

POWER DYNAMICS: DISRUPTING OR MAINTAINING OF THE COFFEE INDUSTRY AS AN INSTITUTION^{*}

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Power dynamics: Disrupting or maintaining of the coffee industry as an institution

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of symbolic capital in the maintenance and disruption of patterns of institutional control. This article explores how the power relations of coffee roasters have survived the changing nature of coffee consumption. This is achieved through an interpretative, qualitative study focus on the coffee industry in United States, between 1929 and 2010. The study contends that market control is not only based on the economic power of dominant actors. It argues that institutional underpinnings are also important. More specifically, the article explores how the use of symbolic capital is reflected in organizational discourse at a micro level, and in the symbolic system and power dynamics of the coffee roaster industry at the macro level.

Keywords: Institutions, industry coffee, symbolic capital.

JEL Classification: M10, L13, L66.

La dinámica del poder: ruptura o permanencia de la industria del café como institución

RESUMEN

El presente estudio examina el papel del capital simbólico en la ruptura y conservación de los patrones de control institucional. Analiza cómo sobrevivieron las relaciones de poder de los tostadores de café a los cambios en el consumo de café mediante un estudio interpretativo y cualitativo de la industria cafetera estadounidense entre 1929 y 2010. Se argumenta que el control del mercado no se basa únicamente en el poder económico de los actores dominantes sino también en sus bases institucionales. En términos más específicos, el artículo analiza cómo se refleja el uso del capital simbólico en el discurso organizacional a nivel micro, y en el sistema simbólico y en la dinámica de poder de la industria tostadora a nivel macro.

Palabras clave: Instituciones, industria del café, capital simbólico.

Clasificación JEL: M10, L13, L66.

A dinâmica do poder: ruptura ou permanência da indústria do café como instituição

RESUMO

O presente estudo examina o papel do capital simbólico na ruptura e conservação dos padrões de controle institucional. Analisa como sobreviveram as relações de poder dos torrefadores de café às mudanças no consumo de café mediante um estudo interpretativo e qualitativo da indústria cafeeira estadunidense entre 1929 e 2010. Argumenta-se que o controle do mercado não se baseia unicamente no poder econômico dos atores dominantes, mas também em suas bases institucionais. Em termos mais específicos, este artigo analisa como se refletiu o uso do capital simbólico no discurso organizacional em nível micro e, no sistema simbólico e na dinâmica de poder da indústria torrefadora, em nível macro.

Palavras-chave: Instituições, indústria do café, capital simbólico.

Classificação JEL: M10, L13, L66.

Introduction

The role of power has risen in importance within institutional research, in response to criticism that this concept was an overlooked matter in institutional analysis (Perrow, 1985; Lawrence *et al.*, 2009). Efforts to incorporate power into institutions have been focused on the creation of new institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Yet the organisational literature does not offer a deep understanding as to how institutional actors maintain and disrupt institutional patterns of control (Scott, 2001; Simons and Ingram, 2003; Lawrence and Suddaby 2006), with a few exceptions that have emphasised the use of regulative and normative mechanisms to accomplish these processes (Lounsbury, 2001; Goodstein and Velamuri, 2009; Hirsch and Bermiss, 2009). However, too little attention has been paid to cognitive-cultural mechanisms (Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Maguire and Hardy, 2009; Zilber, 2009; Maclean *et al.*, 2010).

The purpose of this explorative study is to understand the process through which power relations are maintained in an organisational field. To do so, in the belief of the author, significant attention needs to be paid to the role of symbolic capital as a mechanism for the maintenance and disruption of institutions in general, and as part of the discursive practices of organisations to maintain their power in particular. The specific focus of this research addresses how power relations survive the shifting of institutions? This is divided into three elements: i) dominant actors, for whom the key questions are: who has power in the coffee industry? and, how can power

dynamics be measured? ii) disruptive events, and the question as to how changes in an institutional context affected power dynamics?; iii) institutional maintenance and disruption, and the question as to the role played by symbolic capital in these processes.

The present study draws on institutional theory, specifically the forms of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence *et al.*, 2009) employed to understand the symbolic maintenance and disruption of coffee drinking as an institution, and the institutionalized power dynamics of the roaster in the United States' coffee industry between 1929 and 2010. The research builds on Bourdieu's (1977) notion of symbolic capital because, according to him, the capacity for dominant agents to impose their symbolic productions plays an essential role in the reproduction and maintenance of social relationships.

In developing this argument, this research makes three contributions: First, it highlights the role of symbolic capital in the maintenance and disruption of institutions and patterns of control in an organisational field. In order to examine this, the study focuses on a cultural-cognitive mechanism, which has previously been overlooked in the study of these institutional processes (Scott, 2001; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Second, the study is based in a context in which the institutions and organizations have been challenged by competitive and critical events. This provides the opportunity to illustrate how organisations use institutional forms of work to reinforce and reduce the competitive struggle in the industry, adding to the growing efforts

to demonstrate that institutional and competitive processes do not necessarily oppose one another (Powell, 1991). Finally, in looking at the forms of institutional work, the study links micro elements of the dominant actors with the macro elements of institutions. While institutional approaches have traditionally focused attention solely on the macro elements of social transformation (Lawrence *et al.*, 2009).

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. *Institutions and institutional work*

Institutional approaches to organization studies focus attention on both the relationships between organizations, and the fields in which they operate. Traditionally these studies have focused on the role of formal structures in enabling and constraining organizational behaviour, in order to explain organizational similarity or isomorphism effects (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott and Meyer, 1983). However, a new emphasis has emerged in institutional studies centred on understanding the role of actors in effecting, transforming and maintaining institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Recent studies have attempted to understand how new institutions are created (Scott, 2001; Simons and Ingram, 2003; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). The issue of how institutions are maintained and disrupted by actors in organizational fields has, however, received significantly less attention to date (Scott, 2001; Dacin *et al.*, 2010).

Institutions, as social constructions, require ongoing interactions among their actors to maintain the institutional stability (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Barley and Tolbert, 1997) by supporting, correcting or recreating the mechanisms that guarantee social compliance with it (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Institutional mechanisms are “cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life” (Scott, 2001, p. 48). Scott (2001) suggests that the regulative elements appear when institutions impose rules on the actors to constrain and regulate the behaviour. Organisations accede to regulations for reasons of convenience, and prefer not to suffer from penalties and sanctions that would be imposed for non-compliance with these rules. Normative elements are introduced when institutions produce guidelines concerning norms and values, which help to define the goals to attain and describe how they may be reached. The ability of normative elements of institutions to guide organisational actions and beliefs comes from social obligation or professionalization. Cultural-cognitive elements embody symbols (words, signs, gestures, images), as well as cultural rules, which promote the sharing of meaning and the internalisation of behaviour; organizations will often accept them without conscious thought (Hoffman, 1999).

