# From Mother’s Ruin to Ginaissance. Emergence, Settlement, and Resettlement of the Gin Category

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approach product categories as socially constructed entities and make informed use of history to explain the successive categorical dynamics. Strategic action field theory is applied to explain how internal and external category actors interact to create and change product meanings and affect categorical configurations. Our results show how the intricate, complex, and historically embedded processes that the product category underwent first triggered stigmatization and then put conditions in place that led to concentration and made the current ginaissance possible.

Findings drawn from this study of gin contribute to research on product categories by revealing some peculiar dynamics of concentration and partitioning, status recategorization, and categorical stigma, which are summarized in an empirically grounded process model of category emergence and change.
FROM MOTHER’S RUIN TO GINAISSANCE. EMERGENCE, SETTLEMENT, AND RESETTLEMENT OF THE GIN CATEGORY

Abstract

This article provides a historically grounded explanation of category emergence and change by using the gin category as an example. Formerly a standardized spirit produced by a narrow group of large England-based producers, gin has become a premium craft spirit made by thousands of big and small producers in every corner of the world – a categorical shift that commentators have dubbed the ‘ginaissance.’ We approach product categories as socially constructed entities and make informed use of history to explain the successive categorical dynamics. Strategic action field theory is applied to explain how internal and external category actors interact to create and change product meanings and affect categorical configurations. Our results show how the intricate, complex, and historically embedded processes that the product category underwent first triggered stigmatization and then put conditions in place that led to concentration and made the current ginaissance possible. Findings drawn from this study of gin contribute to research on product categories by revealing some peculiar dynamics of concentration and partitioning, status recategorization, and categorical stigma, which are summarized in an empirically grounded process model of category emergence and change.
Keywords: Categories, strategic action field, history, stigma, concentration, partitioning, taste regime, status, gin, ginaissance

Introduction

Gin is a neutral grain alcoholic spirit with a minimum alcohol by volume of 37.5% (40% in the US) and a predominantly juniper flavor. There are no other restrictions or production standards. Unlike with other spirits such as Scotch or Tequila, no precise territorial provenance is imposed on gin makers. Once dominated by a few global players producing undifferentiated, low-priced products, it is now the domain of innumerable handcrafting distillers making highly differentiated premium (i.e., priced largely above the average) products (Knoll, 2015). This process has been labeled a ‘ginaissance’ (Knoll, 2015; Atkins, 2017). The current picture of the gin category reveals an unstoppable trend of growth: In the UK alone, there are currently 361 gin distilleries, three times the number recorded in 2012 (Mann, 2019). Sales of gin in the UK totaled £1.9 billion in 2017 and are expected to grow around 37.2% by 2021 (French, 2018).

The aim of this paper is to provide socio-historically grounded explanations for how this happened and to answer the following research question: How have political, social,
economic, and technological forces – and the interaction between them – affected
successive configurations of the gin category from its origins to the present?

Owing to its tumultuous historical development, the gin category is a particularly
interesting case to study in order to answer the research question.

“Gin’s story is rife with contradiction. It has been the drink of both kings and
commoners. It inspired the first modern drug craze in eighteenth-century London, yet
London dry gin went on to become the embodiment of sophistication (…). And, while
gin is enshrined in modern bar culture, it still battles the remnants of a negative
reputation (…). Of all the spirits, gin is quite possibly the most beloved and the most
berated” (Solmonson, 2012, pp. 7–9).

From a theoretical perspective, the gin story allows us to disentangle the complex net of
political, social, economic, and technological forces that make it possible for an entire
product category – in this case, one with controversial associations at its inception – to
rise in status to the top of the taste hierarchy.

We consider product categories as socially constructed (Rosa, Porac, Runser-Spanjol, &
Saxonet, 1999; Khaire & Wadhwani 2010) and historically situated entities (Leblebici,
Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991) shaped by an intricate nexus of meaning-making
practices (Glynn & Navis, 2013). We integrate extant debate about product categories
with strategic action field (SAF) theory (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012) to give account of
the dense network of actors engaged in the process of creating and changing product
categories. We adopt an in-depth socio-historical approach (Negro, Koçak & Hsu, 2010; Khaire & Wadhwani 2010; Durand & Paolella, 2013; Glynn & Navis, 2013) and use history as the main driver behind the successive configurations of categorical dynamics, and use it to inform a theoretical conceptualization of these dynamics, an approach called “history in theory” (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016). Our work contributes to research on product categories, especially within the context of resource partitioning theory (e.g., Carroll, 1985), by showing that the process leading to concentration and the subsequent proliferation of players may be far more complex than the theory postulates. In addition, we contribute to discussions on status recategorization (e.g., Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016) by shedding new light on the role that historically situated, place-bounded, and class-dependent mechanisms and processes play in producing and modifying a product’s status. Finally, with regard to categorical stigma (e.g., Piazza & Perretti, 2015), we lay out a dynamic process of destigmatization that is only partly explained by organizational stigma management and primarily motivated by the product category’s gradual transition from one social class to another. Taken together, these contributions reveal a unified and empirically grounded process model of category emergence and change.

In the following, we first review the literature on product categories and provide the basic tenets of SAF theory. This review is followed by a thorough historical
reconstruction of the gin category and by a general discussion that also includes contributions, implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

**Literature review**

*Product categories as socially constructed entities*

Product categories are cognitive infrastructures that underpin markets (Lounsbury & Rao, 2004) as they form the primary ground to allow interaction between supply and demand (Rosa et al., 1999).

Product categories define the boundaries for organizational membership (Zuckerman, 1999; Durand & Paolella, 2013), are the primary element that firms apply to manifest their identity (Carrol & Swaminathan, 2000), and are the most visible element that consumers use to form their expectations (Sujan, 1985) and consider alternatives as members of a common set (Cattani, Porac, & Thomas, 2017).

Because of their relevance to codifying organizational and market dynamics, product categories are a major focus of analysis in category studies. While adopting different theoretical lenses (see Vergne & Wry, 2014 for a review), these studies share a common view of product categories as dynamic entities. Such dynamism can stem from firms’ natural inclination toward strategic differentiation, but categorical changes at the product level extend firms’ conduct to encompass the broader social context(s) in which product categories are nested (Glynn
& Navis, 2013). Research has shown that product categories are in continuous flux: Audiences, from consumers (Kjeldgaard, Askegaard, Rasmussen, & Østergaard, 2017), trade intermediaries (Khaire & Wadhmani, 2010), and the media (Rosa et al., 1999) to the advertising and the fashion system (McCracken, 1986) or social movements (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003), can change established interpretations of the product category and the criteria through which category membership is assessed.

