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Adapting Authenticity:

The Role of Linguistic and Symbolic Choices in Greek Wine Labels

MA Thesis: Intercultural Communication

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Abstract

This research examines the complex interplay among commerce, culture, and language by analyzing Greek wine labels. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, this study conducts in-depth interviews with three winemakers to explore how linguistic elements and cultural symbols on labels are used to manage the dual objectives of preserving cultural authenticity and appealing to global markets. Six theoretical frameworks were used to support this thesis, including: Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, 1934 & Blumer, 1969), Commodification of Culture (Cohen, 1988), Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1984), Authenticity Theory (Trilling, 1972), Staged Authenticity (MacCannell, 1979) and Semiotics Theory (Saussure, 1916 & Peirce, 1931). These theories collectively shed light on how linguistic choices on wine labels contribute to both cultural identity and commercial success, through the use of techniques like the commodification of culture. The significance of this research lies in its investigation into the cultural aspects of global commerce, focusing specifically on how cultural authenticity is maintained alongside market demands, despite its negotiable character. In particular, winemakers use transliterated Greek names and symbols, sometimes stereotypically, as well as traditional motifs, national colors, and toponyms, to appeal to an international market while promoting aspects of Greek culture. The findings indicate that Greek winemakers strategically utilize language and symbols not only to uphold cultural identity but also to cater to the linguistic preferences of diverse consumer groups. On the other hand, they sometimes use foreign names and expressions on the label to create cultural capital specifically in the Greek market, thereby giving their wines a prestigious character. This study not only deepens our understanding of semiotic and cultural negotiations in label design but also provides practical insights for marketers seeking to enhance cultural relevance in label communication.

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Introduction

At the dawn of the 21st century, the world has witnessed an unprecedented acceleration in global interconnectedness, facilitated by advancements in trade, investment, and technology (Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2018). This global integration has brought distinct cultures into closer contact, particularly evident in the international trade of cultural commodities like wine. Wine, as a product, offers a unique perspective into how nations communicate culturally and economically on a global stage. Greek wine labels, the focus of this thesis, are not merely marketing tools but potent symbols of cultural identity and heritage. This research aims to dissect the nuanced interplay of commerce, culture, and language as reflected through the prism of wine labels. The study explores how linguistic choices and cultural symbols on Greek wine labels reflect broader global communication dynamics and cultural representations.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the strategic decisions Greek winemakers make regarding the linguistic features and symbols of their wine labels and how these decisions balance the dual imperatives of preserving cultural authenticity while appealing to an international audience. This study is grounded in six theoretical perspectives: Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, 1934 & Blumer, 1969), Commodification of Culture (Cohen, 1988), Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1984), Authenticity Theory (Trilling, 1972), Staged Authenticity (MacCannell, 1979) and Semiotics Theory (Saussure, 1916 & Peirce, 1931). Qualitative interviews with three winemakers, based in Greece but exporting their products to diverse markets, provide detailed insights into cultural authenticity and representation in practice. The theoretical framework examines the strategic linguistic choices made to attract or repel specific consumer markets and analyses how

winemakers may adapt their communication strategies to match the implicit communication styles favored in various cultural markets.

The primary research question posed is: How do Greek winemakers balance the preservation of cultural authenticity with the adaptation of linguistic and symbolic choices on wine labels to attract diverse markets? This is complemented by two equally important sub-questions, which are the reason why the researcher chose this topic: “Why do Greek winemakers promote their wines in international markets using Greek transliterated words on the labels?” and “Why do they use labels with foreign names in the Greek market?”

This thesis begins with a brief overview of the researcher's reflexivity, followed by a literature review serving as a foundational backbone, situating the current study within the broader academic dialogue. Subsequently, the theoretical chapter defines essential concepts like symbolic interactionism, commodification of culture, cultural capital, authenticity theory, staged authenticity and semiotics theory, connecting them to the research topic. The methodology section then outlines the detailed procedures of this study. This is followed by a combined section presenting the results and discussion from the data analysis. The thesis concludes with a final chapter that provides key findings and offers recommendations for practical applications.

Researcher's reflexivity

As the principal investigator of this study, my personal journey deeply influences the framework and interpretation of this research. Being of Greek heritage, I possess an intrinsic familiarity with the cultural nuances that define Greek identity, which is both an asset and a potential bias in the conduct of this study. My academic background in cultural studies and linguistics provides me with the tools to dissect and analyze language as a core component of cultural representation. However, my cultural proximity to the subject matter necessitates a vigilant awareness of the potential for subjective bias. For example, later in this study, the Cycladic door of Santorini will be mentioned as part of a label. I present this symbol as stereotypical because, to me, it seems that people use it intentionally, and it now holds a fixed meaning. However, it might also be a significant cultural aspect of the island, rather than just a stereotype. Meanwhile, being Greek myself, I have a deeper understanding of the terms ‘authenticity’ and ‘staged authenticity,’ which will be introduced later, when it comes to Greek examples. This background allows me to compare examples from Greek reality, evaluate them, and determine whether they align with the notion of authenticity or staged authenticity. Furthermore, as this study involves cultural representations, there is an inherent responsibility to portray the cultural elements discussed with respect and accuracy, avoiding cultural stereotyping or commodification.