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identify rules and symbols as mechanisms for institutional maintenance. Rules are defined as techniques and general procedures that are applied in the

disruption/transformation of social practices (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). They are related to the regulative and normative elements of institutions, and their maintenance requires disciplinary actions to maintain their systems of rewards and punishments (Zilber, 2009). Symbols are related to the cultural-cognitive elements of institutions, and their maintenance involves the effort at making sense of the institutional order and reproducing its values and meanings (Zilber, 2009).

Institutional mechanisms are the result of a series of actions through which institutions affect organisations, and organisations affect the institutional arrangements within which they operate (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence *et al.*, 2009). These actions, or forms of work, are highlighted in the institutional work approach, which focuses on the relationships between institutions and the actors who populate them (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence *et al.*, 2009). However, these forms of work not only affect the relationship between institutions and the actors, but the power dynamics within the institution, changing the resources available to organisations (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

1.2 Power and Discourse

“Institutional transformations are simultaneously material and symbolic transformation of the world” (Friedland and Alford, 1991, p. 246). They involve not only a shift in the structure of power, but in the definition of power (*ibid.*). Therefore, to examine the power dynamics in an organisational field, it is necessary to understand the concept of

power and how it has been examined within the field of organisational studies.

In its most generic sense, power is the capacity, or ability, to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events. Bourdieu (1977) defines power as a practical social action and identifies four forms of capital that can be used as source of power in order to pursue different objectives; these are economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1977) claims that symbolic capital is the connection between the other three types of capital; although, economic capital is the ultimate basis of power, it can only be used to maintain the delimitation of power when used in the form of symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1977) defines symbolic capital as the resources available to an individual or organisation that become visible in the form of prestige, recognition, status, reputation, and titles, among others (Levina and Orlikowski, 2009). Organisations use this type of capital to exert power and make it durable (Bourdieu, 1977).

Power relations are a form of social structure that are produced, reproduced and transformed through everyday life (Clegg, 1989). Power relations are, legitimised through the reproduction of habitus, in which individuals come to accept the given social order as naturally pre-ordained, taking for granted the existing relations of domination in a specific context or field (Levina and Orlikowski, 2009; Maclean, 2010). These fields are defined by Bourdieu (1996) as the diverse and nested systems of structured social relations within which actors carry out their everyday

practices. Such nested systems of social relations may be understood as institutions.

Organisational theorists have illustrated the value of focusing on discursive practices and their transformation as a means of understanding power relations within an institution (Hardy and Clegg, 1996; Hardy and Phillips, 2004; Levina and Orlikowski, 2009). Discourse is defined as an interrelated set of texts that brings an object into being (Munir and Phillips, 2005), and may be spoken, written, pictorial and/or symbolic, but is always grounded in specific context and power relations (Clegg, 1989, Fairclough, 1992, Phillips *et al.*, 2004).

Bourdieu and Thompson claim that the power to produce discourse constitutes symbolic capital and affords an important means of shaping social reality (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991). Other authors, such as Hardy and Phillips (2004), have also identified the important relationship between power and discourse, which they define as mutually constitutive, emphasizing that discourse “constitutes power relations by holding in place meanings associated with concepts, objects, and subjects positions, which distribute power and privileges among actors” (*Ibid.*, 2004, p. 300). Power dynamics that characterize a particular context determine, at least partly, how and why certain actors are able to influence the processes of production of text and their consumption, leading to new texts that transform, modify or reinforce discourse. At the same time, the distribution of power among actors, the forms which actors can draw, and the types of actor that may exercise power in a given situation, are constituted by

discourse and are fixed at any given moment in time (Hardy and Phillips, 2004).

2. Methodology

This research is exploratory in nature and aims to describe the evolution of the institution of coffee-drinking from 1929 to 2010 in order to understand how the power relations of roasters were maintained in the coffee industry. A qualitative study was selected for this purpose, employing discourse analysis as the interpretative methodology (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Phillips *et al.*, 2004; Munir and Phillips, 2005).

Discourse analysis involves the systematic study of texts, in order to explore the relationship between discourse and social reality (Phillips *et al.*, 2004). It also provides a method for exploring how linguistic and symbolic practices create and maintain objects associated with social controls that gradually institutionalize them (Munir and Phillips, 2005; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Critical discourse analysis focuses on the role of discursive activity in constituting and sustaining power relations (Fairclough, 1992; Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Dick, 2004), linking “the micro-level (text) with the macro-level power structures (sociocultural practice)” (Thomson, 2002, p. 352). The term ‘text’ is understood not only as written transcriptions but as any kind of symbolic expression that requires a physical representation, such as pictures or artwork (Phillips *et al.*, 2004).

The primary reason for the choice of discourse analysis methods in the present research is to explore how socially constructed sym-

bols support the maintenance of coffee drinking as an institution in the United States, which, at the same time, helps roasters to maintain their power within the industry (see figure 1).

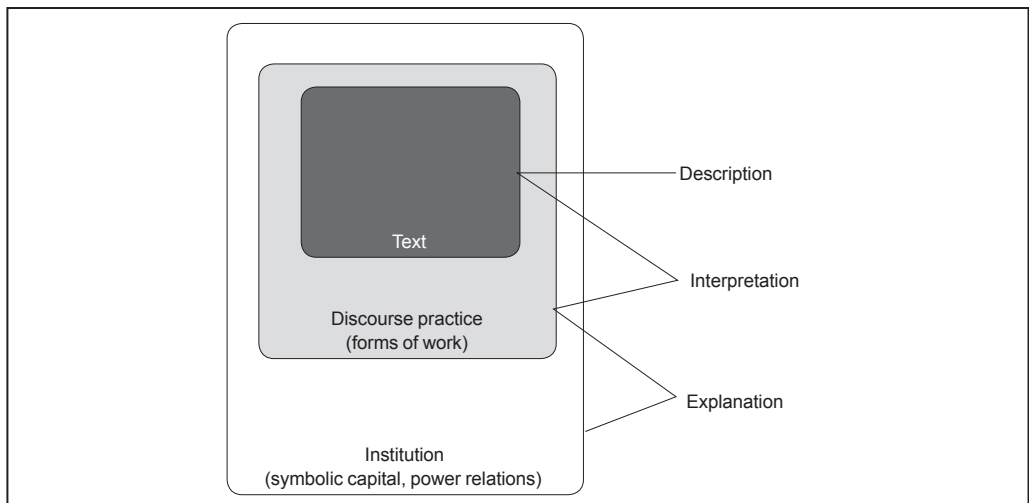
The present study is based on longitudinal qualitative data, which are employed to account for the symbols used by the coffee industry to maintain its institutional stability and power dynamics, through use of diverse forms of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