Product categories are now framed as socio-cultural (Glynn & Navis, 2013), historically embedded (Khaire & Wadhmani, 2010) entities that carry meanings created and modified through a complex net of social, political, and cultural forces (Rao et al., 2003; Lounsbury & Rao, 2004). Such forces may prompt the emergence of new product categories (Glynn & Navis, 2013), favor their legitimization (Kennedy, Lo, & Lounsbury, 2010), preserve their stability (Lounsbury & Rao, 2004), or even delegitimize the very structure underpinning them (McKendrick & Hannan, 2014). For example, research has shown that delegitimizing practices enacted by consumers to contest the dominance of industrial over craft firms in specific product categories (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; McKendrick & Hannan, 2014; Kjeldgaard et al., 2017) triggered category partitioning, that is, the proliferation of small specialized players in markets dominated by large generalist firms (Carroll, 1985). Other studies have shown that audiences can contribute to shaping a negative social identity for an entire product
category that extends to all member organizations, a phenomenon known as categorical stigma (Vergne, 2012; Durand & Verge, 2015; Piazza & Perretti, 2015).

Regardless of the specific meanings associated with a product category, their creation and acceptance depend on a set of mechanisms that affect how individuals judge, classify, and relate to objects, assess categorical membership, and evaluate differences (Barlow, Verhaal, & Hoskins, 2018). That is, they depend on ‘taste regimes’ (Arsel & Bean, 2013). Taste regimes are practice-based mechanisms and processes that regulate distinctions between economic and social strata throughout the hierarchical ordering of products and product categories (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Kravets & Sandikci, 2014) in socially, historically, and culturally bounded contexts (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2012). The concept of a taste regime goes beyond that of a product status. It is not limited to the intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of a product through which producers and consumers signal their relative position in the social hierarchy (Sauder, Lynn, & Podolny, 2012) but extends to the processes and mechanisms through which audiences create and perpetuate a system of meanings, including status ordering. In other words, while the concept of a status settles the specific identity that a product or a product category comes to assume, the notion of a taste regime makes it possible to explain how such a categorical identity comes to be crystallized (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016). By way of example, the presence and perpetuation of a taste regime regulating the commensuration and valuation of modern art contributed to shaping the categorical
identity of Indian art as one that, for a long time, was regarded as having a low status (Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010).

Owing to the socially constructed nature of product categories, studies addressing their emergence and change have often merged two or more theoretical approaches into a unified framework. As Negro et al. (2010) and Durand and Thornton (2018) claim, the complexity of socially constructing categories can hardly be understood through a single approach, unless the latter simultaneously takes into account the agency that actors have, the structural conditions in which this agency is deployed, and the multitude of market and nonmarket forces that are jointly at play to shape or change them. Researchers have blended the socio-cognitive approach to category dynamics (Rosa et al., 1999) with institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) to make sense of some product categories’ stability (Lounsbury & Rao, 2004) or of the emergence of valuation criteria in other product categories (Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010). Some have combined partitioning theory (Carroll, 1985) with tenets from social movement theory (Morris & Mueller, 1992; Swaminathan & Wade, 2001) to make sense of de-concentration trends in identity-resonant product categories (McKendrick & Hannan, 2014). Others have jointly used tenets from organizational ecology, as well as institutional and social movement theory, to provide a compelling explanation of how the institutional logic governing categorization can shift (Rao et al., 2003). In line with these calls for theoretical pluralism, this research relies on strategic
action field (SAF) theory, a general social theory that condenses and integrates many of the aforementioned theoretical approaches into a single theoretical anchorage (Goldstone & Useem, 2012) and takes into equal account the various market and nonmarket forces that can prompt the phenomena of product category emergence, stabilization, and change.

Product categories as strategic action fields
Borrowing from practice (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984), as well as institutional (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and social movement theory (e.g., Morris & Mueller, 1992; Swaminathan & Wade, 2001), SAF theory focuses on how social actors engage in individual and collective practices to create, stabilize, or change various meso-level social arenas called strategic action fields (SAFs) (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Laamanen & Skålén, 2015). Fields are ‘strategic’ because field actors take actions while being mindful of what others are doing in the same field (Fligstein, 2013) to produce or to impede change. Every social space occupied by actors whose actions are oriented toward each other can be regarded as an SAF and approached through the lens of SAF theory (Laamanen & Skålén, 2014). Thus, since product categories provide the relevant social boundaries to identify markets and the relations among market actors (Porac et al., 1995; Zuckerman, 1999; Lounsbury & Rao, 2004; Durand & Paolella, 2013) and are meso-level structures in between producers and
consumers (Rosa et al., 1999), they can also be approached through the lens of SAF theory.

Most importantly (and in line with the tenets of SAF theory), there are three main reasons why product categories can be approached as SAFs: first, because category membership is based more on subjective standing than on objective criteria (Rosa et al., 1999); second, because categorical boundaries are assumed not to be fixed but to shift depending on the issues at stake (Porac et al., 1995); third, because product categories are fashioned over time by members of the field (Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010).

It is worth noting, however, that the theoretical and empirical challenge of SAF theory is to provide not just a precise ontological understanding of what an SAF is but also explanations for how and why fields change. As Wadhwani (2018) contends, SAF theory differs from other theories that are just as concerned with meso-level social orders, especially in reference to the central role that change assumes in the whole theorizing effort. In SAF theory, change is frequent and intentional, largely the outcome of constant jockeying between field actors, and mostly dependent on actors’ power and position within the field. In every field, stability is precarious, and even when it is achieved, it hides the constant work of actors to change the social order in which they act (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Forces of change are constantly at play to endanger stability, and forces of stability are always at play to counteract threats of change. This particular way of framing change, which is gaining traction in research focusing on
organizational and market dynamics (e.g., Özen & Özen, 2011; Taylor, 2016; Helfen, 2015; Corbo, Corrado, & Ferriani, 2016; Kauppinen, Cantwell, & Slaughter, 2017; Kjeldgaard et al., 2017; Litrico & David, 2017; Modell & Yang, 2018; Wadhwani, 2018), is also well suited to explain the process through which product categories develop.

While other meso-level theories have been used to theorize about categorical changes at the product level (Vergne & Wry, 2014), SAF theory adds theoretical precision to the analysis of their underlying dynamics. It places greater emphasis on collective action to counterbalance the subjective view of agency that characterizes Bourdieu’s (1977) approach. It has a broader scope than social movement theory because it sees social movement as one (but not the only) driver of change. It also expands the view of institutional fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) because it sees fields as only rarely organized around a truly consensual reality but always subject to contestation (Wadhwani, 2018). While the institutional entrepreneur is often considered the driver of change in institutional fields (Battilana, Leca & Boxenbaum, 2009), it hardly constitutes a systematic theory of field change as it conflates action with structure and leaves little room for transformative forces from outside the field (Leca & Naccache, 2006). SAF theory, by contrast, combines the institutional focus on the level of the organizational fields as loci of exchanges with a central interest in understanding the sources of change that stem from the various social networks in which these organizational fields are
nested (Wadhwani, 2018). In SAF theory, interaction with other SAFs (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012; Fligstein, 2013) or, more generally, exogenous shocks, is the most frequent source of field-level changes.

