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## **The resurgence of craft retailing: marketing and branding strategies in the food and beverage sector**

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### **<a>Abstract<a>**

The twentieth century saw a decline in the social prestige and role of shopkeepers, stripped of their historical double function of retailers and artisans. Indeed, they lost their role as cultural actors, becoming relegated to mere economic intermediaries between mass production and consumers. However, recently the demise of Fordist economy and the development of the neo-craft industries paved the way to a resurgence of artisanal retailing, which relevance is confirmed both by a peculiar category of workers and shops and by the permeating brand of artisanal production in retailing. This chapter firstly contextualises and explains the cultural and economic processes that made this resurgence possible. Then, based on ethnographic research composed of participant observation notes and interviews with food and beverage micro-entrepreneurs, analyses the fundamental features of marketing and branding strategies enacted in the food and beverage neo-craft retailing.

**Keywords:** craft; retailing; marketing; Fordism; food; branding.

### **<a>Introduction<a>**

In recent times artisanal production is experiencing renewed fortune (Bell & Vachhani, 2020; Naudin & Patel, 2020; Oejo, 2017; Thurnell-Read, 2019), making neo-craft industries (Land, 2018) an economic sector capable of earning its place and legitimacy in the contemporary economy. The reasons for the success of neo-craft sectors seem to be much more related to consumption trends than with technological developments in production or novel competitive advantages. Indeed, artisanal products seem to be significantly fitted to meet the taste of culturally omnivorous, cosmopolitan middle-class consumers (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Craft production certainly benefits from current technological developments both in the production of the goods and in their commercialisation - see for

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example the maker movement, and the Etsy platform<sup>2</sup> - but is still rooted for the most part in manual work and face-to-face retailing. To summarise, craft is still a labour-intensive and capital-poor economic sector, part of the 'industrious economy' that is rising at a global level with different forms and intensities (Arvidsson, 2019).

Notably, this resurgence of craft consumption is attributing renewed social and academic relevance to a professional figure, the small and independent retailer, that industrialism seemed to relegate to a state of unresolvable obsolescence. Industrial production, and more precisely the Fordist system of economic organisation based on the pairing of 'mass production for mass consumption', stripped small retailers of their previous role as acknowledged and knowledgeable actors, capable of directing the consumption patterns of customers. Furthermore, it left them as uninfluential intermediaries between mass production factories and mass consumers (Hilton, 1998). Moreover, it favoured the retailing structure of the supermarket first, and the shopping centre after (Humphery, 1998), leaving small and independent shops to the margins of the twentieth-century retailing scenario.

Today, the demise of the Fordist economy also entailed the crisis of the connected retail structures. The digital platform economy and e-commerce brought the supermarkets and shopping centres into what is now widely known as the 'Retail Apocalypse', a phenomenon that is likely to produce a permanent restructuring of the retail sector with a drastic reduction of physical retailers (Helm et al., 2020). In this context, neo-craft retailing is imposing itself as one of the few viable, successful strategies to pursue for small and independent shopkeepers.

This chapter aims to shed light on the apparently unexpected resurgence of craft retailing, based on the literature on the topic and the results of ethnographic research of food truck operators and hipster bar owners in Milan. After a brief methodological section, first contemporary small and independent craft retailing will be historically contextualised, arguing that its marginality during the twentieth century should be read as a parenthesis induced by Fordism rather than a permanent disappearance. Craft retailing should be framed as an innovative resurgence, rather than a novel trend. The chapter will go on arguing why craft retailing appears an emerging paradigm in retailing, in particular for small and independent shopkeepers, in post-Fordist society. Finally, the fundamental marketing and

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<sup>2</sup> Etsy is an e-commerce platform where often small and independent craftspeople can exhibit and sell and their creations to customers.

branding strategies used in this sector will be schematised, based on the results of the ethnographic research.

### **<a> Methods </a>**

The results derive from ethnographic research composed of participant observation and 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews with "gourmet food trucks" and "hipster bar" owners, located in the city of Milan and collected between 2017 and 2018 by the author of the chapter. The participants were sampled based on distinctive features that, in our opinion, characterise neo-craft retailing shops: the authenticity and distinctiveness of the product, the authenticity and distinctiveness of the atmosphere, the display of a passionate attachment to the job.

