

Vienna 2019 Abstract Submission

Title

Georgia Tells its Story: Wine marketing through storytelling

I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Presentation

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Keywords

Georgia, Storytelling, Vintages, Wine Marketing

Research Question

Which are the main components in the story telling of the Georgian wine industry? How is storytelling used to meet the market goals of the industry's and individual companies?

Methods

The study behind this article was outlined as a classical case study using triangulation and a mixed methods approach. This approach has a methodological advantage since it facilitates in-depth study.

Results

Our results show that the essential story in the Georgian presentation of its wine culture is its 8000 year old wine history, and that Georgia is the "cradle of wine".

Abstract

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Introduction

Georgia has a story to tell though its wine making in the Caucasus region. The country can trace its wine production that represents a continuous agricultural activity for the past 8000 years. Wine making was originally developed in the Black Sea region, and the former Soviet Republic of Georgia has seen wine making continuously within its borders for the entire period. The slogan: 8000 vintages was developed by the Georgian wine industry to illustrate this by few disputed fact. Other countries have made similar claims, but have seen border changes and alterations in the naming of regions so their wine production does not represent the same unbroken chain of vintages.

The methods used today in wine making in Georgia dates to the Antique period of wine production. In addition to this long history, the different wine grower can point to a more recent history of wine making which dates to the 18th and 19th century. These traditions add to the stories that the wine represents and display in the global wine market. We adopt a storytelling perspective in our narrative approach to the marketing of Georgian wine. We have made on site visits in Georgia and sampled wine to investigate what kind of stories that are displayed on the bottles. An on-site investigation of wine cellars and wine growers are included in our study.

The main questions answered in this article are: Which are the main components in the story telling of the Georgian wine industry? How is storytelling used to meet the market goals of the industry's and individual companies? How is storytelling molded in various communication channels, such as bottle labels, home pages and films?

The study behind this article was outlined as a classical case study using triangulation and a mixed methods approach (Cresswell, et al., 2013; Yin, 2009). The case study approach has a methodological advantage since it facilitates in-depth study of a population or phenomena, in this case, storytelling. It is also appropriate if triangulation of methods and sources is necessary. In this particular case, the case study approach will help us combine various sources and methods to go deeper into the study of storytelling and the analysis of written and visual sources. We will implement a classic discourse analysis by studying: 1) What is the topic of the stories used by companies/industry?; 2) How are topics described?; 3) What is presented as truth? 4) Which subject propositions are put forward? And, 5) What is omitted in the stories? (Gee, 2014; Bolander and Fejes, 2015). The sources for the discourse analysis are advertising material, films and wine labels.

We have also conducted in-depth interviews with key-stakeholders at the ministry of agriculture, employees in wine firms, including a start-up, and we have also conducted some field visits to vineyards in three different regions. The interviews have been analyzed using phenomenography to identify the nuances and differences in interpretation and visualization of in the answers provided by informants. It will be useful to help us understand why and in which way storytelling is used and communicated (Åkerlind, 2012). Results from interviews will be complemented with storytelling captures in special wine shops and restaurants.

The methodological approaches used in this article are well suited to support the theoretical elements in storytelling research. In the search for evidence within storytelling research, scholars propose for example the use and analysis of written and web-based sources using categories, such as Construction/main features of the story, dimensions, elements and diffusion channels/sharing (see for example Markowska & Lopez Vega, 2018; Yong-sook & Woo-jin Shin, 2015).

Stories

Our results show that the most essential story in the Georgian presentation of its wine culture is its 8000 year old wine history, not only suggesting, but also arguing that Georgia is the "cradle of wine". Archeological findings have proven that Georgia has produced wine for the Last 8000 year. According to the storytelling, wine making was invented on the east shores of the Black Sea. Georgia tells this story by calling it its 8000 vintages. While vast amount of historical research concludes that neighbouring countries (especially Armenia and Azerbaijan) also made wine for the same period of time, it is according to the Georgian wine industry, Georgia and its people who have produced wine for 8000 years.

In line with the former the second element highlights Georgia as being Noah's ark of viticulture with 525 endemic grape varieties, 40 of which are today used in commercial production. Some of the most known varieties are Saperavi and Rkatsiteli. Grape varieties are also connected to wine regions, such as Kakheti. Each region has in turn its own historical and archaeological sites and its own stories and traditions.

The third element in the Georgian wine history is the making of traditional Qvevri wine. This is the antique method of making wine which involves large clay vessels that are buried underground and labour intensive handling of the maceration process saying that "we touch fire grape juice, shell residues, etc. during the first fermentation round the clock for about three weeks". The vessels are sealed for several months after the initial fermentation has taken place. This wine acquires a taste with a hint of clay minerals. This traditional wine has gained a market share within the former Soviet Union and is sought after among the independent post-Soviet states.

The fourth element has a strong connection to religious beliefs. Wine as a finished product is often referred to as a miracle of god. When clay vessels are sealed “what happens in the Qvevri is a secret between the vessel and god”. Monks, priests and believers pray for the success of the fermentation process. And, every year when the clay vessels are opened especially important guests are invited. It is a special and magic moment and when the first wine can be enjoyed “one can note that a miracle once again happened”. Vines are also connected to the cross of King Tamara, saint and mother of Georgia and descendent of the Bagrationi dynasty, who according to the story put together two vine stems to build a cross.