The theorization of change offered by SAF theory is also broader than that implied in other sociological approaches in category studies, such as resource partitioning theory and socio-cognitive dynamics: The former (e.g., Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Dobrev, 2000; Swaminathan, 2001) overemphasizes the agency of one or more firms to gain dominance over an untapped stock of resources left free by incumbents. The latter (e.g., Rosa et al., 1999) admits categorical changes only if producers and consumers reach a consensual agreement over the meanings of the goods being exchanged.

Besides propounding a finer-grained articulation of field change, SAF theory also offers a systematic and rational categorization of three central sets of actors: *incumbents*, *challengers*, and *governance units* (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). *Incumbents* are those actors whose interests and views tend to be heavily reflected in the dominant organization of the SAF. They generally take advantage of greater availability and control over those resources that ensure the field’s stability. *Challengers*, by contrast, have little influence over the mechanisms regulating the very functioning of the SAF but can change the rules of the game by exploiting their ability to seek collaborative agreements with others. Lastly, *governance units* are collective actors that oversee compliance with field rules, facilitate the system’s overall functioning and reproduction,
and seek to maintain the established social order. SAFs cannot exist in isolation: They are embedded in and connected to others defined by their *proximity* (those fields whose actions routinely affect the field in question) and *interdependence* (those that are subject to the influence of another or exercise mutual influence over each other). Finally, fields can be *state* or *nonstate*, with the former being those actors that have formal authority to intervene in, set rules for, and generally make pronouncements on the legitimacy and viability of the latter.

The articulation of actors forming a focal SAF, as well as the identification of other fields that may have a connection with it, is not new to the stream of studies dealing with product categories. However, as these studies are mostly rooted in epistemic approaches that focus less analytically on external actors and/or are more concerned with stability than with change, they offer a partial understanding of how product categories emerge and develop (Durand & Thornton, 2018; Hsu, Koçak, & Kovács, 2018). Conversely, SAF theory puts change rather than stability at the center and takes both internal and external forces that may revolve around stability and change into equal consideration. Thus, it is well suited to make sense of how the process of socially constructing product categories takes place.
Data and methods

In order to reconstruct the history of gin from its origins, we employed history books, papers, pamphlets, laws, and other printed documents as the main sources of data. We collected a large number of historical data sources to limit biases stemming from a reliance on single data sources (Golder, 2000; Tosh, 2006). Cultural artifacts such as paintings, engravings, and other cultural representations of gin were also used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the social construction of product meanings at different points in time (Karababa & Ger, 2011).

Recent industry data is used to provide a compelling picture of the current gin industry and is complemented by up-to-date information from reliable online sources. In addition, we interviewed producers, distributors, bartenders, and opinion leaders and participated in several gin-centered events between 2014 and 2018 (the list of primary and secondary data is available from the first author on request).

To ensure the reliability and robustness of the socio-historically grounded explanations of the categorical evolution provided in this research, we relied on Kipping, Wadhani and Bucheli’s (2014) methodology, which requires that the validity of each historical text be critically assessed and that these historical sources be triangulated with other primary and secondary data. Doing so would reduce bias and increase confidence in empirical results (Wadhani, Suddaby, Mordhorst, & Popp, 2018). This step was followed by a meticulous analysis of historical facts that were first chronologically
ordered, then interrelated to unveil sequential chains (i.e., a series of events that produce patterns of change), and finally arranged in a historical narrative (Langley, 1999; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013; Mordhorst & Schwarzkopf, 2017).

The historical reconstruction that follows is divided into three periods identified by taking into consideration the changing political, legal, economic, social, technological, and business conditions in which the gin category was nested over time. The first, which historians call the ‘gin craze,’ stretches from the end of the 17th century to the end of the 18th century. The second period – from the beginning of the 19th to the end of the 20th century – is characterized by the establishment of modern gin production. And the third period – from 1999 to the present – starts with the launch of Hendrick’s gin and the rapid subsequent increase in the variety and availability of premium products, a period that is now widely known as the ‘ginaissance.’

**Category emergence: The gin craze (end of 17th to end of 18th century)**

The origins of gin can be traced back to the 11th century, when Italian Benedictine monks flavored distilled spirits with juniper berries to heal the sick. Juniper-flavored potions were especially popular in the Low Countries, where the first written records of a juniper-based distillate called *jenever* have been found (van Maerlant, ca. 1260). English troops discovered jenever in Holland during the Eighty Years’ War (1568–1648) and largely employed it to support soldiers’ morale; for this reason, it was
nicknamed ‘Dutch courage.’ The English brought jenever to England and anglicized the name to “gin.” At the time, many Protestants were fleeing the Low Countries because of religious persecution and set up small distilleries in England. When William III (an Englishman of Dutch descent) took the English throne in 1689, he ratified a series of laws aimed at relaxing licensing restrictions on the distillation and sale of gin while banning imports of foreign alcoholic beverages (Solmonson, 2012). These measures had political and cultural significance as their goal was to affirm gin as a material signifier of breaking with the old symbolic politics of beer in favor of the nascent, triumphant Protestantism (Nicholls, 2008). The number of distilleries grew to more than 1,000, while there were some 6,000 gin taverns in London alone by 1725. Because it was cheaper than other drinks, gin rapidly became the favorite drink of the poor (Warner, 2011; Williams, 2014). Thus began a period that would pass into the annals of history as the gin craze. Statistical records document that the annual per capita gin consumption rose from 1 pint in 1700 to about 8 pints in 1750 (Mitchell & Deane, 1962).

Gin evolved from being a sovereign’s opportunity to establish a beverage imbued with new meanings of Englishness to becoming a social problem that had to be tackled. Claimed as a moral crusade against poisoning vices, the opposition to gin had thick economic overtones. The upper classes were scared that as long as the poor were left free to drink gin, the nation would run the risk of not having enough healthy workers to
sustain England’s economic growth. In addition, since the lower classes found in gin a substitute for beer, beer producers, who were traditionally rich upper-class landowners, did their best to spark off a social and political debate against gin and to advocate for beer as a drink that could ideologically signify ‘Britishness’ (Nicholls, 2008). Many British intellectuals of the time – handsomely compensated by beer producers (Dillon, 2004; Williams, 2014) – committed themselves to condemning gin and the habit of gin drinking. Novelist Daniel Defoe (1728), for example, identified the salvation of “lower class of people from utter ruin (…) by preventing the immoderate use of Geneva” (p. 1) as an urgent priority.