Moreover, all participants in my study are either personal friends or family acquaintances and as a result, this close relationship facilitated a level of trust that encouraged them to share some of their long-term plans with me. For example, one of the participants told me that within the next five years, he intends to launch a wine called “Roditis” (Greek: Ροδίτης), using the Greek letter “δ,” which is globally recognized. Thus, the final label would include the name “Roδitis.”

However, to maintain the academic integrity and objectivity of my thesis, I do not intend to use this information as factual data. The aim of my research is to base the findings on recent and verifiable events. If it is necessary to refer to any of the information shared that came up because of my personal relationship with the participant, I will make sure to present it clearly as the winemaker's intentions for the future and not as facts that have already happened. In this way, the thesis remains grounded in accurate data while acknowledging potential future developments as intentions rather than established facts.

Additionally, being a part of the Greek wine community myself, I have a deep understanding of the complicated difficulties encountered by these people, at least the ones living in my region. Having this background enables me to analyse the data with greater comprehension of the cultural, social, and economic factors that impact winemaking methods. It enables me to examine the data collected from participants from a distinct viewpoint, drawing on my own experiences working in vineyards. This ensures that the findings are not only precise but also enhanced with a contextual understanding that outsiders would overlook. In that way, by integrating my specialised knowledge and ensuring a clear differentiation between personal opinions and factual evidence, I reinforce the academic validity of my thesis. On the other hand, for instance, when discussing the impact and importance of Greek names on wine labels, my own admiration for this might have influenced my questions, my tone, and the way I examined the data afterward. Although this attitude and knowledge helped me better understand the complex thoughts behind winemakers' decisions, I also risked leading the participants to give me the responses I was aiming to get, as, during the interviews, I used notable Greek wine labels that caught my attention as examples to help them understand the initial question.

Finally, this thesis has notable limitations, primarily because it examines only the perspectives of winemakers, and specifically, just three of them, resulting in an extremely small sample size. This narrow focus is a significant constraint, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Despite this limitation, it was the only feasible approach available to comply with the university's guidelines and regulations for the thesis and additionally, it was the easiest solution for me, as I have a background in the Greek wine industry and had acquaintances who I was confident would participate. For now, the findings of this thesis contribute to the ongoing discussion and provide a foundation for further inquiry into the intersection of cultural authenticity and market dynamics in the wine industry.

Literature review

Introduction

Wine labels go beyond their practical function of identifying the contents of a bottle and instead become invaluable cultural artefacts that convey a significant amount of symbolic information. This literature review examines the semiotic elements of wine labelling, exploring how labels function as conduits for cultural symbols and impact consumer perceptions, expectations and behaviours. Utilising a range of scholarly research, this review specifically examines the unique point where language, culture, and marketing intersect. The review is structured topically, examining important components such as design features, authenticity, customer perceptions, and the significance of semiotics in wine marketing. However, a strong and concrete connection between these topics and Greek wines, in particular, is missing.

Semiotic elements in wine label design

Williams (2018) investigated how Millennials perceive various design elements on wine labels, highlighting the subconscious influence of icons, symbols, fonts, and colours on their evaluation of the worth and quality of wine. Williams posits that visual and textual components function as semiotic conveyors, transmitting messages pertaining to the historical background, excellence, and brand recognition of wine. The study highlights the importance of wine producers creating labels that effectively connect with specific target audiences, using semiotics to improve the way the brand is perceived.

Moreover, Celhay and Remaud (2017) created a semiotic analysis of Bordeaux wine labels, examining how visual codes and elements convey authenticity and quality to consumers. Their

study reveals that conventional components, such as images of chateaux and classical fonts, strengthen the perception of heritage and excellence. This study indicates that these visual codes remain consistent among various consumer demographics, emphasising their significance in communicating cultural authenticity. This affirms the notion that conventional designs can convey a feeling of history and excellence, attracting a wide range of people.

Authenticity and consumer perceptions

When it comes to authenticity, Pelet, Durrieu, and Lick (2020) investigated the impact of perceived authenticity on consumers' intents to purchase wines through online platforms. According to their study, labels that are well-designed and successfully communicate authenticity have a significant influence on customers' willingness to purchase, making these labels more likely to succeed. The research emphasises the critical importance of label design in the context of online purchasing, particularly when the buyer can not touch, feel, or see the product in person. As a result, authenticity plays a crucial role in shaping the consumer's decision-making process, and it is efficiently conveyed via well-crafted visual and verbal elements. Finally, this underscores the need of developing labels that can efficiently convey authenticity, especially in digital markets.