The interviewees' sampling follows a non-probabilistic 'purposive homogeneous sample' strategy (Etikan et al., 2016). During the participant observation of street food festivals, the author identified food truck operators belonging to the 'gourmet food truck' scene - based on the truck features – and other participants were selected reviewing secondary materials such as press articles. The author first identified two neighbourhoods in Milan for the hipster bars, recently characterised by a steady growth of new shops serving young customers, even if with some differences between them. Following a period of participant observation in the two areas, a set of 'hipster bars' relevant for the research was identified, and the author interviewed their owners or managers. The final corpus of interviews comprises forty formal, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, 20 to food truck owners and 20 to hipster bar owners. Of the 20 food trucks, most prepare food from Italian regional cuisine, while some offer ethnic cuisine and two craft beers. The 20 hipster bars are a mix of shops specialised in serving food, beers, wine or cocktails, many also with a hybrid identity that mixes the delivery of food and beverages with other functions (to sell clothes, to repair bicycles, to act as a social and cultural hub, etc.).

Almost all the interviews lasted between forty-five and seventy-five minutes and were conducted with one or more founders, with only one exception constituted by an employee, chosen because the business owner did not work directly in the shop. In addition to interviews, the researcher did extensive participant observation at the bars – attending during regular hours and special social events - and during street food festivals.

All the interviews were transcribed and the results coded by the author, adopting an open thematic coding approach (Gibbs, 2018) through the use of the qualitative software RQDA.

### **<a> The craft strikes back: explaining an unexpected resurgence </a>**

In 'The Craftsman', Sennett (2008, p. 108) argued that, 'by the mid-nineteenth century, as the modern economic system crystallised, the enlightened hope dimmed that artisans could find an honoured place in the industrial order'. In the first analysis of the socio-economic development of capitalism in Europe, Werner Sombart (1928) significantly distinguished in the European economic history from the Middle Ages onwards, two economic paradigms: the 'craft economy' and the 'industrial economy'. The first was characteristic of the Middle Ages, and the second of the contemporary age, while the modern age represented a long period of transition between the two paradigms, in which the majority of artisanal producers - in manufacturing and beyond - started to adopt industrial approaches and machinery.

That industrialisation lead craft production to inevitable obsolescence is a standard assumption in analyses of contemporary economy and society. However, if this oppositional depiction can be useful to summarily schematise the shift in the manufacturing of goods between the modern and contemporary age, it appears inaccurate on a more fine-grained level of analysis. In particular, the historical reconstructions of the conditions of artisans and independent retailers during the nineteenth century, that shared a similar fate, allow the adoption of an important distinction. Indeed, Crossick and Haupt (2013) in their history of the petite bourgeoisie in Europe between late eighteenth century and the First World War, state that the decline of small-scale retailing and craft is not intrinsic to either industrialisation or capitalistic production. Based on archival and statistical data, they show that during the early industrialisation of Europe in the nineteenth century in most countries small artisanal, and retailing businesses co-existed and were even stimulated by industrialisation, through three different kinds of relationship: they integrated with industrie; they benefitted from the technological development led by industrialisation; and they positioned themselves in the market niches between the interstices of industrial production, interlocking with it. Rather than industrialisation or capitalism per se, it is the industrial mode of production based on industrial concentration and standardised mass production and consumption that caused the decline of small shopkeepers. This process started to emerge during the second industrial revolution during the second half of the nineteenth century (Mokyr, 1998) and became paradigmatic of Western economies under the denomination of Fordism for a large part of the twentieth century.

Indeed, for small retailers and artisans, the period between 1850 and 1914 was characterised by a struggle for survival, with them already investing on strategies entailing diversification, rituals to provide unique experiences to customers and even home delivery (Winstanley, 1983). In the same period, as standardised production became the norm in a growing set of industries, small retailers and artisans suffered a loss of independence (Crossick & Haupt, 2016).