A new field often emerges because of changes in the wider social context in which a focal SAF is embedded (Fligstein, 2013). These changes gradually feed into episodes of contention, where incumbents and challengers vie more openly for influence over field rules.

Similarly, when a product category emerges, the lack of a shared set of rules governing individual and collective actions generates competing cultural meanings that a given set of actors tries to impose on others, depending on the power they hold, the structural position they occupy, and the support they are able to rally in their broader social environment.

In the case of gin, these meanings were associated with its ability to be recognized as a symbol of ‘Englishness’ to the detriment of beer, which had traditionally fulfilled this
role. It was because of this symbolic opposition that a new SAF was created. Despite beer and gin being two distinct product categories, their symbolic rivalry led beer and gin producers to take each other into account in the structuring of their actions. This rivalry resulted in gin shifting from being associated with the newly established national identity to being considered the spirit of the outcasts, which produced the conditions for its stigmatization (Vergne, 2012). Even though the stigmatization of product categories is often the result of their contentious morality (Anteby, 2010; Voss, 2015), it can also occur because the category is associated with someone or something that carries a devalued social identity (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). Throughout the 18th century, the stigma of gin resulted from the association between gin and its typical consumers, the lower class. This phenomenon, known as stigma transfer (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009), culminated in collective actions involving three sets of actors: the moral powers, who questioned the morality of gin and of gin drinking; the beer producers, who exploited their power resources and better position within the broader social field (including direct participation in Parliament) to consolidate beer as the national drink; and the state field, which, encouraged by the moral powers and beer producers to do so, deployed its formal authority to limit the spread of gin. Organizational theorists have often underscored the role that the state field, i.e., government or legislative institutions, plays in supporting or neglecting the legitimization of emerging practices or emerging organizational forms (Aldrich & Fiol,
In the case of gin, the state field deployed its power to prevent gin trade and consumption through a series of legislative acts emblematically known as the “Gin Acts.”

The first act (1729) made a retail license of £20 per year (approximately the annual revenue of a small retailer) compulsory, introduced a tax of 2 shillings per gallon of gin sold, and set a fine of £10 for smuggling gin (White, 2003). However, this act was a failure, and widespread evasion of the law led Parliament to repeal it in 1733 (Solmonson, 2012).

The second act (1736) was issued following an incident that pushed Parliament to intensify political measures against gin abuse: the case of Judith Defour. Judith was a woman sentenced to be executed after she had strangled her 2-year-old daughter and sold her clothes to buy a ration of gin (Stove, 2008). This episode attracted so much attention that gin came to be nicknamed *mother’s ruin* (Waterson, 2000). The 1736 Act sought to reduce gin consumption by prohibiting the sale of gin in quantities less than 2 gallons (which was implicitly a measure to impede individual consumption) and by imposing a distribution license fee of £50 per year (Clark, 1988). It gained extensive support from the moral powers, including the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (White, 2003; Dillon, 2004), which successfully lobbied legislators to take an active role in preventing the lower classes from drinking gin (White, 2003; Nicholls, 2008). The beer makers’ lobby stood side by side with the moral powers to increase the
social fear of gin in 1736. This is well represented in an engraving entitled “The
lamentable fall of Madam Geneva,” by Elizabeth Foster, in which “Madam Geneva”
(i.e., gin) lies supine on a platform with her dress pulled down to reveal both her breasts
and a public house with a sign reading “No more Gin by retail Parsons Entire Butt” (a
reference to the beer brewed by Humphrey Parsons, a member of Parliament at the time
and a fierce opponent of gin) in the background.
The act initially halted consumption as gin suddenly became unavailable, but it sparked
riots in the poorest London neighborhoods (Warner & Ivis, 1999), thereby reinforcing
gin’s role as a material identifier of the poor. The more Parliament tried to ban gin, the
more popular it became and the more entrenched it was in the political and cultural
makeup of its drinkers.
As a side effect, the 1736 Act had increased gin smuggling (Clark, 1988): Gin
reappeared, and the protests subsided.
In 1743, Parliament passed another act that cut taxes on gin retail and reduced the
license fee to only £1, which had the effect of reducing the price for legal gin and
making the bootlegged variety less attractive than before.
Gin consumption peaked in 1750 with more than 11 million gallons of gin sold in
The 1751 Act prohibited retailers from selling not only gin but any kind of spirit;
however, gin was once again the primary target in the social debate. This targeting is
evident in two well-known satirical engravings known as ‘Beer Street’ and ‘Gin Lane’ (Hogarth, 1751), in which the inhabitants of Beer Street are portrayed as happy and healthy, while those living on Gin Lane are depicted as being destroyed by their addiction to gin.

The effects of the 1751 Act were significant, as the annual gin consumption dropped to 1.2 gallons per capita from 2.2 gallons in 1743 (Warner et al., 2001).

It has to be noted that the aim of all the aforementioned acts was to penalize gin distribution and consumption while avoiding any additional tax, restriction, or penalty on production. Ever since gin made its debut in England, distilling companies had strengthened their social position and relative influence. Gin rapidly became a flourishing economic sector absorbing a significant number of workers and responsible for about a quarter of the financial resources collected by the state through taxation (Warner, 2011; White, 2003).

Finally, in 1757, Parliament took the extreme decision to prohibit the production of any distilled spirit, which put a definitive end to the craze (Warner et al., 2001).

Despite legal attempts to ban gin, the stigmatization process did not result in the category disappearing. Instead, it created the conditions to tie gin to a prevailing taste regime according to which product meanings were largely determined by their ability to perpetuate a clear-cut distinction between social classes (Arsel & Thompson, 2011; McQuarrie et al., 2012). This taste regime institutionalized the symbolic connection
between gin and its typical consumers, inhibited gin from spreading among upper-class consumers, and confined it to the bottom of the hierarchy in terms of status. Historians agree that the gin craze petered out from 1757 onward in particular because of the decrease in the number of people living in poverty. Those who started to enjoy better living conditions shifted from gin to other beverages as a means of signifying their social emancipation (Warner & Ivis, 1999; Warner et al., 2001). After 1757, as we will show, following a brief and apparently stable period, internal and external dynamics started to produce relevant changes in the category.

Category settlement: The advent of modern gin (1800–1999)

If during the 18th century the gin category had been the theater of social and political struggles, it subsequently entered a relatively settled stage that lasted until the end of the 20th century.

