



**REVIVING THE CULT OF DIONYSUS: LEVERAGING STORYTELLING
CAPABILITIES OF AFIANES WINES TO AN INTERNATIONAL
AUDIENCE**

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Overview of Icaria Island	1
1.1.1 Overview of Afianes Wines	1
1.2 Internship Activities	3
1.2.1 Digital Storytelling	3
1.2.2 Liaison with International Media	4
1.2.3 Merchandising	4
1.2.4 Wine Tours and Tastings	4
1.3 Organization of Master Thesis Content	5
2. Objectives	5
2.1 Master Thesis Objectives	5
2.2 Internship Project Objectives	6
3. Literature Review	6
4. Digital Analysis of Afianes Wines	9
4.1 B2B Analysis	10
4.1.1 Market Segment	10
4.1.2 Market Competition	10
4.1.3 Market Sizing	10
4.2 B2C Analysis	10
4.2.1 Market Segment	10
4.3 Current Afianes Digital Presentation Analysis	12
5. Project Methodology	13
5.1 Main Actions Introduced During Internship	13
5.1.1 Communication with International Media	13
5.1.2 Creation of the ‘Wine Stories’ Blog	15
5.2 Identification of Afianes Wines Storytelling Potentials	16
5.3 Analytical Techniques to Measure the Effect of the ‘Wine Stories’ Blog	16
6. Storytelling Potentials	17
6.1 Ancient Greek Legends	17
6.1.1 Icarus	17
6.1.2 Dionysus	17
6.2 Classical Greek Literature	19
6.3 Wellness and Icaria in Antiquity	19
6.4 Wellness and Icaria in Modern Day	20
6.5 Afianes Wines and Sustainability Values	20
6.6 Afianes Wines as a Microcosm of Icarian Values	21
7. Results	22
7.1 Results of Communication with International Media	23
7.2 Results of the ‘Wine Stories’ Blog	23
8. Discussion	29
9. Conclusion	30

Table List:

Table 1: Archetypes, Story Gists, and Brand Examples (Woodside et al., 2008, p. 114)

Table 2: Publications Contacted and Shared Values with Afianes Wines

Figure List:

Figure 1: SWOT Analysis of Afianes Wines' Digital Image

Figure 2: Map of Ikaria Island and References to the Cult of Dionysus (Afianes, 2004, p.14)

Figure 3: Brand Compass of Afianes Wines

Figure 4: Number of Afianes Website Visitors from April 8th- May 15th

Figure 5: Top Visitors of the Afianes Website from April 8th- May 15th, Sorted by Country

Figure 6: Top 10 Most Accessed Pages of the Afianes Website during April 8th- May 15th

Figure 7: Top 20 Most Accessed Pages of the Afianes Website during April 8th- May 15th

Figure 8: Number of English-language Readers for Blog Announcement

Figure 9: Number of Greek-language Readers for Blog Announcement

Figure 10: Number of English-language Readers for First Official Blog Post

Figure 11: Number of Greek-language Readers for First Official Blog Post

Annexes:

A1: Blog post excerpt, from *Words and Wine and a Wandering Mind*.

A2: Email response from *Wine Enthusiast* editorial team.

A3: Aerial photo of Afianes Wines.

A4: Photo of the traditional *pithari*, where the natural wines are fermented and aged underground in clay amphora.

A5: Photo of manual pressing of the grapes in the traditional granite stone press, called *patitiri*.

A6: Photo of a recently filled *pithari*, before being sealed shut with beeswax.

A7: Photo depicting traditional Greek music in the *Dionysian* theatre at Afianes Wines.

Abstract

This research details the importance of storytelling as an essential facet of the overall marketing scheme of Afianes Wines, and seeks to provide an unobstructed roadmap towards clarifying the potentials of their brand narrative. This entails considering the complexities of *how* and *where* good stories are shared, and identifying the capacity for narrative growth amongst the digital space, retail space, and embedded within the personal relationship with visitors. This project has two main avenues of focus. The first is that of establishing and maintaining a written blog on the Afianes website, entitled 'Wine Stories,' which acts as a dedicated space to explore the nuances of wine, culture, art, gastronomy, and the ways in which they inhabit our lives in creative convergence. This also extends a more personal way to relay brand narrative to existing Afianes Wines customers. The second is that of actively driving and maintaining control of Afianes Wines storytelling by pitching a carefully crafted in-depth feature about them to international media, thus highlighting the most intriguing narrative aspects while introducing them to a plethora of new consumers. Both content analysis of the academic scope of good storytelling, as well as detailed research about the unique history of the island were used to leverage the best possible outcomes of narrative potential for Afianes Wines. Additionally, Google Analytics provides numerical values to reveal the initial public response to the blog creation and to project future consumer behavior as the blog develops over time.

Keywords: Storytelling, Brand Narrative, Wine Tourism, Afianes Wines, Ikaria, Greece

List of Abbreviations:

Wintour: Referencing this degree program, Master's in Wine Tourism and Innovation

SWOT: Analysis based on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

B2B: Business to business sales model

B2C: Business to consumer sales model

Glossary:

Kykeon: Kykeon refers to an elixir described by Homer as containing Pramnian wine, barley, grated goat cheese, and honey (Homer, 1997, X, p. 234-236).

Méthode Champenoise: The method of producing sparkling wine by secondary fermentation in the bottle, as produced in the Champagne region of France.

Pithari: Pithari is the ancient Greek method of fermenting and macerating wine in clay amphoras buried underground.

Pourriture Noble : Also known as 'Noble Rot,' it is the beneficial form of the grey fungus, *botrytis cinerea*, that concentrates the natural sugars in grapes and allows for sweet wine production to occur.

Pramnian wine: Pramnian wine is the antiquated name of wines originating from Ikaria.

1. Introduction

There is nothing more compelling than a good story. From the time we were children, stories have entered into our lives through bed-time tales, and have stayed lodged inside of us into a place that has only grown dearer with time. Stories have the ability to reach into the very core of our humanity, to intrigue and inspire us, to cause our hearts to swell, or ache, or sigh, or sing. As one of our most ancient and effective forms of communication, a good story enraptures and invests us in the narrative told. The true lure of an enthralling story never loses its magic; therefore, it is vital to find the right story to tell.

This research delves into just that: choosing the right story to tell. In my time spent developing this 600-hour professional project at Afianes Wines in Ikaria, Greece, my main aspiration and biggest passion was to unveil the stories behind the rigid facts, to open the pathways to connection through emotional understanding, and to enchant reality by finding the narrative spin within the certitudes.

1.1 Overview of Ikaria Island

The island where the God of Wine calls his home. Wines of such reputation, they were emblazoned by the work of Homer in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Essential to the witch Circe's magical elixir, Pramnian wine, or wines of Ikaria, have materialized throughout some of history's greatest legends and lore.

But the magic of this island does not just live within storybooks, it is also alive and well in the island spirit that pervades this region, and in the lush nature scattered across its shores. Ikaria island resides in the Eastern Aegean Sea, bordering the Western Coast of Turkey. With just around 8,000 year-long residents, the small population of Ikaria has promoted a tight-knit community of independent, yet welcoming people ("*Geography & Geology*," n.d.). The location of Ikaria is quite far from the capital city of Athens, averaging about 8 hours via ferry, or 1 hour via airplane ("*Geography & Geology*," n.d.). The island receives about 40,000 visitors each year (in a non-pandemic year), which is quite calm when compared to its island-neighbor, Mykonos, which receives at least 400,000 per year (Statista, 2021). This exemplifies the stark difference in tourism trends, as Ikaria's vast nature generally attracts more rural and agro-tourism, which is a definitively smaller segment.

Of interest and relevance to this project is to note Ikaria's special position as one of the world's 'Blue Zones,' one of only five locations in the world with the highest population of living centenarians and natural trends of longevity (Buettner, 2021). This highlights the extremely healthy lifestyle of the local people, and the focus on nature and community as vital aspects of Ikarian life.

1.1.1 Overview of Afianes Wines

For all of its fame throughout antiquity for producing excellent wines, Ikaria's commercial wine production halted for nearly 100 years, due to a combination of phylloxera decimating the island vines

and a massive outflux of Greek immigrants to other lands (Afianes, 2004). However, in 1997, Nikos Afianes decided to revive the ancient practice and to bring ‘Pramnian wines’ back into the world spotlight once more. Mounting a boutique winery with biodynamic principles, Afianes Wines produces ancient-style raw wines created by the time-honored traditions of the island’s past. Using only their indigenous grape varietals of Fokiano and Begleri, fermenting with wild yeast, and burying the wine in clay amphoras underground, Afianes Wines upholds the same ancestral practices that once brought such renown to the island (“*Wine and Tradition*,” 2019). Additionally, in 2004, Nikos Afianes published his studies on Ikarian Wine in his paper entitled, *The Vine Which is in Icaria*, detailing the long-standing relationship of Ikarian wine with Greek culture and literature, two vital facets that inform the Afianes business philosophy even today (Afianes, 2004).

A quaint family winery nestled atop the gorgeous Ikarian highlands some 600 meters above sea-level, Afianes Wines upholds a minimal-intervention philosophy, revering only the truest expression of their land. Owned and operated by Nikos and Maria Afianes, their children Konstantinos and Eftychia also contribute as Co-Winemaker and Marketing Director, respectively. Their production size is limited, averaging at about 12,000 bottles per year, and the cultivated vineyards of Fokiano and Begleri emerging at just 6 hectares. In a normal year, the winery receives approximately 2,000 visitors, most of which come during the summer season, from June until the end of September (E. Afianes, personal communication, March 10, 2021).

Although limited in production, this allows the wines of Afianes to maintain their high quality, and they have won plenty of awards to attest to their exceptional standards, including international wine competitions held in London and Paris (“*Distinctions*,” 2019). Afianes Wines produces a total of fourteen labels, differentiating between their *pithari*-style wines (aged in the Ancient Greek method of burying in clay amphoras), their more ‘classic’ line of *Icarus* (aged with traditional French oak), and also a production of *Méthode Champenoise* sparkling wines, as well as a *pourriture noble* produced sweet-wine, called Tama, made only in exceptional years (“*Our Wines*,” 2019).

Their current model relies upon both business to business (B2B) and business to consumer (B2C) channels, with B2B attributing for about 40% of overall sales, and B2C maintaining approximately 60%. Regarding their B2B avenue, they currently distribute internationally across five different continents and fifteen different countries, with wholesale vendors making up 70% of B2B sales, and in-store sales coming in at 30%. B2C is the most profitable model for them, and is comprised of the summer tourism activities that the winery offers (E. Afianes, personal communication, March 10, 2021).

Afianes Wines currently offers three levels of wine tasting and guided tours, in addition to two wine tourism experiences. The wine tasting packages vary from a ‘Classic’ tour of the winery and includes three standard Afianes wines for ten euros per person, whereas the upgraded tour, entitled the ‘Wine Lover’s Tour’ includes three standard Afianes wines, as well as two additional cellar wines for eighteen euros per person. The third and most exclusive tour must be booked in advance, as it is the ‘Winemaker’s

Tour,’ and is solely led by either Nikos or Konstantinos Afianes, the two winemakers of the estate. Included in the forty-five euro per person price is two standard Afianes wines, four cellar wines, and an accompanied charcuterie platter (“*Wine Tasting & Guided Tours,*” 2019).

The wine tourism experiences incorporate aspects of vital Ikarian culture, such as an emphasis of nature and integrating local Ikarian cuisine. The first experience, entitled, ‘Canyon Picnic Hiking Tour’ takes visitors to nearby Chalaris Canyon to enjoy a picnic of local Ikarian cuisine, and then back to the winery for a guided tour and tasting. This experience lasts around five hours and is priced at fifty-five euros per person. The other wine tourism experience is entitled, ‘Dine Under the Stars,’ and takes place at a traditional Ikarian granite house on the estate. There, visitors enjoy an intimate dinner prepared by a private chef, as well as a special wine-pairing incorporating three cellar wines of the estate. This experience lasts approximately four hours and costs one-hundred-and-five euros per person (“*Wine Experiences,*” 2019). Afianes Wines has created various thoughtful wine tourism experiences to engage and entertain their visitors.