2.1 Data sources

This research uses data from the International Coffee Organization (ICO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the U.S. Census Bureau, to produce indicators such as the income distribution, prices, market share and concentration ratios in order to identify key actors

and to measure the power dynamics of the coffee industry. In addition, data on coffee consumption per capita are employed to account for the changes and maintenance of coffee drinking as an institution. Finally, this study uses advertisements in magazines and newspapers to construct a comprehensive account of the discourse used by the dominant actors to maintain the power dynamics within the industry. A total of 230 coffee advertisements from the four major brands (Maxwell House, Folgers, Eight O'Clock, Chase & Sanborns) in United States, were used because they offer the symbolic manifestation of the roasters power. Even though the focus of this study is on the roasters, attention is paid to other actors, such as substitute products and anti-coffee movements, who tried to disrupt coffee drinking. The benefits of using a variety of independent sources of data on which to base this analysis lies in the added credibility gained from their corroborating evidence (Jick, 1979).

Figure 1. Dimensions of the discourse analysis



Source: adapted from Thompson (2002, p. 253).

2.2. Data analysis

In the analysis, discourse is identified from text using a “semi-grounded” approach. Data are separated into first and second order concepts (Van Maanen and Barley, 1985; Orlikowski, 1993; Thomson, 2002), and arranged in chronological order (Garud and Rappa, 1994) for the period 1929-2010.

In the first part of the analysis, qualitative data in form of advertisements, journals and books are described; these data around the symbolic capital created to maintain or disrupt coffee drinking. The descriptions are used to identify relevant concepts in the data and group them into categories or first-order concepts. At the same time, the descriptions are linked to the forms work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) used to maintain or disrupt coffee drinking, by identifying the discourses that challenged or defended coffee drinking. Next, the relationships between and among the first-order concepts in the text are identified, and these are brought together into second-order concepts or forms of symbolic capital.

3. Findings

The study was commenced in order to address the question as to how power relationships survive the shifting of institutions. For the purpose of the research, this is examined in three parts: i) dominant actors, ii) disruptive events, and iii) institutional maintenance and disruption. In this section, findings concerning the survival of power relationships between dominant actors in shifting institutions will be presented.

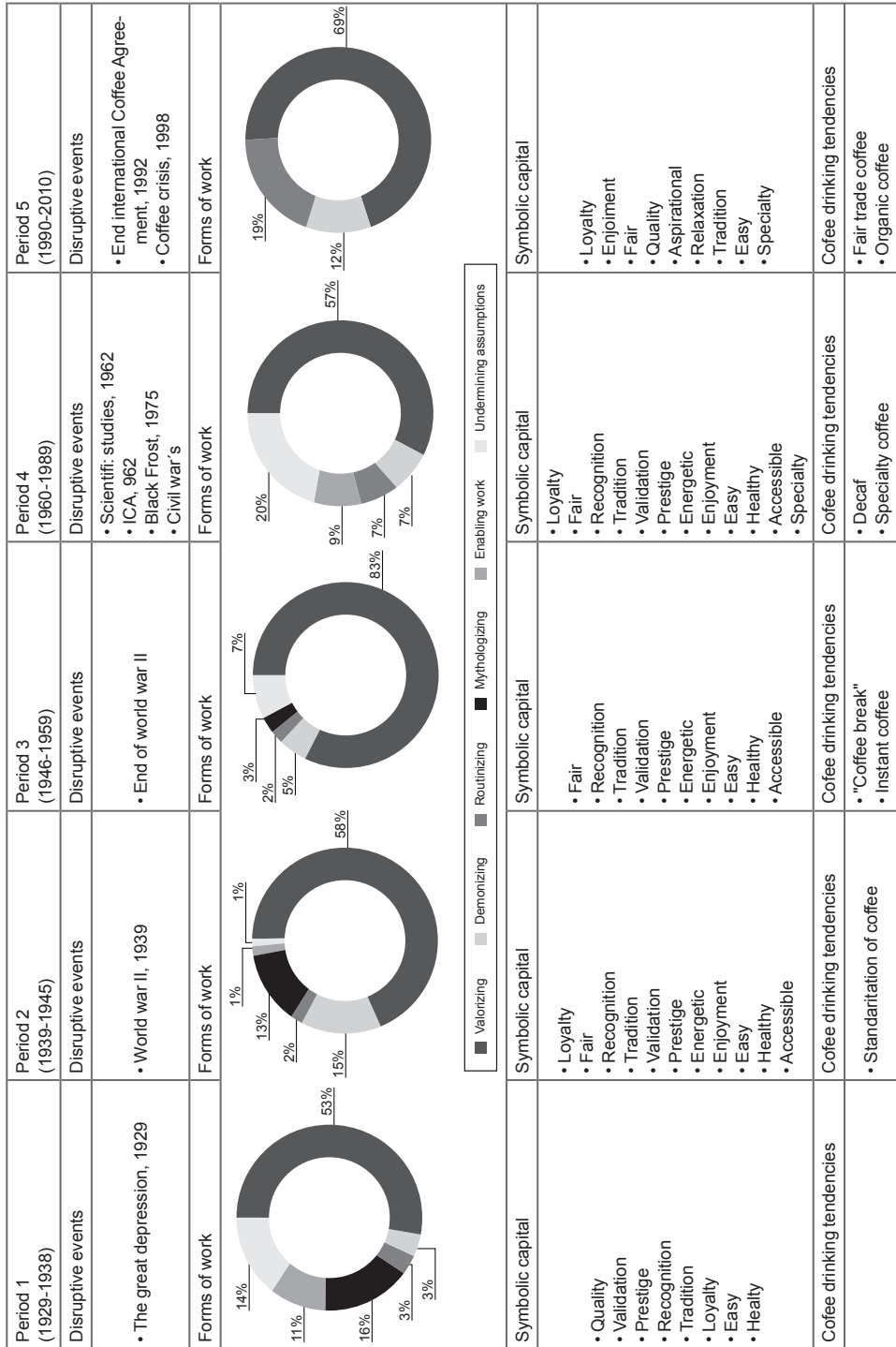
First, an overview of the coffee industry is provided within its historical context. This overview focuses on both the actors, and the power dynamics they exhibit within the industry. The evolution of the industry is divided into five periods, and the initiation of each period corresponds to the emergence of one or more disruptive events, noted as important in historical accounts, industry reports and trade journals. Figure 2 presents the institutional history of the coffee industry, in which the significant events, forms of work, symbolic capital and coffee drinking tendencies are represented.