Two main laws contributed to a relative stabilization of the product category. First, the 1823 Excise Act fixed a minimum limit on the productive capacity at 400 gallons to distill. The reasoning behind the act was that smaller stills would be too easy to conceal and, therefore, would facilitate illegal distilling (Buxton & Hughes, 2014). Because of this law, all the small-scale gin distillers operating in the UK became illegal overnight. Second, the 1830 Beerhouse Act made it possible to sell beer without a license and sparked fierce market competition between beer and gin shops (Skelly, 2011). Because
of the new act, many gin shops were forced to close down. Those that survived became too expensive for the less wealthy and started targeting more affluent consumers (Williams, 2014). They ultimately transformed their modest taverns into *gin palaces*: fantastically ornamented drinking places (Dickens, 1836) designed to be aesthetically pleasing in order to draw upper-class drinkers away from beerhouses (Du Bois & Boons, 2014). The arrival of factories made consumption more affordable for a higher number of Londoners and fostered the emergence of a new cluster of urban consumers, i.e., the middle classes, which became a big target for gin. As Solmonson (2012) notes, the gin palaces played a key role in elevating gin’s image by establishing the idea that ‘drinking was a social sport, not just a means to oblivion’ (p. 68).

In addition to these laws and the newly established retail format, another event contributed to bringing stability to the gin category: the invention of the column still in 1832. This technological innovation enabled the production of gin on a larger scale and made it possible to obtain a better-quality distillate with well-balanced aromatic qualities: the London Dry style. Gin finally became a spirit similar to the product we know today with its own English style and started to be more appealing to upper-class consumers.

Gin profited from the emergence of a novel taste regime that favored a further category shift. The new taste regime orchestrated practices of consumption on the basis of their degree of ‘modernity.’ Consuming modern (i.e., mass-produced) products was
considered an act of emancipating oneself from the past and a way for people to express their belonging to a clearly identified social status (Glennie & Thrift, 1992).

Gin started to be considered part of the English cultural repertoire when it was deprived of its popular meanings and embraced more modern ones. This is a process of vertical status recategorization similar to that described by Delmestri and Greenwood (2016) with respect to grappa. Unlike with grappa, however, the change in gin’s status resulted from the transition from artisanal to industrial production. Industrial, mass-produced gin became respectable, while traditional, small-batch gin continued to have negative connotations (Williams, 2014).

Category studies have often focused on the process of reconfiguring categories, in which concentration is challenged by actors that question the legitimacy of mass-producers, which prompts category partitioning (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; McKendrick & Hannan, 2014). However, these studies have little to say about why and how this concentration occurs. Concentration is often taken for granted and motivated by the existence of scale advantages at the production, distribution, or marketing level (Carroll, 1985). In the case of gin, concentration was only partly attributable to scale advantages: It was a complex and intricate network of collective internal and external actors that made it possible to attain a relatively long, albeit temporary, settlement. Incumbents (i.e., large-scale gin producers) were able to keep the structure of the category close to settled for more than a century because they took advantage of the
existing norms that reduced the likelihood of new entries, and because they exploited a
taste regime that promoted mass-produced products as better and more respectable
alternatives than their non-industrialized counterparts. As a matter of fact, unlike what
was found in previous studies (e.g., Negro, Hannan & Rao, 2011), the advent of
‘modernism’ in the gin category did not generate any resistance or identity tension. In
the ‘industrialized’ gin category, there were no challengers, which are generally
assumed to emerge in order to satisfy a demand for non-massively produced products
(Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Swaminathan, 2001; McKendrick & Hannan, 2014),
simply because such a demand did not exist.

To say that a field is settled, however, does not imply there is no change. Settlement is a
sort of ephemeral state as internal and external challengers are always ready to change
the field in their favor, albeit sometimes unsuccessfully or too incrementally (see
Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984 for similar arguments).

The first drastic change to the settled field dates to 1869, when the Wine and Beerhouse
Act imposed a license to sell all alcoholic beverages, including beer and wine. As
Harrison (1967) documents, by the 1860s the temperance movement in England had
started playing an important role in social debate and political decisions around the
regulation of alcohol production, trade, and consumption. After the reform took effect,
gin consumption dropped significantly. While gin was solidifying its presence among
the growing middle class, the laws passed by the British Parliament posed significant
obstacles to the consolidation of gin makers on the national scene, which, at the time, was already populated by some players that are still around today: Gordon’s, Beefeater, and Tanqueray, among others. English producers responded to these laws by exploiting nondomestic markets to consolidate their competitive position and were aided in this pursuit by the British Empire’s colonial expeditions (Manning, 2012).

Thanks to the emergence of the mixing practice, gin in England started gaining ground again by the first two decades of the 20th century, but this growth was severely stalled in the 1920s because of the negative effects of the Volstead Act in the US, which banned the sale and consumption of alcohol.

Between the repeal of the Volstead Act (1933) and the end of the 1960s, vodka expanded both in Europe and in the US and eroded gin’s share of the market. As Williams (2014) outlines, in the 1960s vodka was a blank cultural canvas on which to write differently from gin’s historical dark legacy. As a result, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the gin category continued to be concentrated in the hands of a few players producing standard products and did not attract any challengers.

The first attempt to revitalize the category came in 1987 when the multinational company Bacardi Martini launched the world’s first premium gin: Bombay Sapphire. By lowering the juniper and raising the citrus levels to offer a lighter taste, Bombay Sapphire introduced novel category codes (see Hannan, Pólos, & Carroll, 2007) that would be largely employed years later. These novel category codes are (Manning,
2012): 1) **botanical composition**: Bombay Sapphire was the first gin ever to report the botanical composition on the bottle and to make the botanicals an element of the marketing strategy; 2) **packaging**: it was the first gin to propose a bright blue and unusually squared-shaped bottle that stood out from traditional gin; and 3) **cues of authenticity**: it was the first to market the product by making explicit reference to the method of production and to the place of origin. However, for more than 10 years, Bombay Sapphire represented the only attempt to sell a premium gin. New challengers took time to emerge both in England and elsewhere, and it was only at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century that gin underwent a rebirth.

**Category resettlement: Ginaissance (1999 to the present)**

Many consider 1999 to be the year in which the *ginaissance* began (Knoll, 2015). This was when Hendrick’s gin, a brand owned by the Scottish corporation William Grant & Sons, was launched. It would soon be enthusiastically emulated by thousands of other producers.

Hendrick’s was conceived as an unconventional premium gin, obtained by distilling 12 classic botanicals, along with unconventional cucumber and Bulgarian roses. Despite an on-trade price of about $40 per unit, Hendrick’s rapidly became a market hit with sales climbing from 7,000 9-liter cases in 2003 to 925,200 in 2016.
Hendrick’s changed the category in many ways. First, it pushed incumbents to launch premium products to defend their market shares. Examples include Tanqueray 10 (launched in 2000), Beefeater 24 (in 2009), and even a cucumber-flavored version of the global leader, Gordon’s (in 2013).

