselves with the objective of making fresh sense of the dynamics of organizing during a global pandemic. In pursuit of fresh insight to all of this, we seek to illuminate what Covid-19 can do to/for breweries and to know the world differently (through recognizing more than one way of knowing). So, to enrich the reader's understanding of organising in the haecceity of responding to and dealing with Covid-19, our method of inquiry involves integrating empirical materials from brewery social media activities with poetic transcription from interviews with brewers. We find support for the view that such integration of findings through research poetry clothes the social media content findings and neither approach dominates the other. Potential implications for future beer studies from the field of poetry are discussed in light of the new comings-together in this chapter.

KEYWORDS:

1. Covid-19
2. Situational analysis
3. Brewery/brewer experiences
4. Haecceity
5. Intègraphy
6. Social media
7. Research poetry

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

Intègraphy is “...a consumer research process and an example of a study of situations...” (Levy & Kellstadt, 2012: 1073) comprising four stages: observation, annotation, investigation and implication. We adapt and adopt this multi-method approach to explore the situation of Covid-19 and its impact on craft beer in Scotland. By telling how we have come to our particular focus and sharing the “...thinking of the researchers that precede the launch of the actual study” (Levy & Kellstadt, 2012: 1074), we enter the first stage of intègraphy: observation.

Introducing the thinking that precedes the research: observation (stage 1)

As with many other research projects and in keeping with what this book is about (i.e. researching craft beer), this chapter began life as a conversation in a pub after a hill run in the Ochils (Stirlingshire, Scotland) during the Summer of 2020. Discussing the *not-yet-known* (Gale, 2018) in terms of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic (referred to as Covid-19 from now) on pubs and craft beer breweries, and wondering how craft beer in general would survive the pandemic, our conversation *then* (and this chapter *now*) was driven by astonishment and breakdown in our understanding (Brinkmann, 2014) and a “sensitivity to the ongoing situation that acknowledges the simultaneous becoming of the researcher and the research” (Brown, 2020: 14). Daniel informed James about the back-story of this very book, explaining that it is based on a two-day symposium that took place, pre-Covid, in mid-2019. Since Covid-19 did not exist at the time, it was not mentioned at the symposium. As speakers at the symposium submitted proposals for chapters based on the work they presented at the event, it was not surprising that none of the ideas for chapters directly addressed the situation of the pandemic and / or its many elements (e.g. the event of ‘going into’ lockdown, social distancing, ‘coming out’ of lockdown, the government Eat Out to Help Out scheme, the 8 and 10pm curfews and The ‘Rule of Six’). While supping their beer, Daniel and James’ curiosity deepened as they began wondering (Carlsen & Sandelands, 2015), how an edited volume on researching craft beer might be received if it is published almost a year since the start (i.e. March 2020) of ‘Lockdown 1.0’ and yet does not feature a chapter dedicated to exploring the impact of Covid-19 on craft beer? Especially when, unfortunately and quite tragically, viewed from within the thick of writing this chapter (i.e. November 2020) it seems quite possible that Covid-19 is *still* going to be around and the global catastrophe is *still* going to be on everybody’s lips come April 2021, when this book was originally scheduled for publication (with work for the proposal having started as far back as August 2019).

Covid-19 is a situation and an on-going event and, given the immediacy of the unrelenting “mo(ve)ment” (Gale, 2018: 165) with everything Covid-related, both the research and writing for this chapter has taken place *during* the pandemic. Moreover, the ‘polishing’ of an earlier draft version of this chapter began just days after Lockdown 2.0 was announced (i.e. 5th November 2020). This chapter, then, has been composed “in all its ins and outs, ups and downs, forwards and backs in just one fantastic haecceity” (Gale, 2018: 131). That is, our writing offers insights into the *thisness* of writing, researching and living out the impact of Covid-19 on craft beer where “those who are interested are invited to join in” (Gale, 2018: 140).

“Researchers are observers” (p. 1074) and as researchers we have observed the instigation of our project. The next stage is Annotation, the subject to which we will now turn.

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

On the impact of Covid-19 on craft beer: annotation(s) (stage 2)

Our aim in this section of the chapter is to annotate, as matter of 'fact', the situation of Covid-19 in relation to craft beer in order to prepare the ground for analysis of the impact of Covid-19, that is, according to craft beer brewers, gleaned from our own Investigations in stage 3. In Annotation, Levy & Kellstadt (2012: 1074) write, "Media of all sorts can play a role, including newspapers and magazines, which traditional researchers often neglect" (p. 1074). From that, the chapter now *pivots* (Ulmer, 2020), offering insight into the impact of Covid-19 on craft beer according to non-academic literature.