3.1. Description of the coffee industry and its power dynamics

Coffee has become an international commodity that has transformed the economy, ecology and politics of the production countries, especially in Latin America and Africa (Pendergrast, 2001). Coffee was the top commodity export for 23 countries in 2009 (UNTAC, 2010), and it was the world’s twelfth-largest legal agricultural export by value in 2009 (*Ibid.*). Moreover, it is estimated that over 125 million people worldwide are dependent on coffee for their livelihoods (Osorio, 2002).

Producers, traders, roasters, retailers and consumers, in addition to their regional and international associations, make up the coffee industry. The coffee industry can be understood as an organisational field, as this is defined as being composed of the “key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p. 148), and

Figure 2. The institutional history of the coffee industry



Source: Prepared by the author.

forms a group within which these “participants interact with one another more frequently and fatefully than with actors outside the field” (Scott, 2001, p. 56).

The coffee industry has experienced from multiple challenges, such as the Great Depression, World War II, Black Frost and Civil Wars that have triggered considerable transformations to the industry during recent decades (Pendergrast, 2001). However, the power relationships between the actors in the industry have remained the same, as is illustrated by the income distribution among the industry actors remaining the same over the years. In 1971 an estimate 18% of total income was retained by growers, in addition to 12% of value added in producing countries, while 58% was retained in consuming countries, which include both roasters and retailers. This distribution underwent a significant change in 1990, after the liberation of the market with the termination of the International Coffee Agreement (ICA), after which the participation of the growers in the final income was only 11%, while 79% was retained in the consuming countries. However, after the coffee crisis in 2000, the income distribution reverted to similar levels to those of the 1970s (Talbot, 1997 and Oxfam, 2001).

3.1.1. Producers

During the last 30 years, coffee beans have been produced and exported by more than 50 developing countries, and within these 70% of the coffee producers are smallholders (with less than 10 ha), 15% are of medium size (10-50 ha) and 15% are plantations (>50% ha) (Food World R & C, 2000). Furthermore,

in many of these countries, coffee is one of the main agricultural exports, making it an important product for the economy as a whole, but, at the same time, making the economies of these countries vulnerable to changes in the coffee market, especially changes in coffee prices.

Producers have been earning less and less money in proportion for the same amount of coffee exporter over the last 30 years. This situation became especially significant between the years 1998 and 2004, during which the prices went from 145.41 to 32.74 U.S cents per pound; the period known as the Coffee Crisis (ICO, 2011). However, this situation is not new for the producing countries; during the Great Depression the price of coffee fell from 22.5 cents a pound in 1929 to just 8 cents in 1931. Likewise, in 1944 as the World War II was finishing, the price ceiling on coffee entering the United States (13.38 cents a pound) became increasingly burdensome for the producing countries (Pendergrast, 2001).

3.1.2. Traders

The traders can be divided into local traders and international importers. In most producing countries, most of the green coffee is bought from farmers by a variety of private traders and exporters, with the remainder purchased by cooperatives, which then normally sell it on to the international traders. The international importers have grown in size and diminished in number, through alliances with local traders and even with producers (Calfat and Flores, 2002). In 1998, the two largest coffee traders (Neumann and Volcafé) controlled 29% of total market share

of international coffee trading, and the top six companies controlled a combined 50% of the market (Ponte, 2001).

3.1.3. Roasters

The high degree of concentration of roasters in United States (US) is the result of a continual process of acquisition of brands and intensified competition between them which has been marked by mergers and acquisitions. In 1915 over 3,500 roasters provided coffee to US consumers, in 1945 there were 1,500 roasters (Pendergrast, 2001), by the late 1950s the number of roasters had decreased to 850, and further to 240 roasters in 1965 (Fridell, 2007). In 2005 the figures showed that there had been a small increase in the number of roasters, to 337 (US Census Bureau, 2007).

3.1.4. Retailers

In the history of the coffee industry in the United States, the vast majority of coffee sold by retailers has been purchased in grocery chains and supermarkets (Pendergrast, 2001), however, there has recently been an expansion of coffee retailing performed by international chains that have coffee and food under their own brands, such as Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts (Euromonitor International, 2011).

3.1.5. Consumers

The United States is the largest coffee importer in the world, and its importations of coffee has increased over the last 30 years. However, the per capita consumption of coffee has decreased over the years in the US. In the

1930s, during the Great Depression, the US per capita consumption of coffee held steady at around 13 pounds a year, finally rising to 14 pounds per annum in 1939. During the first years of World War II (wwii), the per capita coffee consumption in the US rose to 16.5 pounds, for families, and to 32.5 pounds annually per capita for the army. By the end of wwii the US annual per capita consumption had climbed to 19.8 pounds (Pendergrast, 2001), and instant coffee, a new product, accounted for 20 to 25% of this consumption (Fridell, 2007). However, after the Black Frost in 1975, the consumption per capita reduced from 12.3 pounds to 10.4 pounds in 1980, and reached a low point of 9.3 pounds in 2008 (World Resources Institute, 2011).

New consumption patterns have been emerging associated with a growing importance of specialty, fair trade, and organic coffees. The specialty segment has taking a rapidly increasing portion of the coffee industry. In the US, specialty coffee increased its market share from 1% in 1980 to 20% in 2005 (*Tea & Coffee Trade Journal*, 2007). Fair Trade coffee has also increased its participation in the share of the specialty coffee market, rising from 2.3% in 2003 to 4.1% in 2004, 7% in 2006 and 12% in 2007 (TransFair USA, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007). By the end of 2009, 16% of all coffee imports to US were certified as Fair Trade (Pierrot *et al.*, 2010).

3.2. Institutional forms of work and symbolic capital in the coffee industry

Valorising, mythologizing and demonizing work were found to be the principal forms

used by dominant actors to create and maintain their symbolic capital and power. In addition, the undermining of core assumptions was used by some actors to disrupt the institution of coffee drinking. Figure 3 illustrates the final data structure, and presents a description of the texts used by the industry actors (at the micro-level) and the symbolic capital (of the macro-level), with the forms of work employed as mediators between them.

