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STRATEGIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP: EXPLORATION, EXPLOITATION, AND AMBIDEXTERITY PRACTICES IN CRAFT BREWERIES FROM UBERLÂNDIA, MG¹



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper aims to understand the configuration of strategic entrepreneurship practices of exploration, exploitation, and ambidexterity in craft breweries from Uberlândia, MG.

Originality/value: Strategic entrepreneurship enables the comprehension of entrepreneurial phenomena from an organizational perspective. Furthermore, this research is conducted in an emergent industry in Brazil, with few studies in the field of management that consider the idiosyncrasies of craft breweries.

Design/methodology/approach: We conducted a qualitative multicase study with three craft breweries from Uberlândia, MG. Twelve interviews were performed, and the set of empirical data collected were analyzed through narrative analysis technique.

Findings: We identified several strategic entrepreneurship practices in the craft brewing sector. First, exploration practices were found in some radical innovations, such as the pioneering nature in the production of craft beers in Uberlândia, the creation of new products, and in the setting of new business models. Second, exploitation practices were also identified in incremental innovations that enabled business development. Hence, ambidexterity relied on the balance of exploration and exploitation practices, as innovative endeavors enabled the creation and development of new products and access to new markets. Thus, strategic entrepreneurship practices reflect the initiatives of entrepreneurial agents that seek to promote organizational innovations in terms of quality improvements, new production and marketing strategies, and the adoption of new technologies. Therefore, strategic entrepreneurship reflects and contributes to innovation possibilities, strategic renewals, and the competitiveness of craft breweries, revealing the analytical power of this theoretical approach for the study of entrepreneurial phenomena.

KEYWORDS

Entrepreneurship. Exploration. Exploitation. Ambidexterity. Craft beer.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is a phenomenon with socioeconomic and scientific relevance and an object of increasing interest in academia (Lopes & Lima, 2019; Wiklund, Wright, & Zahra, 2019). The configuration of this field has developed around different theoretical aspects, which has contributed to generating several research possibilities (Clark & Harisson, 2019).

One of the possibilities for understanding and explaining the entrepreneurial phenomenon lies in the notion of strategic entrepreneurship, associated with the analysis of innovations and strategic renewal processes in organizations (Hitt, Ireland, Camp, & Sexton, 2001; Kuratko & Audretsch, 2009). Mazzei (2018) points out that this approach is based on two central points: exploration, linked to the creation and identification of new business opportunities, and exploitation, related to taking advantage of existing opportunities (Gupta, Smith, & Shalley, 2006; Popadiuk & Bido, 2016). From the balance between exploration and exploitation, the concept of ambidexterity, or organizational ambidexterity, emerges (Cao, Gedajlovic, & Zhang, 2009; Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013; Koriak, Lockett, Hayton, Nicolaou, & Mole, 2018; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013).

The strategic entrepreneurship approach has been applied to the analysis of organizations from different branches of economic activity (Goel & Jones, 2016; Mazzei, 2018). In this article, we chose to investigate craft breweries, an emerging industry in Brazil (Dalmoro & Fell, 2020; Freitas, 2015; Giorgi, 2015; Krohn, 2018; Santo & Carniello, 2019; Tonelli, Borges, Brito, & Zambalde, 2018). According to Brazil's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply, in 2019, the craft beer business grew 36% compared to 2018 (Ministério da Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento – Mapa, 2020). Some regions in the country are relevant in this market. In Uberlândia, in the state of Minas Gerais, there is considerable investment in this industry, encouraged by government actions through the Municipal Program to Promote the Beer Industry, instituted in 2017 (Prefeitura Municipal de Uberlândia, 2017).

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to understand the configuration of strategic entrepreneurship practices of exploration, exploitation, and ambidexterity in craft breweries in Uberlândia-MG. For this purpose, through a qualitative study of multiple cases, we specifically sought to understand the practices of exploration related to radical innovation, the practices of exploitation related to incremental innovation, and the practices of ambidexterity that work as a balance between the previous ones.

2. STRATEGIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP: *EXPLORATION, EXPLOITATION, AND AMBIDEXTERITY*

The concept of strategic entrepreneurship has been increasingly explored in entrepreneurship studies (Mazzei, 2018), although it is still not widely explored in these studies in Brazil (Borges, Parreira, Enoque, & Almeida, 2017; Moraes & Lima, 2019). It is an alternative that allows the understanding of issues related to the entrepreneurial phenomenon, from the recovery of perspectives associated with possibilities of innovation and strategic renewal processes (Kuratko & Audretsch, 2009).