Timeline of events¹

1 March: First positive case of Covid-19 confirmed in Scotland (i.e. Tayside)

11 March: UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak announces £12bn package of emergency support to help UK businesses

13 March: First confirmed death of a patient in Scotland (i.e. Lothian) with Covid-19

15 March: Scottish Government (SG) advised organisers to cancel or postpone all mass events (500 people or more) indoors or outdoors

16 March: Lockdown inferred by Matt Hancock in speech

17 March: SG First Minister Nicola Sturgeon urges every citizen to reduce all non-essential social contact

19 March: SG announces the closure of schools and nurseries from the end of the week (Friday 20 March)

20 March: UK Government orders all pubs, restaurants and other social venues to close

23 March: Prime Minister Boris Johnson gives a televised address to the nation, telling people that they should only go outside to buy food, to exercise once a day, and to only go to work if they cannot work remotely/from home

26 March: Across the UK, people start a weekly clap at 8pm as a show of thanks to NHS workers and care-givers

26 March: UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak introduces a package of measures to support self-employed workers

27 March: Prime Minister Boris Johnson and UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock test positive for coronavirus

15 April: SG announces second phase of small business relief funding, worth £120m.

30 April: SG announces new £100m package of grant support for SMEs

¹ Key source for the above timeline: 'Timeline of Coronavirus (Covid-19) in Scotland (<https://spice-spotlight.scot/2020/11/27/timeline-of-coronavirus-covid-19-in-scotland/>).

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

18 May: Lockdown eased with garden centres and cafes opening

18 June: SG publish a list of all measures taken by Scottish Government to support the food and drink supply chain during the Covid-19 outbreak

20 June: SG announces intention to allow Scotland's tourism and hospitality sector to reopen on 15 July

4 July: Hospitality venues in England were able to reopen, with Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland soon following suit

15 July: Pubs re-opened in Scotland

3 August: Eat Out To Help Out (EOTHO) launched

14 August: Mandatory for hospitality settings to collect the contact details of visitors to their premises in support of Test and Protect

25 September: 10pm curfew introduced in Scotland for all pubs, bars and restaurants

7 October: SG restricts hospitality opening hours (i.e. 6am-6pm) indoors, with no sale of alcohol. Premises may open outdoors until 10pm, with sales of alcohol. All licensed premises in the central belt area will be required to close, with the exception of takeaway services

18 October: SG launch the 'Scotland Loves Local' grant for local projects

2 November: New, five-tier system of Covid restrictions introduced in Scotland

5 November: England entered into lockdown 2.0

13 November: In Scotland the local authority areas of Angus, Fife, and Perth and Kinross were moved up from Tier 2 to Tier 3

[England went into lockdown 2.0 but it's hard to identify lockdown 2.0 in Scotland because of the introduction of a different tiered system allowing pubs to serve beer in Tier 2 meant that Covid-19 restrictions were distributed unevenly across different Local Authorities within Scotland]

20 November: Some parts of Scotland enter Tier 4 which evokes certain aspects of lockdown 1.0, i.e., pubs, cafes and restaurants are closed and no alcohol can be served but schools and colleges remain open and essential travel for key workers is still allowed

Summing up the impact of Covid-19 with a one-size-fits-all answer, for some, is an "impossible task" (McKirdy, 2020). Across the food and drink sector, however, attempts have been made to assess the loss of revenue. For example, Scotland Food & Drink (SFD, 2020) report that "The impact of Covid-19 has been grave...with up to £3 billion of revenue lost to the industry in 2020" (p. 3). In March alone, Perrett (2020) observes that "the effect on the beer market of lockdown was immediate as beer sales plunged by 40%" compared to the same period in 2019". Elsewhere, global exporters have not been immune from the impact of Covid-19, with Diageo predicting "...profits will be hit by up to £200m this year as China's on-trade all but closed down" (Gray, 2020).

From all this, the picture that has emerged is one in which craft brewers have raced (Holloway, 2020) to re-purpose and re-permit, turning physical spaces within the brewery into opportunities to generate alternative revenue streams. They have also sought to find new ways to use their customers'

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

spaces as marketing spaces and to change their own approaches to decision making where activities are more about survival than 'the new never'.

Investigation(s) (stage 3)

In this stage, our approach to writing involves searching for empirical materials (i.e. 'data') that "...exert a kind of fascination, and have a capacity to animate further thought" (MacLure, 2013). Following Gale (2018: 150), by 'data' we also allow in "transgressive data", that which is "...uncodable, excessive, out of control, out-of-category forms of data" including: emotional data, dream data, sensual data and response data". So, in this section of the chapter we cherry-pick (Gabriel, 2018) that which shimmers from our olio of data to tell a story of what Covid-19 can do to/for craft beer. While working at the wonder of what Covid-19 does, we are handling "...things that are not supposed to relate, connect and surge into new intensities" (St. Pierre et al., 2016, p.104) to make fresh sense of things. For example, before we started out writing this chapter, we did not know that fishmongers, milk bottles (i.e. 'growlers') and Covid-19 were connected.