However, every period was characterized by the use of different forms of work to create, maintain or disrupt different symbols surrounding coffee drinking. In the Great Depression the main form of work used by industry actors was valorising, which was carried out by providing discourses that promoted loyalty from consumers, and that established some quality characteristics for coffee. In addition, the roasters tried to sustain some myths regarding the prestige of coffee drinking, associating this practice with sophistication and recognized figures from American history. The relationship between forms of work used and symbolic capital that was promoted during this period to maintain coffee drinking, in addition to the efforts to disrupt it, with the used of undermining assumptions.

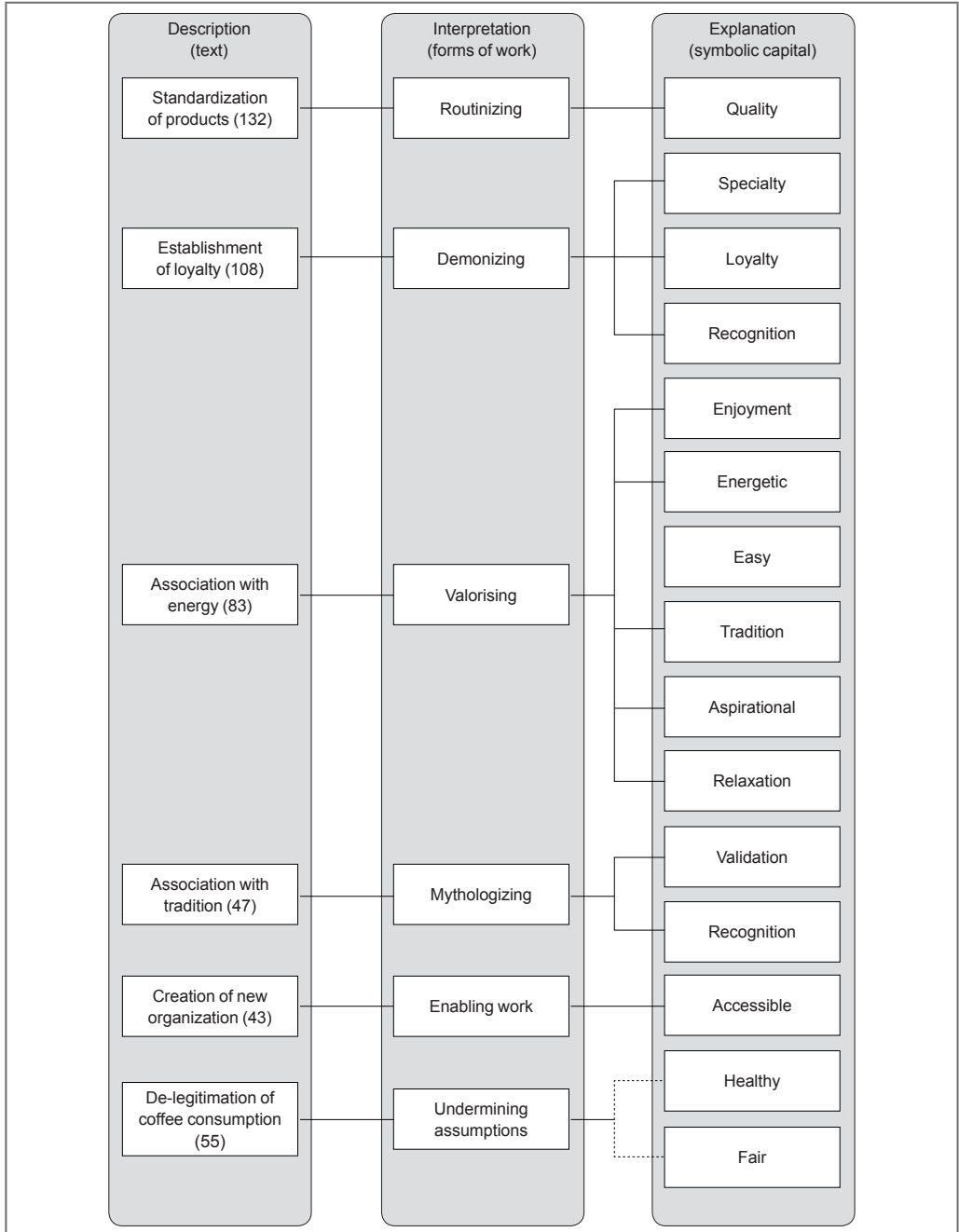
During the Second World War (wwII), the industry actors used valorising, demonizing and mythologizing as principal methods by which to recognize the work of soldiers and Americans in the war, linking coffee to all their activities as a source of energy and enjoyment, and, at the same time highlighting the qualities of coffee.

After wwII, between 1946 and 1959, the principal discourse of the industry was centred on traditions. This was carried out by providing examples of coffee drinking in day-to-day practices and traditional activities in American society. In addition, roasters dedicated their efforts towards promoting the quality of, and facility in, the use of instant coffee.

The years of the International Coffee Agreement were marked by a variety of troublesome events, such as health concerns surrounding coffee consumption, natural disasters and civil wars. The discourse of the roasters at this time was centred on health issues rather than on fair treatment for coffee producers, even though this was a period of civil wars in the producing countries which caused economic problems for the coffee growers. Roasters, and some other actors, promoted coffee drinking by valorising its healthy characteristics, while demonizing the discourse of other actors who tried to undermine the assumptions of health, associated with coffee consumption, by the creation of new organizations and investment in research. This period was also characterized by discourse that highlighted the quality of coffee and promoted specialty coffees.

Finally, the period between 1990 and 2010 was characterized by discourse that centred on fair conditions for coffee growers and specialty coffees, principally through forms of work such as valorising and routinizing. Other discourse used by roasters at that time linked coffee with the achievement of aspirations and with enjoyment of life.

Figure 3. Dimensions of analysis



Source: Prepared by the author.

In summary, the data suggest that the roasters, identified as the dominant actors in the industry, are engaged in the creation and maintenance of symbolic capital to preserve coffee drinking as an institution. The power relationships involved survive the shifting of institutions. In the next section, the power dynamics in the industry, and the discursive practices that have produced these power relationships, are discussed.