According to Hitt et al. (2001), strategic entrepreneurship is constituted from two main characteristics, associated with the creation and support of competitive advantages and with the processes of identification and exploitation of business opportunities. Mazzei, Ketchen, and Shook (2017), in turn, when synthesizing the theoretical framework on the referred approach, highlight that this approach is based around the notion of exploration and exploitation, developed from March's (1991) research.

The concept of exploration is related to the creation and/or discovery of new business opportunities through the use of creativity, application of innovations, and experimental developments (Gupta et al., 2006), always being viewed as an exogenous category of strategic entrepreneurship (Chen, 2017; Koriak et al., 2018). Authors such as Andriopoulos and Lewis (2009) and Moss, Payne, and Moore (2014) define exploration as organizational activities that are associated with elements such as the focus on research and development, the ability to take risks, the exercise of autonomy, the relationship with the external environment in a state of entrepreneurial alertness, and the promotion of an innovative and adaptive internal environment, open to new discoveries and new experiences.

In turn, the concept of exploitation is related to taking advantage of opportunities linked to activities that already exist within the organization. These initiatives aim to transform and use skills to improve organizational processes and to solve problems (Goel & Jones, 2016), consequently being viewed as an endogenous category of strategic entrepreneurship (Fuentes, Arroyo, Bojica, & Pérez, 2010). It is observed, then, the formation of activities directed to the continuous improvement of processes, methods, techniques, actions, products or services, new means of production or execution of an activity, and implementation of new practices in an efficient way (Popadiuk & Bido, 2016; Luger, Raisch, & Schimmer, 2018).

In this way, exploration is attributed a more significant association with radical innovation, while exploitation is linked to incremental innovation (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Borges, Lima, & Andrade, 2014; Chen, 2017). Based on this, the need for consistency between exploration and exploitation practices is emphasized, which would imply higher levels of performance at the firm level (Gupta et al., 2006; Moss et al., 2014). It is, therefore, necessary to recognize the emergence of strategic entrepreneurship as a result of a balance between exploration and exploitation, which opens space for ambidexterity, or organizational ambidexterity (Cao et al., 2009; Luger et al., 2018; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013).

Ambidexterity can be observed through analyzes of contradictory dualities at the organizational level (Duncan, 1976), such as efficiency and effectiveness, radical and incremental innovation, and exploration and exploitation (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013; Chen, 2017; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). In this scenario, organizations make decisions about strategies of flexibility and efficiency, adaptation and strategic renewal, and exploration of new and current competences (Koriak et al., 2018; Popadiuk & Bido, 2016). Therefore, it can be said that ambidexterity portrays the organization's ability to improve and perfect existing routines and methods and, at the same time, to adapt to changes that occur from the development of new opportunities (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013). With that, the referred conception constitutes the base for the performance, competitiveness, and survival in the market (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008; Severgnini, Takahashi, & Abib, 2019).

Therefore, ambidexterity is strongly associated with the notion of strategic entrepreneurship, as it reflects the potential for intervention of exploration and exploitation actions on organizational reality (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Mazzei, 2018). In other words, it is about the balance between tradition and renewal, based on their capacity for innovation (Borges et al., 2014; Moss et al., 2014). Thus, ambidexterity establishes itself as the organizational capacity to manage exploration and exploitation in order to achieve a balance between the efforts and results of innovations (Chen, 2017; Luger et al., 2018). Thus, organizations must add practices of strategic entrepreneurship in their processes and actions, which indeed reveals the theoretical and practical potential that this concept assumes for the discussion and broader scientific investigation in the field of entrepreneurship.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this article, a multiple case study was carried out with qualitative guidance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006; Stake, 2000), which enabled the exploration of particularities associated with entrepreneurship with due depth and density (Neergaard, & Ulhøi, 2007). This allowed us to understand the configuration of strategic entrepreneurship from the manifestation of exploration, exploitation, and ambidexterity practices in craft breweries in Uberlândia, a city located in the Triângulo Mineiro region, in the state of Minas Gerais, in Brazil. This city has stood out in the production of craft beer in the state of Minas Gerais, mainly due to the quantity of producing units and the quality of the beverage produced by them.

In order to make the research operational, the following criteria were used to select the cases studied: 1. the historical trajectory of organizations in the craft beer industry; 2. the degree of the particularity of the cases, verified through their competitive differentials and the development of innovations in their products and processes; 3. the relevance of the case in the regional context, taking into account its market share; and 4. the formalization of the business and, mainly, the production registration with the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (Mapa). Currently, Uberlândia has ten formal breweries, five of which met the criteria mentioned, with three cases selected for this article.

