



Società Italiana
Marketing

MARKETING & RETAIL
NEI MERCATI
CHE CAMBIANO

XIII^a SIM Conference
Cassino, 20-21 ottobre 2016

ISBN 978-88-907662-6-8

PROCEEDINGS

Nationalism and Autarky in the Contemporary (Liberal) Marketplace: The Emergence and Rise of Futurist Mixology

Author: Giuseppe Pedeliento (Università degli Studi di Bergamo)

Track: Consumer Behavior

Abstract

While nationalist and autarkic ideology are getting centrality in the global political agenda, marketplace actors are exploiting these ideological resources to position their brands and products, and to provide alternative configurations to regulate commercial transactions, production and consumption choices. By recognizing the topicality of nationalism and autarky in the contemporary political debate and marketplace, this research reports preliminary findings of a qualitative study performed to detail the emergence and evolution of a community characterized by a thick nationalistic ethos and by a common endeavor to restore the autarkic project of self-sufficiency: Futurist Mixology. The study contributes to the wide literature on nationalism and ethnocentrism by introducing autarky as an analytical concept intended as a principle that regulate market transactions and interactions. It also contributes to the literature on subcultural market configurations by underlining the role played by producers.

1. Nationalism as a marketplace resource

Nationalism is getting increasing consensus and centrality in global political and social discourses. Many European countries are witnessing unprecedented electoral gains for nationalist right and far-right parties. Examples are countless: the *AFD* in Germany, the *Front National* in France, the Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, and the Republican candidate Donald Trump. Letting aside their xenophobic ideals, all these right and far-right parties envision self-reliant nation-states able to survive without or with limited access to international trades making extensive use of a political rhetoric aimed at exhorting people to prefer national to imported products and to consider xenophilia a sort of anti-patriotic behavior. This political discourse is of course linked to a contemporary reality that offers valuable opportunities to meet popular demand and to affirm the rightists' ideology in wider social circles (Norris, 2005). Nationalism thus materializes itself at the crossroad of macro-level conceptualizations of market systems, and micro-level consumption choices (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014). Scholars found that consumption is a vehicle through which individuals express their nationalistic sentiment (Sandikci & Ger, 2002) and their opposition to market forces undermining national sovereignty (Varman & Belk, 2009). Authors have also shown that marketers often rely on nationalism to assume iconic status (Holt, 2004) especially in times of radical social shifts. Nationalism thus, is an ideological marketplace resource that can be either exploited by firms (Holt, 2004), and/or "consumed" by consumers' to manifest their sense of belongingness to a specific nation and to sustain their national economy (Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004; Varman & Belk, 2009; Kravets, 2012). Obviously, nationalism - as a market resource - can be more or less salient

according to whether it can be inscribed in a larger social or socio-historical context in which the nationalist ethos is made more relevant.

2. The rise of autarky in the contemporary marketplace

Besides being a market resource, nationalism can also be the principle through which market systems are created and governed. Production, distribution and consumption in any society are organized by a set of rules that uphold the maintenance of specific market forms (Polanyi, 1957; Bowles, 1998). When nationalism is the inspiring principle to the organization of national economic systems, markets are subject to state regulation aimed at achieving self-sufficiency and independence from international trades (Tortella & Houpt, 2000). That is, they are organized as autarkic economic systems. The modern European history offers several examples of nation-states that have tried to attain the status of self-sufficient economic systems. Autarkic market projects have been envisioned in Italy during the fascist regime, in Germany during Hitler's dictatorship and in Spain, during "Francoism". Autarky for these regimes was seen as the natural way to keep the national economy independent by others and to justify colonial expansion and military invasions. Even though autarky is an utopic-like form of organization of national economies – never completely fulfilled neither during the aforementioned dictatorships – the autarkic rhetoric is overwhelmingly coming back due to a generalized disenchantment and dissatisfaction with the promises of globalization (Kapstein, 1996; Rodrik, 1997; Thomas, 2016).

Besides becoming a recurrent topic in political debates, autarky is finding room also in company ads, and in corporate differentiation strategies. It thus emerges that as in today liberal world the autarkic project of national self-sufficiency is no longer imaginable, autarky shifted from the political power to the marketplace. Political parties and social movements work as ideological amplifier of a diffused sense of dissatisfaction with the liberal paradigm of free trade that marketplace actors, consumers and/or producers appropriate and transform in marketplace's cultural and economic resources to regulate commercial transactions.

By acknowledging this shift and by assuming the societal relevance that this liberal form of autarky is assuming in the contemporary marketplace, this research focuses on a community still mostly composed by producers and only marginally by consumers characterized by a significant nationalistic ethos and by an extensive use of the autarkic rhetoric: Futurist mixologists.

3. The emergence of Futurist mixology

Inspired by Futurism, an artistic and political movement emerged in Italy at the beginning of the 20th century led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Futurist mixologists counteract the global standardization of mixing and drinking in favor of a local school of mixology that emphasizes Italian-ness and exalts the quality of national products. In particular, Futurist mixologists propose an autarkic expression of the mixology art by expressly requiring the use of only Italian products, and also banning the use of English terms that form the vocabulary of bartenders from all over the world.