4. Discussion

4.1 Power dynamics in the coffee industry

Despite the multiple challenges that the coffee industry undergone during the last 80 years, and contrary to the expected changes that these challenges might generate in the power of the industry actors (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977), the power dynamics and structure of the industry have remained the same, and can be categorized as oligopolistic. There is a high concentration of, and domination by, roasters which has been characterized by their increased concentration through mergers and acquisitions, and, also, a decreasing power of the producers, marked by an increase in the number of producing and exporting countries. The bargaining power of the roasters may preclude new entrants through their erection of barriers, such as scale economies, technology and capital requirements (Porter, 2008), such as processing plants and warehousing facilities. However, the market control of the roasters is also due to their use of symbolic capital to maintain control over the social meanings and beliefs concerning coffee, such as the idea that it is

a healthy, energetic and traditional beverage, which gives legitimacy to the practice of coffee drinking (Hoffman, 1999). The brands represent the roasters' symbolic capital. These form the basis of the loyalty and goodwill assets of the roasters, which provide them with the incentives and ability to respond to changes in the surrounding environment.

The power imbalance is best revealed in the relationship between the roasters and other actors in the industry, especially the producers. As the roasters have control over the symbolic system of the institution, the inequities in the market are not fully recognized by other relevant actors in the industry, especially the consumers. This situation affects the producers' economic capital. It also leaves the producers without tools to access others forms of capital, such as social and cultural capital, to use as negotiating tools with decision-makers (*e.g.* government agencies) for better terms, conditions and prices. However, in recent decades the producers have been represented by the Fair Trade and Organic Coffee movements, giving the formerly disempowered producers some symbolic capital around which to construct meanings and differentiate practices. This has increased the producers' bargaining power in the market, allowing them to secure premium prices, and, at the same time has called into question the legitimacy and taken-for-granted practices of the dominant actors (Maguire and Hardy, 2009). However, this has not been the only effort of producers to gain bargaining power. During the 1960s, Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, became significant exporters of instant coffee, although, they had limited market participation becau-

se of consumers preferences for the roasters' brands (Talbot, 1997). In addition, in 1962, the first International Coffee Agreement (ICA) came into force and continued to operate, under successive Agreements, until 1992 (Ponte, 2001). The use of this regulative mechanism gave the producers and their governments some authority to negotiate prices and quotas with consuming countries and to monitor decisions concerning exports (Scott, 2001). These measures provided some price stability to the market, although, this stability did not correspond to notably improved conditions for the producers, especially the small size growers who represent 70% of the total growers in the world (Food World R & C, 2000). The small-scale coffee bean growers are significantly affected by social and economic instabilities in their own countries (Pendergrast, 2001).

Although the retailers had economic capital, this was not enough to overcome the bargaining power of the roasters, especially the top four roasters whose brands (Maxwell House, Folgers, Eight O'Clock, Chase & Sanborns) have had over 40% of the market participation throughout the last 80 years (US Census Bureau, 1997, 2002, 2007; Pendergrast, 2001). These brands are linked by consumers to the meanings and practice of coffee-drinking which represent the legitimate characteristics of coffee (Friedland and Alford, 1991). However, some coffee retailers, such as of Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts, that have built symbolic capital around coffee, such as quality, specialty, and fair trade, and so have legitimized their products, and delegitimized the commoditized coffee of the roasters (Pettigrew, 1979). This is reflected in the in-

creasing market participation of Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts over the last ten years, which has been at the expense of the market share of the main roasters.

Some empirical studies exemplify how downstream actors have gained market power through the de-institutionalisation of some practices; however, these studies have focused on the regulative and normative mechanisms for institutional disruption. For example, Lounsbury (2001) describes the financial sector in United States which has experienced a fundamental transformation, including a shift away from bank lending to institutional investors, allowing retailer firms, such as Sears, to offer services historically restricted to banks. The present study, on the other hand, has placed an emphasis on the use of symbolic capital as a cognitive-cultural mechanism by which to maintain and disrupt institutional dynamics.

Roasters, the dominant actors of the industry, have mainly used valorising, demonizing and mythologizing forms of work to construct and maintain the symbolic system of the institution of coffee drinking (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). This illustrates that use of such institutional symbols can be manipulated, and their meaning and behavioural implications controlled, by dominant actors in the organisational field (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Friedland and Alford, 1991), helping them to maintain their power over the industry. The present study also demonstrates that other actors, such as coffee substitutes and anti-coffee movements, have contested the cognitive and cultural elements of coffee drinking, mainly by undermining the healthy

assumptions of coffee, which has affected the legitimacy of the institution (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

However, the cognitive-cultural, regulative and normative elements of institutions are not totally independent, but, rather, overlap each other (Hoffman, 1999). The present study has, therefore, also identified the regulative and normative mechanisms used by industry actors, such as enabling work by the creation of new organisations and rules (*e.g.* Pan American Coffee Bureau, International Coffee Agreement and the Scientific Advisory Group of the National Coffee Association), and turning the normative foundations of coffee drinking (*e.g.* Coffee Break) into routines in order to maintain the legitimacy of the institution.

4.2 Evolution of the symbolic system of coffee drinking

There have been some significant changes in the way that people view and drink coffee all over time. In its early history, coffee drinking was used for medical purposes by Arabian physicians in the late 800s early 900s, and then, in 1258 A.D., as a religious beverage with properties that could raise the spirits (Ukers, 1935). From on the time of the American Civil Wars, coffee drinking was incorporated into daily life, becoming embedded in American society and institutionalized through the inter-connectedness of social relationships and social practices that were developed around it (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The most significant coffee drinking trends in the United States over the last 80 years are divided into five periods: The Great Depres-

sion, World War II, Post-war, International Coffee Agreement and Free Market, and are discussed below.

Period 1: The Great Depression (1929-1938)

Even though, the worldwide Great Depression was accompanied by years of unemployment, this did not halt the consumption of coffee (Pendergrast, 2001). This period had a paradoxical effect on coffee drinking, as, even with the economic restrictions, consumers developed an appreciation for the finer coffees, which were associated with sophistication, but, also with the quality and beneficial values associated with fresh-roasted and fresh-ground coffee, due to their low prices and educative campaigns of the roasters. For instance, Maxwell House attempted to mythologize the history of coffee as a social activity performed by sophisticated people, associating coffee drinking with culture and distinction: “The coffee that became a social center”, “Not White Swan, Roasted –nor Oysters in Champagne– but this COFFEE, now more popular than ever” (Maxwell House, 1930). On the other hand, Chase and Sanborn, promoted quality with characteristics such as freshness: “Just ‘plain folks’ at home... these glamorous successes find DATED coffee luxuriously satisfying”, “Fresh-as the cream you put in it... look for the date on the can” (Chase and Sanborn, 1930, 1931), and demonized coffee that was not fresh “Stale coffee causes nervous irritation... offends your taste”, “You’ll do it better on dated coffee. Coffee is a recognized stimulant. You get out of it new strength, gay spirit, kneener zest. But be sure your coffee is never stale”

(Chase and Sanborn, 1933, 1935). Furthermore, the Latin American producers funded the Pan American Coffee Bureau in order to promote coffee consumption in North America, becoming an ally in the efforts of roasters to promote coffee consumption. However, substitute products, such as Postum, tried to delegitimize coffee drinking with campaigns such as “Coffee and poor marks so often go hand in hand” (Postum, 1935) which associated coffee with unwanted detrimental consequences in intellectual and physical performance and with the creation of a cartoon called Mr. Coffee-Nerves (Postum, 1936) which demonized the coffee, embodied it in an antihero.