The data were collected between September and November 2019, using the interview technique (Fontana & Frey, 2011; McKenzie, 2007). This activity included personal meetings between the team of researchers and the agents interviewed in the space of the studied breweries – factory, administrative offices, pubs, restaurants, or bars. Nine interviews were carried out in total, three in each company, all of them with written authorization from the interviewees. The number of interviews was defined based on the number of central agents involved in each of the studied breweries. The criterion of data saturation was also considered, observing when it was found that new personal meetings for data collection would not add relevant evidence to the investigation reported (Fontanella, Ricas, & Turato, 2008). Figure 3.1 presents the categorization of the companies studied and the agents interviewed in detail.

(Figure 3.1)

CRAFT BREWERIES AND AGENTS INTERVIEWED

| | Brewery A | Brewery B | Brewery C |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Founding partners | 2 partners (a man and a woman – brothers in law) | 3 partners (all men – father and two sons) | 3 partners (all men – friends) |
| Number of employees | Factory (5) Bar (8) Temporary employees (10) | Factory (4) Bar/restaurant and Temporary employees (31) | Brewpub (20) |
| Years of operation | 12 years | 2 years | 2 years |
| Initial productive capacity | 2 thousand liters monthly | 12,3 thousand liters monthly | 18 thousand liters monthly |
| Productive capacity (2019) | 16 thousand liters monthly | 18 thousand liters monthly | 20 thousand liters monthly |
| Interviewees | Founding partner Commercial manager Bar and restaurant manager | Founding partner B1 Founding partner B2 Production manager | Founding partner Brewmaster Sales coordinator |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The interviews were conducted with the support of a script (Gaskell, 2010), composed of open questions aimed at elucidating the following points: 1. historical trajectory of the studied breweries, pointing to events such as the foundation, the emergence, and the characterization of the organization; 2. evolution and growth of companies over time, pointing to strategic, competitive and market elements; and 3. recovery of strategic entrepreneurship practices, problematizing the processes that could be framed as exploration, exploitation and ambidexterity initiatives.

Finally, it should be noted that the data collected were treated based on the technique of narrative analysis (De La Ville & Mounoud, 2010). Through the integrated reading of all the transcripts, we proceeded to identify narratives that illustrate the different practices observed in the companies studied. In order to do so, narratives about events such as the creation of the business, the process of creating and/or identifying opportunities, their evolution and formalization, and aspects related to innovation practices in the production and marketing of craft beers were mapped. This procedure allowed the identification of the central narratives reported in each company studied that could later be associated with the theoretical categories of strategic

entrepreneurship – exploration, exploitation, and ambidexterity –, thus forming a broader framework that enabled the construction of the analyzes and discussions that were undertaken, enabling the achievement of the research purpose.

4. STRATEGIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP PRACTICES IN CRAFT BREWERIES

In this topic, the configuration of strategic entrepreneurship in craft breweries in Uberlândia-MG is explored, emphasizing the manifestation of exploration, exploitation, and ambidexterity practices, which will be listed in the following sections.

4.1 Exploration practices in craft breweries

Exploration practices are close to the concept of radical innovations (Borges et al., 2014; Chen, 2017), being observed in actions aimed at creating and/or discovering new business opportunities (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Luger et al., 2018). Therefore, initially, there is the creation of the studied craft breweries as an exploration practice, as these initiatives represented processes of identification of innovative opportunities in the local market (Figure 4.1.1).

(Figure 4.1.1)

EXPLORATION PRACTICES IN THE CREATION OF CRAFT BREWERIES

| Case | Exploration |
|-----------|---|
| Brewery A | At that time [at the opening of the company], if I'm not mistaken, there were about 50 breweries in Brazil alone. We were the first in the Triângulo Mineiro [region], there never had been anything even close. We opened the factory in 2008 (Founding partner – brewery A). |
| Brewery B | My brother and I are civil engineers [...]. And in one of the jobs I was there [...], I went to Curitiba, and there is a very strong beer production [...], you have more contact with beer. Then I started doing it at home [...]. At the time, the market was not strong here [...]. So we saw an opportunity to invest. We were already sort of "leaning towards" this business (Founding partner B1 – brewery B). |

(continue)

(Figure 4.1.1 (conclusion))

EXPLORATION PRACTICES IN THE CREATION OF CRAFT BREWERIES

| Case | Exploration |
|-----------|--|
| Brewery C | We already liked beer a lot, you know, drank beer, these craft beers [...]. But then, from the moment we started to drink other types of beer, to be aware, the desire to make beer also arose. So I started making beer in 2016, homemade [...]. Then, we thought it was time to try to get busy in the market here in Uberlândia, which had been stopped for about 10 years, and that something new doesn't come out, you know? [...] And there came the idea of opening the brewpub (Founding partner – brewery C). |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The narratives reveal different trajectories of opening craft breweries linked to the notion of exploration. Brewery A is considered as the first craft brewery installed in the Triângulo Mineiro region, an innovative business that brought a new type of proposal to the market through the offer of a differentiated product, which can be seen as a specifically situated innovation from a regional perspective (Ferreira, Vasconcelos, Judice, & Neves, 2011). The case of brewery B reveals the opening of a business based on an opportunity little explored in the local market, given that it is an emerging industry of activity (Krohn, 2018; Santo & Carniello, 2019). Brewery C reflects the creation of a company based on an innovative business model (brewpub) from a local and regional point of view.