Mass, standardised production not only brought shopkeepers and artisans on their knees at the economic level and undermined their social prestige but even impoverished their working prerogatives and practices. This fact remained almost wholly overlooked in academic literature but has great relevance in light of the recent trends. The only exception to this oversight is fundamental research over tobacco retailers from the ninetieth to the twentieth century by Hilton (1998). He, based on archival material, describes in detail the vital cultural role that the (male) independent shopkeeper that regarded himself also as a craftsman played in the performance of his job in the ninetieth century:

For as well as performing the purely economic act of engaging in commodity exchange with his customers, he was also in a position to direct the precise nature of these economic transactions. His specialist knowledge of twists, flakes, pigtails, rolls and cakes guided the choice of the smoker, who could taste, feel and test the products on offer, with the reputation of the artisan trader forming part of the guarantee of the quality of the article to be purchased.

(Hilton, 1998, p. 115)

Instead, in opposition, the tobacco trade in 1930 was dominated by mass-produced products. By that period, the shopkeeper: 'merely handed over to hundreds of faceless customers whose purchasing decisions had been decided in advance of entering the retail establishment: the guarantee of quality now came from the product, not the assurance of the retailer.' (Hilton, 1998, p. 116)

These are ideal-typical representations, but well represent the de-skilling process that took place. Shopkeepers as a category were able to maintain their economic function, benefitting from the growth in demand caused by mass production, but at the cost of losing their cultural role as intermediaries that they had held, and their identity as craftsman other than

shopkeepers. Mass-produced products came with their own brands and advertisements, leaving the shopkeeper with a marginal role in the process of influencing customer taste and choices. This process paralleled that experienced (and much more covered by the literature) by labourers in the same period (Braverman, 1998).

What has been illustrated to this point has two fundamental implications. The first is that a craft economy can perfectly co-exist together with an industrial economy, and even be reinforced by it. The crisis craft suffered during the second half of the nineteenth century, and demise during most of the twentieth century, means its obsolescence only if economic history is read with a simplified positivistic bias. One assuming that every new paradigmatic economic system overrides the previous one, with radically innovative features that make past versions obsolete. Instead, if we consider that subsequent economic configurations may recover features and mechanisms from the past, modified and influenced from the different context, it becomes possible to explain an apparent paradoxical trend inversion. Read in these terms, the industrial and the artisanal can constitute two interdependent realms of production and consumption (Hirsch & Tene, 2013). The second implication is that the figure of the 'master of craft' (Ocejo, 2017) - a craft shopkeeper who performs both cultural and economic labour, possessing a high reputation for them - rather than being a novel figure generated by the new hipster economy has much in common with the pre-Fordist shopkeeper, that often held the roles of the artisan and the retailer together. The tobacco retailer described by Hilton and the mixologists or craft brewers described by contemporary literature, are individuals embedded in very different times. However, they perform a very similar role of taste dealers (Gerosa, 2021), orienting the choices of the customers on the basis of their mastery and translating aesthetic regimes in the handicraft goods.

### **<a> The retail apocalypse and the paradigm of neo-craft retailing <a>**

In 1964, Doody and Davidson authored an article in the Harvard Business Review in which they argued that 'despite many prevailing prophecies of doom, there is underway growing strength in small retailing' (Doody & Davidson, 1964, p. 69). The claim was original, and opposed to the general opinion of the time. In the sixties, Fordism was still the dominant paradigm, and supermarkets together with shopping centres were the symbol of mass consumption of industrial products. However, the two authors were among the first to note that something was changing in the patterns of consumption of customers, that small and

independent retailer could be well placed to exploit. In particular, Doody and Davidson discerned three growing opportunities for small retailers: the quasi-integration between shops, the problems of large-scale retailing, and the changing nature of consumer markets. The last two arguments appear of particular interest for our aims. Supermarkets and shopping centres started to experience issues because of their extensive conformity, the mass standardisation of the goods for sale, and diminishing returns. At the same time, the consumer taste started to change, demanding more diverse products and a fragmented market. These two arguments, the authors observe, bring an end of the fundamental assumption of Fordist retailing, namely to deliver the highest possible number of physical products per dollar spent, in favour of a vision characterised by market segmentation and product differentiation. Small and independent retailers could benefit from these phenomena through speciality shops, with a core emphasis on uniqueness in the store design and appearance, and store personality.