1.2 Internship Activities

My internship activities were mainly focused on strengthening the online communication with their audience, as tourism was still closed to Greece until May. Eventually, as tourism was slowly re-introduced and borders opened slightly, I was able to interact with visitors and lead wine tours and tastings at the Afianes estate. This culminated in strengthening both the online and in-person storytelling capabilities of Afianes Wines, through every available platform.

1.2.1 Digital Storytelling

As the coronavirus pandemic decimated tourism in the 2020 season, Afianes whole-heartedly switched their focus towards a more digital market, enhancing their wine shop and attempting to reach their customers through a more virtual platform. Though e-shop sales sustained them, they still lost the integral interaction with customers to relay their brand story, thus diminishing the proximity of the relationship with their audience. Seeking to recuperate more of a personal relationship online, Afianes hired me to enhance the storytelling aspect of their website. We decided on a wine blog that would not solely focus on descriptions of bottles or tedious tasting notes, but would be more of a creative approach to the wine world in conjunction with our everyday lives. The writing was meant to be personal and honest, and reveal what impassions us about the world of wine. Thus, it was a way for Afianes customers to ‘travel’ online, to still recover the same sensations as one undergoes on an international trip: awe, excitement, inspiration, and a feeling of surprising proximity while in a foreign environment. The wine blog, entitled ‘Wine Stories,’ was a deliberate attempt to capture the attentions of their consumer, to extend a sense of relatability, and to platform a creative environment in which their audience could also participate.

1.2.2 Liaison with International Media

Another strategic attempt to excite an online audience was in focusing communication and press to published online article opportunities. Thus, I began intense communication online with international publication, continually ‘pitching’ Afianes Wines as a great story opportunity. We focused our efforts towards publications that share values with the winery: those of sustainability, high gastronomy, culture, and travel appreciation. Some of the publications contacted were *Wine Enthusiast*, *Travel and Leisure*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Food & Travel*, *Gastro Obscura*, *Saveur*, *Imbibe*, *AFAR*, *Luxiders*, *Pebble* magazine, as well as others further detailed below.

1.2.3 Merchandising

Once tourism was officially opened in Greece in early May, we prepared to receive visitors. The physical Afianes Wine Shop had been closed for over a year, and needed to be totally re-organized. I assisted in the swift re-vamping of the shop in order to present the most coherent and attractive layout to the customer. We focused on showcasing their two most special wines: a Begleri sparkling wine aged underwater in the Aegean Sea, and a noble rot Fokiano natural sweet wine, only produced in spectacular years. Previously these two wines were stored on the bottom shelves of the cases, as they have a high price, yet I felt that the visitor would not understand *why* they were priced so high unless we showcased them and effectively communicated their quality. All new labels were made with enough information that the consumer would understand the quality, yet not be overwhelmed by details. Furthermore, the wine shop also held artisan Ikarian products hand-made by local artists, such as jewelry and ceramics. Their expensive prices were also misunderstood, as they were formerly jumbled together in a corner with no information about the hand-made quality. This was also rectified before we opened to the public, in an attempt to better communicate the plethora of wonderful Ikarian items displayed.

1.2.4 Wine Tours and Tastings

Wine Tours and Tastings were of the utmost importance in aptly relaying the brand narrative of Afianes Wines, as the person-to-person interaction leaves the most impressionable mark. In my role leading visitors around Afianes Wines, I had to ensure they had a positive experience, as well as left with a good impression of the winery. The role of tour guide necessitates good storytelling, as it is the unique opportunity to express passion and enthusiasm to the customer, and to adequately portray the core values of the winery in a limited amount of time. Therefore, deep knowledge of the winery is necessary, as well as the attitude to make that information exciting to the customer. It is not enough to merely relay the information about the biodynamic or sustainable focus of Afianes, but also to explain *why* the family believes in this philosophy, *how* it pertains to their island culture, and to *show* how it

makes their wine unique. The wine tasting that follows also must be entertaining yet informative, and make the customer feel comfortable, even if it is their first time at a winery. A delicate balance is necessary, therefore, to adequately navigate the social aspects of a wine tour, and emphasis on the core brand story must be taken into consideration in each tour.

1.3 Organization of Master Thesis Content

The organization of this Master Thesis centers around storytelling as a marketing tactic and communications enhancement for Afianes Wines. The objectives of both the Master Thesis Project, and the specific Internship Project objectives, are clearly stated. A concise literature review of contemporary scholarship centered around storytelling is explored, with a subsequent digital analysis of the current Afianes Wines image. Specific Methodology is introduced, detailing the measures taken to enhance storytelling potentials for Afianes Wines. That is followed by an exploration of particular storytelling potentials of Ikaria island and Afianes Wines, and the results of the implemented strategies ensuing shortly after. Finally, the discussion and conclusion of the Master Thesis project is reviewed in light of current marketing approaches, to determine the projected success of the initiatives undertaken.

2. Objectives

Taking into consideration the increasing importance of storytelling from a marketing perspective, the aim for my thesis project is to enhance the storytelling potentials for Afianes Wines, and to more effectively and cohesively communicate their brand story across all major platforms.

As Jordi Segarra (2017) states in his paper, *Marketing Destinations through Storytelling*, “Stories break through logic to desire, where the value of the experience exceeds the price” (Segarra, 2017, p.2). Storytelling connects with the audience and leaves them wanting more, thereby supporting the purchase decision and clarifying the all-important role they play in the success of a small winery.

The aim of this Master Thesis project and the aim of my specific Internship Project overlap in their considerations, and mutually complement each other in their completion. To further clarify the specific objectives of each supportive aspect, I have detailed them further below.

2.1 Master Thesis Objectives

- To analyze the potential for current storytelling proposals, taking into consideration classical literature references, associated legends, and mythology of the island as a basis of narrative prospect.
- To highlight connections between Ikaria, wellness, organic wines, and sustainability as core elements of additional storytelling proposals.
- To measure the suitability of storytelling communication as a strategic action to broaden international exposure of Afianes Wines.

- To discuss the activities fostered during the internship along the guidelines of current successful communication and branding techniques, according to contemporary scholars in marketing today.

2.2 Internship Project Objectives

- To recognize the unique aspects of Ikaria island and Afianes Wines, and to ensure their full usage is integrated into the existing storytelling.
- To communicate with the audience in a more personalized approach, thus ‘unveiling’ the winery image and presenting a more friendly and relatable viewpoint.
- To reach beyond the current Afianes contacts, and to expand their audience to a more international market.
- To ensure that the improved storytelling takes place in all possible areas: in the digital space, in the experience of the wine tours, in the presentation of their merchandising, and in the communication with international media.
- To measure the effects of the storytelling enhancements, backed with data from website interactions, shared posts, and other numerical indicators that may reveal digital success.

3. Literature Review

As the great Greek philosopher Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.E./1925) once wrote, “Compelling stories need to have ethical appeal, emotional appeal, and logical appeal to connect with the mind, heart, and human spirit of the audience” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1925). The wine industry is finally catching on to this concept, incorporating their own unique brand stories in an attempt to better connect with their consumer. In the marketing world, this specific term is called storytelling, and it quite simply relays a concept we are all already familiar with: bedtime stories, old wives’ tales, and mythic legends and lore that have spun around inside of our heads since we were children.

Human beings react emotionally to stories because they satisfy a deep need inside of us, that of connection and mutual understanding. We utilize stories to better interpret the world around us, and they reveal to us facets of both ourselves and of others. Storytelling in marketing is a natural extension of this intrinsic internal device into our place of business. As Segarra (2017) so aptly states,

“The art of persuasion consists of uniting ideas with emotions, and emotions are best conveyed through the form of a compelling story. Arousing the audience’s emotions spurs energy in them and moves them to take action. This is the power of storytelling” (Segarra, 2017, p.3).

The idea is to back a brand with such strong emotional appeal that the consumer is transformed by their passion. In this way, they are brought into both a mythical and emotional realm, rather than a cut-and-dry transactional one. Complementarily, new consumer behavior is shifting towards more of a community based, peer-reviewed trust (Segarra, 2017). Thus, consumers are much more likely to trust their family or

friends over traditional advertising. Scholars Denis L. Wilcox and Bryan Reber (2016) confirm this in their own paper, *Storytelling: The Power of Brand Journalism/ Content Marketing*, citing “Persuasion Theory” as evidence that individuals give more credibility to content that comes from “people like me” (Wilcox & Reber, 2016, p. 3). Storytelling is the perfect avenue towards introducing more of an emotional interaction with the consumer, and allows the opportunity for a continued, life-long relationship. On page 2 of his paper, Segarra (2017) writes,

“When the story is really compelling and provides value to the audience, they are willing to read more chapters and continue living the experience, thus becoming loyal followers and customers” (Segarra, 2017, p.2).

In this sense, a brand can effectively *include* a consumer into their inner realm, rather than just employing marketing tactics to entice them to buy. Storytelling allows the possibility for true authenticity to unfold, because it gives the audience a chance to decide whether or not they relate to the story told.

In their paper, *When Consumers and Brands Talk: Storytelling Theory and Research in Psychology and Marketing*, by Arch G. Woodside, Suresh Sood, and Kenneth E. Miller (2008), the all-important theory of archetypes in storytelling is emphasized. They argue that consciously or unconsciously, consumers love stories because they can easily relate to the archetype and what they represent for the moral of the story. Noting from this excerpt,

“Storytelling permits the teller to experience an archetype fulfillment; the plot line in the story told provides evidence that the storyteller-as-protagonist represents a regular guy/gal, lover, jester, creator, ruler, rebel, sage, hero, outlaw, magician, or some other archetypal primal form” (Woodside et al., 2008, p. 100).

Brands understand the narrative-forming mindsets of their audience, and thus use this to their advantage as well. Below is Table 1, which relates some of the most common examples of archetypes, and how big brands have used similar storytelling to invite their audience into a familiar comfort.

Table 1:

Archetypes, Story Gists, and Brand Examples

Table 1. Archetypes, Story Gists, and Brand Examples.		
	Story gist	Brand examples
Ultimate Strength	When an obstacle is there, it must be overcome; strength must be proven in use.	Timex—"It takes a licking and keeps ticking."
The Siren	Power of attraction, linked with the possibility of destruction.	Allure by Chanel; Envy by Gucci
The Hero	Fortitude, courage, and victory; a journey and transformation.	Michael Jordan and Nike shoes; Joe DiMaggio and Mr. Coffee; Power Puff Girls; Forrest
The Antihero	Universal message of destruction and attraction of evil; the bad dude.	Heavy metal icons; Howard Stern; Jerry Springer; Oakland Raiders; Che Guevara; Harley
The Creator	Creative inspiration and the potency of imagination; originality; authentic.	Coca Cola—the real thing; Walt Disney; Kleenex
The Change Master	Transformation, self-improvement, and self-mastery.	Curves—fitness studios for women; Gillette's Mach 2 Razor; Porsche 911
The Powerbroker	Authority, influence and domination—the world's leading . . . ; the best . . . ; number one.	CNN; E.F. Hutton; Bill Gates; Microsoft
The Wise Old Man	Experience, advice and heritage; staying the test of time.	Levi's; Obi-Wan Kenobi
The Loyalist	Trust, loyalty, and reassurance.	Coca Cola and "Mean" Joe Green with boy of 12 TV commercial; <i>I Love Lucy</i> ; <i>Friends</i> TV
The Mother of Goodness	Purity, nourishment, and motherly warmth.	Just Juice; Ivory Soap; Tropicana orange juice; Aunt Jemima; fairy godmother; Witch of the East; Snow White
The Little Trickster	Humor, nonconformity, and the element of surprise.	Dennis the Menace; Bart Simpson; <i>Pee-Wee's Big Adventure</i> ; <i>SpongeBob SquarePants</i>
The Enigma	Mystery, suspense, and uncertainty.	Zorro; Abercrombie and Fitch; Star Trek

Source: Developed in part from several chapters in Wertime (2002).