At the same time, the creation of new products denotes the apprehension of new possibilities for the studied companies and for the beer industry in Uberlândia, which can be interpreted as exploration situations (Figure 4.1.2).

The narratives illustrate the creation of beer recipes involving their own interpretations of beverage types already known locally and the exploration of types unknown by the local public – a relatively common strategy but significant to the institutionalization of the industry (Tonelli et al., 2018). In the cases of breweries A and B, the introduction of new types of beer was based on decisions and preferences of the entrepreneurs and on market and consumer influences. In the case of brewery C, there was a product development process based on the creation of new recipes, forming a portfolio with unique beer types in the local market. With this, exploration practices are configured based on a specific type of product innovation (Ferreira et al., 2011).

(Figure 4.1.2)

EXPLORATION PRACTICES IN THE CREATION OF NEW PRODUCTS

| Case | Exploration |
|-----------|--|
| Brewery A | <p>[...] when we opened it [...], we made a dark draft beer, which is our Schwarzbier, pure malt, and made a Pilsen. Then we made a Brown Ale [...] which is a middle ground between the two, she is not bitter (Founding partner – brewery A).</p> <p>[We created] a Weiss Bier [...], a Vienna Lager [...], a Double APA [...], a Fruitbier ... Usually Fruitbier are sweet, have the sweetest ending, but the [founding partner] chose to make a recipe that has a slightly bitter finish, which gives it a balanced taste. In this one, we use guava pulp [...]. So, it is an innovation for our region. [We also make] a Saison Farm House [...], an IPA and a Double APA that is more alcoholic and as bitter as an IPA [...]. There's Sour [...], [which] is a beer that goes lactobacillus, goes lactose, made to be really sour [...]. In Uberlândia, we were the first company to make Sour (Bar and restaurant manager – brewery A).</p> |
| Brewery B | <p>[Today] we create recipes exclusively for us: Stout, which is black beer, English IPA, America IPA, Pilsen and Weiss, and now, yellow IPA, New England (Production manager – brewery B).</p> |
| Brewery C | <p>We said: "man, let's bring a new proposal, a different IPA, an APA, a Witbier, that we didn't have here [...]. In the beginning, we ended up opting for these styles, the IPA [...], the APA, which is lighter than an IPA, less bitterness; a Witbier, which has a lot to do with Uberlândia, which is a beer to refresh. And a Lager, which is the Pilsen style with a little more hops (Founding partner – brewery C).</p> <p>[...] we created a Pilsen and a Hop Lager [...] more Americanized; it has a little more hops [...]. Here in the city a lot of people already drink IPA, so it was important for us to have our version of an IPA too [...]. And now there is a Double IPA, which is even stronger [...]. [There are] five fixed types and two or three seasonal ones (Brewmaster – brewery C).</p> <p>[...] We [...] did [...] the New England IPA, which has exploded all over the world. We were the first here in Uberlândia to make a New England IPA [...]. We are going to launch one now, another New England [...]. So that's it, we are bringing these innovations to the city in the beer market too (Founding partner – brewery C).</p> |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In addition, exploration practices were also observed in craft beer production and marketing activities (Figure 4.1.3).

(Figure 4.1.3)