Second, it led to the resurrection of small-scale distilleries in the UK after about a 200-year absence. In 2009, the London-based Sipsmith distillery (later acquired by Beam Suntory) lobbied successfully to have the 400-gallon limit from 1823 abolished (Buxton & Hughes, 2014) and attracted the attention of many small distilleries that would go on to base their activities in the UK.

Third, it encouraged the operation of thousands of small craft distilleries around the globe (Knoll, 2015).

As Knoll (2017) wrote, what William Grant & Sons did was change the taste profile of gin at a time when the category was largely dominated by value (priced below $10) and standard products (priced between $10 and $15) (Barnett, 2011), with very low differentiation in terms of taste. It is worth noting that, like both Grappa di Picolit (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016) and Bombay Sapphire, Hendrick’s is a product innovation by an established company and not a newcomer representing an emerging countercultural or an antagonistic movement. Thus, even the resurgence of the gin industry stands in contrast with the thesis of resource partitioning theory (Carroll, 1985).
Despite a brand like Hendrick’s undeniably having some factual connection with a contemporary culture of consumption driving the demand toward non-mainstream products (Bean, Khorramian, & O’Donnell, 2018), its introduction and later success should not be interpreted merely as a response to a generalized consumer quest for unusual products (Firat & Venkatesh 1995). Rather, the company sought to fill a gap in its product range and to confer on Hendrick’s an image that is by no means linked to traditional standards of the gin category. The goal that William Grant & Sons strived for was not to raise product quality *per se*, as Bombay Sapphire had previously done, but to detach gin from a devalued image (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016) by making something only loosely coupled with the cultural orthodoxy of the gin category (Holt & Cameron, 2010; Rindova, Dalpiaz, & Ravasi, 2011).

The transformation of the gin category since 1999 aligns with the fundamental contention of SAF theory that SAFs are more frequently destabilized by outsiders invading the SAF than by internal members (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). While most of these invasions do not produce dramatic changes, others have the potential to destabilize the field and to drive it toward a new settlement. According to SAF theory, when a settled field is drastically challenged, this event does not necessarily lead to disruption but can produce resettlement. Resettlement indicates that the transforming field, while radically modified, is still linked to and bears a significant imprint of the
field it comes from, as incumbents do not disappear but take an active role in the field’s configuration.

Hendrick’s gin is an example of a powerful outsider that successfully led an established field toward resettlement.

The likelihood for outsiders to cause a field to transition toward resettlement largely depends on incumbents’ ability to obstruct or impede outsiders’ access to the field, defections of incumbents to the side of the challenger, and the existence of governance units that may preserve the settlement and delegitimize the challenger (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012).

When Hendrick’s arrived on the scene, all these aspects were working in its favor. Incumbents, like Diageo and Pernod Ricard, followed Hendrick’s by developing premium versions of their century-old products, thereby validating the competing interpretation as a legitimate claim to the label (see Negro et al., 2011, for similar arguments). Governance units, which are generally collectively created by incumbents to stabilize the field and preserve the status quo of their members, were non-existent. The Gin Guild (the UK industrial association of gin makers) was only established in 2012, which means no collective body had previously existed to prevent challengers from resettling the field.

Although they are different, the new gins have many similarities. First, they all compete in the premium product range, which is the only one in the gin category experiencing a
real boom. Data on the spirit industry (IWSR, 2016) shows that sales of gin by volume grew by 12.3% between 1996 and 2015. However, if analyzed by price range, the trend shows the incidence of premium gin shifted from 18.2% to 43.8% during the same period (see Table 1).

Second, new products are positioned as being unique rather than different. The lack of production restrictions limiting the type and quality of botanicals that can be distilled with juniper berries, as well as the absence of norms regulating provenance, allowed producers to emerge in a variety of countries. It also offered gin makers the opportunity to challenge each other’s recipes by simply taking advantage of their fortunate territorial belonging. Examples are the Black Forest–based Monkey 47, Canada’s Ungava, which is produced by using only rare local botanicals from the eponymous peninsula in Quebec, and Rivo gin, which uses foraged herbs and handpicked spices from the area around Lake Como in Italy. The list is almost endless, and there are now gins featuring the most peculiar botanicals, as well as capers, salt, seaweed, tomatoes, saffron, and tea. Many commentators on the gin industry refer to this new class of gin as the ‘contemporary style,’ where ‘contemporary’ does not deal with provenance, production
method, botanical composition, or price but indicates that the predominant juniper flavor leaves the stage to other ingredients.

We compiled a list of the 475 gins that have received an award at least once at any one of the three leading spirits competitions worldwide (Chicago, San Francisco, and London) between 2000 and 2015. The list features spirits from 31 countries on all five continents. Most of the 475 awarded gins (292 entries) do not fit within the traditional London Dry style and were launched (345 of the 475) after Hendrick’s had entered the market.

With the producers’ rush to use botanicals that had never been used before in gin making, the SAF moved dramatically toward resettlement. In the previous configuration of the product category, the incumbents’ stickiness to a prototypical product form (Zuckerman, 1999) had trivialized the category favoring concentration. But in the resettled field, the search for differentiation and the ease through which differentiation can be made allowed new players to enter and moved competition from the mass market to market niches, from the UK to the rest of the world – that is, to partition the category. However, this partitioning did not stem from an oppositional identity rooted in notions of authenticity (Carroll & Swaminathan 2000; Hannan et al., 2007; McKendrick & Hannan, 2014). As argued before, the identitarian connections between gin and England were severed in the 18th century when gin was stigmatized. Partitioning was set in
motion once producers understood they could make a signature local gin by using
locally available botanicals.
This peculiar partitioning benefited from the presence of a contemporary taste regime
that orchestrates consumption choices on the basis of the product’s uniqueness and
identitarian value and no longer on the basis of social classes and class distinction (Firat
& Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 1998). This taste regime emerged as a product of the
transition from modernity to postmodernity and with the establishment of a
contemporary market paradigm where mass market production is supplanted by
segmented production, and consumption is no longer a way to satisfy needs but rather a
way to satisfy desires (Van Raaij, 1993).
This postmodern taste regime places products at the high end of the status hierarchy
largely on the basis of their degree of novelty, differentiation, and unusualness,
regardless of their intrinsic quality, and confines mass-marketed and well-known
products to the lower end.
At present, despite the myriad unique interpretations of gin, the category still seems to
remain united under the gin label. Most often, when this happens, a product category is
split into two (or more) variants (Kennedy et al., 2010) as audiences come to view
certain market offerings as too loosely associated with the category’s prototypical
identity. In the absence of governance units and of cogent legislation to define
production standards, it seems the common ingredient juniper was by itself able to hold
this very diverse product category united and to grant producers the chance to keep claiming their membership in the category, regardless of whether their gin is low-brow or premium, traditional or contemporary.