The overarching storyline or plot, if there is one, for the picture that has emerged from our glimpsing of brewers' responses to the impact of Covid-19 based on our two complimentary investigations on craft beer is cut together here in three bullet points. Covid-19 can do the following (and *more-than*) **to** craft beer, it can:

- make for a febrile atmosphere and with beer flowing differently, posing an existential threat, it can also make brewers care more for their team(s) and customers;
- make social media more important than ever before, allowing brewers to remain relevant and stay connected with their consumers while turning their website/Facebook/Instagram into a shop window or a fully fledged online shop;
- make consumers re-assess spending habits, giving them time to think about what they value thereby also challenging traditional and established ways of getting beer from brewery to glass (i.e. upend and shake up existing business models), creating opportunities for those with time and flexibility and a diverse portfolio. It also sparks innovative ways of getting products to customers (distribution/supply/delivery), bringing small independent business owners closer together.

Covid-19 can do the following (and *more-than*) **for** craft beer:

- help brewers (re)connect with local audiences and buyers, bringing new customers to the brewery and strengthening existing connections/bonds/relationships with the kinds of consumers brewers want to connect with.

Whereas 'to' is read as negative impacts of Covid-19 on brewing, 'for' is read as opportunities and new activities afforded thanks to Covid-19.

Examining social media activities (*Investigation one*)

A survey of European micro and nanobrewers conducted by Alonso, Bressan & Sakellarios (2017) found innovative marketing through social media channels to be one of the most agreed upon ways in which brewers were innovating, second only to the creation of new beer recipes. As one respondent

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

in the survey noted: “We find that social media is a fantastic marketing tool and actually get orders through them” (p. 148). Since craft beer brewers use social media platforms such as *Twitter* as a marketing communication channel, posts about craft beer tend to be ‘public’ and open access, with the intention of positively influencing attitude, perception and behaviours toward the brand. Social media therefore presents us with an “invaluable real time window” (Das et al., 2005: 103) through which we can observe *if* and *how* brewers engage with the public in the here-and-now of the coronavirus pandemic.

Stanley (2020) observes that the considerations for using online social media data are: distinction between public and private spaces, informed consent, and protecting data to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. With regards the latter, since the data from *Twitter* in this chapter is exclusively drawn from public-domain accounts, “Informed consent is assumed here as for any other publication” (p. 248). For this reason, brewery names are given in the text so that experiences of the force with which Covid-19 has hit can be directly attributed to the brewery, linking what Covid-19 can do to/for craft beer to the brewery. Following Stanley (2020), “where identifiable names are given in the text, these are the names of people who have, themselves, published about their experiences” (p. 248) and this information is already available in the public-domain.

In order to identify relevant *Twitter* accounts to analyse, we first construct a list of Scottish brewers using craft beer maps made available by *Visit Scotland* and *The Brewers Association of Scotland* (TBAS). We filter this initial list of thirty-eight brewers based on three criteria: (i) the brewery must have a public *Twitter* account, (ii) the brewery must have ‘tweeted’ on at least one occasion during the date range spanning from 16th March 2020 to 15th July 2020 (the “lockdown period”),² and (iii) the brewery must have also ‘tweeted’ on at least one occasion during the corresponding date range in 2019.³ The latter condition, relating to the previous year, is introduced as it provides a benchmark from which to identify and analyse ‘abnormal’ brewer activity on *Twitter*. Introducing these three criteria reduces our sample to twenty-five Scottish brewers.

Using the username for each brewer’s *Twitter* account, we retrieve and compile a history of brewer tweets using the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API).⁴ Tweets are then brought into a dataframe in Python, a high-level programming language, and analysed using packages such as *Natural Language Toolkit* (NLTK) and *Gensim* (for topic modelling purposes). Our final dataset consists of 4,575 tweets published during the lockdown period in 2020, which marks a 23% increase in tweet frequency when compared to the same time period in 2019. This preliminary evidence suggests that the importance of social media as an innovative marketing tool (Alonso et al., 2017) increased during Covid-19. However, this trend is not observed across all brewers: in the case of 44% of brewers, twitter activity decreased or remained broadly the same. Brewers were particularly active on *Twitter* in the first two weeks following the Prime Minister’s recommendation to avoid “...pubs, clubs, theatres and other such social venues” on 16th March 2020 (UK Government, 2020); the highest number of tweets

² This date range is selected as it spans from the day on which Prime Minister Boris Johnson expressly recommended that the public “...avoid pubs, clubs, theatres and other such social venues” (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-16-march-2020>), until the day on which the Scottish Government’s First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, permitted pubs and restaurants to reopen following the nationwide lockdown.