EXPLORATION PRACTICES IN CRAFT BEER PRODUCTION AND MARKETING ACTIVITIES

| Case | Exploration |
|-----------|---|
| Brewery A | <p>[...] what is most important in a beer? The recipe or the process? The process. You can have a fabulous, wonderful recipe, but if your process is bad, it will not work [...]. So I use a diatomaceous earth filter to do dry hop [...]. I use enzymes [...]. The use of enzymes helps to clarify, give a better performance, to reduce the foam during fermentation, among other things that nobody here has done (Founding partner – brewery A).</p> <p>[...] we are also starting to use different techniques, creating some things that we don't have here in Uberlândia. We are starting a production that will stay in the oak barrel to mature the beer. It has a different process, using lactobacillus at the beginning of production, so things are emerging now (Commercial manager – brewery A).</p> |
| Brewery B | <p>[...] Today, in Uberlândia, for example, we are the only ones with a candle filter (Founding partner B1 – brewery B).</p> <p>[...] We already had the idea of opening the bar [...]. It was an idea of a place that would only sell draft beer. And then there would not be this variety that we have in gastronomy, just like we have today in our restaurant, which is a restaurant and a tavern in a shopping mall in a city like Uberlândia, with 700 thousand inhabitants, something that no one has taken the risk here before (Founding partner B2 – brewery B).</p> |
| Brewery C | <p>[...] we have filling either in bottles or barrels and we are also implementing filling in cans. Can is also a very cool product, logistics and storage are much better, you have a larger area of communication [...]. Much better [than bottle], preserves for much longer, you lose less gas [...] and no competitor here in Uberlândia has tried it yet (Brewmaster – brewery C).</p> <p>We started with the brewpub [...]. Then we had a boom at the beginning, which is normal when it opens and such, but then we saw that it was starting to fall. Then, it came the idea for us to create the happy hour system, with a differentiated system here in the city, with cool promotions for the guy who comes here (Founding partner – brewery C).</p> |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Respondents reported the construction of different innovative practices around the development of craft beer production and marketing activities (Carmona, Cerutti, Gomes, & Melo, 2017; Ferreira et al., 2011; Freitas, 2015; Krohn, 2018; Santo & Carniello, 2019). From the production point of view,



these practices included the creation of equipment exclusively dedicated to the processes of filtering, storage, manufacturing, and filling, and the use of inputs (yeasts, enzymes, etc.) specifically developed for the production of the beverage. From the commercialization point of view, there were initiatives to position the company and increase its market share, involving actions such as the creation of channels for the sale of beer and the search for access to new markets and consumers.

Therefore, there is recognition of the importance of opening the studied craft breweries, creating new products, as well as introducing these production, marketing, and market innovations, as decisions and actions that can be viewed within the scope of the exploration category (Severgnini, Galdamez & Vieira, 2018; Moraes & Lima, 2019). Considering this, it appears that this notion of exploration constitutes a conceptual category to be observed in the broader plan of strategic entrepreneurship and can be considered as a starting point for understanding the specificities of this phenomenon within the studied organizations on the craft beer industry, from aspects such as the creation of the business itself, as well as the creation of new products, production processes, and marketing strategies. Thus, the analyzed and discussed initiatives of the breweries illustrate and elucidate the manifestation of exploration practices, reinforcing the dynamism and competitiveness of the studied craft breweries in the industry.

4.2 Exploitation practices in craft breweries

Associated with exploration actions, exploitation practices were observed in particular situations in the context of the studied craft breweries. These practices are related to taking advantage of opportunities already identified and involve continuous improvement and refinement of products, services, methods, and processes established in the organization (Goel & Jones, 2016; Moraes & Lima, 2019; Popadiuk & Bido, 2016). It is, therefore, an endogenous category of strategic entrepreneurship, close to the concept of incremental innovation (Fuentes et al., 2010).

Initially, exploitation practices were observed in actions aimed at incremental product innovations and craft beer production (Figure 4.2.1).



(Figure 4.2.1)

EXPLOITATION PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH CRAFT BEER PRODUCTION

| Case | Exploitation |
|-----------|---|
| Brewery A | <p>[...] we started working on other types [of beer] [...], as we managed to increase some things in the factory [...] because we had a very structural restriction [...]. So, the improvement of the factory, the improvement of the bar, all of this contributed to the increase in productivity (Bar and restaurant manager – brewery A).</p> <p>[...] the best thing I did was [use the atomacia earth filter]. I had a very high hop waste, and now it takes everything away, the waste is almost nothing. You use hops up to the maximum. This improves efficiency and reduces waste (Founding partner – brewery A).</p> <p>[...] The manufacturing process, yes, [it has improved over time], in the filling and control process, this always evolves (Commercial manager – brewery A).</p> |
| Brewery B | <p>[...] We have tested an enzyme now. We are testing another enzyme to clarify the product [...]. So we had to add new technologies, new equipment, continuous improvement, right? All of this aiming at customer satisfaction (Founding partner B1 – brewery B).</p> |
| Brewery C | <p>Our capacity today is around 150 thousand liters per month. Today, we are close to 10% of what we can produce. What we need is just more fermenting tanks [...]. Our filling line is also sized for 30 to 40 thousand liters per month in bottle. Today, we produce 10% of this, 2 thousand, 4 thousand bottles per month, at most. But we designed the factory already thinking in the medium and long term (Brewmaster – brewery C).</p> <p>[...] we have several methods [for quality control]. The direct methods are with the same instrumentation. So I have some laboratory equipment to measure Ph, the density of beer gasification, and have a lot of sensory analysis. There, sensory needs the experience of the person who is tasting it, and it is not an easy job, people think it is easy, but it is not (Brewmaster – brewery C).</p> |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Decisions and actions for product exploitation and craft beer production include initiatives that contributed to the optimization of processes, increased production capacity, and maximized efficiency and productivity, which made it possible to introduce changes in the beer produced and offered to the consumer market (Ferreira et al., 2011). There was also the introduction of continuous refinements that involved the use of differentiated inputs, such as imported malt and hops, selected yeasts developed in the laboratory, water with special treatments, and the use of enzymes, lacto-bacilli, and additives to enhance the quality of craft beers (Krohn, 2018).