The proliferation of contemporary styled gins is now raising concerns and setting off a debate between traditionalists and modernists, similar to the one that Negro et al. (2011) recount about traditional wine makers, that could lead to a subdivision of the category as the structure further evolves. What is contested, however, is neither the brand’s ownership, nor the product’s provenance or the production techniques used, but the prevalence of other ingredients over juniper. As James Hayman, master distiller and owner of Hayman Distillers, declared: “I feel uncomfortable with a product called gin that isn’t juniper-led (…) It is a shame and quite damaging for the category. I think legislation has become a necessity right now” (Kiely, 2015). Desmond Payne, master distiller at Beefeater since the beginning of the 1960s, echoes the same opinion in an interview he gave us during a gin convention: “some of these recently launched gins are so lightly flavored with juniper that it must be questioned if they should still be called gin.”

**General discussion and conclusions**

The aim of this paper was to provide a historically grounded explanation of category emergence and change by taking the gin category as an example and to answer the
following research question: How have political, social, economic, and technological forces – and the interaction between them – affected successive configurations of the gin category from its origins to the present?

We adopted a cognizant history in theory approach (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014) by using history as the main driver to explain the successive configurations of categorical dynamics. We extended our analysis over a significant timeframe and provided a separate analysis of three main historical periods corresponding to an equal number of configurations of the gin category. Table 2 summarizes the findings for each of the three periods analyzed.

- TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE -

As shown in the empirically grounded process model represented in Figure 1, each categorical configuration corresponds to a particular market structure. Each market structure is tied to a specific taste regime that, in turn, provides the necessary conditions to regulate the hierarchical ordering of the product category. Therefore, the taste regime is analytically framed as a meso-level construct between market structure and category status to account for the variety of audiences and social forces that create and perpetuate a system of meanings underpinning product categories.
We showed that, in stage one, the lack of a shared understanding of the category and its meanings led to a fragmented supply and the creation of fierce market conflicts with beer makers vying for the same demand, thereby devaluing gin’s social identity. The result was the inclusion of gin in a taste regime whose products were used to reiterate and reinforce social and class distinctions. Gin was firmly entrenched in the poor’s consumption preferences and imbued with symbolic meanings of social rebellion of the lowest class of people against the establishment. The production, consumption, and retailing of gin were considered representative of questionable morality, and the product was placed at the lowest level of status.

Coercive intervention from the state, along with technological developments and changes in the wider social structure, favored concentration from the 19th century onward. In stage two, concentration promoted gin’s inclusion in a newly established taste regime where mass-produced products came to be associated with an image of sophistication and were more appealing than non-mass-produced ones. The affirmation of this taste regime contributed to stabilizing the field and positioning gin as a mid-level product in the hierarchical status ordering.

The structure of the category remained almost stable despite a challenger, Bombay Sapphire, making efforts to change it. However, because of its adherence to the
prevailing prototypical product form, it did not significantly alter the category or its status. The field’s structure allowed an outsider (William Grant & Sons) to launch an unconventional product that set the stage for gin’s transition into a contemporary taste regime where marketplace actors emphasize distinction and produce the conditions for a vertical rise in gin’s status toward the high end of the spirits market.

This study contributes to current research and theory regarding product categories in several ways. SAF theory gives the historical reconstruction we provide in this research the necessary theoretical abstraction needed to explain how history affects current categorical configurations. Using history in theory requires “a theorized understanding of the historical particularities and contingencies of the series and relationships under analysis” (Kipping and Üsdiken, 2014, p. 562). As Wadhwani (2018) contends, SAF theory is particularly suited to historical analysis as it makes it possible to overcome the theoretical impasse that presumes fields are relatively stable and characterized by rule-like patterns by viewing fields as historically contingent, time-bounded, and inherently inclined to change. It also allows focusing not just on the effects of change but also (and above all) on the patterns behind the change. The application of SAF theory to the case we illustrate in this paper helps account for these patterns of categorical change as a series of complex and intertwined negotiations among actors situated in different social contexts.
This study also offers three other important contributions to the stream of category studies with particular reference to resource partitioning theory, status recategorization, and categorical stigma.

As for partitioning, the gin story shows that the process leading to concentration and the subsequent proliferation of players may be far more complex than the theory postulates. Concentration was the ‘unexpected’ outcome of a socio-cultural and political project to hinder gin’s ascent in English society and inhibit the creation of market spaces that are supposed to be occupied by small specialist firms. Partitioning, in turn, has had a dynamic that is different from the kind shown in similar product categories (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; McKendrick & Hannan, 2014) because of the remaining cultural legacy from the time when gin was known as *mother’s ruin*. Besides preventing the emergence of an oppositional identity between large generalists and small specialists and/or between traditionalists and modernists (Rao et al., 2003; Negro et al., 2011), this legacy has made issues of authenticity (Beverland, 2006) irrelevant and favored the global diffusion of gin production. This does not mean that a similar proliferation of players at a geographically unlimited scale is unique to gin. Rather, such a global proliferation would not have been possible if, at its inception, gin had been considered a legitimate symbol of national identity.

Our study also offers an incremental contribution to the stream of research on status recategorization. Unlike with Delmestri and Greenwood (2016), we not only analyzed
how gin moved from a low to a high status but also shed light on the historically situated, place-bounded, and class-dependent mechanisms and processes that led to gin’s positioning at the lower end of the market hierarchy at the beginning and gradually permitted the more recent climb in status. The introduction of period effects allowed for drawing a trajectory of status recategorization that only partly aligns with the kind theorized by Delmestri and Greenwood (2016) in regard to grappa. Gin’s rise in status from stage one to stage two runs counter to the argument that an institutional entrepreneur is required for status recategorization. As historical records confirm, a combination of unfavorable legislation, technological innovations, new retail formats, and the growth of the middle class created favorable conditions for gin to become a respectable product. The second rise in status – from stage two to stage three – was largely due to the actions of a single actor (i.e., Hendrick’s), similarly to what Nonino had done for grappa. However, unlike with grappa, we explain such a rise in status by linking it more tightly to the historical dynamics that the category underwent and that has made the gin category particularly receptive to status changes.