Note. Table 1 reflects common archetypes represented in big brands (Woodside et al., 2008, p. 114)

Thus, brands that align themselves with relatable story-tropes immediately have an advantage with the consumer, as there is already some kind of a priori knowledge about who they are and what they represent.

Furthermore, a brand story needs to be continually accessible and continually understood, meaning, it is not enough to merely relay a story to the consumer and hope that it sinks in. A story should be both verbally and non-verbally communicated, so it is in the interest of the winery to make sure their entire brand story is cohesive, from the visitor experience to the packaging and labeling of their products. As author Scolari (2009) relays in their work, *Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production*, brand packaging symbolism is broken down by consumers, creating specific means of interpretation and understanding of the brand (Scolari, 2009). Thus, if a brand story revolves around sustainability, yet their packaging is exclusively wrapped in plastic, or other non-recyclable materials, the brand story has conflict between what is being said, and what is actually portrayed.

Similarly, in *Brand Management in the Wine Industry*, by Demetris Vontris and Alkis Thrassou (2014), the authors also emphasize the multi-sided factors to good wine branding and storytelling. They

argue that wine branding involves two distinct aspects: tangible features, those pertaining to quality portrayed, grape varietal, and the physical aspects of bottling and labeling, and also intangible features, those of general image, country-of-origin, mental associations, history, myth, and philosophy (Vrontis & Thrassou, 2014). There must therefore be an overall holistic approach to storytelling, taking into account what is explicitly said, and what is inherently implied.

In the case of wineries that make natural wines, such as Afianes, there is a growing interest and great potential in this aspect of their storytelling. In their work, *Understanding the Relationship between Green Approach and Marketing Innovation Tools in the Wine Sector*, scholars Marianonietta Fiore, Raffaele Silvestri, Francesco Contó, and Giustina Pellegrini (2017) state,

“Wine consumers are becoming increasingly interested in green issues so that the concept of environmental sustainability can act as a relational channel between wineries and customers” (Fiore et al., 2017, p. 4,090).

Consumer interest in sustainability is rising, and provides a perfect opportunity to incorporate into building a brand story around the environmentally-friendly factors a winery champions. However, wineries should approach this with caution as well, as the world of natural wines is known to be both blurry and baffling for some consumers. In their paper, *Natural Wine: Do Consumers Know What it is, and How Natural it Really is?* by Pablo Alonso González and Eva Parga-Dans (2020), they reveal that there is much confusion over natural wines, as there is no official definition or approved legislation for natural wine, but a variety of certifications that represent sometimes vastly different approaches (Alonso González & Parga-Dans, 2020). This is especially bewildering for a new consumer, so if a winery includes natural winemaking as part of their storytelling, they must attempt to present themselves in as clear a manner as possible.

By adequately sifting through the academic studies around storytelling, it becomes clear what works and what does not. The research reveals just how important the emotional appeal is to the consumer, and also suggests that storytelling is not just verbal and must be fully communicated in all of its nuances. Archetype embodiment is detailed, as well as both the tangible and intangible features of good storytelling. Furthermore, emerging studies around green marketing lends exciting potential as storytelling enhancements for applicable wineries, such as Afianes. In gauging a realistic view of storytelling research, it informs and guides the initiatives undertaken to reach this project’s stated objectives.

4. Digital Analysis of Afianes Wines

In order to understand the area for improvement in regards to storytelling, a practical and current view of the website and brand image was first necessary to proceed. Therefore, one of my initial tasks with the winery was to perform a digital analysis, and discuss with them the next steps to further improve their online narrative. A thorough and apt understanding of their current business model is detailed below.

4.1 B2B Analysis: Comprises of 40% of total annual sales and within that percentage 70% is wholesale and 30% is instore (E. Afianes, personal communication, March 10, 2021).

4.1.1 Market Segment: Small Travel Agencies, Boutique Wine Shops, Restaurants

- Afianes seeks to work with vendors that share the same value-systems as them, and that can authentically cross-promote. They wish to provide genuine experiences as well as products that fit into the conscious lifestyle of their patrons, and to fulfill the need for high quality, veritable experiences and products that will satisfy both the business and consumer expectations.

4.1.2 Market Competition: Other local wineries and additional agro-tourism experiences on Ikaria

- Afianes must differentiate their offer to the consumer, emphasizing their unique winemaking techniques, sustainable philosophy, and special wine experiences available. This will set them apart when compared with the other two local winery options on the island, who do not follow the dedicated ancient wine-making techniques. Additionally, Afianes competes for the attention of the visitor while they are on the island, as other agro-tourism activities are readily available, such as yoga, scuba diving, and surfing (“*Alternative Tourism*,” n.d.). Therefore, it is in Afianes’ best interest to really market their ‘Wine Experiences,’ such as the Canyon Picnic Hiking Tour, in order to compete with other recreational island activities.

4.1.3 Market Sizing: Rising Interest in Natural Wines and the ‘Green Marketing’ Trends

(Fiore et al., 2017).

- Afianes seeks to become part of an integral network with other small businesses on the island. Hotels and touristic agencies on the island will receive Ikaria’s nature-oriented travelers seeking authentic experiences, therefore Afianes wants to serve an essential role in connecting consumer behavior, namely, where tourists are staying, what they are doing, what they are consuming, and how they are entertaining themselves. This alignment with a loyal base of local businesses acts as a symbiotic relationship that benefits both business and consumer, as consumers are recommended top-quality experiences and services.

4.2 B2C Analysis: Comprises of 60% annual sales, and is the most profitable channel

(E. Afianes, personal communication, March 10, 2021).

4.2.1 Market Segment: Foreign Tourists, Domestic Tourists, Agro-Tourists

Tourism plays an especially important role in the business model of Afianes, and potentially every tourist that comes to Ikaria could find a positive experience at Afianes Wines.

- **Foreign Tourist:** Ikaria is not a mass-tourism island, and has gained a reputation for more nature-oriented travelers. Perhaps wine tourism is not the thing they are initially looking for, but it can be a welcome addition to their vacation, as a fun and relaxing activity during their trip. Though maybe not familiar with natural winemaking methods, the consumer would find it to be an interesting and unique facet of their vacation.

Customer Profile: Graham and Karen are a middle-aged couple from Ashebourne, UK, seeking a relaxing Grecian vacation. After exploring the beach in Ikaria, they are recommended by their hotel concierge to visit Afianes Wines. They book a wine tour and tasting, and although they have minimal knowledge about wine in general, they enjoy learning about the ancient winemaking techniques and buy a few bottles as a way to memorialize their experience at the winery.

- **Domestic Greek Tourist:** Ferries from Athens run regularly throughout the summer, so Greeks from Athens generally come to Ikaria to relax and enjoy a calmer island, while visiting one of the summer festivals. They are familiar with Greek wine, and may come for a tasting or to enjoy the wine bar. They may find prices too high and are probably less likely to pay for exclusive wine experiences offered, but rather want to enjoy a singular experience.

Customer Profile: Giorgos is from Athens and is in his late twenties, arriving to Ikaria to enjoy the summer festivities with his friends. A local recommends Afianes Wines, and they book a guided tour and tasting, then decide to stay at the wine bar in the evening. The group is vaguely aware of natural wines due to having visited wine bars in Athens, but it is not something they would normally choose. They enjoy the tour and experience, but they wouldn't pay to have wine shipped after-the-fact.

- **Agro-tourist:** This is Afianes' ideal market segment, as the client is more likely to understand the business philosophy, and would be more willing to pay for a product that is ethical and aligns with their values. They would be enraptured by the entire Afianes Wine experience, and would act as ideal brand ambassadors, creating a small but effective word-of-mouth marketing that would recommend Afianes to other like-minded individuals.

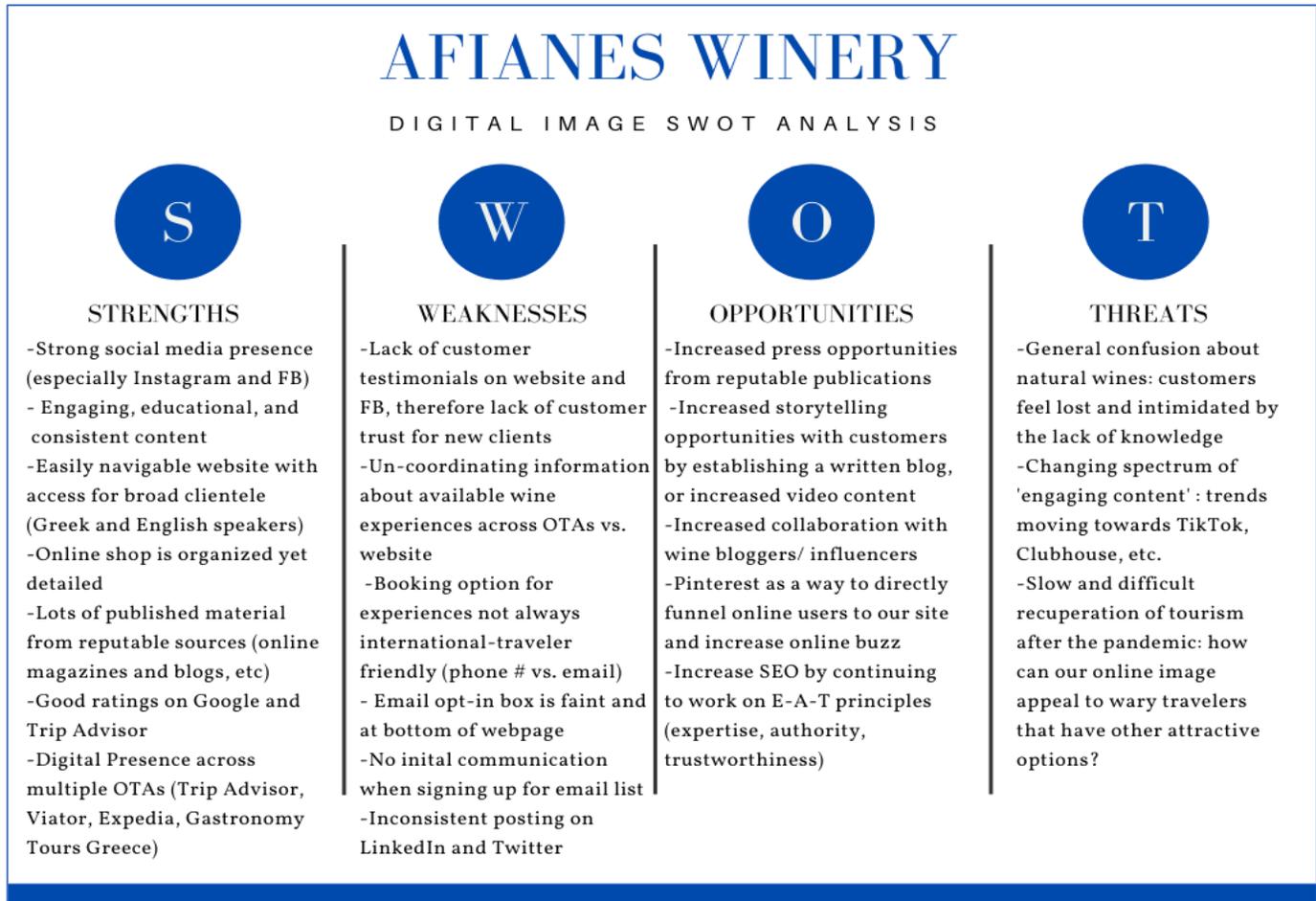
Customer Profile: Lukas, from Berlin, Germany, is in his early thirties and is a chef at a 'slow-food' style restaurant. He arrives to Ikaria searching for a nature-focused vacation, but also wants to experience the local gastronomic scene. He is intrigued by Afianes' natural wine styles and positive reputation online. He makes a reservation to do the extensive 'Cellar Wine Tasting Course,' and falls in love with the philosophy of the business, the quality of the product, and the authentic story behind the wines. He decides to bring Afianes Wines into his restaurant in Berlin to pair with his 'slow-food' concept. He creates a lasting and positive relationship with Afianes Wines.