The foresight of this analysis is remarkable: very similar features dominate the contemporary depictions of small retailing strengths (D'Andrea et al., 2006; Megicks & Warnaby, 2008). However, even if capitalism in the following decades effectively transformed itself, abandoning the production of standardised goods to satisfy the thirst for the authentic (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007), small and independent retailing mainly remained in a position of marginality. A vast array of studies continued to argue the death of the high street and the chronic state of crisis of small retailing (Bromley & Thomas, 1995; Hughes & Jackson, 2015; Kacker, 1986), also confirmed by a diffused nostalgia of shopkeepers towards an idealised better past (Urban et al., 2005). Small and independent shops continue to be considered fundamental for the economic vitality of neighbourhoods and places, but this relevance is at odds with their difficulties to remain competitive in the market (Clarke & Banga, 2010). Local institutions praise them and declare the will to sustain them for their supposed benefits, but generally fail to support them (Smith & Sparks, 2001) concretely.

Today, supermarkets and shopping centres are indeed in a state of deep crisis, a crisis that has been labelled as a 'retail apocalypse'. However, the origins of this apocalypse are neither independent shops, nor the shift toward omnivorous taste. Instead, it has been technological innovation and the digitalisation of retail that has brought brick-and-mortar retail stores to the point of bankruptcy (Bhattarai, 2019), together with market growing concentration, income inequalities and the service economy (Goolsbee, 2020). The struggle for survival for physical

stores depends on their ability to innovate. The contemporary drivers of retailing innovation mostly pertain to technological developments and digital trends (Grewal et al., 2017), only available to supermarket chains and shopping centres. Even an extensive research about small retailing innovation (Quinn et al., 2013) had to conclude that very few examples existed in the literature, relying upon theoretical developments to discern possible trends.

Significantly, it argued that the nature of small retailer innovation would be incremental, focusing on 'customer service, product assortments, product range expansion, diversification, brand image'.

It appears straightforward that in the age of the 'retail apocalypse', for small shops to engage in price competition in the market would be even less viable than before, due to the competitive advantages of e-commerce (Burt & Sparks, 2003; Wrigley & Currah, 2006).

Online retailing also allows for the offering of an incredible range of diverse products, in many variants, and by different producers (Bakos, 2001). Product diversification in itself also does not appear as a field in which small shops can achieve competitive advantage. However, small shops seem to be particularly fitted to exploit the trends in consumers' taste and behaviour, predicted by Doody and Davidson in the sixties and described in detail by more recent analyses, in food retailing and other sectors (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007; DeSoucey, 2010; Ocejo, 2017; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Smith Maguire, 2018; Thurnell-Read, 2019; Zukin, 2008), based on the principles of providing an authentic experience to the customer, through unique, highly differentiated products, and atmospheres of high quality.

What emerges is a second paradigm of 'neo-craft retailing', alongside the most prominent and discussed one of e-commerce and omnichannel retailing (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). Neo-craft retailing seems suited to become a predominant formula for brick-and-mortar shops because artisanal products can satisfy the requirements of authenticity and uniqueness, in symbolic and material opposition to the industrial mode of production. Furthermore, as craft production remains overwhelmingly a matter of manual labour, with modest seed capital needed to start the business and a generally cheap production process, it is particularly suitable for individuals without high-level education and proficiency and with limited economic resources, aiming to start small, independent shops.

What links together these two models is the focus on the customer experience model for retailing (Grewal et al., 2009; Puccinelli et al., 2009; Sachdeva & Goel, 2015), the principle



that retailing has much more to do with the provision of an experience uniquely tailored on the customer than of a product.