³ We also download brewer tweets dated between the 16th March and 15th July for years 2015 through to 2018. We do this to identify broader trends in *Twitter* activity over time, but we do not utilise or highlight individual tweet data from these time periods in our analysis.

⁴ The Twitter API (<https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/twitter-api>) allows users to “programmatically analyse, learn from, and engage with the conversation on Twitter”.

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

on any one day (154 tweets) was 21st March 2020, and five of the top ten most active days in the lockdown period took place during March.

Perhaps a sign that brewers were adopting creative and innovative methods during the UK-wide lockdown lies in the creation of original content. Our analysis suggests that 25% of tweets from Scottish brewers during the lockdown period were ‘retweets’ of content originally published by others, versus 40% of tweets over the same time period between 2015 and 2019. Unique tweets (those that were not retweets or direct responses to other twitter users) constituted 29% of all brewer tweets during the lockdown period, compared to 22% in previous years, which is again suggestive of an increase in original content. Furthermore, the popularity of a number of “...at home...” events organised by brewers and published during the lockdown period, such as *#FyneFestAtHome* and *#AMunroOfStairs*, suggests that Scottish brewers were – as Holloway (2002) claims – repurposing their online spaces to establish and maintain a connection with customers and non-customers. During the lockdown, Fyne Ales (@FyneAles) invited followers to interact with the brewery by partaking in online quizzes and creating videos in which they shared their fondest memories of previous Fyne Fest festivals, using the hashtag *#FyneFestAtHome*. Harviestoun Brewery (@HarviestounBrew) shared footage of staff climbing their stairs 361 times, and asked followers to share ‘climbing selfies’ using the hashtag *#AMunroOfStairs*, as part of a charitable campaign to raise funds for *NHS Charities Together*.

According to Kleban & Nickerson (2012: 74), social media has “brought microbreweries, nanobreweries and large breweries to a common battlefield...” in which those that “...strategically utilise these networking resources, will prevail”. Though this may be the case, there is little evidence to suggest a “battlefield” mentality exists amongst brewers during the lockdown period. This may -to some extent- reflect a belief that the industry can best weather the ongoing uncertainty through cooperation and togetherness. This matches much of what has been learned of craft beer elsewhere (e.g. Kraus et al., 2019), where even ‘getting into bed’ with the competition is a norm. As Tempest Brewing Co (@TempestBrewCo, 17th March 2020) articulate: “Never has it felt more unpredictable than it does right now, but this is a storm we can weather together if we stay positive and look out for each other. And that extends to the bottle shops, bars and all the other great breweries that we owe so much to.” Indeed, Campervan Brewery (@campervanbrew, 21st March 2020) express disappointment in an action that contradicts the sense of togetherness amongst brewers, bottle shops and bars: “Disappointed to see a local bar chain cancel their Direct Debit today. I thought we were all in this together? We have help now and as long as we keep money flowing amongst us we should all see the light of day. Just talk to us, don’t assume it’s ok to hang us out to dry.” Again, this suggests a close-knit brewing community in the online arena, rather than a platform for direct battle. We also note that this phenomenon is not exclusive to 2020; a similar trend emerges when we examine interactions during the corresponding period in 2019, and words such as “collab” and “collaboration” emerge as key topics in brewer tweets historically.

Finally, our analysis suggests an increased utilisation of online shops, and a focus on key dates (such as Father’s Day) as a key retail opportunity during lockdown. The *#FathersDay* hashtag features in the top ten most used hashtags during the lockdown period, whereas it is not present in the top twenty-five between 2015 and 2019. As an example, St Andrews Brewing Co. (@StAndrewsBrewCo, 12th June 2020) offer a “...new Fathers Day selection – now online!...” featuring “...eleven dad pleasing beers and a branded pint glass to bring the pub to him”. The hashtag *#growler* was not something we expected to find in the list of most popular hashtags amongst brewers during the lockdown period. The popularity of using containers to ‘take out’ / ‘take away’ beer (“growlers”) for consumption off-premises grew as a method of supplying direct-to-consumer, especially among brewers with a

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

taproom and / or an off-license who turned their brewery into a gift shop / retail space. This is consistent with Holloway's (2020) observation of a repurposing of physical space. For example, as Loch Leven Brewery (@LochLevenBrew, 21st March 2020) tweeted: "Full clean down as we turn our Taproom from a bar and gift shop into a gift shop only, including our famous #Growlers....Fantastic #Craft #Beer #Ale & #Gin to help see you through".