The interviews also revealed improvements related to the adoption of new technologies with the acquisition of new machines and equipment.

In parallel, exploitation initiatives were also identified in decisions and actions to commercialize craft beer (Figure 4.2.2).

(Figure 4.2.2)

EXPLOITATION PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH CRAFT BEER MARKETING

| Case | Exploitation |
|-----------|---|
| Brewery A | <p>We have invested heavily in advertising, [...] to explore and solidify our brand as the first in the Triângulo [Mineiro region] (Founding partner – brewery A).</p> <p>Today, we have two sales paths here: one is to an independent distributor here [...], once the purchase is made, the product is theirs. And another one is the work I do, with delivery and events, other than selling at the [brewery A's] bar (Commercial manager – brewery A).</p> |
| Brewery B | <p>We invested a lot in marketing to promote it, you know? [...] We did a lot of promotion, understand? So we invested a lot in that [...] to boost the audience, right? Participated in events ... (Founding partner B2 – brewery B).</p> <p>[...] Delivery to almost all establishments in Uberlândia, right? Delivery too, all of that [...] Chopp ... And the bottle more for supermarkets and emporiums, bakeries, these types of businesses (Founding partner B2 – brewery B).</p> |
| Brewery C | <p>[...] the brewpub ended up taking a proportion that the partners did not even imagine. 60%, 80% of what we produce in the month ends up staying here, not leaving the factory. That's nice [...]. But we want to expand the brand, the beer, and that's what we're doing (Brewmaster – brewery C).</p> <p>In the first months the distribution started very slowly [...]. Today it has changed a lot. Today the market has expanded [...]. You find [beer C] in the main beverage distributors in Uberlândia and in several neighboring cities here in the Triângulo [Mineiro] region, reaching a market with a lot of potential (Sales coordinator – brewery C).</p> <p>[...] [The external sales team] already does all the training, for example, [you] will sell beer to a restaurant, so you will have to explain about the product, about the service, how to serve a bottle, how to store, at what temperature to serve etc., which one goes with that meal, we do all the training for the establishment (Brewmaster – brewery C).</p> |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

It was found that the breweries explored the realization of events and marketing actions aimed at customer loyalty and the definition of strategies

to better explore their points of sale – factory, brewpubs, bars, and restaurants. In addition, the breweries engaged into partnerships with distributors in order to sell their production and increase their field of action from a regional perspective, and also invested in the distribution itself, of external sales, to explore the local market.

In this way, exploitation practices can be viewed as incremental innovations (Carmona et al., 2017; Ferreira et al., 2011), demonstrating the potential for exploring opportunities already accessed by the entrepreneurs of the studied craft breweries in an increasingly competitive industry. These actions reflect on the quality of the product that is offered to consumers. Thus, strategic entrepreneurship relates the practices of exploration and exploitation, pointing to situations of balance that denote possibilities of ambidexterity postures of the studied craft breweries.

4.3 Ambidexterity practices in craft breweries

From the practices of exploration and exploitation, it was possible to identify situations of ambidexterity (Koriak et al., 2018), which suggest the capacity of the studied organizations to improve and perfect routines and processes and, at the same time, to adapt to changes from the creation of new practices arising from the emergence of new opportunities (Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). These practices are elucidated from the interviewees’ narratives and contextualized within each studied craft brewery (Figure 4.3.1).

(Figure 4.3.1)

AMBIDEXTERITY IN CRAFT BREWERIES

| Case | Ambidexterity |
|-----------|--|
| Brewery A | <p>We were the first [craft beer producer] in the Triângulo [Mineiro region] [...]. And we opened the factory here in 2008 (Founding partner – brewery A).</p> <p>[...] in the case of craft beer, the range of change is much greater. I can work an IPA, and the [competitor] works an IPA, they are beers of the same type, I make a blend with three types of malt, he can use and make a blend with three different types of malt, I work with one type of hops in the boil in a certain amount and the competitor works another of the same style, you have recipes that are totally different. So, the possibility for you to innovate is much greater [...] this alchemy in beer is much broader (Bar and restaurant manager – brewery A.)</p> |

