

Black Fleet Brewing

The Brew Crew: Ben, Elissa, Jazzmin, and Vernadette

Our leading goals throughout this entire process have generally asked what the brand of Black Fleet Brewing (BFB) is. What is BFB known for? The beer? The atmosphere? Or the restaurant/food? By asking this question throughout our research, common themes repeatedly arose in each of our instrument designs and results such as beer, the BFB experience, and the food. These core themes have allowed us to see generalized views of the brewery (through the survey) as well as some of the finer details (through the ethnography, interview). Our goal for this paper is discovering what BFB is doing successfully in the eyes of committed customers (ex. Mug Club members and ourselves), as well as what needs improvement for the longevity of the brewery. This synthesis will examine the broad themes from our research, examples that support these ideas, and suggestions for improvements moving forward.

The first major consistent theme that our group noticed throughout all aspects of our research was Beer Culture. We define beer culture as, “the beliefs, practices, attitudes, and expectations surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of beer.” Beer culture showed up in our survey and ethnography research. Under the theme of beer culture we identify two subthemes: Quality and Experimentation.

A persistent subtheme was Quality. By quality, we mean “the standard of excellence or association of value that an object, thing, element, etc. possesses.” In the survey, we noticed 64 percent of our respondents noted that quality beer was primary thing that they associate Black

Fleet Brewing with. Furthermore, during the ethnography stage of our research, Vernadette stated that, “the ciders were good and matched my previous experiences with ciders.”

Another persistent subtheme was Experimentation. By experimentation, we mean, “the willingness to try new things.” In the survey, some respondents expressed that they’d, “love to see more experimental/one-off brews” or “generally more tap rotation.” Our ethnography observations also drew to the idea of changing up the beverages available. Vernadette expressed that, “the alcoholic beverage selection could use more variety—as a person who likes sweeter drinks, they could do better.”

In our research, it became apparent that the quality and variety of beer is a strong selling point for Black Fleet, as shown in our quality and experimentation subthemes. We believe that beer isn’t an area of concern for the establishment, but we believe that there is room for BFB to continue expanding and changing their beer selection. During the survey (which we had Mug Club members complete), we asked for people to, “please let us know if you have any additional comments or concerns regarding Black Fleet Brewing.” Responses to this open-ended question included statements like, “would love to see more experimental brews” or “I’d love to see generally more tap rotation.” Since these responses are from BFB’s core customers, we believe that they hold weight when it comes to whether or not BFB makes any changes. Since Mug Club members are looking for more experimentation in their beverage selection, Black Fleet would be wise to adjust their options over time in order to satisfy their base.

The second major consistent theme that our group noticed throughout all aspects of our research was the overall BFB Experience. We define the BFB experience as, “the aspects that a customer can expect to experience at BFB that contributes to their overall understanding of the

brand and the environment.” The BFB experience showed up in the content analysis, interview, survey, and ethnography. Under the theme of BFB experience we identify two subthemes: Family-Friendly and Staff.

A persistent subtheme was Family-friendly. By family-friendly, we mean “an atmosphere that is considered to be suitable for all members of an average family and provides services to families that have young children.” In the interview, Lori specifically said, “So we choose to come here...but [family] as a whole is a reason why we come.” She also mentioned that “Bill and his wife, Lori, and their daughters have been, um super. Just super, and really made us feel like a family.” During the ethnography, we noticed on multiple occasions the prevalence of a family-friendly environment. Elissa observed 5+ kids during one of her visits, and as a group we saw the kid’s menu item as well as the “play area” that had games and activities for young children.

Another subtheme was Staff. By staff, we mean “a group of individuals employed by a specific organization.” In the interview, Lori stated that, “I really like that it is a family that runs it, owns it, works together.” While she had a positive view of the staff, our survey had responses that contradicted this, especially one individual that said “They need friendlier staff!!! Or they could at least smile and look like they enjoy being there.” We also noticed during our ethnography that the staff working weren’t the most approachable. In our three times visiting BFB, the staffing experience we had was less than satisfactory.