Period 2: World War II (1939-1945)

During World War II all types of goods were rationed, including coffee, sugar, processed foods, clothing and gasoline. Individuals were issued with a ration book and several sheets of stamps in order to purchase a particular commodity (Pendergrast, 2001). Although coffee was not needed for survival, it was an important part of American social practice, especially for soldiers, who saw this beverage as both a stimulant that helped them to perform their ‘duties’ and, at the same time, recompense for their hard work. The US government launched a campaign to ration coffee consumption, featuring soldiers drinking coffee accompanied by phrases such as: “Do with less-so they’ll have enough. Rationing gives you your fair share” (Office of War Information, 1943). At the same time, the Pan American Coffee Bureau launched a campaign teaching people how to make good use of to the ration stamp and at the same

time promoting consumption with phrases such as: “You can’t stretch coffee any more than you can stretch sugar with sand” (Pan American Coffee Bureau, 1942).

Examples of the discourse used by actors during this period, recognizing the work of soldiers and Americans in the war, included the campaign “When life needs a lift its Maxwell House coffee time”, “When you’ve done your bit for Uncle Sam... It’s Maxwell House coffee time”, “When Christmas brings back familiar faces... Maxwell House says ¡Welcome Home!” (Maxwell House, 1944), which showed families writing letters to soldiers and soldiers drinking coffee, and nurses and doctors drinking coffee, and a woman soldier with her family in Christmas. Chase and Sanborn’s continued promoting quality with characteristic such as aroma and flavour: “Heavenly! For that never-to-be-forgotten flavour... we use more of the rarer, richer coffee beans never before so available... aroma... flavour” (Chase and Sanborn’s, 1941). Folger (1944), in the other hand, tried to promote loyalty using cartoons showing a navy soldier shouting at another navy soldier or a man living his wife with the phrase: “When I say coffee I mean Folgers”. In addition coffee was promoted as an energy provider by the Pan American Bureau, with advertisements such as: “For extra energy on the job have another cup” (Pan American Coffee Bureau, 1940). These advertisements, showed women drinking coffee in a factory, because, in war time, women had to perform jobs that were normally performed by men. Some other characteristics promoted during this period were traditions and prestige, with the use of myths, such as Santa Claus, or the use of recognized

Hollywood actors and actresses of that time, such as Wilbur Shaw and Joan Bennet. By the end of World War II American coffee had become a standardized product like any other, with uniform quality and flavour between brands, because of the common practice of roasters to use of low quality coffee beans in their blends (Pendergrast, 2001).

Period 3: Immediate post-war period (1946-1959)

After World War II, a new institution was created, the “coffee break”, a social activity that became popular through Pan-American Coffee Bureau campaigns that advised consumers to: “Give yourself a Coffee-Break –and get what coffee gives to you” (Pan American Coffee Bureau, 1952). This new institution was accompanied by the introduction of instant coffee and vending machines, which were a success in sales in the 1950s (Fridell, 2007). Maxwell House promised that Instant coffee would save time at home and at work, and, at the same time, promoted coffee as a drink for all season and related with day-to-day activities (e.g. a father helping his son with the school work) and traditional social activities (e.g. football games, birthday parties, friends gatherings, dancing, fishing) accompanied with the phrase “Everybody knows the sign of good coffee. Maxwell House... the one coffee with that ‘Good to the last drop’ flavor” (Maxwell House, 1950). Chase and Sanborn used another type of discourse, which demonized the use of bad quality coffee, showing images of husbands spanking their wives or throwing cups at them, accompanied by phrases such as “If your husband ever finds out you’re not ‘store-testing’ for

fresher coffee... if he discovers you’re still taking chances on getting flat, stale coffee... woe be unto you! For today there’s a sure and certain way to test for freshness before you buy” (Chase and Sanborn, 1950).

Period 4: International Coffee Agreement (1960-1989)

This period was marked by three major events. First, research studies emerged that claimed that coffee was harmful for consumers’ health. Second, the Black Frost destroyed the coffee plantations in Parana (Brazil). Brazil is the largest coffee producer, with almost 30% of production worldwide in 1970, so the impact of this severe frost generated a shortage of coffee around the world. Third, civil wars in various producing countries also reduced the availability of coffee. In addition to the establishment, between most producing and consuming countries, of the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) in 1962, that created a new regulatory system, a price band and export quotas, to try to stabilize coffee prices, were introduced (Calfat and Flores, 2002). During the ICA regime, the coffee industry was characterised by a relatively stable institutional environment, with politically negotiated rules, and regulated markets.

In the 1960s a growing number of studies linked coffee with several diseases, such as heart problems and cancer. Irwin Ross made an attack on the drink in Science Digest, claiming that “caffeine, the essential ingredient in coffee, is a poison...” (Pendergrast, 2001, p. 247). The National Coffee Association, which was composed by the major roasters of United States, responded to these health

concerns by creating the Scientific Advisory Group. This group of scientists developed research that reflected the benefits of coffee consumption, and undermined the results of the previous studies. However, one consequence of these health concerns was an increased popularity of decaffeinated coffee, which came to account for 17% of the total coffee consumption in 1975 (Talbot, 1997), Folgers for example, launched its decaffeinated coffee promoting the taste “So much taste there’s no room for caffeine” (Folgers, 2001).

In addition to the healthy characteristics of coffee, some roasters also promoted quality coffee as a means to maintain happiness and stability in marriage and friendship. They employed commercials in which young wives sought advice as to how to prepare good coffee for their husbands and friends, and others in which images of friends’ gatherings accompanied by phrases such as “Good coffee is like a friendship, rich and warm and strong” were used (The Saturday Evening Post, 1962).

