ABSTRACT

One of the most successful industries of the last few decades in the U.S. is the craft beer industry. Past studies have suggested that the neolocalism movement, the growing desire of people to reconnect with their local communities, is one of the main drivers for the success of this industry. Likewise, studies have suggested that individuals who visit microbrewery taprooms do so for various reasons. Although studies have discussed the importance of the neolocalism movement and the motivations behind visiting taprooms, it is still unclear how consumers’ perceptions of the microbrewery taproom experience influence behaviors.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how consumers’ microbrewery taproom experiences can influence their feelings of attachment to place and/or brand, and if these feelings of attachment subsequently influence consumer loyalty. Guided by theories of consumer behavior primarily rooted in attitude theory, consumer value theory, relationship theory and attachment theory, a conceptual model was developed for testing the hypothesized relationships between neolocalism, experiential value, relationship quality, place attachment and brand attachment, and place loyalty and brand loyalty.
Overall, results provided support for several of the hypothesized relationships in the conceptual model. More specifically, the findings of this study indicate that microbrewery taproom visitors’ perceptions of items related to neolocalism and experiential value positively influence their feelings of relationship quality. This leads to positive influences on place attachment and brand attachment, and further loyalty to the microbrewery brand. Along with this, the results indicate that microbrewery taproom visitors can be split into various groups based on their: level of involvement with craft beer, desire for unique consumer products, desire for authentic experiences, and perceived similarity to others, and multiple differences were found between the groups. These results suggest that by focusing on their connections with local communities and the overall taproom experience, microbrewery operators can potentially increase visitors’ feelings of loyalty toward their brand. Likewise, researchers can utilize the results of this study to further assess potential differences between various groups of microbrewery taproom visitors. The study provides a discussion of further implications of the findings, along with future research opportunities.