4.3 Current Afianes Digital Presentation Analysis

Below is the SWOT analysis I created, represented as Figure 1, gathered from my initial digital experience with Afianes Wines, and which informs the subsequent actions taken to improve storytelling aspects.

Figure 1:

SWOT Analysis of Afianes Wines' Digital Image



Note. Figure 1 reflects the researcher's understanding of the Afianes Wines' Digital Image, represented as a SWOT analysis.

Together with my Professional Advisor, it was decided that the scope of my work would focus on the first two opportunities outlined, namely,

- Increasing press opportunities with reputable publications (as a way to control and expand the brand narrative to as many people as possible) and
- Increasing storytelling with existing customers by establishing a written blog and continually posting relevant and interesting content.

These two digital improvements in the overall storytelling of Afianes would lend to a more solidified online experience for the everyday consumer, as well as give weight to the overall perspective as a reputable player in the natural wine world. By expanding potential press opportunities, it would allow Afianes to present the exact image they want to portray to a host of new clientele. The creation of the blog would allow more of a conversational tone with their existing audience, and also permits the opportunity for a more creative connection. Creativity and authenticity are something revered by Afianes Wines, as is apparent in their support of local music and theatre, the promotion of local artisans in their wine shop, and the commission of Ikarian artists to decorate their labels, tables, and other various artifacts throughout the winery. Therefore, the expansion into a more creative realm where they could ‘open a conversation’ with their existing consumers, as well as express one of their most beloved values, was the perfect opportunity to improve their marketing while still staying true to their essential philosophies.

5. Project Methodology

This section will explore in more detail the actions introduced to complete the project objectives, as well as the specific analytical techniques used to measure their effects.

5.1 Main Actions Introduced During Internship

5.1.1 Communication with International Media

This aspect of the project was formatted in the composition of a solid story pitch, and the subsequent attempts to ‘sell’ this story to international outlets with large audiences that could be interested in a feature about Afianes Wines. A careful story pitch was crafted with oversight by my Project Manager, as we needed to create a concise summary of the winery as a whole, to effectively communicate the core values, and to emphasize *why* the publication’s readers would want to read about Afianes, all in about one short paragraph to the magazine’s editor.

Of course, I only targeted publications with shared values with the winery, and diligently researched their past articles to review the preferred writing-style and subject matter that they published most consistently. Below, represented as Table 2, is a list of the publications contacted and the shared values with Afianes Wines. I have organized the values in simplistic terms, namely: Wine, Culture, Travel, Gastronomy, and Sustainability.

Table 2:

Publications Contacted and Shared Values with Afianes Wines

Publications	Shared Values
Wine Enthusiast	Wine
Imbibe	Wine
Decanter	Wine
Food & Travel	Wine, Gastronomy, Travel
Gastro Obscura	Wine, Gastronomy, Travel
Saveur	Gastronomy
TASTE	Gastronomy
Condé Nast Traveler	Travel, Culture
Travel and Leisure	Travel, Culture
AFAR	Travel, Culture
Suitcase	Travel, Culture
Wanderlust	Travel, Culture
Luxiders	Sustainability
Pebble	Sustainability
VinePair	Wine, Culture
HuffPost	Culture
Life and Thyme	Gastronomy

Note. Table 2 displays the international publications contacted during this research, and the shared values that overlap with Afianes Wines.

5.1.2 Creation of the ‘Wine Stories’ Blog

The creation of the ‘Wine Stories’ Blog was carefully crafted to complement our goal of increasing Afianes Wines storytelling potentials, and also based on reliable research from marketing concepts. In accordance with the previously aforementioned ‘Persuasion Theory,’ increasing credibility is best performed when the consumer feels they can trust somebody they can relate to (Wilcox & Reber, 2016). In this sense, content marketing is about making the brand the storyteller, and a blog is a strategic way to illustrate the values and culture of a business without outwardly saying so, thereby intriguing the reader and allowing them to make their own decision from a more trustworthy outlet (Wilcox & Reber, 2016).

Similarly, scholar Jordi Segarra (2017) mentions in his work that truly compelling stories are what he calls, “real world integrated stories” (Segarra, 2017, p. 4). This concept highlights stories that empower the readers to participate and follow along in the various chapters of the overall narrative, and those that incite the desire for a personal relationship with the storyteller (Segarra, 2017). A blog inherently encompasses this, as each post is a facet of the overall narrative as how it pertains to Afianes Wines, yet it feels more ‘unbiased’ as it is coming from an unrelated source.

Our strategy for the blog was to introduce myself as an ‘outsider’ experiencing Icaria for the first time, as well as newly integrating into Afianes Wines as a temporary employee. In this sense, we establish legitimacy by including my personal backstory in the blog posts (why I am there, what I will be doing, how I am experiencing life in Icaria at the winery, etc.) and including the audience into this ‘behind-the-scenes’ experience, as if they were living it themselves. By positioning myself as a foreigner to Icaria excited to meet everything the island has to offer, the reader can easily relate and imagine themselves in this same position. Furthermore, this is setting up a sort of ‘archetype,’ as mentioned earlier by scholars Woodside, Sood, and Miller (Woodside et al., 2008, p. 114). It relays a ‘Hero’ narrative that relates a journey to an unknown place, and the transformation that becomes of having the courage to discover new things. This is extremely advantageous to the winery, as *they* do not relay this narrative, but still receive the benefits of existing as the ‘backdrop’ of the story. And having an ‘unrelated’ individual tell this story to the consumer only increases customer trust in the winery, as it appears they do not have a stake in this game, yet all chapters reflect positively.

To summarize the academic justification of the ‘Wine Stories’ blog, Woodside, Sood, and Miller (2008) aptly conclude:

“Two marketing strategy implications that follow naturally from archetype research include
(1) To create new dramas that build on *real-life self-reports of lived experiences* with brand icons and
(2) To improve brand icon stories to aid consumers in unconsciously and consciously enacting archetypes via experiences with brands.” (Woodside et al., 2008, p. 107)

By positioning myself as a sort of ‘brand icon,’ the ‘Wine Stories’ blog follows these exact two guidelines. Each blog post reveals a ‘*real-life self-report*’ of a lived experience, and furthermore, it

enables the reader to imagine themselves in this same experience as well. The blog in itself is a very obvious form of storytelling, but also the implications of its mere existence bode well as a deeper faceted communications approach from Afianes with their clientele.

5.2 Identification of Afianes Wines Storytelling Potentials

The method used to gather information surrounding Afianes Wines storytelling potentials was a qualitative content analysis approach. In their paper, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, scholars Leedy and Ormrod (2001) define content analysis as “a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p.155).

Thus, the narrative thematic gathered around storytelling potentials was based heavily upon research gathered from academic sources, such as Nikos Afianes’ (2004) thorough examination of Ikaria island and its long relationship with winemaking, as examined in his paper *The Vine Which is in Ikaria* (Afianes, 2004). Furthermore, the legends and mythology of the island are commonly discussed in conversation here amongst locals, though I did fact-check their legitimacy by consulting the official Ikaria Tourism page (“*History*,” n.d.). In regards to storytelling potentials around wellness, sustainability, and organic winemaking, the initiatives crafted were centered around my first-hand experience working at the winery, in addition to the academic justifications, found once more through Nikos Afianes’ (2004) paper about the cultural heritage of Ikarian wine (Afianes, 2004), in addition to more recent academic studies based upon ‘green trends’ in tourism (Fiore et al., 2017). To summarize, the approach taken to identify the storytelling possibilities was based upon academic research, investigation with local people, as well as first-hand working knowledge at the winery to identify the common themes and patterns that reveal narrative potential of both Ikaria island and Afianes Wines.

5.3 Analytical Techniques to Measure the Effect of the ‘Wine Stories’ Blog

To constructively gauge the audience reaction to the blog creation, it is first necessary to understand *how* we can identify those effects. The main methodology used to analyze the feedback of the blog was in engaging with Google Analytics to track the number of website visitors, and to analyze their interactions with the published posts.

The creation of the ‘Wine Stories’ Blog was a new addition to the Afianes website, and highlighted myself as the first featured writer, with the concept in mind that as Afianes invites more interns, they can continue that section with new perspectives and opinions. In conjunction with my Professional Advisor, we agreed upon my writing approximately 10 blog posts for them over the course of my internship, however, we decided it was in the best interest of the winery and their social media promotions to publish only 1 blog post per month. This means that while I had written the posts, unfortunately, I would not be able to analyze the full scope of the blog results, as they will continue to publish my blog posts over the

course of the next 10 months. However, as the blog announcement was officially published on April 15th, we are able to analyze the initial response to this new section, as well as take the past month's statistics to project what the future of the wine blog will look like.

To properly analyze the results of the first blog post, I decided to look at the webpage analytics starting from April 8th (one week before the published blog announcement, on April 15th) until May 15th (precisely one month after the announcement was released). This allows a full view of the publication of the first blog announcement in the days before April 15th, as well as the consequential results after its publication. Additionally, I looked into the social media reach on both Facebook and Instagram platforms to understand in which ways consumers were interacting with the posts.

6. Storytelling Potentials

To adequately reach the first objective outlined in the proposal, it is first necessary to dig deep into the culture, mythology, history, and overall philosophy of both the island of Ikaria, and Afianes Wines. Luckily, Ikaria is rife with legends and lore that contribute to the overall special effect of this island, thus placing it in a favorable position to center storytelling as a core pillar of their marketing and tourism. Also important to note is the outlining of both the tangible and intangible aspects of each potential, as referenced earlier by scholars Demetris Vontris and Alkis Thrassou (2014).

6.1 Ancient Greek Legends

6.1.1 Icarus:

Deriving its name from the infamous story of Icarus, the island of Ikaria has deep roots in Ancient Greek mythology. According to legend, the famed inventor Daedalus, and his son Icarus, escaped from the notorious labyrinth on the island of Crete by fashioning wings for themselves out of feathers and wax. Daedalus warned his son not to fly too low to the sea, lest the feathers dampen, and not too high to the sun, lest the wax melt. Yet Icarus, jubilant at his newly found flight, forgot to heed his father's warnings and soared too close to the sun. The wax melted and he plunged to his death in the sea, his body washing ashore a nearby island, now named Ikaria in his honor ("*Myth of the Fall of Icarus*," n.d.). This legend is well-known on the island, and is a storytelling potential derived directly from local mythology, a clear example of an 'intangible' attraction (Vrontis & Thrassou, 2014).