Period 5: Free market (1990-2010)

The free market period had two notable events; the end of the International Coffee Agreement in 1992, and the Coffee Crises from 1998 to 2005. Changes in the regulatory framework for coffee at the international level, with the end of the ICA, generated a loss of political power and voice for the producing countries, and deepened the power gap between producing and consuming countries. This was accompanied by price volatility and over supply, which triggered the Coffee Crisis.

During the free market period, roasters changed their discourse from the advertisement of energy characteristics associated with coffee to promote it as a beverage related to aspiration, relaxation, enjoyment and tradition. They used phrases such as: “Stay in the bath until your toes wrinkle, finish the crossword puzzle, enjoy something made better with time” or “Make every day good to the last drop” accompanied by a list of aspirations to be accomplished. In addition, some efforts to de-legitimize the consumption of coffee substitutes such as soft drinks (Maxwell House, 1991).

Fair trade and organic coffees took on a new importance in the era of the free market. During this same period, there was a proliferation of café chains and specialty shops, which increased coffee consumption outside of the house. This changed fundamentally the way in which people purchased and drank coffee. This trend was facilitated by the establishment of certification labels, such as Fair Trade, which was registered in the United States in 1998.

In summary, the findings suggest that the maintenance of macro institutions and market control is rooted in micro elements, such as discursive practices for the creation and use of symbols.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Contributions to the literature

This research makes three contributions to the study of institutional theory. First, it provides an account of the symbolic aspects of

power used by dominant actors to maintain institutional patterns of control, in a context in which the institution and its organizations have been challenged by critical events. At the same time, it illustrates the efforts of upstream, downstream and external actors to change the meanings and practices of the institution in order to gain bargaining power in the industry.

Institutional theorists have principally examined the creation of institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) and much less attention has been paid to the process of institutional maintenance and disruption (Scott, 2001). The few exceptions to this in the literature have emphasised regulative and normative institutional mechanisms (Lounsbury, 2001; Goodstein and Velamuri, 2009; Hirsch and Bermiss, 2009), and have overlooked the cognitive-cultural mechanisms behind the maintenance of institutions, such as the use of symbols (Zilber, 2009).

Second, institutional theorists have traditionally highlighted the distinction between market-driven and institutional sectors (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Tolbert and Zucker, 1983) and this has led empirical research to focus specifically on the public and non-profit sectors (Goodstein and Velamuri, 2009; Hirsch and Bermiss, 2009; Zilber, 2009). The discussion in the present study adds to the growing efforts to demonstrate that institutional and competitive processes are not necessarily opposed to one another (Powell, 1991), by highlighting the institutional forms of work that support, protect and attenuate the competitive struggle in the industry.

Third, in looking at the institutional forms of work, the present study links the micro elements (the texts) of the dominant actors with the macro elements (the symbolic system, and power relations) of institutions. Traditionally, attention in institutional studies has been focused on the macro elements of social transformation, while institutional work attends more closely to the actions that affect the relationships between the actors and the institution (Lawrence *et al.*, 2009).

5.2. *Limitations*

This study provides an exploration of the evolution of the coffee drinking and power dynamics of the coffee industry over a period of 80 years, with the use of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were used to identify industrial patterns and to account for the actors' power in the industry, using market-based measures, such as proxies of power (Langley, 1999; Maclean *et al.*, 2010). Even though these types of measurements account for economic capital, which is recognized as the ultimate basis of power by Bourdieu (1977), there are some limitations with their use when they have to be applied to social and cultural capital (Maclean *et al.*, 2010).

On the other hand, qualitative data were used to identify the discursive practices used to create and maintain symbolic capital, allowing roasters keep market control over the industry. However, as with all historical studies, the limitations of this study include data availability (Jones, 2001); for example, not all indicators were available for the complete period of the study. Likewise, an im-

portant issue in relation to the data collection was the selection of the brands employed to account for the discursive practices of roasters. The four major brands (Maxwell House, Folgers, Eight O'Clock, Chase and Sanborns) were prioritized because, over the 80 year timeframe of the study, they have survived and held their positions as the most widely recognized brands in the United States' market.

Similarly, it should be acknowledged that the exercise of identification and refinement of recurrent categories inevitably involves subjective judgments on part of the researcher, because of the social constructivist epistemology of the discourse methods, which is the base used for this study.

A number of alternative explanations as to the reasons that roasters maintain their power in the coffee industry may be raised. For example, it may be that the barriers to entry into this resource-intensive part of the value chain are simply too high for many (Porter, 2008). This explanation, however, does not adequately address what was observed, as there are some examples of upstream actors (e.g. instant coffee from producing countries) and downstream actors (e.g. retailers, such as Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts) that have successfully overcome these barriers to entry, and have gained important positions in the market. Another, competing, explanation is that it may be that the roasters' marketing and distribution muscle means that it is 'natural' that they control the industry (Porter, 2008). However, over recent decades, the Fair Trade and Organic Coffee movements, which are represented by non-profit organisations

with low marketing budgets, have called into question the legitimacy and taken-for-granted behaviour of some practices by the dominant actors, by changing the meanings around fair treatment, and, as a result, have increased the producers' bargaining power in the market. Likewise, the vast majority of ground coffee have been commercialized through supermarkets (Pendergrast, 2001), which have large-scale distribution channels and their own brands (Calfat and Flores, 2002); however, these brands have not been able to erode the market position of the traditional roasters.

5.3. Directions for future research

This study has some implications for future research. First, the study has explored how, with the creation and used of symbolic capital, the dominant actors of the industry have held on to market control. Market control is measured, here, by indicators that reflect the economical capital of the industry's actors (e.g. income participation and market penetration). Further research could usefully examine and measure the role of other forms of capital in the maintenance and disruption of institutional power.

Second, the study has considered how, in a particular type of industry with low value added in production (primary-commodity), the dominant actors were able to create symbolic capital to maintain the institution and their power dynamics. A question remains as to whether these institutional processes differ in low value-added versus higher value-added industries.

Finally, the study considers symbols as a central mechanism for institutional maintenance and disruption, but other mechanisms such as cultural rules (Hoffman, 1999) and myths (Dancin *et al.*, 2010) may also play a key role in maintaining and disrupting a particular system of meanings and beliefs.

In conclusion, this research is a contribution to broadening the understanding of the role of symbols as mechanisms for the maintenance or disruption of institutions in general, and as part of discursive practices of organisations to maintain their power in particular.

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