

## Belgian Abbey Beers' Online Founding Stories Orienting to a Global Market

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### Abstract

This study explores the construction of authentic global brand identities, by investigating the narrative strategies organisations employ in their founding stories. In particular, the focus lies on Belgian abbey beer brands, a category of beers “subject to debates and conflicts over authenticity” (Beverland et al. 2008: 3). Specifically, the online founding stories of two Trappist breweries – a category of abbey beers traditionally perceived as highly authentic – (Westmalle and Orval) are compared with the stories of two commercial abbey beers (Affligem and Grimbergen). Methodologically, a sociolinguistic, narrative analytical approach (see De Fina/Georgakopoulou 2012) is drawn upon to investigate the stories as social practices, while a multimodal discourse-analytical lens (Page 2018, 2019) is employed to study the visual and aural resources in the narratives. As the analyses illustrate, the Trappist brands pay little attention to the construction of authenticity, since their primary narrative focus lies on the presentation of their beer as an innovative, qualitative, and commercial product. Contrastively, commercial brands rely on “fact construction” (Edwards/Potter 1992) strategies to create a credible and authentic – i.e., historical, religious, traditional, and regional – brand identity, which downplays any commercial motives. Additionally, they employ a “crossfictional” (Hatavara/Mildorf 2017) frame of reference to imbue their narratives with values of self-transcendence and perseverance, thereby further enhancing their locally anchored products’ participation in the global marketplace.