The fifth element of wine storytelling in Georgia is the presentation of the Georgian land and its agriculture. There are two major wine regions in Georgia: the western and the eastern regions. Traditional Qvevri wine making are established in both regions, but the western regions are producing more of the semi dry and sweet wines that has been popular in Russia. In the Eastern region two main grapes are dominating the production the red Saperavi grape and the white Rkatsiteli. These two grapes dominates the production of wine, but there are many more local grape varieties. During the Soviet times grapes that yielded larger harvests were preferred and quantity of grapes were preferred over quality. In later years the quality of grape varieties has been emphasised by Georgian wine producers and several more grape varieties has come into fashion.

The sixth element is the way in which wine is consumed. All informants concluded that drinking is a social activity connected with the eating of good Georgian cuisine under a strict set of social rules. The drinking is directed by a toast master who keeps speech and shares words, leads the participants into songs and honors the host. The toast master is always a man and most often the oldest man during that occasion and is considered to be an ancient tradition as archeological findings indicate that toast masters have been around for at least two millenia. As these parties can go on for many hours, plenty of food is required and some of the most typical dishes are proposed as essential during these occasions. Some of the dishes are Khinkali, Kachapuri (that can be served in many different versions), Chaqapuli, Georgian bean pot, et cetera.

Vineyards

In our quest for vineyards and wineries that tell the Georgian story of winemaking we have conducted in-depth interviews with representatives from four different wine companies. The first is called Chateau Mukhrani a winehouse that started its winemaking in 1878. The vineyard has been owned by the old royal family, the Bagrationi, a family that to this day has claim on a royal throne in Georgia. The Bagrationi family is one of the oldest royal families in Europe. It is this connection, and the fact that the vineyard has a castle like building on its estate, that has lead the vineyard to call its wine a Chateau wine. Chateau Mukhrani attracts busloads of tourists that visits the main building and the modern production facilities. Visitors are told the old history of the Bagrationi family and both the traditional and modern ways that wine is made on the estate.

The second vineyard that tells a Georgian story is the Badagoni winehouse. This is a much newer wine producer that was started by investors in 2006 in the Kakheti region which is a region in the heart of Georgian winemaking. Badagoni uses the most modern techniques to make wine and has attracted an Italian enologist Dr. Donato Lanati to assist in the development and production of wine. Dr. Donato has been listed among the world’s top five enologists by the magazine Wine Enthusiasts. Grapes are harvested from all of Kakheti’s micro-zones to produce high quality Georgian wine. Badagoni is situated near the Alaverdi monastery which the company has helped restore to its former glory. The monastery has produced wine since the 9th century. The connection between Badagoni and Alaverdi adds an historical dimension to the Badagoni vineyard.

A third story of Georgian wine making is represented by the Tsinandali estate. The complete name of the estate is Prince Alexander Chavchavadze Tsinandali Estate. Alexander Chavchavadze was born in 1786 and is considered to be the father of modern Georgian winemaking. Tsinandali is situated in the cradle of classical Georgian wine making where Georgian wine was first bottled. Among its collection of wine are bottles of the 1841 vintage of the Saperavi grape. The vineyard has its own wine history museum with its Princely Oenothèque. The collection include in addition to Tsinandali Saperavi even bottles of Chateau Lafitte and Chateau d’Yquem and other legendary wines from the 19th century.

Our fourth storyteller is the Corporation Georgian Wine which was established in 1999 in the Tsinandali village in the Telavi region in Eastern Georgia. The company is proud to be exporting wines to countries like Ukraine, Kazakhstan,

Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, China and Russia. The company makes 16 different types of wine under 12 of its own brands. The company has an innovative label which you can scan with a smartphone. This directs you to Youtube and Georgian songs with English subtitles. The wine and the songs promotes the image of Georgia in the export markets as well as in Georgia. Especially are the other Post-Soviet countries in Eastern Europe receptive to Georgian wine traditions as they have been drinking Georgian wine during the Soviet period. Corporation Georgian wine is also reaching markets in China and Japan where Georgian wine is exotic and new.

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Georgia Tells its Story: Wine marketing through storytelling

Rytkönen P; Vigerland L. and Borg E.A.

Abstract

Introduction

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Photo: Queen (King) Tamara

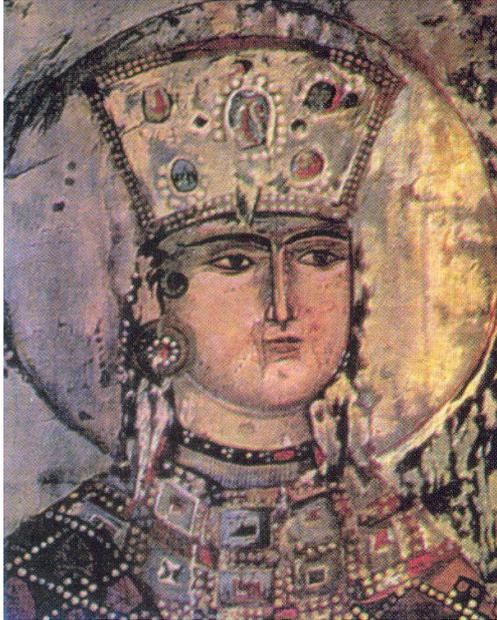


Photo: By Unknown - Part of the 12th-13th-century Vardzia Monastery mural File:Queen Tamar - Vardzia fresco.jpg, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5537134>

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Photo: Georgian toast master.



Photo: Rytkönen, 2018. Museum of history and anthropology, Tbilisi.

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