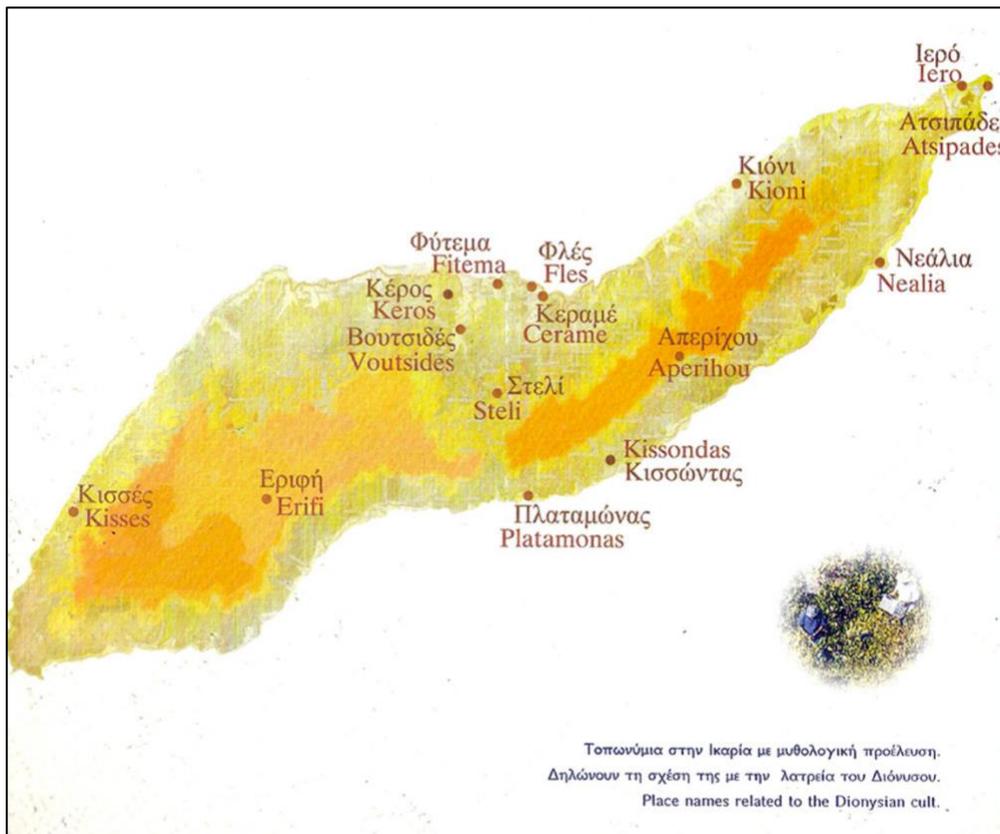
6.1.2 Dionysus:

Ikaria also boasts the birthplace of the God of Wine himself, Dionysus. A cave in the region of Drakanum is cited as the actual place where Dionysus was born, as many fragments and relics belonging to the Dionysian Cult were found here, and it also yields the Greek name, *lero*, translating to 'holy altar' (Afianes, 2004). Before it was called Ikaria, the island's oldest name was *Makris*, the name of the nymph

that allegedly nursed Dionysus as a babe. In fact, many of the villages across the island claim Dionysian names associated with the Cult itself. Villages named *Hippa*, *Nyssa*, and *Erifi* honor the nymph-nannies that nursed the motherless Dionysus as an infant, *Kosko* references the various groups of followers of Dionysus, *Kissos* represents the ivy plant used in the ritual of the Dionysian Mysteries, and several villages are named to honor the God himself in his many forms, namely, *Fleus*, *Enalios*, *Perikionios*, and *Daemon* (Afianes, 2004). The island has always held a fervent respect for wine, as is evident in the relics of the Cult of Dionysus and the long-standing relationship to the industry until even today. And what better place to have a winery than in the blessed land of the God of Wine himself? This storytelling potential associated with Dionysus is particularly advantageous for a winery, and is based upon local mythology, as well as historical fact found in the artifacts of a once thriving Dionysian Cult here on Ikaria (Afianes, 2004). Found in Figure 2 is a map of Ikaria island and the identified locations in relation to the ancient Cult of Dionysus.

Figure 2:

Map of Ikaria Island and References to the Cult of Dionysus



Note. Figure 2 details the island of Ikaria with locations related to the ancient Dionysian Cult that once populated the island (Afianes, 2004, p.14).

6.2 Classical Greek Literature

Wines of Ikaria, in antiquity referenced to as ‘Pramnian wine,’ have been mentioned by various Greek authors. Most notably, perhaps, is the mention of Pramnian wine by the great Greek author, Homer, in both of his epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Often cited as an essential ingredient in the magical elixir of *kykeon*, Pramnian wine makes various literary appearances. In the eleventh rhapsody of *The Iliad*, it is mentioned that Hecamede prepares a nourishing potion to restore the strength of Nestor and his friends,

“In it the woman, like unto the goddesses, had mixed for them Pramnian wine, and grated over it a goat’s-milk cheese with a brazen rasp, and sprinkled white flour upon it: then bade them drink, as soon as she had prepared the potion” (Homer, 1997, XI, p. 618-643).

In the tenth book of *The Odyssey*, kykeon is also cited with the same specific ingredients, yet is now used by the witch Circe for more malicious purposes,

“And she mixed them a potion with barley and cheese and pale honey added to Pramnian wine, but put into the mixture malignant drugs to make them forgetful of their own country (Homer, 1997, X, p. 234-236).

The wine of Ikaria has a long history, and not only that, but a mythical one as well. Pramnian wine has entered into some of humanity’s greatest literary scenes, and has seeped itself into the deep cultural fabric of Western literary tradition. This storytelling potential is particularly alluring for literary-lovers, and lends weight to the long-standing history of wine-making on the island, as well as adding a mysterious sense of mythology that greatly intrigues the visitor.

6.3 Wellness and Ikaria in Antiquity

Ikarian wine has historically been esteemed for its medicinal values, noting its strong characteristics. The historian Eparchides proclaimed Pramnian wine as, “A wine that has neither sweetness nor body, austere, dry, and with a singular power” (Boulay, 2015, p.273). It has been described as unsuitable for the ancient Greek *symposiums*, in which aristocratic men drank wine and discussed philosophy, as the Pramnian wine was too intense and would intoxicate the guests too quickly (Afianes, 2004). Acclaimed historical doctors, Hippocrates and Galen, also prescribed Pramnian wine for its medicinal qualities. Some of its apparent uses were for healing an infected wound, or for curing fits of depression or mental disorder (Afianes, 2004). The Greek historian, Semos, also quoted,

“In Ikaria there is a rock, the so-called ‘Pramnos’ and next to it there is a high mountain and, on this mountain, they produce Pramnian wine, which is also called by some *Pharmakites*, meaning medicine” (Afianes, 2004, p.23).

Pramnian wines were therefore well-known throughout the ancient world for their healing quality, and much recorded medicinal literature details the benefits of Pramnian wine. This storytelling potential is one derived directly from historical text, and is an interesting segment for those interested in wellness.

6.4 Wellness and Ikaria in Modern Day

From antiquity to modern day, Ikaria still appears in headlines that revere the quality of life found here on this special island. Most recently in modern day and what has brought it once more to the public eye, is the classification of Ikaria as one of the world's 'Blue Zones.' The 'Blue Zones' project was conducted by National Geographic Fellow and *New York Times* bestselling author, Dan Buettner. His research revealed five pockets of the world where people live the longest and are the healthiest: Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Loma Linda, California; and Ikaria, Greece (Buettner, 2021).

The Blue Zones project is not just a research, but has evolved into a lifestyle guidance as well. The Blue Zones website boasts updated academic research, recipes of the Blue Zone locations, and definitive action plans to help transform other cities with the '9 healthy habits' of the original Blue Zone locations (Buettner, n.d.). In Ikaria, this press has also created a specific sort of 'longevity tourism' in the past few years, as tourists interested in an alternative and 'healthier' lifestyle have traveled to Ikaria to learn the island's best-kept wellness secrets. Ikaria attracts nature and health tourism, those that are interested in traversing one of the island's plentiful trails, or those looking to delve into a 'wellness retreat,' such as the 'Ikaria Longevity Retreat' hosted in the village of Raches ("Ikaria Longevity Retreat," n.d.).

Ikaria has received much media attention about the quality of life and the longevity of its people. To mention just a few for reference: *The Island of Long Life* published by The Guardian, *The Island Where People Forget to Die* published by the New York Times, and *The Greek Island with the Key to Longevity* published by the BBC (Anthony, 2018; Buettner, 2012; Tejada, 2017). This storytelling strand has much potential in connecting both ancient and modern concepts of wellness, and has garnered a lot of interest by the public in recent years.

6.5 Afianes Wines and Sustainability Values

As the issue of environment rises in today's cultural conversation, so too, has it seeped into the values narrative of the wine industry. As today's consumers grow more conscious of their own environmental impacts, the question of sustainability within the wine industry has grown ever more important. To quote researchers Nelson Barber, Christopher Taylor, and Cynthia Deale (2010) in their paper, *Environmental Attitudes towards Wine Tourism*,

"It is also becoming evident that environmental consciousness has increased as consumer lifestyles change to integrate environmental considerations, such as purchasing decisions based on how products satisfy individual needs, while minimizing the negative impact on the natural environment." (Barber et al., 2010, p. 13).

Sustainability is of growing importance to the average consumer, and it is in a winery's interest to support and uphold these values. Consumers already deeply committed to beneficial environmental

practices are an appealing segment, especially to a winery with a similarly rooted philosophy. As Afianes creates natural wines and follows biodynamic principles, they inherently attract this rising segment as their ideal target market. This is important, as these consumers understand the nuances of what natural winemaking entails, and are more likely to intrinsically understand the philosophy behind Afianes Wines, enabling clearer communication and appreciation. This opens the opportunity of a more coherent storytelling and fluent ‘language’ between the business and consumer, considering the audience is already well-informed and there is no need to convince them of the values of sustainability. The more detailed facets of the winery: growing only indigenous varieties and following the biodynamic calendar, fermenting with wild yeast, resisting mechanical intervention in the winemaking process, the avoidance of additional sulfites, and leaving the wines unfiltered and unrefined, make up an interesting and rich tapestry of the Afianes Wines story that may not be entirely relevant to an un-informed and more generic audience. Therefore, their sustainability values also contribute to their overall storytelling, especially as the ‘green trend’ grows and the average consumer is shifting towards a more ecological value-system (Barber et al., 2010; see also Fiore et al., 2017).

6.6 Afianes Wines as a Microcosm of Ikarian Values

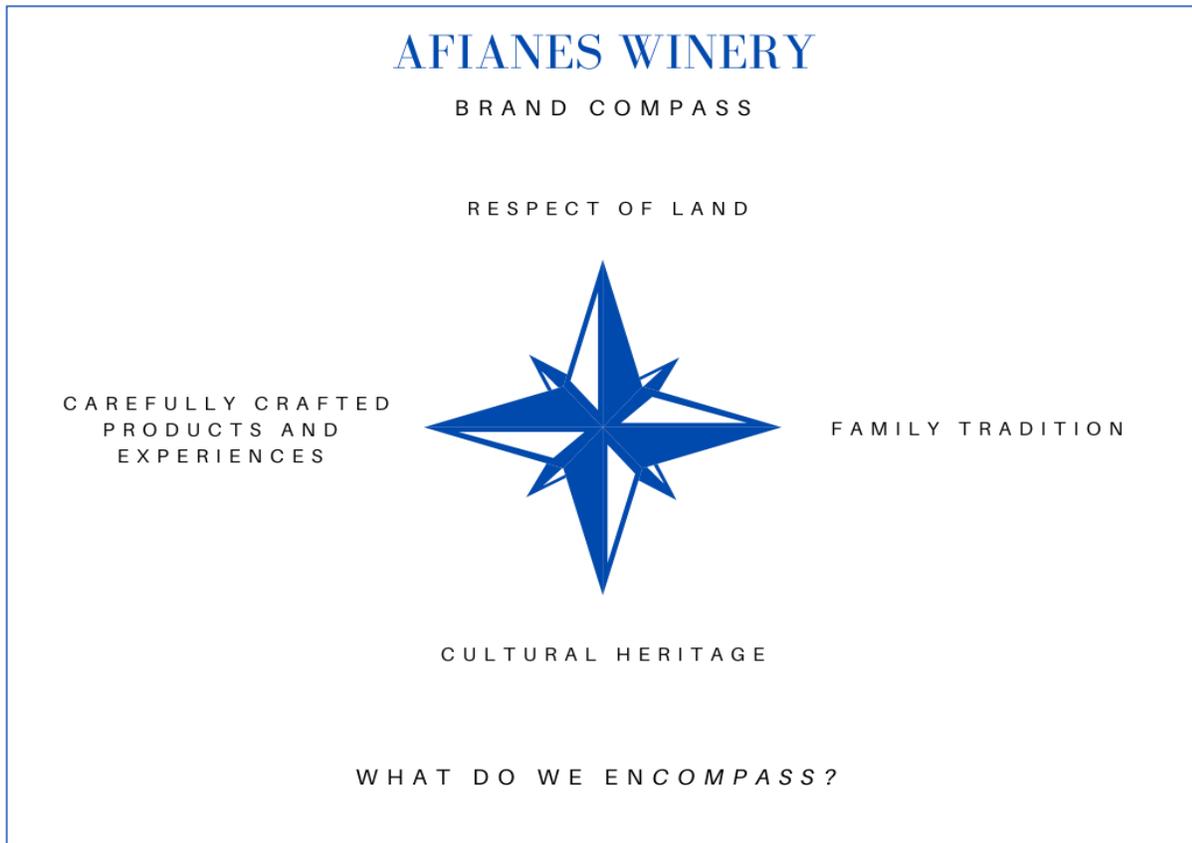
Afianes Wines holds the storytelling advantages indigenous to the island, as well as the ability to position themselves as representative of the exact island values that make Ikaria so special. As a biodynamic winery, they represent the inherent connection to the land, and respect for their environment. By upholding the ancestral wine-making methods of fermenting and aging in clay amphoras, they honor their ancestors and contribute to the long line of winemakers that have populated the island for thousands of years. The usage of only the historical and autochthonous grape varieties, Fokiano and Begleri, also attribute to their keen interest in the island’s history and viticulture. The labels of their wine also reference the island’s mythological past, such as the label names *Icarus*, *Icarus Black*, and *Icarus Matured*, and their on-site Greek theatre is named in homage to the God of Wine and Theatre, Dionysus. The winery is also run entirely by the family, and thereby transmits a strong value in family and connection, as is apparent as a core principle throughout the island itself. Dan Buettner emphasized strong social connections as a core indicator of longevity and wellness in his ‘9 healthy habits’ of Blue Zone locations, and Afianes Wines represents this perfectly (Buettner, n.d.).