**<a> An overview of marketing and branding strategies of neo-craft retailers in food and beverage sectors <a>**

**<b> The authenticity and distinctiveness of the product </b>**

Unsurprisingly, marketing strategies in neo-craft retailing revolve around the goods sold to customers. Quite surprisingly, though, products in craft retailing are not necessarily handcrafted with different techniques than the ones used by more classical brick-and-mortar shops of the same sector. In other words, what distinguishes neo-craft retailing is not a difference in manual proficiency but in cultural and symbolic mastery. What makes a food truck operator an 'artisan of food' is not a superior manual ability in the preparation of the hamburger, but rather the mastery in the conferment of an authentic taste and aesthetics to the product, in ways that can be recognised by the customers. In this sense, the assemblage of the final food or drink is in itself both manual work and the appliance of a marketing strategy, with the aim to brand it as authentic (Beverland, 2005).

The artisan in this act aims to craft a product that is both perceived as authentic, and distinctive from the mass of competitors. A vast literature describes the relevance of the concept of authenticity for contemporary consumption patterns (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Peterson, 2005; Zukin, 2008), albeit its evocative potential seems to be paired by an intrinsic ambiguity in the meanings it assumes. Here, the chapter assumes the most general and commonly accepted interpretation of authenticity as 'staying true to oneself' (Trilling, 1972). Distinctiveness is a feature that instead derives from the trends of product differentiation and market segmentation (Dickson & Ginter, 1987; Smith, 1956), that characterised retailing in the last decades. It is in some senses connected to the concept of authenticity, but rather than being true to oneself, it indicates the necessity to distinguish oneself from the competitors and stand out among the crowd. Both concepts are best understood if considered in opposition to the Fordist equivalent value: the 'authentic' is opposed to the 'industrial', the 'distinctive' is opposed to the 'standardised'. Notably, as we are discussing values attributed to products, what matters here is perception, the experience lived by the customers and the artisan (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), not the actual mode of production. A simple proof of this last corollary is the vast tendency of food and beverage

industries to adapt to this paradigm, crowding supermarkets' shelves with products that are industrially produced but are framed as 'artisanal'.

The most typical way to brand a product as 'authentic' in the neo-craft food retailing sector is to rely on the notions of typicality and genuineness of the link between the product and a tradition. Most commonly, these values derive from the raw ingredient crafted together in the final dish by the artisan. The authenticity infuses the entire food piece from the single components. However, it is not enough that the single ingredients are 'typical' of someplace. What is critical, to present the final food piece as authentic, is the coherence of the *ensemble* to the narrative and the mission displayed by the artisan. However, the coherence of the ensemble must be calibrated with the inclusion of a distinctive set of ingredients to display the food piece as unique from all the others. This calibration can be understood by the following excerpt, taken from an interview by a vegan neo-craft retailer that proposes to recover the rural food tradition of a specific region:

*We prepare the sandwich with carrot cream and grapefruit peel, with chickpea 'panella' and hemp, that is with ingredients that are not obvious, but are homemade if you think about them. Panella is panella, a traditional Palermitan dish; carrots are carrots; hemp is hemp. I do not like to use algae or things...my cooking is that of grandma pinuccia. (Food trucker A)*

The mix of ingredients is calibrated for coherence and distinctiveness, being unexpected ('not obvious') but also coherent to the overall narrative of being homemade and represent the rural tradition of the archetypal Italian grandma. Algae are instead used as an exemplification of a potential source of incoherence, rupturing the efficacy of the marketing strategy. It is an ingredient commonly used in vegan cuisine and is both typical of a particular food tradition and distinctive, but it would be out of place in the overall narrative.

This coherence has not to be necessarily built based on a typical local geographic provenance. Different culinary traditions can be innovatively combined to reach distinctiveness and still maintain narrative coherence. This is the case, for example of these neo-craft artisan retailers:

*The tradition is Apulian, but the breath is international. We also served gazpacho for example, it is a dish that tells a story, it is made with tomatoes anyway, for us it*

*reflects this ... it had the characteristics to be considered in line with our offer. We would hardly serve sushi type ... which is a traditional dish anyway. (Food Trucker B)*

He grafted an 'international breath' on the Apulian traditional cuisine in order to gain distinctiveness on the market, but it did so with a dish, gazpacho, that 'told a story' in line with Apulian tradition. At the opposite, sushi is cited as an example of a traditional dish that would not be coherent with their narrative. The artisan retailer embodies the marketing strategy in the food through the crafting act. The ingredients become the symbolic vectors of the foundational values of the own identity, through which the artisan promotes itself as a legitimate member of the neo-craft industries with an ethical mission.