Interviewing brewers (*Investigation two*)

Translating *what can a body do?* (Gale, 2018) into *what can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?* and drawing on insights gleaned from stage 2, we developed an interview schedule (see Appendix 1) to guide our research conversations, and we interviewed craft beer brewers to assemble possible answers.

A long-list of brewers I (Daniel) would like to speak with, based on convenience, proximity, likelihood of gaining access -through personal networks- and genuine curiosity/interest in those breweries was written up, producing a dozen names. Brewers were then contacted by email and direct messaging via Facebook, inviting them for a conversation about their experiences of keeping the beer flowing during Covid-19. A range of brewers in terms of size, number of years trading and location were targeted to elicit a diversity of experiences and voices, resulting in a short-list of seven brewers who replied positively to my request for an interview. One was difficult to tie down, failing to reply to follow-up communications and another did not reply until very near the end of the research stage, sounding an alarm that "Things are quiet at the brewery..., bit 50/50 how it will end up to be honest. But I have my health and so do my family and friends so that's the main thing" (Personal Communication, 12.14.2020). My re-issue of an invitation to discuss managing and organizing 'how it will end up' was subsequently not engaged with. Not wanting to appear like we were fishing for gossip, I wished him well and desisted with my request for an interview. In the end, it was possible to arrange a conversation with four brewers (see Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Between 2nd and 12th December 2020, two telephone and two in-person interviews (physically-distanced, at the brewery) took place, lasting between 48 and 82 minutes. They were recorded using both a smartphone *and* a digital voice recorder, then transcribed afterwards, producing over 232 minutes of audio and more than 12,800 computer processed and handwritten words of interview transcription. This empirical material has been reduced and represented using poetic transcription according to Glesne (1997) for whom the rules are: (1) words should not be mine, (2) you can pull phrases from anywhere in the transcript and juxtapose, (3) keep enough of their words together to represent their speaking rhythm, their way of saying things. To facilitate readability and attributing experiences to research participants, all words that are not ours will be presented in *italics* and initials of the brewer given after the poemish (Lahman et al., 2019) 'findings' are presented. Inspired by Darmer & Grisoni (2011) who chose to write their article as a radio broadcast, I present just the headings of each section like a newspaper headline (for example, 'Covid-19 makes for a febrile craft beer atmosphere') to summarise what Covid-19 can do to/for craft beer. I use three dinkuses (i.e. "***") to signify a different brewers' experience/voice, and I use a single dinkus (i.e. "*") to separate out different yet related experiences of the same brewer. Four participants provided informed-consent for use of their brewery and personal names and member checking was done with all

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

participants to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of each of the poemish assemblages featured in this chapter. Two brewers requested no changes. One of the brewers requested just one word to be changed out for another, for fear of saying something that alienates and insults his customers. And another brewer requested that one of the poetic transcriptions be 'unattributed' because it came across, in his view, as painting a much bleaker picture than he would want to. As such, the poetic transcription remains in this research-text but it has been anonymized. It has been preserved because first, we strictly adhered to Glesne's (1997) three simple rules; secondly, we feel it tells an evocative, expressive and compelling part of the much larger Covid-19 and craft beer story where the *in vivo* quality of the poetry stands out (something observed by one of our reviewers), and thirdly, the poem resonates with experiences recounted by other brewers in our study, evoking some of the far-reaching implications of Covid-19 with vivacity.

Poetry seems to matter in craft brewery marketing communications. For example, product descriptions on craft beer labels can be quite poetic. It could also be argued that beer in and of itself *is* poetry (if all but in liquid form). And, indeed there are many poems about beer. For example, see Tierney-Jones (2016) for poetry about beer by some of the most celebrated writers such as Charles Dickens, and read ktbryski (2015) for furthermore Victorian poems of beer. Beer poetry, then, is in fact a thing, all on its own (Beslouer, 2017). Since an aim in this chapter/book is to make the research on craft beer more accessible, because "...poetry might make research more accessible to an audience" (Lahman et al., 2011: 894) and it "... results in dynamic texts that might be appealing to broader audiences" (Thomas, 2020: 7), it made sense as a next move to incorporate research poetry into this study.

Covid-19 makes for a febrile craft beer atmosphere

Covid-19 can be destructive. It can also worry and frustrate craft beer brewers, posing an existential threat. And although the impact of Covid-19 was immediate, there was something in the air before it 'hit'... Elsewhere, being lucky can help avoid financial pain.

Febrile-ness is in the air

Ever shrinking bank balances

debts growing...

Very bleak meetings and

financial pain.

A very febrile year.

Substantial closures already

a substantial number more.