Finally, this study contributes to the stream of studies dealing with categorical stigma (Piazza & Perretti, 2015). Gin was stigmatized not because of its implicit amorality but because of the association with its typical consumers – a phenomenon of stigmatization that has previously received scant attention. The story of the gin stigma is the story of a product whose devalued social identity is tightly intertwined with a class-based
distinction rooted in individuals’ consumption choices. To understand the evolutionary
dynamics of these class-based product categories, one cannot overlook the
understanding of the social structure and of the class divisions that created the
conditions to stigmatize them and conferred legitimacy on them in later periods.
Previous studies focus on how organizations cope with categorical stigma (Hudson &
Okhuysen, 2009; Vergne, 2012, Piazza & Perretti, 2015) but offer limited information
on how such a stigma affects subsequent categorical configurations. We provide an
empirical explanation of how categorical stigma was created and how it was gradually
dismantled to the point where the category was even promoted at the high end of the
status hierarchy. It is a dynamic of de-stigmatization that is only marginally explained
by organizational stigma management and primarily motivated by the gradual transition
of the product category from one social class to another.
This research also contributes to SAF theory. As some of its critics affirm (see
Goldstein & Useem, 2012), SAF theory has a general tendency to emphasize the
willingness of incumbents to stabilize the field in order to create shared meanings and
produce cooperation among social actors through the creation of governance units. In
our study, however, we found that settlement was reached despite a lack of governance
units, and the incumbents did not seek to prevent a possible invasion by challengers.
Thus, these results do not align with the assumption of SAF theory that stability requires
incumbents to play hard to maintain the status quo. In specific product categories,
incumbents can be in a position to take advantage of the settled field they are in simply because the field is so mature and static that it discourages outsiders from challenging it.

However, this study’s results and theoretical contributions must be viewed in light of its limitations. The first deals with the historical sources used and how we interpret them. To the best of our knowledge, we collected all available historical reconstructions of the gin category, evaluated the existence of controversial interpretations of the same events to limit biases, used other secondary data, and collected primary data. However, since we covered an extended period of time and tried to cover all the ‘macro’ events that affected the emergence, development, and change of the gin category from its inception to the present, there might be other interpretations that we overlooked, particularly if all the micro-processes and negotiations that occurred during the product category’s development were considered.

While we based our research on a deep and detailed analysis of a single product category and its unique historical development, the second limitation concerns the fact that the theoretical elaboration cannot disregard the scope conditions (Walker & Cohen, 1985) imposed by the time-place bounded mechanisms of category emergence, settlement, and resettlement we give account in this research. For example, because the gin category included some degrees of conflict at its inception, future studies are needed to evaluate whether, similarly to what happened to gin, these conflicts systematically feed phenomena of category stigmatization that later turn into a vertical process of
status recategorization. A product category like blue jeans can be a suitable research setting to assess the degree of generalizability of the theoretical explanation of category emergence and change we lay out in this research, as it took the garment – previously identified exclusively with the working class – more than a century before it came to be associated with many of the symbolic attributes of consumption it has today (Davis, 1989). A further scope condition that deserves attention for future studies involves the unique historical path that gin took to assume cultural relevance. As the case of the gin category shows, the process through which products assume cultural importance is complex, historically intertwined, and not necessarily uncontested. Additional research is needed to assess whether the amount of dynamism inherent in gin can also be observed in other product categories that, at the time gin was stigmatized, were included in a taste regime where product meanings were determined by their ability to perpetuate a clear-cut distinction between social classes.

References


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van Maerlant, (ca. 1260). *Der naturen bloeme*.


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**Source.** Own compilation of IWSR (2016) data
Table 2. A summary of the findings

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<td>Large-scale gin producers. Few producers producing in large quantities.</td>
<td>Large-scale gin producers of traditional (London Dry) gin. Few producers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>supply structure.</td>
<td></td>
<td>producing in large quantities.</td>
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<td><strong>Challengers</strong></td>
<td>Myriad independent gin bootleggers.</td>
<td>Bombay Sapphire (the first premium product after more than 150 years).</td>
<td>Contemporary style gin makers established all over the world.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consumed neat and in mixed drinks.</td>
<td>juniper-dominated gins emerge. Botanicals sourced from all over the world</td>
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<td><strong>Production technology</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Places of consumption</strong></td>
<td>Gin taverns.</td>
<td>Gin palaces (beginning of 19th century) and cocktail bars (from end of the</td>
<td>Cocktail bars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19th century onwards).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State field</strong></td>
<td>From 1689 to 1729, supportive of the gin establishment.</td>
<td>Opposition to gin and institutional support for beer.</td>
<td>Lack of norms regulating gin production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From 1729 to 1757, an antagonistic role vis-à-vis gin (Gin Acts). The state</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>field was hostile to gin retail and gin consumption but did not impose serious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>constraints on production.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proximate fields</strong></td>
<td>Beer and malt spirits producers. Members of competing fields are especially</td>
<td>Beer and malt spirits producers still concerned with maintaining their</td>
<td>Many vodka and gin makers start approaching premium gin production allured by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>concerned with maintaining their market share and the meanings of Englishness</td>
<td>means that affects and produces changes in the gin category.</td>
<td>the market growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>associated with their product.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance units</td>
<td>Non-existent.</td>
<td>Non-existent.</td>
<td>Non-existent until 2012 but do not play a role aimed at granting the status quo of incumbents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wider social structure</strong></td>
<td>Pre-modern societal structure characterized by thick divisions between low and high classes. Lack of a middle class.</td>
<td>Modern societal structure characterized by the emergence of a middle class.</td>
<td>Post-modern societal structure characterized by loose boundaries among social classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taste regime</strong></td>
<td>Consumption is a way to perpetuate a clear-cut distinction between social classes.</td>
<td>Consumption is a way to express ‘modernity’. Consuming modern (i.e. mass-produced) products is a way to signify social emancipation.</td>
<td>Consumption is a way to express consumers’ identity but no longer structure social-classes and class distinction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td>Low-quality product, largely smuggled, associated with people occupying the bottom of the social pyramid. Gin considered to be of dubious morality, the product of the outcasts, a symbol of the social rebellion of the poor against the establishment.</td>
<td>A spirit characterized by a new style (the London Dry) targeting middle- and upper-class consumers, distilled through modern techniques, and consumed in charming gin palaces</td>
<td>Contemporary style gins are unique and targeted at international consumers who consider gin drinking a playful search for the unusual. Consumption choices are guided by artisanship, localness, and variety setting the stage for connoisseurship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market structure</strong></td>
<td>Fragmentation</td>
<td>Concentration</td>
<td>Partitioning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 1.** The empirically grounded process model of category emergence, settlement and resettlement

- **Category emergence**
  - **Market structure**
    - Fragmentation
  - **Taste regime**
    - Products maintain class distinction
  - **Categorical status**
    - low quality for low people
  - **STIGMATIZATION**

- **Category settlement**
  - **Market structure**
    - Concentration
  - **Taste regime**
    - Mass produced products are emancipative
  - **Categorical status**
    - mid quality for mid people
  - **STANDARDIZATION**

- **Category resettlement**
  - **Market structure**
    - Partitioning
  - **Taste regime**
    - Differentiated products are self-expressive, but no longer structure social classes
  - **Categorical status**
    - high quality (and style) for contemporary consumers
  - **PREMIUMIZATION**