In neo-craft retailing involving drinks rather than food, some variation exists due to the different characteristics of the products, but the fundamental mechanism at the base of the marketing strategy remains the same. Drinks cannot rely on raw ingredients in the same way food does. Furthermore, the crafting act performed by the retailer is more limited or at least differed in time. The craft of beer or wine happens before, often by another person. Even in the case of cocktails, where an assemblage exists, it is more limited. The artisanal nature of the retailer expresses itself in the masterfulness of the knowledge of the drinks, in the possession and fulfilment of a mission to promote a specific kind of taste or variety of a drink. This brings to the appliance of the same fundamental marketing principles to display the products as artisanal. To rely on the two principles of authenticity and distinctiveness of the products to frame them as opposed to industrial and standardised goods, and to accurately choose an offer that is coherent to a familiar narrative proposed by the neo-craft retailer. As for food neo-craft retailers, they have too to balance the coherence to their own philosophy with the distinctiveness of the products. Like in the following case:

*We are of Anglo-Saxon inspiration, then we have chosen to compromise [...] we are focusing a lot on product diversification, and quality [...] (Craft beer pub owner)*

In this case the philosophy of the owner is the one to promote Anglo-Saxon craft beer scene to the public, but they also recognised the need to compromise with other beer traditions to reach diversification and quality. However, to balance authenticity and distinctiveness does not mean they are opposed concepts, rather that they are inextricably connected. Following the Walter Benjamin's conceptualisation of aura, authenticity and uniqueness (Benjamin,

1969[1936]) together with the ones of indexicality and iconicity of Charles Sanders Peirce as applied to authenticity by Grayson and Martinec (2004), the aura of authenticity of a crafted product derives from its uniqueness and fades if the product is reproduced. However, crafted products base their authentic value on iconic authenticity, i.e. they are made to resemble a (supposedly) original recipe, tradition or typical food through an array of strategies such as placement, inference, reduction or projection (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). As such, each craft is an 'authentic reproduction' under constant risk of losing its uniqueness, and therefore its authentic aura at the eyes of the customers. Distinctiveness becomes the marketing antidote to this risk, strengthening the claim of uniqueness of the product.

### **<b> The authenticity and distinctiveness of the atmosphere </b>**

As mentioned in the previous section, it appears predictable that the marketing strategies of neo-craft retailers significantly revolve around the craft products sold to customers. However, products are not the only strategic devices that concur to the framing of the business and the orientation of consumers' taste: also the place atmosphere plays a significant role (Kotler, 1973). Indeed, the efforts of neo-craft retailers are also directed toward the realisation of an authentic and distinctive atmosphere in the shop or the truck, to be obtained through a coherent combination of style, design and furniture. The main goal is to create a unique environment that mirrors and transmit the 'true self' and the passion of the owner, reinforcing the claim of the retailer to be a cultural and symbolic actor other than a mere manual worker and, consequently, an artisan. This process requires to actively plan and manipulate the environment's atmosphere to stage a specific experience (Bille et al., 2015).

The environment's role, be it the shop or the food truck, is inseparable from the one of the products. Both must appear coherent for the neo-craft retailer to appear as authentic. As such, for example, a bartender that proposed itself as a mixologist committed to making rediscover traditional American cocktails from the prohibitionist era, coherently designed his cocktail bar, trying to re-build that atmosphere. Food trucks too, even if they can only be seen and not lived by the inside, are designed uniquely to transmit somehow the essence of the owner and the corresponding mission. A food truck operator selling craft beer told about the style of their food bike:

*We try to follow our brand, a little modern but tied to the traditions of beer: we produce and sell classic Belgian style and classic German style beers. Even the wooden counter wants to recall a classic pub. (Food trucker C)*