(continue)

(Figure 4.3.1 (conclusion))

AMBIDEXTERITY IN CRAFT BREWERIES

| Case | Ambidexterity |
|-----------|---|
| Brewery B | <p>[...] today, in Uberlândia, we are the only ones with a candle filter. There is no other factory here that has this model of equipment (Founding partner B1 – brewery B).</p> <p>Yes, we do intend to expand production. The idea is to increase everything here, to put a tank here. And here on the side, there is this land that belongs to the city [...] and we have already started the process there to buy the city's land (Production manager – brewery B).</p> |
| Brewery C | <p>[...] there wasn't a brewpub in Uberlândia [...] But that was the idea, opening a brewpub (Founding partner – brewery C).</p> <p>[...] We were the first ones here in Uberlândia to produce a New England IPA, which was sensational, which ended in 1200 liters, we sold it in 17 days [...] We will launch a new one now, this coming weekend again, another New England [...] we're bringing these innovations to the city in the beer market too (Founding partner – brewery C).</p> <p>[...] I'm already talking to the people who developed the equipment for us to see if they can assemble more specific equipment [...] to increase efficiency. For example, [...] I don't have the physical separation between yeast and beer, I have to wait for the yeast to decant over time [...], and there are some filters that I can retain the yeast [...]. So I'm developing these filters with the manufacturers (Brewmaster – brewery C).</p> <p>We strongly believe in the quality of the product, [...] that we are delivering a different product that people have already drunk here in the city [...]. a different experience, you know? [...] an environment that is also attractive, that is comfortable, has a nice service is also something different from the final delivery of the product. And then you adapt this type of process more to improve efficiency (Brewmaster – brewery C).</p> |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In specific terms, the interviewees' narratives, properly contextualized within the scope of each studied craft brewery, reveal the configuration of ambidexterity practices based on a balance between exploration and exploitation initiatives (Chen, 2017; Gupta et al., 2006; Koriak et al., 2018; Luger et al., 2018; Moss et al., 2014). Among these practices, it is possible to highlight aspects such as the foundation of the studied breweries, actions aimed at consolidating these companies in the market, the definitions and redefinitions of their business models, the creation of new types and styles of beer, improvements in terms of increase in production capacity, product quality,

consumer satisfaction, market share, customer loyalty, and the adoption of new technologies, among other situations.

Thus, the importance of the balance between exploration and exploitation is reinforced through different radical and incremental innovations that are consistent with and contribute to the configuration of organizational ambidexterity (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008; Severgnini et al., 2019). Ambidexterity is based on the manifestation of elements that establish and demonstrate the balance between exploration and exploitation actions, such as the creation of the brewery combined with the delimitation and refinement of the business model, the increase in market share coupled with improvements in terms of quality and production and commercialization processes, the creation of new products combined with the search for improvements in production and productivity, among other possibilities. Therefore, through the analysis of the collected data, it was possible to carry out a synthesis of the practices identified that refer to the dimensions of exploration, exploitation, and ambidexterity, which underlie the bases of strategic entrepreneurship (Hitt et al., 2011; Kuratko & Audretsch, 2009; Mazzei, 2018; Mazzei et al., 2017).

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to understand the configuration of strategic entrepreneurship practices of exploration, exploitation, and ambidexterity in craft breweries in Uberlândia-MG. In order to accomplish this, a qualitative case study was carried out with three organizations that produce craft beers, seeking to ascertain, in the narratives of the interviewed agents, entrepreneurial decisions and actions that could later be categorized and reinterpreted under the perspective of strategic entrepreneurship.

Specifically, the concept of strategic entrepreneurship provided a conceptual framework that enabled the apprehension of the practices for identifying and exploring business opportunities, the creation practices of the studied companies, and the practices of building innovative processes at the organizational and market levels. This set of practices was analyzed and discussed in the light of the theoretical framework built, thus enabling its consideration from the dimensions of exploration and exploitation.

Brewery A stands out in terms of exploration, given the company's pioneering spirit in the Uberlândia market and in the Triângulo Mineiro region, as well as brewery C, which launched the brewpub business model (manufacture and consumption in the same place). In parallel, it appears that



exploitation initiatives were developed in all of the cases studied, given that the craft beer industry is conditioned to the introduction of constant and continuous modifications and improvements in products, services, processes, and production and marketing strategies.

Based on this movement, there was an initial balance between exploration and exploitation actions, which reflects the configuration of organizational ambidexterity. In fact, the manifestation of ambidextrous behavior in breweries contributed to the development of their internal activities and also to the formation of specific differentials in their industry from a local and regional perspective. This context became evident as elements such as the identification of opportunities for improvement in production processes, adaptations of new techniques, instruments, and production equipment collaborated to create new recipes, to adapt beer types to the local market, to the creation of new forms of commercialization, among other practices.

