

## Migration of Culture(s)

### ABSTRACT

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### **Authenticity of product: Italian heritage and branding in the Australian wine industry**

This paper will discuss the use of cultural markers in branding and marketing techniques of Italian Australian winemakers. A survey of these brands carried out by the author found that Italian wine makers in Australia almost invariably refer to their Italian heritage in their marketing material. The use of this reference, and often their immigrant 'rags to riches' stories are utilised in an attempt to add authenticity to their product, to make them stand out from the others in an increasingly competitive and overcrowded market. But does it work? What do we think we are buying when we buy an 'Italian' product? What cultural associations do we make as Australian consumers? The commodification of culture is an area of study that would be well-adapted to Italians in the wine industry in Australia, and is the focus of this paper.

In his study, Beverland (Beverland, 2005) found that wine brands throughout the world make use of 'a sincere story' to give the impression of authenticity to the product. This sincerity was achieved by connecting to place, espousing the use of traditional methods, referring to history and culture and by appearing to be above solely commercial aims. He specifies the use of 'rags to riches' stories of immigrant families as being one of the marketing techniques used to claim authenticity. Beverland's study mostly concentrated on French wine brands of international repute, but these same themes can be found in Australia. A large number of Italian-Australian wine firms make use of these techniques, most specifically with references to culture, to that of being Italian or of Italian origin.

Apart from Italian heritage, 'Italianness' or the Italian migrant story, in the case of Australian Italian wine brands, particular aspects of these and other techniques identified by Beverland can be identified. The theme of 'passion', for example, is

often repeated, as if expected from 'authentic' Italians. Historical references, terms and dates are also common, stabilising the brand and the family or individual presence in the industry, often accompanied by old black-and-white photos. Tradition, knowledge and trans-generational involvement are also key themes in these wine family histories. Geographical links are also often used, connecting wine regions in Australia to wine regions in Italy, as this paper will illustrate.

The use of the themes identified by Beverland is typical of a brand's establishment of authenticity in order to separate it from others. The use of 'Italianness' is seen to add to this authenticity, for Italy's long history of winemaking surpasses that of the local Australian industry by thousands of years, and the immigrant story enhances the 'sincere story' of the wine firm.

Grant (Grant, 2005) also identifies these themes: the brand is about story-telling, which is meant to connect to the consumer, to touch feelings or emotions, and is also about authenticity and connecting to places. Grant states that the narrative must be 'succinct, meaningful, authentic, relevant and memorable' and that differentiation is the key to standing out among thousands of other brands. 'Sense of place' is also another way of connecting the people to the product as consumer trends move toward products 'that are authentic and unadulterated, handcrafted rather than mass-produced and which have a strong link to a particular location or culture'.

Beverland (2005) identifies techniques such as 'evoking aspects of an idealized past' the 'retelling of historical stories' and highlighting the use of 'time honoured ways' in order to connect the product to tradition, one of the fundamentals of 'authenticity' in a brand or product. Whether the Australian Italian companies discussed in this paper are fully aware of these techniques or not, they are all in use, making their own heritage a marketable commodity – something that until recently may not ever have occurred to either the producers, or to the consumers. Historically in Australia, being an Italian migrant would not have been seen as a saleable quality, *au contraire*, it may have been detrimental to the acceptance of the product or brand outside of the migrant community. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, it is an entirely different story.

- Beverland, M. B. (2005). Crafting Brand Authenticity: The Case of Luxury Wines. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(5), 1003-1027.
- Grant, G. (2005). A dummy's guide to branding. *Wine Industry Journal*, 20(3), 36-37.