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

*Existential threats,
plans have been torn up,
thrown out the window.*

*This whole year has been one change after another
Pubs shutting
without a doubt
took a huge volume away from us.*

*It's been:
A 1000-year storm
A smack in the face.
A very febrile year.
(Anonymous)*

End of our world?
*A flipping immediate impact.
Just so destructive.
Oh my god.
This is the
end of our world.
Not an easy experience.*

*By golly. You know,
Covid.
We had to take some deep breathes.
Not an easy experience.*

*We don't want to live through that again.
Not an easy experience.
(IPM)*

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

to be a brewery next year

it's been,

well,

shit.

we moved here in May 2019

in July 2019 we produced our first batches

start of 2020 we were ready to open our taproom

ready to push on

maximise what we had

a rural, tourist- driven economy

from March to October

it would have been busy for us

we were ready to run as a bar

but

the way things worked out

we only got to open for

five Saturdays

our year is encapsulated by that major frustration

if lockdown is a

prolonged event,

it will be

catastrophic

if this is

still happening

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

*next year,
it wouldn't be worth our while
to be a brewery*

*it might be a
race to the bottom
reducing prices to
get beer on that tap
with the knock-on effects,
there is going to be a
dearth of breweries that
go under*

*I think the worst is yet to come
(CL)*

Covid-19 makes social media more important than ever before

While social media has “always been important” (JD), during Covid-19 it took on a whole new level of importance.

Important ingredients of beer

A famous beer blogger once said:

*'The core ingredients of beer are
malt, hops, yeast, water and
the core ingredients of craft beer are
malt, hops, yeast, water and Facebook/Instagram/Twitter'*

*Normally, 3000 people come to us and
camp for a weekend of
beer, food and music.
All of that stuff has fallen away.*

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

So we really had to focus on staying connected to our customers in a very different world.

We don't want to emerge from all this....

'Oh! Yes. Fyne Ales. I remember them. They were really 2019 weren't they?!'

(JD)

Deliver fun film and photographs

I cannot under estimate the value of social media:

getting on to Facebook,

getting onto Instagram,

bringing a bit of us to the brand.

We did a video of a local taking receipt of a delivery of beer and people really enjoyed that a lot of people up here know that guy and they got such a laugh out of it.

We also got a little model delivery van, we took it out on road-trips and posted photographs of it, trying to just bring some personality to the brand

I want us to be remembered as one of the entities in our community who kept life kind of lively and fun and interesting.

Reached several thousand people who

really got a buzz out of what we were doing and they'd enjoy seeing the van.

With a bit of ambivalence, it says

'Trucking great beer' on the back.

It makes people snigger and that term has been enjoyed

(IPM)

post off-the-cuff things

if all the shops and bars were shut

the only way for us to sell was online

or, to local people.

it's a case of, if I am in the brewery today

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

shipping boxes anyway,

on the off-chance someone is coming by

I will post off-the-cuff things on Instagram or Facebook:

“The brewery shop is going to be open today between 10-1. Come by if you want”;

“Our regular hours are Thurs-Sat 10-1pm. Come visit our shop”.

(CL)

Covid-19 makes consumers re-assess spending habits (with knock-on effects)

The pandemic halts established ways in which human beings co-constitute experiences. It also gives people time to think about what they value, handing an “olive branch” (RH) to those who are able to offer what consumers are looking for.

“Party Rules Applied” (JD) early on during lockdown, creating a challenge for brewers who heavily relied upon traditional and established (i.e. on-trade using keg/cask) ways of getting beer from brewery to glass. While larger breweries with infrastructure and resources (i.e. bottling/canning and online shop), and those with a varied portfolio, successfully pivoted with relative ease, smaller breweries developed innovative and collaborative ways of getting product to customers (through alternative means of distribution/supply/delivery).

Changing habits

Farmers markets

weather was great

everybody started re-assessing their spending habits

I genuinely got the impression that for lots of people:

‘Oooo. This is quite exciting. Maybe I’m going to get my meat from the butchers instead of Asda’.

lots of little business saw this amazing boom from that and

I was one of them.

(RH)

*

Looking for local products

Covid has given me

great exposure to

people who want to try new things

and

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

...given me the grants to

buy the kit to

make enough beer.

It's been quite good

I found that a lot of people were really inquisitive:

A lot of dog walkers pass the brewery

A lot of interest at the markets too

...looking for local businesses.

'I see you make beer, can I try some?'

A lot of people looking for local products

I sell in bottles.

It wasn't,

'Oh shit! The pub trade is falling apart'

It didn't bother me in the slightest.

It probably helped me a lot

(RH)

A really constructive benefit

our value is in doing home deliveries

we hooked up with our local butcher and fishmonger

in a very geographically wide area

it meant if I've got orders from Mallaig/ way out west,

the fishmonger takes our beer out on a Tuesday/Friday

if I got an order from Glen Coe/Balachulish

then the butcher takes beer down on Wednesday

(I would take all their meat and fish back to our area on a Saturday and Tuesday)

dealing mostly with hotels and pubs (to satisfy mainly the visitor, not the local)

people hadn't heard of us

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

a major brand benefit:

an association with those two much more established brands.