This example is illustrative of two general tendencies. The first is the link between the design and appearance of the truck or the bar/pub/shop and the branding of the neo-craft business. The second is the trend toward a combination of traditional elements, that want to recall old, 'authentic' places of the pre-industrial era visually and symbolically, and modern and contemporary elements, that projects the place and the brand of the business toward the future, distancing it from that same traditional counterpart. These businesses are collectively promoting a visual branding with shared, fixed features which aim to answer to the new and growing cultural demands advanced by customers, establishing a new cultural orthodoxy (Holt & Cameron, 2010). This second oscillation between the recall of old places and a modernist design is fundamental to understand better the nature of neo-craft retailing and the two pillars of authenticity and uniqueness. Chris Land called this feature of neo-craft industries as a movement 'back to the future' (Land, 2018): neo-craft retailing too, coherently with what exposed in the two past sections, is a contemporary phenomenon, a resurgence, that nevertheless to marketise and brand itself refers to the pre-industrial past, leaning on a 'progressive nostalgia' (Gandini, 2020).

## **<a> Conclusions <a>**

In this chapter, the fundamental features of craft retailing's resurgence - an economic sector that seemed irremediably obsolete – were illustrated. First, the chapter explained which historical, cultural and economic processes allowed an inversion of the trend in this sense. On the side of artisanal production, it argued that the claim of the incompatibility between industrial and craft production is false, and that incompatibility regarded perhaps a specific industrial mode of production, that is Fordism. It also argued that in the post-Fordist economy, craft not only seems suited to satisfy the consumers' demand for authenticity but also can well combine with the business form of the small and independent retailer - another figure that Fordism relegated to economic and cultural marginality - to give birth to a new retail paradigm. The fundamental marketing and branding strategies used by retailers of this new field of neo-craft retailing in the food and beverage sector were summarised. The

analysis focused on using craft products and the atmosphere of the place to frame themselves as artisans and their offer as authentic and distinctive from every other competitor, positioning themselves in open opposition to industrial and standardised products. In sum, the new paradigm of neo-craft retailing appears as one of the primary outcomes of the surge of authenticity value in the orientation of customers' taste, and one of the principal channels through which brick-and-mortar stores, in particular the independent ones, can develop and strengthen.

The implications for small business owners in the retail sector are relevant. Current trends demonstrates that small and independent brick-and-mortar shops are more suited to efficiently capture and exploit the current trends in consumption patterns and taste compared to shopping malls. In order to do so, however, they have to manage to successful brand themselves as authentic and distinctive to the eyes of the customers they target. The entrepreneur needs to craft a business concept - and a visual branding to accompany it - contemporarily peculiar and well-inscribed into the aesthetic and symbolic canons of the neo-craft sector. Furthermore, they have to balance these two aspects with the planning of a business model capable to ensure economic viability: in other words, they have to identify a niche sufficiently original to allow distinctiveness but sufficiently popular to attract enough clientele. Another fundamental challenge entrepreneurs in the neo-craft economy must face is the price setting of their commodities. Small businesses positioning themselves in the neo-craft sector usually serve a middle-class clientele, that wants crafted products made with high quality raw materials but at an accessible price. In other words, they look for gourmet products clearly distinct from industrial, mass-produced goods but without the prices associated with highbrow, posh locations. If the neo-craft entrepreneur will set a price too low, the promise of an authentic and distinctive taste will lose credibility due to suspicion toward the quality of the raw materials. If the prices will be too high, at the opposite, the authentic claim will as well lose credibility for drifting too much apart from the craft tradition. A last relevant challenge for neo-craft retailers lays in the relationship with their neighbourhood: as we have observed in the chapter, it is fundamental that the brick-and-mortar retail business also builds an identity coherent with the one of the neighbourhood and establish roots in the economic, cultural and even social surrounding area.

Naturally, the current study has also many limitations, that hopefully, future research will overcome. The historical analysis of retailing in the transition between a Fordist and a post-

Fordist model of production and consumption has only been sketched, and can be developed into a much more complex and insightful account. Also, the relationship between authenticity and distinctiveness in neo-craft production needs further research to be adequately untangled. Finally, the empirical section is based on an analysis of the neo-craft retailing of food and drinks, a relevant but limited category of brick-and-mortar retail shops, in a specific city (Milan). Thus, further research in other sectors and contexts could enlighten new phenomena and add novel empirical insights.

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