Furthermore, their carefully crafted wine experiences also aptly convey the island philosophy to the consumer. As briefly mentioned earlier, their two wine experiences, ‘Canyon Picnic Hiking Tour’ and ‘Dine Under the Stars,’ both highlight the natural environment and local Ikarian gastronomy, thus reflecting Afianes’ commitment to sharing their core values, which in turn mimic the overall principles of the island itself (“*Wine Experiences*,” 2019). This is an integral aspect of their storytelling, as it connects the consumer to the very strong sense of place around them, and also aptly conveys Afianes Wines’ brand

story. Below, highlighted as Figure 3, I have created a brand compass outlying the core concepts of the Afianes Wines story:

Figure 3:

Brand Compass of Afianes Wines



Note. Figure 3 depicts the researcher’s understanding of Afianes Wines’ core values, and how those values should guide their brand narrative.

The outlined potentials in storytelling enrich greatly the overall narrative of Afianes Wines, and although they already inhabit many of the rich storytelling concepts in their current image, there is always room to better solidify the message to the consumer, and to expand their core audience.

7. Results

Of the two main avenues to expand Afianes storytelling, the results varied, though are still susceptible to change, as the timing did not allow a full view of how ‘successful’ these initiatives were, or what they could continue to grow into. To give a full understanding, the initiatives were drafted during the first months of the internship, and put into action during the month of April. That results in leaving approximately a one-month time span (until mid-May) to analyze the results, yet really the project was just beginning in many aspects.

7.1 Results of Communication with International Media

To calculate the success or failure of this communication is perhaps immeasurable, as there are no true numbers to validate whether this was a triumphant effort or not. Perhaps more pertinent is to ask if this attempt is worthy in itself, regardless of whether or not it procures a lengthy feature piece in the end. If we understand the venture itself as an extension of our storytelling, then yes, it has been a successful realization of the project objective, as it was an active reaching-out to a new audience and conveying the brand narrative of Afianes Wines.

In my task of communicating with media, I sent out seventeen initial story pitches to seventeen different publications, and an equal number of follow-up emails. The world of freelance article writing and story pitching is rife with editors looking for specific topics to fit into the scope of their magazine. Therefore, it is quite a subjective world, in which one editor may love the story pitch, and the other may not be interested at all. Until late May, the responses did not seem initially very ‘positive.’ Some editors replied that they were not interested, whereas many did not reply at all. However, on May 26th I received an email from *Wine Enthusiast*, replying that they were very interested in my story pitch and would like to proceed with the next steps for publication on their digital platform.

Known as one of the most revered wine magazines and with a total readership of 4.1 million people and a monthly digital reach of 2.1 million people (“About Us,” 2021), this is a huge victory for a small, family-run winery like Afianes. To convey their story and values to such a large audience is a wonderful opportunity, especially considering the readership is already specified as wine-lovers. To be featured by such a respected wine publication enhances their own reputation, as well as expands their storytelling to a much wider audience than they could ever reach alone. Though of course the completed article for *Wine Enthusiast* will not be finished by the publication of this thesis, I am in contact with their editorial team and hope to see the finished product online sometime this summer.

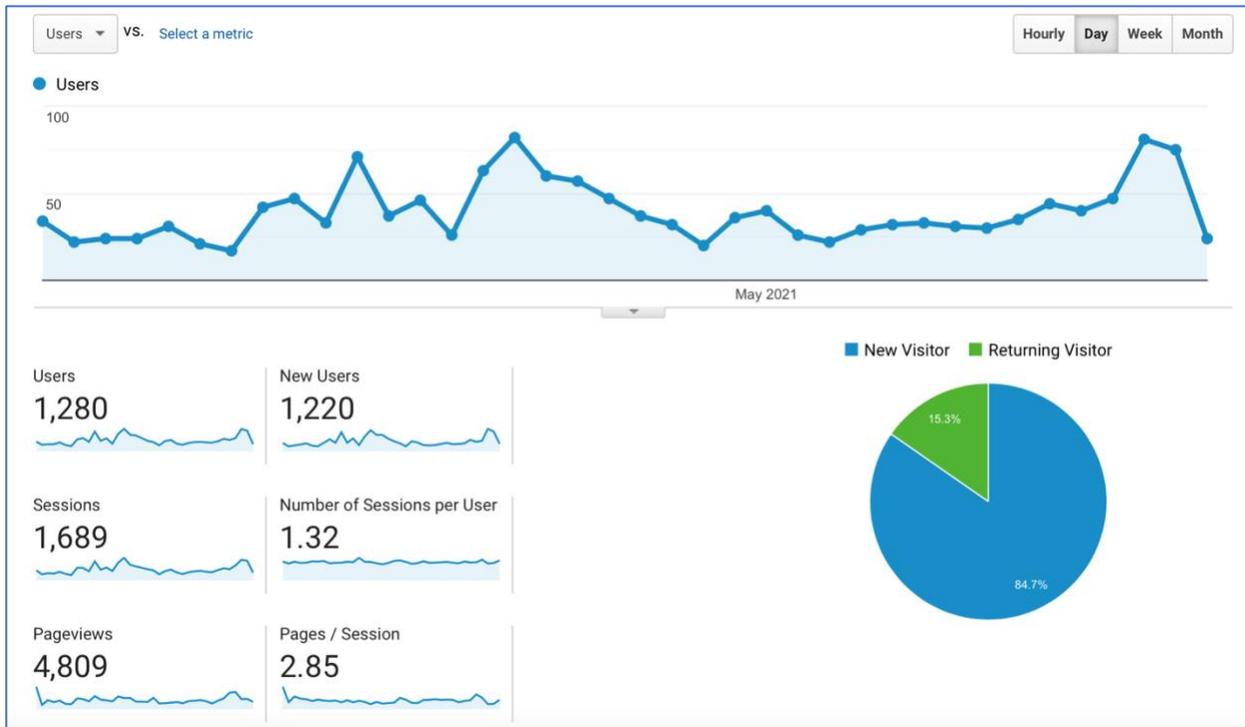
7.2 Results of the ‘Wine Stories’ Blog

In this section I will analyze the results from the ‘Wine Stories’ blog, during the specific time frame of April 8th- May 15th. The blog announcement was released on April 15th, however it will be useful to view the analytics including the week before its publication, to fully understand the impact the announcement had. Specifically, I will be looking at the results of the blog announcement and first official blog post, differentiating between English and Greek readers’ behavior online.

For reference, the total amount of monthly visitors on the Afianes webpage fluctuates between 150 users (during a very low month) and 1,500 users (during the holidays or the summer season). During the timeframe of April 8th- May 15th, as represented by Figure 4, the webpage received a total number of 1, 280 visitors, veering towards some of their higher monthly numbers.

Figure 4:

Number of Afianes Website Visitors from April 8th- May 15th



Note. Figure 4 is a graphic from Google Analytics that depicts the number of monthly visitors (differentiating between new and returning visitors) during the timeframe of April 8th- May 15th.

Furthermore, they had a total of 1,220 new visitors, with the top visitors coming from Greece and the United States. As compared to previous months, the United States rose greatly in their viewership. Below, Figure 5 details the breakdown of visitors by country.

Figure 5:

Top Visitors of the Afianes Website from April 8th- May 15th, Sorted by Country

Demographics	Country	Users	% Users
Language	1. 🇬🇷 Greece	495	38.46%
Country	2. 🇺🇸 United States	442	34.34%
City	3. 🇫🇷 France	55	4.27%
System	4. 🇩🇪 Germany	33	2.56%
Browser	5. 🇬🇧 United Kingdom	28	2.18%
Operating System	6. 🇪🇸 Spain	22	1.71%
Service Provider	7. 🇮🇹 Italy	19	1.48%
Mobile	8. 🇨🇦 Canada	18	1.40%
Operating System	9. 🇩🇰 Denmark	15	1.17%
Service Provider	10. 🇮🇱 Israel	13	1.01%

Note. Figure 5 is a graphic from Google Analytics that depicts the top visitors, sorted by country.

Out of the 427 existing pages on the Afianes website, the general ‘Wine Stories’ landing page (to access the blog posts) was number 7 in most accessed pages, as depicted in Figure 6. The first actual blog post after the announcement, titled, ‘*Words and Wine and a Wandering Mind,*’ was number 19 most accessed, and the blog announcement, titled, ‘*Raising a Glass to our Own Potential,*’ was number 20 most accessed, as displayed in Figure 7.

Figure 6:

Top 10 Most Accessed Pages of the Afianes Website during April 8th- May 15th

Page ?	Pageviews ? ↓	Unique Pageviews ?	Avg. Time on Page ?	Entrances ?	Bounce Rate ?	% Exit ?	Page Value ?
	4,809 % of Total: 100.00% (4,809)	3,446 % of Total: 100.00% (3,446)	00:01:35 Avg for View: 00:01:35 (0.00%)	1,689 % of Total: 100.00% (1,689)	57.96% Avg for View: 57.96% (0.00%)	35.12% Avg for View: 35.12% (0.00%)	€0.00 % of Total: 0.00% (€0.00)
1. /	733 (15.24%)	525 (15.24%)	00:01:32	464 (27.47%)	40.30%	36.56%	€0.00 (0.00%)
2. /en/	442 (9.19%)	340 (9.87%)	00:01:40	238 (14.09%)	43.28%	35.29%	€0.00 (0.00%)
3. /eshop/	353 (7.34%)	181 (5.25%)	00:01:06	61 (3.61%)	49.18%	26.06%	€0.00 (0.00%)
4. /en/eshop/	240 (4.99%)	142 (4.12%)	00:01:11	30 (1.78%)	33.33%	20.83%	€0.00 (0.00%)
5. /en/cart/	153 (3.18%)	87 (2.52%)	00:00:45	13 (0.77%)	92.31%	19.61%	€0.00 (0.00%)
6. /τα-κρασιά-μας/	115 (2.39%)	86 (2.50%)	00:02:15	19 (1.12%)	68.42%	40.87%	€0.00 (0.00%)
7. /en/wine-stories/	112 (2.33%)	65 (1.89%)	00:00:49	7 (0.41%)	71.43%	13.39%	€0.00 (0.00%)
8. /en/eshop/red-wines-en/icarus-red-2017/	108 (2.25%)	75 (2.18%)	00:01:43	48 (2.84%)	54.17%	39.81%	€0.00 (0.00%)
9. /ιστορίες-κρασιού/	104 (2.16%)	69 (2.00%)	00:01:23	20 (1.18%)	70.00%	23.08%	€0.00 (0.00%)
10. /en/checkout/	79 (1.64%)	49 (1.42%)	00:02:36	7 (0.41%)	57.14%	35.44%	€0.00 (0.00%)

Note. Figure 6 reflects the top 10 most accessed pages on the Afianes website.