Therefore, it is concluded that the manifestation of strategic entrepreneurship allowed to highlight the capacity that the studied craft breweries have to deal with the different possibilities in terms of exploration, exploitation, and ambidexterity. Indeed, the practices associated with these dimensions reflected in different practices that can be equally linked to the construction of processes of radical and incremental innovation, which has a decisive impact on the competitiveness of the studied companies in their development, from the organizational point of view, and in their prospects for survival in the market. This reveals the strength of the notion of strategic entrepreneurship for the study of the entrepreneurial phenomenon.

It should be noted that the present article has some limitations. There was a methodological choice due to the restriction of access to the field and the research focus on craft breweries in the city of Uberlândia. Thus, future studies could investigate the business reality of different locations and/or regions to ascertain similarities and differences in terms of entrepreneurship and innovation in this industry. In addition, it was decided to delimit the cases to be studied through a section of those objects considered most suitable for carrying out the study. In this sense, future investigations could focus on expanding the number of cases to be analyzed, as well as resorting to quantitative methodologies and/or perspectives of method triangulation to obtain greater breadth and scope of the research findings.

Nevertheless, it is believed that, despite such limitations, the article presents some contributions. A practical implication of this study is the possibility of highlighting the relevance of innovation and ambidextrous behavior for the processes of change and organizational transformation experienced



in the daily lives of the studied breweries, given their strategic impact. Based on this scenario, it is even possible to establish means to encourage the execution of decisions and actions aimed at exploring new opportunities and exploiting existing products and processes to build an innovative dynamic capacity for craft breweries. With this, it is believed that this study adds to the literature and contributes by shedding light on the manifestation of strategic entrepreneurship in the context of craft breweries, highlighting the potential that the apprehension of innovation and strategic renewal processes assume for the understanding of the context of the studied companies, which can also be extrapolated to understand and explain the reality experienced by other breweries in this market.

From a scientific point of view, the present article is relevant when exploring the notion of strategic entrepreneurship, a theme that has been relatively little explored in Brazilian studies on the entrepreneurial phenomenon and which has gained prominence in an international perspective in the fields of studies on entrepreneurship and innovation, especially from the concepts of exploration, exploitation, and ambidexterity. Furthermore, this study contributes by applying the concept of strategic entrepreneurship to the context of craft breweries, a specific type of organization that belongs to a relatively emerging industry and is still little explored in the broader plan of research in management and entrepreneurship.

EMPREENDEDORISMO ESTRATÉGICO: *EXPLORATION*, *EXPLOITATION* E AMBIDESTRIA EM CERVEJARIAS ARTESANAIS DE UBERLÂNDIA-MG

RESUMO

Objetivo: Compreender a configuração do empreendedorismo estratégico a partir da manifestação de práticas de *exploration*, *exploitation* e ambidestria em cervejarias artesanais de Uberlândia, MG.

Originalidade/valor: O empreendedorismo estratégico permite uma análise do fenômeno empreendedor em uma perspectiva organizacional. Ademais, o estudo é aplicado em um setor emergente no Brasil, com poucos estudos que problematizem suas especificidades na área de administração.

Design/metodologia/abordagem: Trata-se de pesquisa qualitativa realizada por meio de estudos de casos múltiplos em três cervejarias artesanais de

Uberlândia, MG. Realizaram-se nove entrevistas, e os dados foram tratados com base na técnica de análise de narrativas.

Resultados: Foi possível verificar práticas de *exploration*, como o pioneirismo na produção local de cerveja artesanal, na criação de novos produtos e em torno do modelo de negócio adotado. Práticas de *exploitation* também foram identificadas, com ações de melhoria contínua que contribuíram para o desenvolvimento dessas empresas. A ambidestria foi observada em situações em que melhorias na produção permitiram o surgimento de novos produtos e o atendimento de novos mercados. Assim, as ações de empreendedorismo estratégico refletem iniciativas de agentes empreendedores que buscam promover inovações e melhorias contínuas em suas organizações, seja por meio da melhoria da qualidade da cerveja produzida, da introdução de novas estratégias de atendimento ao mercado e de novos métodos de produção, e/ou da adoção de novas tecnologias. Com isso, abre-se espaço para novas possibilidades de inovação, renovação estratégica e aumento da competitividade das cervejarias artesanais estudadas, revelando o vigor da referida abordagem para o estudo do fenômeno empreendedor.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Empreendedorismo. Exploração. Exploração. Ambidestria. Cervejas artesanais.

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