In our research, we noticed that the BFB experience was most affected by the family-friendliness of the establishment and the role that the staff played. While Lori gave the establishment glowing reviews in terms of how BFB fulfilled all of her expectations, we believe

that there is room for growth in this area. Although our research identifies BFB as family-friendly environment, we see discrepancies between what BFB advertises as “family hours” versus “bar hours” and the notion of having kids in a brewery. In the content analysis portion of our research, we noted that a participant from the JACKson 5 survey stated, “But like that's great for people who don't have the option of leaving the kids at home that they can bring them with them that's great. But it's still just weird, i'm like ‘am I on the east coast’ cause kids in bars is weird.” We suggest the brewery have more consistency with the expectations of when the space is available for kids and families or just adults. Otherwise, people may be unsure about when kids can be in BFB.

Another area of concern that we have relates to the staff service at Black Fleet. While there wasn't consistent consensus across the research that staff service was a negative at BFB, we believe that it is an area that Black Fleet should keep in mind going into the future. Our own experiences with the staff were less than ideal, and while we understand that BFB is understaffed and still increasing their worker numbers, we think it's important for the establishment to put high quality service at the forefront of their future growth.

The last major consistent theme that our group noticed throughout all aspects of our research was Food Culture. We define food culture as “the beliefs, practices, attitudes, and expectations surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food.” This theme showed up in the ethnography, interview, survey and content analysis. Within our food culture theme, we identified two primary subthemes: food availability and ordering process.

Our first subtheme is Food Availability. By this, we mean “the presence of sufficient food options on a consistent basis at an establishment.” Lori also mentioned in her interview that

“We do go to Odd Otter on occasion, instead of coming here, but we come here first, because there’s a menu.” During the survey, our results showed that Mug Club members were also pleased in the area of food availability, with the exception of the kid’s menu. In the ethnography stage, we observed that there was only one kid menu option. Within the content analysis portion of our research, we also came across a quote from JACKson 5’s qualitative data that read, “I mean I kind of appreciate that they’re focused on having staple pub foods rather than like trying to spread themselves too thin. But you know, maybe a little more food options would be great, especially for the kids food. And I know that this can seem a little more self-serving as a parent, but maybe a couple more kids food options would be nice...They only have really one kids option on the menu and it’s the chicken strips. Now just as a parent who has a little more picky eaters, an extra option would be nice.”

Another persistent subtheme is the Ordering Process. We define this as “the means by which someone requests and receives their food.” In the ethnography stage, we experienced confusion surrounding where to order and how to order our food. We sat down for a short period of time before someone at the bar had to tell us to come order at the bar. While we became accustomed to the ordering process, Elissa had a customer approach her and ask how they were supposed to order their food. Additionally, our survey question about where customers expected to order showed that there are differing expectations (50/50 split on ordering at table vs. bar).

When it comes to food availability, most customers find that their needs are being met and that they like BFB’s wide variety of food. A thing to keep in mind is the aspect of a “family-friendly” environment. Because this is an aspect in which customers identify to be a part of BFB’s brand, Black Fleet should be mindful that this comes with a set of food expectations as

well. Having only one kid option on the menu, as we observed during the ethnography, does not meet the customers expectations, so we would suggest adding additional menu items for the children.

In our socialization, we internally create boundaries in our everyday lives. When it comes to BFB we symbolize the booths as a clear distinction of where the restaurant ends and the bar starts. This creates an internal understanding that if you are situated in the “restaurant area” that you would be treated as a traditional restaurant customer. However, BFB goes against our metaphorical network, as they treat the entire environment as a self-serving/ordering bar. In terms of the ordering process, there is a divide between survey respondents in whether the space is more restaurant-like or bar-like, so we’d suggest making it super clear what the expectation is for ordering (this could be done by creating a bigger/bolder sign). A potential long-term solution would be having staff for taking orders and serving food.

In conclusion, this paper has identified the common themes of Black Fleet Brewing by synthesizing our research across the instrument papers. We broke down the three biggest themes of beer culture, the BFB experience, and food culture—all while providing context from our research that backed the sub-themes up. Additionally, we laid out potential changes that the establishment might make moving forward. If Black Fleet’s management take two things from all of our research, we’d suggest they change the following.

1. We believe that BFB should improve the ordering process and clearly establish the expectations for ordering food and the environment.

2. We believe that BFB should improve their staff structure. Having clear roles and expectations for the staff will help with the overall flow from ordering food to being served.

These changes reflect areas of BFB that need the most improvement moving forward, and we believe that making the necessary changes will immediately contribute to the longevity and success of Black Fleet Brewing.