Figure 7:

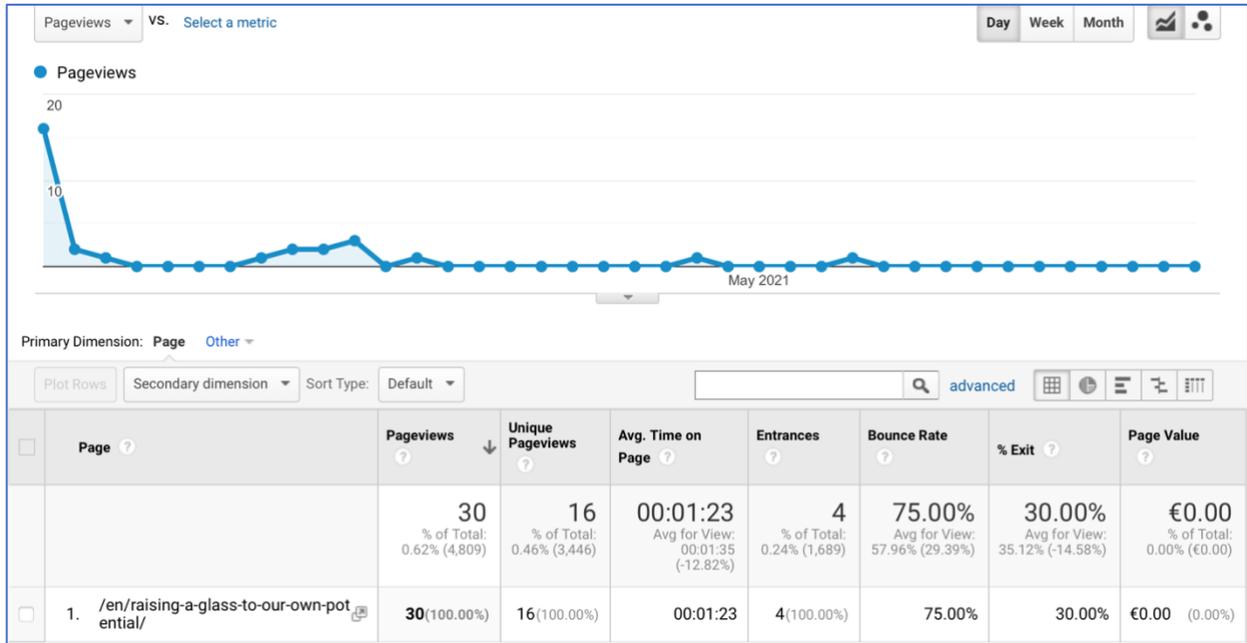
Top 20 Most Accessed Pages of the Afianes Website during April 8th- May 15th

Page ?	Pageviews ? ↓	Unique Pageviews ?	Avg. Time on Page ?	Entrances ?	Bounce Rate ?	% Exit ?	Page Value ?
	4,809 % of Total: 100.00% (4,809)	3,446 % of Total: 100.00% (3,446)	00:01:35 Avg for View: 00:01:35 (0.00%)	1,689 % of Total: 100.00% (1,689)	57.96% Avg for View: 57.96% (0.00%)	35.12% Avg for View: 35.12% (0.00%)	€0.00 % of Total: 0.00% (€0.00)
11. /en/eshop/red-wines-en/icarus-black-2016/	61 (1.27%)	47 (1.36%)	00:01:18	31 (1.84%)	41.94%	29.51%	€0.00 (0.00%)
12. /cart/	60 (1.25%)	42 (1.22%)	00:00:35	12 (0.71%)	91.67%	25.00%	€0.00 (0.00%)
13. /en/our-wines/	59 (1.23%)	46 (1.33%)	00:03:15	11 (0.65%)	63.64%	37.29%	€0.00 (0.00%)
14. /en/our-news/	58 (1.21%)	10 (0.29%)	00:02:15	2 (0.12%)	0.00%	3.45%	€0.00 (0.00%)
15. /κτήμα-αφιανές/	54 (1.12%)	47 (1.36%)	00:02:54	28 (1.66%)	71.43%	59.26%	€0.00 (0.00%)
16. /τα-κρασιά-μας/τοπικές-ποικιλίες/	54 (1.12%)	50 (1.45%)	00:03:04	37 (2.19%)	89.19%	68.52%	€0.00 (0.00%)
17. /fr/	51 (1.06%)	34 (0.99%)	00:01:14	15 (0.89%)	20.00%	17.65%	€0.00 (0.00%)
18. /επισκεφθείτε-μας/γευσίγνωσια-ξενάγηση/	51 (1.06%)	44 (1.28%)	00:02:04	27 (1.60%)	92.59%	54.90%	€0.00 (0.00%)
19. /en/words-and-wine-and-wandering-mind/	47 (0.98%)	32 (0.93%)	00:01:28	20 (1.18%)	80.00%	55.32%	€0.00 (0.00%)
20. /raising-a-glass-to-our-own-potential/	45 (0.94%)	24 (0.70%)	00:01:24	8 (0.47%)	25.00%	28.89%	€0.00 (0.00%)

Note. Figure 7 reflects the top 20 most accessed pages on the Afianes website.

The first initial announcement of the blog was published on April 15th, under the title of “*Raising a Glass to Our Own Potential*,” and established what the ‘Wine Stories’ blog would be about and what kind of content it would be featuring. Figure 8 reflects the initial response of 30 English-language viewers, who stayed on the page for 1 minute and 23 seconds, a positive indication that they read most of the actual post.

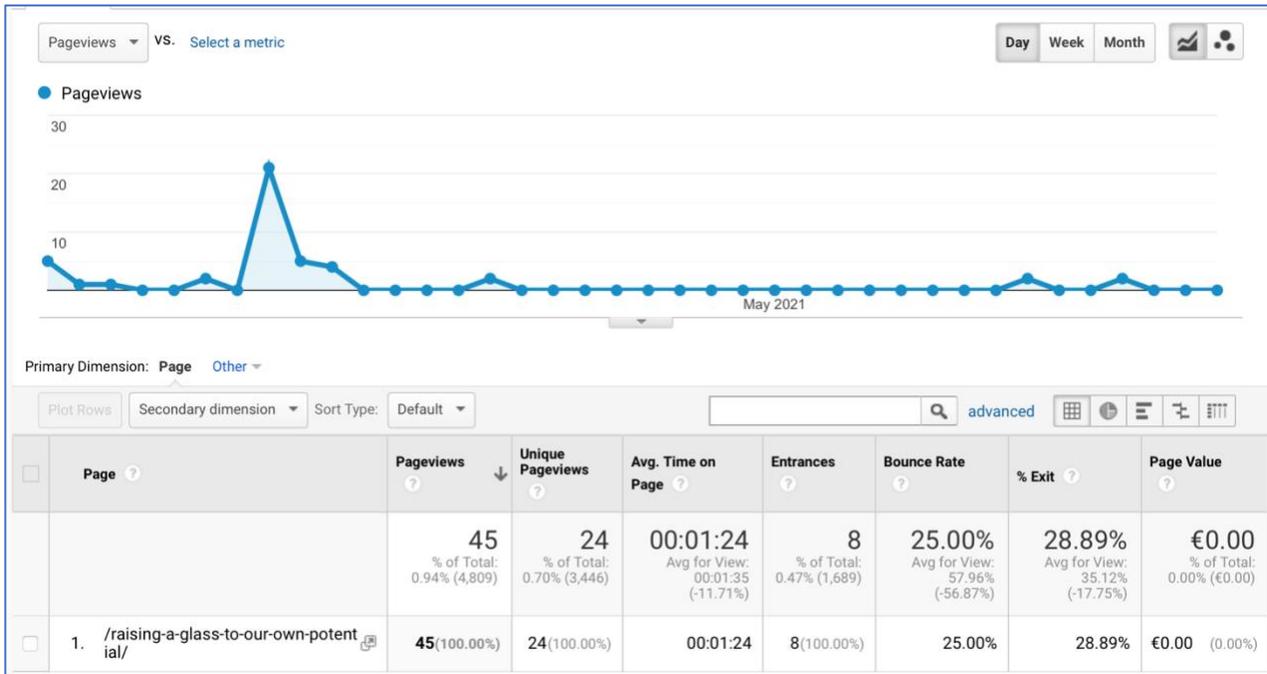
Figure 8:
Number of English-language Readers for Blog Announcement



Note. Figure 8 depicts the number of English-language viewers that read the blog announcement.

The Greek viewers for the announcement post was a bit more, at 45 users, and though they also stayed for around the same time as the English-language users, at 1 minute and 24 seconds, this perhaps signifies that they did not read the post in its entirety, taking into consideration the language barrier and extra time needed to fully comprehend a foreign language. Figure 9 depicts this data below.

Figure 9:
Number of Greek-language Readers for Blog Announcement



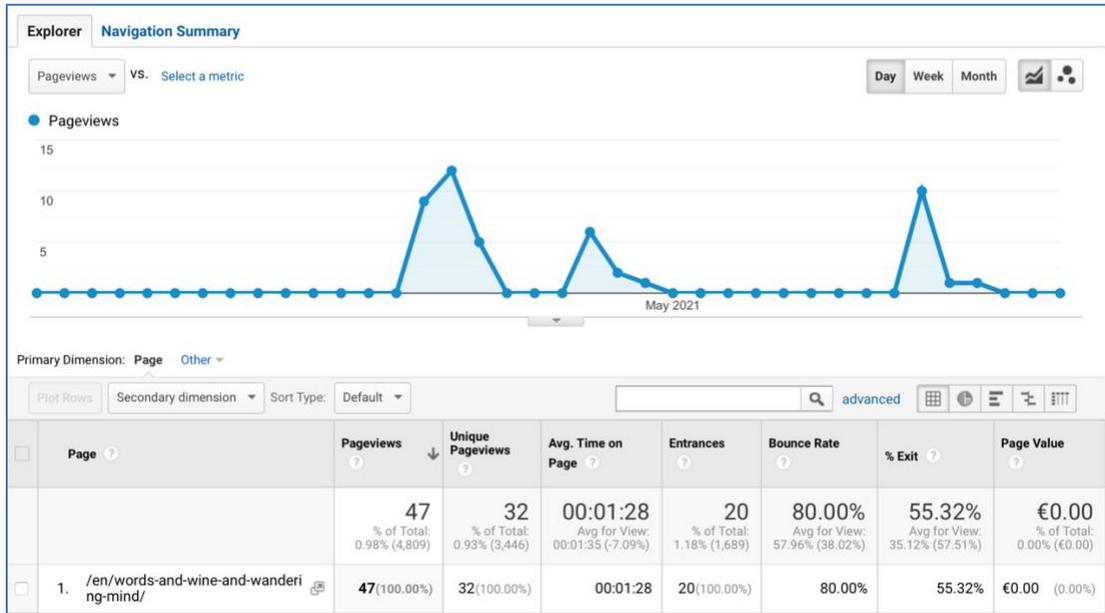
Note. Figure 9 depicts the number of Greek-language viewers that read the blog announcement.