(IPM)

What Covid-19 can do *for* craft beer: Covid helps brewers (re)connect with local audiences/consumers

Perhaps the main thing Covid-19 can do *for* craft beer that is acknowledged and discussed by each brewer whose voice is used to craft (Brown, 2020) this part of our investigation is, it can (re)connect brewers with local the community/customers as people have been drawn towards buying locally and direct form producers during the pandemic. Sales ebbed and flowed as pubs opened and closed so pivoting has been crucial (Holloway, 2020). The ‘monument’ to craft beer community is the brewery taproom (see Phil Mellows in this book). Often hailed the ‘local’ community fixer, although this idea is not without criticism (e.g. see Hubbard, 2019), the dream of opening a taproom spells cautious hope but brings optimism and desire among brewers without one. With a rich desire to “bed down” (IPM), to ride out the “storm” (DP; Holloway, 2020) and ‘we-want-to-still-be-here-next-year’ determination (adapted from CL), the general feeling tone is:

*Not just yet
Not now
The time is not right
But...
Our plan
Basically the future
Open a taproom
You betcha!*

(Poetic transcription, juxtaposing words from IPM and RH)

Eggs and silver linings

whether its cask beer or selling to supermarkets, or whatever else

if we can sell online and

through our own bar,

we don't sell at half the price to other shops

if people are coming into the shop,

we don't need a delivery van, we don't need boxes

if there is a silver lining, it's

direct-to-consumer

but putting all our eggs in one basket?

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

*if your market collapses overnight then you are in
some
seriously
deep
shit*

It's a blended model

*We'd like to be known for that wide, varied approach
(CL)*

I am not going to count my chickens

*On the right train but not cashing the cheque yet. We need to see what happens.
2020, a year of consolidation.*

The plan for winter: larger storage and a taproom.

Not this year.

Increasing capacity: big cost with big implications for the business.

Next year we are going to be squeezed really hard.

This is no time to be speculating.

Just bed down

(IPM)

I'd love to be in a position where

*I've got a taproom. That's basically the
future of this place*

(RH)

*

*Borderless-ness and transient movement of people and goods is good for some
but wasteful.*

*If you are on the wrong side of it, you are
fucked!*

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

Being independent, small and local

Supporting local, it's the only way we are going to be able to live

But I must remember, in general,

most people are spoiled by convenience and are time poor, liking

things that are easy to understand and

delivery to the door.

That's basically the world we are living in

That's difficult to balance

(RH)

We now arrive at the final stage of Intègraphy (Levy & Kellstadt, 2012) where the aim is to take a step back and ask, *where are we going? what have we learned?*

Implication (stage 4)

Suggesting a 'game opener' is where we are going... In keeping with Gale (2018), what we want to offer here is more a "game opening" (p. 140) than a 'conclusion'. There is nothing to conclude from our 'data' on the 'thisness' of craft beer, Covid-19, lockdown and brewers' responses because the "Data keep *dataing*" (Nordstrom, 2017: 5). Entering the impact of Covid-19 on craft beer here, there, and everywhere, we started our writing in the middle of the pandemic and remain in the middle of not yet knowing because at the time of crafting this 'conclusion', the second wave of the virus is spreading more virulently than before. We were in lockdown, then we were out (or, sort of was), and now we are back in it (January 2021). The territory is always on the move (Gale, 2018). Covid-19 and data just won't stand still.

Temple (2020) observes that Ray Bradbury saw a car crash when he was 15 and five people died as a result of it. Arriving within 20 seconds of hearing the collision, we are told that, for Bradbury, it was "the worst mistake of his life" and "he was shaken". We then learn, some six or seven years later, Bradbury turned that encounter into the situation of a short story called *The Crowd*. Temple (2020) continues: "So out of this horror -this really terrible event- you take something that has taught you a certain kind of fear and you pass it on to others and say, 'This is what a car can do'...". Adapting then, Bradbury's advice on writing, here, in this section, out of the nightmare and horror of Covid-19 -this really terrible event- we say, this is what research poetry can do for craft beer researchers. We exemplify 'what research poetry can do' because we use poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) to communicate the 'findings' from our research conversations and borrow from practices of poetic juxtaposition (Thomas, 2020) -that is, a mix of 'poetic transcription' from the findings and 'found poetry' made from the literature review- in the process of writing our discussion (in stage 4) and addressing the question, *what have we learned?* in our "game opening" (Gale, 2018: 140), i.e. conclusion of this chapter.