According to the main claim through which the Futurists' mixologists movement advertise itself, Futurist mixology is the autarkic Italian answer to the (Anglo-Saxon) cocktails of the 30's (Piccinino, 2014)..

Although Futurism was an avant-garde movement founded on a direct attack to die-hardism and traditionalism, the contingent ascent of Fascism from 1919 onwards, and the acknowledgment of autarky as an explicit goal of the regime (Baldwin, 2004), favored the emergence of an antagonistic sentiment toward non-national products also among the members of Futurism. The autarkic program of national self-reliance was sufficiently utopic for the provoking ethos of the Futurist movement, that they even declared (ideological) war to pasta, considered an absurd gastronomic religion that was making the Italians slaves of costly import of grain from other countries, penalizing the national rice industry (Marinetti & Fillia, 1931). The broader realm of gastronomy was conceived since the very beginning as a fertile amplifier of Futurist ideals in the broader social and cultural debate of the time. Cooking for the Futurists was considered an art and, as such, a cultural realm to which artists should devote attention. The Futurist innovative spirit contaminated not only food, but also the mixology art that at the beginning of the 20th century became a global thing. The Italians – differently from other Europeans (English at first) -were not accustomed to drink cocktails, as they were keener to drink wines, liquors and cordials neat.

Marinetti was at the beginning a fierce opponent of the emergent cocktail fashion, by him considered not suitable for the Italian "race". Yet, the Futurist rapidly recognized also the mixology art as a possible field of application of their innovative spirit, by provocatively questioning some of the most important pillars upon which mixology used to and still relies upon.

First, they prescribed the use of only Italian ingredients in mixed drinks and banned the use of non-Italian terms that are widely used to label tools and equipments that daily used in every bar of the world to craft their "*polibibite*" is the Futurist lexicon. Second, they dismantled the all-day/pre/after-dinner categorization of drinks, and introduced novel categories related to the drink's function. Accordingly, there are the "*guerra in letto*" (literally "war in bed") that are thought to facilitate the reproduction of the Italian race, the "*pace in letto*" (literally "peace in bed") that are essentially the opposite of the previous ones, the "*inventina*", that are though and prepared to favor the generation of new ideas, etc. In addition, they also abandoned the sweet-acid/bitter-sweet dichotomies that are cornerstones of the Anglo-Saxon mixology in favor of uncommon taste provoking sweet-savory/sweet-spicy combinations.

However, despite the innovative character of Futurist mixology it remained almost unknown and forgotten by historians, artists and, above all, bartenders until recent times. It became known only recently thanks to Fulvio Piccinino, an Italian bartender that is committing himself to the rediscovery of this forgotten Italian movement of artistic mixology. After several years of archival research, he recognized the opportunity to make the national community of barmen aware of the existence of this national tradition. He involved a great deal of national producers of spirits, liquors and soft drinks that responded enthusiastically allured by the possibility to increase their sales figures and market performances. Piccinino thus started an intense activity of Futurist proselytism to increase the number of adherents to the movement. By

mimicking the communication style of the Futurist movement he first issued a Manifesto of futurist mixology. The Manifesto is a set of six rules in which one reports: “we oblige to use only Italian products in the preparation of *polibibite*. We want to abolish the idiotic xenophilia that traditionally affects our mixology and that pushed us to consider the strangers as superiors, guiltily forgetting that the Italian tradition in the production of liquors and spirits can boast millennia of history, culture and technical ability. Foreign products can be used in the only occasion in which they are necessary and no Italian alternatives are available”.

4. Methodology

This research adopts a socio-historical research method (Golder, 2000) to trace back the origin of the Futurist artistic movement by isolating its main philosophical, social and political undertakes. This allow focusing on the nationalistic ethos of the movement, and the role it played in the utopic fulfilment of the autarkic program sought by the fascist regime. The main features of Futurist mixology are isolated by showing its basic principles and its adherence to the broader political project of Futurism. The emergence of the contemporary movement of Futurist mixology is detailed by showing the mechanisms of diffusion of its tenets throughout the bartender community, and to the mechanisms through which this newly established community performs proselytism. This is done through a series of in depth personal interviews with key informants including marketers, bartenders, and influencers. Interviews are also completed with ethnographic immersion during seminars and bartenders competitions of Futurist mixology.

5. Findings and contribution

First, autarky emerges as a marketplace social construction materialized through a common endeavor of producers and bartenders. The paper thus offers a real case of a community composed by several marketplace actors that are contributing to the diffusion of an autarkic expression of production and consumption. Autarky is distinguished from nationalism as the former is a regulatory system of market transactions and exchanges inspired by the latter, which is its inspiring principle. Second, the relevance that nationalistic ethos and the fulfilment of the autarkic project assume for the community of Futurist mixologists, the mechanisms of interactions among the members and the structure regulating such interactions, allowed to underline the subcultural nature of the community (see Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). The article thus contributes to the literature by extending the analytical category of subculture to encompass not only consumers and consumption, but also producers and production (Hietanen & Rokka, 2015).

Findings also illuminate about the significant advantages industry partners are enjoying by supporting and promoting the establishment and formation of Futurist mixology.

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