

Brewing An Agricultural Identity: A Content Analysis of Textual and Visual Agricultural Elements on O'ahu Brewery Homepages

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Introduction/Need for Research

Craft breweries are evolving from drinkeries into central part of local food systems (Talmage et al., 2024). Craft breweries also provide space for community members to gather, showcase local identity, and foster a sense of belongingness (Mars & Talmage, 2023). Craft breweries are a place-based attraction can support agritourism by promoting local agricultural products, encouraging visitation, and strengthening consumers' connections to regional food and beverage systems (Nelson, 2024). Breweries are linked to agriculture because beer production relies on agricultural commodities such as hops, sugar, barley, rice, rye and wheat (Beer Institute, 2020). According to the Brewers Association (2025), Hawaii's craft beer industry generated approximately \$357 million in total economic output, highlighting its importance to the state's economy. Oahu is home to the largest concentration of Hawaii craft breweries, many of which on local ingredients, island-inspired styles, community-centered experiences (Derrick, 2026). Previous agricultural communication research has demonstrated that craft breweries play an important role in community branding and stakeholder engagement (Jolly et al., 2021a; Jolly et al., 2021b). Agricultural communications researchers have used website content analysis to examine how organizations communicate with stakeholders in digital environments. Previous studies have examined brewery branding, corporate communication, animal welfare messaging, and Extension website communication (Jolly et al., 2021a; Morris et al., 2019; Steede et al., 2018). Although these studies demonstrate the value of website content analysis, little research has explored how craft breweries communicate their connections to agriculture through the homepage content. Because craft breweries rely on agricultural commodities and frequently emphasize local ingredients and regional identity, they represent an important communication opportunity for connecting consumers with agriculture. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how O'ahu craft breweries communicate connections to agriculture through homepage website content. To accomplish this purpose, the following research objectives guided the study:

RO1: Describe the textual elements Oahu breweries use to communicate connections to agriculture through homepage content.

RO2: Describe the visual elements Oahu breweries use to communicate connections to agriculture through homepage content.

Conceptual Framework

Organizational websites function as strategic communication tools that communicate organizational identity, values, products, and priorities to stakeholders. Brewery websites are often a visitor's first interaction with the business and can shape public perceptions (Qrolic, 2025). As the primary point of entry to the website, the homepage functions as an organization's digital introduction, shaping first impressions while communicating organizational purpose and identity (Nielsen, 2011). Because websites communicate through multiple semiotic resources, including written text, imagery, layout, and design, both textual and visual homepage content contribute to organizational meaning (Kim & Kuljis, 2010). Because brewery websites often serve as consumers' first interaction with a brewery (Qrolic, 2025), they also present an opportunity to communicate the agricultural origins of beer and the producers, commodities, and production practices that support the industry. Guided by this conceptual perspective, the present study examined both textual and visual communication elements to understand how Oahu craft breweries communicate connections to agriculture through homepage content.

Methodology

This study was a descriptive, exploratory content analysis of Oahu craft brewery website homepages. Content analysis is a systematic research method used to describe communication content through objective and replicable coding procedures (Krippendorff, 2018). The study population consisted of craft breweries physically located on Oahu and listed on the Hawai'i Beer Trail website. Eleven brewery homepages were coded for textual and visual elements that were used to communicate connections to agriculture. The codebook was developed through an adaptation of previous website content analyses and informed by literature on organizational website communication, place identity, and agricultural communication (Kim & Kuljis, 2010). The codebook consisted of five predetermined communication categories for both textual and visual website homepage content. The categories were agricultural components, production practices, place identity, stewardship, and miscellaneous category for content that did not fit the predefined categories. Because categories were not mutually exclusive, a single homepage could be coded for multiple categories. Coding was conducted by a single trained researcher. To enhance coding consistency, the codebook was pilot tested, and intracoder reliability was established prior to coding the study sample (Krippendorff, 2018).

Results/Findings

Eleven brewery homepages were analyzed to examine how Oahu craft breweries communicated connections to agriculture through textual and visual homepage content. Textually (RO1), Place Identity and Miscellaneous categories were the most frequent, each appearing on six of the eleven brewery homepages (54.5%). Agricultural Components and Stewardship each appeared on 2 homepages (18.2%), while Production Practices were identified on only one homepage (9.1%). Visually (RO2), Place Identity and Miscellaneous elements categories were also the most prevalent, each appearing on seven homepages (63.6%). Production Practices appeared on two homepages (18.2%), while Agricultural Components and Stewardship were each identified on one homepage (9.1%). Overall, homepages emphasize place identity, visitor experience, and organizational information more than connection to Hawaii's agriculture.

Conclusion/Implications/Recommendations

Although craft breweries are inherently connected to agriculture, breweries communicated those connections infrequently through textual and visual elements. Instead, breweries focused on their identity through place-based branding and visitor-oriented information, which is consistent with previous literature describing craft breweries as community gathering spaces that foster local identity (Mars & Talmage, 2023; Nelson, 2024). These findings suggest breweries may strategically emphasize destination identity and hospitality over explicit agricultural storytelling. The prominence of Place Identity across both textual and visual communication suggests that geographic identity may serve as a more central branding strategy. Since brewery websites are often consumers' first interaction with the brewery (Qrolic, 2025), these findings suggest an opportunity for breweries and agricultural communicators to intentionally communicate the agricultural systems, products, and producers that support craft beer production. Future research should examine how consumers perceive agricultural messaging on brewery websites and if those messages influence perceptions of local food systems. As digital communication continues to shape perceptions and impressions (Kim & Kuljis, 2010; Qrolic, 2025) brewery homepages may serve as a platform for increasing agricultural literacy.

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