These numbers reflect just the Afianes website interactions, and do not include the social media interactions. For the blog announcement, *‘Raising a Glass to Our Own Potential,’* Facebook recorded a total of 446 viewers, 11 direct opens from the post, and 30 interactions (likes, shares, comments, etc.) Instagram recorded a total of 785 viewers, 72 likes, and 3 followed the link to the bio to actually read the post.

When comparing these numbers to the first actual blog post published after the announcement, interest seems to have arisen for the English-language readers. For the post *“Words and Wine and a Wandering Mind,”* published on April 22nd, the total number of English-speaking users was 47, and spent an average of 1 minute and 28 seconds, a normal time to read the post for native speakers. Figure 10 represents this data below.

Figure 10:

Number of English-language Readers for First Official Blog Post

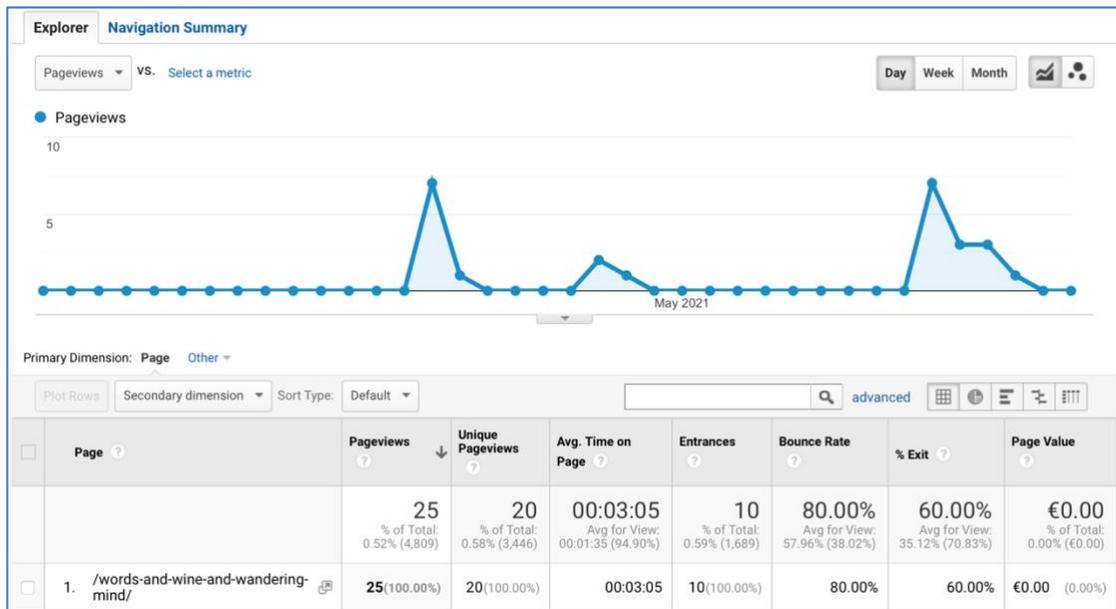


Note. Figure 10 reveals the number of English-language readers for the first official blog post.

For the Greek readers, as displayed in Figure 11 below, the total number of viewers was 25, a big downward shift from the previous Greek blog announcement readers, which could signify that many readers were put off by the English language. However, this time the Greek readers spent an average of 3 minutes and 5 seconds, suggesting that those who entered into the page knew English well enough to continue reading, and took their time in digesting the text.

Figure 11:

Number of Greek-language Readers for First Official Blog Post



Note. Figure 11 displays the number of Greek-language readers for the first official blog post.

The social media interactions also grew with this blog post, with Facebook recording 1,560 views, 71 direct opens of the post, and 176 interactions (likes, shares, comments, etc.) Instagram recorded 1,161 views, 169 likes, and 3 followed the link to the bio to actually open the post to read.

We can conclude that the interest in the blog concept stayed steady from the announcement to the first official blog post, with a combined readership of 75 for '*Raising a Glass to Our Own Potential*,' and 72 combined readers for '*Words and Wine and a Wandering Mind*.' It appears that Greek readers were intimidated by the English language of the posts, but by the second post, those that did decide to read were committed to reading the post in its entirety.

From the announcement post to the first official blog post, Facebook views increased by 1,114 views, received 60 more direct opens to the post, and received 146 more interactions. Similarly, Instagram received 376 more viewers and 97 more likes. This data suggests that the public was generally interested in the concept, though that did not directly translate to readership. It would be interesting to further analyze the online behavior of readers in the coming months, to see if readership continues to hold steady, or if it is possible to convert some of the social media viewers to actual blog readers and increase interactions on the Afianes website.

8. Discussion

This Master Thesis project has attempted to analyze the vast potential for storytelling as an integral facet of brand marketing for Afianes Wines. Taking into consideration both tangible and intangible features, direct narrative streams were formed in order to guide the communication with the consumer, and to include them more fully in the overall experience. Both the communicative outreach with international media publications, as well as the creation and continual publication of the 'Wine Stories' blog, were two essential facets to this project's completion of expanding storytelling of Afianes Wines.

The limitations of the project pertain to various factors. Chiefly, the continued effects of the covid-19 pandemic halted greatly the normal touristic flow of Ikaria and subsequently, Afianes Wines. In this sense, it was difficult to gauge the initial success of the project objectives, as the number of physical tourists, as well as the number of visitors on the website, are certainly not comparable to other non-pandemic years. Therefore, the threshold for comparison this year is not entirely correct, though perhaps as the world slowly emerges from a post-pandemic state and tourism slowly rehabilitates the lost time, the actual measure of this project's introduced initiatives can be fully realized. Furthermore, the timeframe of this internship does not allow an adequate view of its full effects, either. Analyzing the results of the 'Wine Stories' blog, for instance, would be much more suitable in a year's time, after the publication of consistent monthly posts. To analyze the response just after one month does not allow the proper time needed to introduce and familiarize the concept to the general public, as well as establish a consistency of which they can rely upon. Similarly, the communication with international media is not existent solely in

the time frame of this project, but continues, and could potentially result in additional feature articles or press.

Taking into consideration the academic research outlining best methods to identify and enhance storytelling, as framed in the Literature Review, it is my belief that this project has embodied many of the recommended aspects. Emotional appeal and archetype embodiment has been utilized through the scope of the introduced blog, tangible and intangible attractions have been identified as specific storytelling potentials, and focus on the wellness and sustainable aspects of the winery have been emphasized. Of course, with more time investment and continual spotlight of the storytelling across all major platforms, the initiatives introduced during this project will likely have a greater prospect of lasting success.

9. Conclusion

Afianes Wines, on the island of Ikaria, is the stuff legends are made of- literally. Its rich literary legacy, history of longevity, and commitment to upholding the ancestral values of environmental respect, all contribute to the rich narrative potentials that position it in a uniquely interesting spot for consumer intrigue and interaction.

By honing in on, and improving, their storytelling potentials across all major sectors (the digital space, in the experience of wine tours, presentation of merchandising, and communication with international media), it serves as a cohesive glue that clearly conveys their brand story to the consumer. In particular, the ‘Wine Stories’ blog was a newly crafted experience to enhance the online engagement with the consumer, an all-important aspect when considering that for most of this year, online engagement was the sole possibility due to the repercussions of the covid-19 pandemic.

Storytelling is a vital aspect of wine tourism, and if done correctly, can seep into every facet of the consumer’s experience, thus establishing a more authentic and personal relationship. Human beings have always looked to stories to make sense of the world around us, so it is in the best interest of each business to invest time in the development of their own narrative, and to aptly express *who they are, what they want to communicate, and what are their most cherished values.*

Our lives are made up of a myriad of different stories: those that challenge us, those that inspire us, and those that comfort us and bring us joy. Whether a ghost story, a fairytale, a love story, or a cautionary tale, stories are part of the essential fabric of what it means to be human. Storytelling in marketing is another way to reach the ‘spirit’ of another human being, to touch the very core of them, and to invite them into a personal realm where connectivity and mutual understanding is the very essence of purpose.

Acknowledgments

I would like to wholeheartedly thank my wonderful parents, John and Maureen Fitzpatrick, for their endless support and love. They have given me the freedom and opportunity to pursue every one of my dreams, and I am so grateful for the examples that they are in my life.

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To the Henry Miller to my Anaïs Nin, Jake Sprague, thank you for your companionship, quick wit, curious mind, and most of all, your love.

Thank you to the best friend and roommate a girl could ask for, Susana Castro, for making this crazy Wintour journey one filled with joy, laughter, and lots and lots of wine. Thank you to my coquines, Roberta Duca and Rosanna Bucknill, for being a place of comfort and support along the way.

I am so thankful to the entire Afianes family, Nikos, Maria, Konstantinos, and Eftychia, for incorporating me into their wonderful winery, and for truly welcoming me with open arms. I have found a deep love for Ikaria because I have seen its beauty through your eyes.

Additionally, I am so appreciative for the guidance of my academic supervisor, Professor Salvador Anton Clavé, with whom I have found a true kinship regarding our love of literature, and whose support in finding a project to best fit my own unique interests meant the world to me.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude for this entire experience, and to the staff of the faculties of Oenology, Tourism, and Geography at Universitat Rovira I Virgili, the Institute of Vine and Wine Science at the Université de Bordeaux, and the faculties of Sciences and Letters at Universidade do Porto. It has been a challenging, yet illuminating experience that I will remember for the rest of my life.

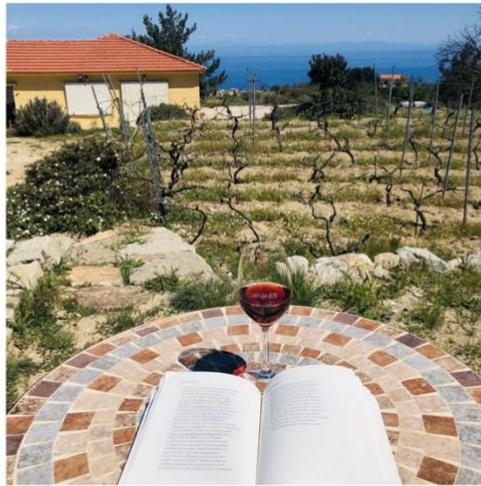
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Annexes

A1: Blog post excerpt, from *Words and Wine and a Wandering Mind*.



*A glass of delicious Afianes wine and poetry by Jack Gilbert,
another American enamored by Greece.*

So, what does this have to do with the world of wine? I fell in love with wine because I fell in love with stories, and wine is, essentially, a story. At its core, it is a basic tale of transformation, from sweet hanging fruit to a seemingly magical elixir that has sustained the human race for millennia. Each bottle holds its own memories: imprints from the harvest year encapsulated within its glass, remnants of its land that linger longingly. A vestige and a testament of its very own metamorphosis. If we are keen enough to listen, wine tells us a story as riveting as any storybook, and invites us in just as warmly. It is a visceral sort of storytelling that travels through the body, absorbing and engaging, enthralling and maddening us, bringing color to our cheeks and joy to our lives.



A2: Email response from *Wine Enthusiast* editorial team.



Layla Schlack <lschlack@wineenthusiast.net>

to Mary ▾

Wed, May 26, 3:59 PM (6 days ago)



Hi Mary,

Thank you for following up. The digital team was absolutely interested in this, and I think Kristen Richard should be in touch shortly!

Best,
Layla

--

Layla Schlack

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A3: Aerial photo of Afianes Wines.



A4: Photo of the traditional *pithari*, where the natural wines are fermented and aged underground in clay amphoras.



A5: Photo of manual pressing of the grapes in the traditional granite stone press, called *patitiri*.



A6: Photo of a recently filled *pithari*, before being sealed shut with beeswax.



A7: Photo depicting traditional Greek music in the *Dionysian* theatre at Afianes Wines.

