The wine bottle back label: The backbone of wine packaging?
René C.G. Arnold; University of Edinburgh
Sophie Gvhanidze, M.A.; Heilbronn University
Prof. Dr. Ruth Fleuchaus; Heilbronn University

Recently, a strong focus of the wine marketing literature has developed discussing the importance and influence of packaging. (e.g. Kidd, 1998, 1999, 2002; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008; Szolnoki, 2007) However, only a small fraction of researcher has so far engaged with the back label. (Chaney, 2000; Charters, Lockshin, & Unwin, 1999) These as well as other studies (e.g. Barber, Almanza, & Donovan, 2006; Shaw, Keeghan, & Hall, 1999) establish the importance of back labels for consumers’ choice processes. Consumers are especially interested in their informative content. Within this, consumers seek out most importantly taste information.

Through technical evolution enabling also small wineries to use back labels on their bottles as well as a concentration on branding on the front label, the back label has been gaining importance in all layers of the wine market. Wine producers and marketers thus need to understand how they can make use of the back label most effectively. Consequently, from a practical perspective this research project aims to identify the actual influence of back label information and phrasing on the success of a wine and consumer’s response.

Academically, this research project will advance the study of wine marketing. Particularly, it will add to our knowledge about the design of back labels and their importance. In order to fulfil this it will advance the mixed methods design that has so far not gained the same attention in wine marketing as in other research disciplines like general consumer research or social sciences. The research will combine quantitative and qualitative methods to draw a fuller picture of back label success factors than a singular approach could do.

In line with the methodology the academic objective of this project is twofold. Firstly, we will apply hedonic price models that have widely been applied to other attributes of wines (Combris, Leocq, & Visser, 1997, 2000; Oczkowski, 1994, 2001; Schamel, 2003, 2004, 2006; Schamel & Anderson, 2003) on the analysis of back labels in combination with a content analysis approach. This will establish the relative importance of back label information in an econometric sense and identify crucial contents.

Beyond that, we want to understand how producers as well as marketers conceptualise and employ the crucial contents identified in the previous steps. These will probably revolve around taste and excellence within wine descriptions. This part of research will foot in grounded theory and discourse analysis similar to Kniazeva and Belk’s (2007) discussion of product descriptions. This will enable us to understand many crucial concepts of wine on a deeper level and hence open new possibilities of studying consumer perceptions of these concepts for further studies.

This paper will present tentative results of a pilot study we conducted in March and April 2009. We will concentrate on the first part of the project showing the potential of combining hedonic price models and content analysis approaches. The research is on-going and will lead to a second stage which will assess consumers’ responses to wine bottle back labels.