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

What we have learned: Covid-19 is still Coviding

What we have learned is, throughout Covid-19, while brewers are always “architecturing” (Gale, 2018: 167), that is, designing (e.g. taprooms and brewery layouts), building (e.g. online shops) and enacting (e.g. distribution channels and responses to strains of Covid-19 spreading), consumers are “always being moved” (Gale, 2018: 173). In the *race for space* (Holloway, 2020) (i.e. stage 2) and through our Investigation(s) (i.e. stage 3), we have found support for the view that consumers are not only being *physically* moved to transact online, to then collect their beer from the brewery or pick-up it up on their very own doorstep. Rather, they are also being *emotionally* moved to re-assess their spending habits; partly attributable to brewers’ attempts to (re)connect with local consumers, partly due to consumers actively seeking out new local products that resonate with their own values. Using poetic juxtaposition, the following words seek to paint this picture.

real

a(b)le

(to live)

at home

brewer

and

landlord

and

grocery shopkeeper

and

delivery driver

a storm

we can weather

bed down

take out

a blessing

really lucky

fortuitous

worried

appreciate

real ale

buy local

and

(stay) at home,

the only way

we are

going to be

able to live

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

Glimpsing “...just one fantastic haecceity” (Gale, 2018: 131) in our Investigation, touching the intensities associated with pivoting and re-pivoting to keep beer flowing through Covid-19, in this chapter we have seen anew what Covid-19 can do to/for craft beer. We have seen how social media analysis draws attention to what Covid-19 can do to craft beer by sketching aggregations of brewers’ responses to it through highlighting ongoing events. And we have shown how poetic transcription draws our attention to the “immediation” (Gale, 2018: 141) of events, casting new light on potentially corresponding brewer emotions, concerns, frustrations and dreams behind such aggregations, clothing social media data and fleshing out what Covid-19 does to craft beer. In doing so, we exemplify (Chia & Holt, 2008) an approach for coming to see with fresh eyes “whatever is real” and “makes itself felt in some way” (Gale, 2018: 141), finding support also for the view that such integration of poetic insights from research clothes the social media content findings and neither approach is subservient to the other. And with these mo(ve)ments, we learn that there are many ‘middles’ as brewers are left with a headache of what to do next... Brewers are in the midst of things and do not know exactly where we/they are going, so to understand the situation of the moment, in the moment is the point. From all this, what is making itself felt and might be next, in more concrete terms, is the continued development of a collaborative ethos amongst craft brewers, and the challenge of sustaining the emergence of localism once the pandemic has subsided.

We want to invite you to consider what this body of text might do for *your* craft beer research. In Gale’s (2018) hands, headaches make an open and creative approach to world making. We hope our writing is generative and our poetic juxtapositions of brewers’ experiences (and our subsequent discussion thereof) are *intellectually* moving. We hope that you also feel *physically* moved (Brewis & Bell, 2020) to include more playful approaches in your own research praxis but in light of these new comings-together (e.g. Intègraphy, Covid-19, textual analysis of social media content, poetic juxtaposition, etc) we acknowledge you may be left with a headache...

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

Table 1. Research participants

Brewery	Founded	Staff	Location	Representative	Role/position
Fyne Ales	2001	25	Cairndow, Argyll	Jamie Delap (JD)	Managing Director
Wasted Degrees	2017	2	Blair Atholl, Perthshire	Conall Low (CL)	Founder
Blunt Chisel	2018	1	Blairadam in Kinross, Fife	Roy Herd (RH)	Founder
Glen Spean	2018	3	Tirindrish at Spean Bridge, Lochaber	Ian Peter MacDonald (IPM)	Co-Founder

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

Appendix 1

Interview schedule

What Covid-19 does / can do 'to' craft beer

1. How were things before Covid-19?
2. How did you initially experience and respond to Covid-19?
3. Some eight months into the pandemic, where would you say Covid-19 has hit the hardest? [Remain open but if prompt needed: where has Covid-19 hit you / the brewery / business the hardest...]
4. How would you describe the force with which Covid-19 has hit [craft beer generally and them as brewery owner/manager]?

What Covid-19 can do 'for' craft beer

5. What changes did you make to keep beer flowing?to remain active.....stay in business....
6. How would you say you are handling the impact of Covid-19?
7. How you had to 'let go' of some things / projects?
8. What have you 'held' onto during this pandemic?
9. How would you like to be remembered and what you like to be known for (in terms of your response to the impact of Covid-19) when the pandemic is over?
10. What, if anything, good has come out of all this? [What can Covid-19 do 'for' craft beer / your brewery / your beer? What can Covid -19 do for a brewery or any business?]

What can Covid-19 do to/for craft beer?

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