Meanwhile, Beverland (2006) examines the notion of branding authenticity in the premium wine sector. The research highlights the way in which producers use historical narratives and traditional production methods in order to establish authentic brand identities. The research also suggests that authenticity is a key factor in differentiating goods in the luxury wine sector, as buyers are willing to pay higher costs for wines that embody cultural and historical elements. Beverland's research highlights the significance of preserving genuineness in branding to attract

perceptive consumers, indicating that a skilfully constructed storyline can augment perceived worth.

At the same time, Sherman and Tuten (2011) examine the impact of various wine label designs and brand name practices on customer perceptions and purchasing behaviour. Their study utilises a 3x3 factorial design to investigate the effects of classic, contemporary, and novelty label designs in combination with different brand naming practices. The results indicate that conventional designs are associated with better levels of quality and trustworthiness, whereas contemporary and novelty designs are more appealing to younger groups that are looking for distinctiveness and modernity. This study emphasises the crucial significance of label design in influencing customer behaviour and brand perception, suggesting that distinct designs might effectively target particular consumer segments.

Finally, in their 2017 publication, Messer, Costanigro, and Kaiser conduct a thorough examination of the consequences of food process labelling, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of various labelling approaches. They stress the importance of being clear and transparent in order to prevent misleading consumers. The authors contend that process labels have the potential to fill in gaps in information, but they can also unfairly stigmatise specific manufacturing techniques without any scientific basis. This paper examines the ethical considerations and practical obstacles involved in creating food labels that are both successful and honest. It also draws attention to the importance of clear and transparent labelling in the wine sector, which shares similarities with the food industry.

Branding strategies and cultural identity

Vlachvei, Notta, and Efterpi (2012) examine the branding tactics utilised by Greek wine producers, emphasising the incorporation of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) quality indicators as crucial components in branding. Greek winemakers utilise international wine exhibition prizes and electronic communication platforms to augment brand recognition. The results indicate that Greek wine producers should embrace a more sophisticated strategy for establishing their brand, with a specific emphasis on intangible factors that have an impact on customer decision-making. This highlights the significance of strategic branding in improving market visibility and fostering consumer confidence.

Tsiakis et al. (2022) investigate the utilisation of toponymy, which refers to the usage of place names on labels, by Greek wineries to convey the characteristics of the specific geographic region and the genuineness of their products. The study reveals that the inclusion of historical notions, location names, and descriptive language on wine labels has a substantial influence on customer involvement and their judgements of the wine's quality. Utilising toponymy aids in expressing a distinct geographical location and cultural heritage, so augmenting the perceived worth of the wine. This study emphasises the significance of regional variables in establishing brand identification and fostering consumer loyalty.

Consumer preferences and market strategies

Investigating the Greek reality in the wine industry, Tzimitra-Kalogianni et al. (1999) examine how consumers in Northern Greece perceive several characteristics of wine, with a focus on taste, clarity, appellation of origin, scent, and label design. The study indicates that in order to

improve consumer perceptions and preferences, wine promotion practices should prioritise these traits. The findings underscore the necessity for additional market research to enhance wine promotion efforts, both domestically in Greece and on a global scale. This signifies that comprehending consumer preferences is essential for formulating efficient marketing strategies.

Conclusion

The literature study emphasises the importance of wine labels as cultural artefacts that effectively communicate symbolic messages about the wine's origin, quality, and heritage. When these symbols convey a sense of authenticity, consumers' trust and brand identity are enhanced, making wines with cultural representations more appealing and unique. Semiotic analysis reveals that the visual and verbal components found on wine labels significantly impacts how consumers perceive the product, supporting its cultural authenticity, and affecting their purchasing decisions. The findings from these studies offer a strong foundation for future research on the cultural and semiotic aspects of wine labelling. They identify areas where evidence is currently insufficient or conflicting, indicating that future studies should prioritise these gaps to enhance our overall understanding of the semiotic influence of wine labels.

To conclude, this thesis provides concrete cases of how Greek language elements, traditional symbols, and regional identifiers are used to attract both local and foreign consumers, in contrast to previous studies that mostly concentrated on generic semantic or branding concepts for non-Greek wines, like Celhay and Remaud's (2017) work on Bordeaux wines. Furthermore, based on the studies mentioned above, this paper establishes connections between concepts such as authenticity (Pelet et al., 2020 & Beverland, 2006), variations in expectations based on age groups (Williams, 2018), and semiotic elements, with issues such as the utilisation of PDO or PGI

terms on labels (Vlachvei et al., 2012), as well as the inclusion of toponyms (Tsiakis et al., 2022), exclusively concentrating, for the first time, on Greek wines. The study offers a detailed analysis of how market dynamics influence cultural representation and provides a sophisticated understanding of how tradition and modernity interact in wine marketing. This addresses a significant gap in the current literature on cultural commodification and authenticity in global trade. As a result, the study is a valuable resource for winemakers and marketing professionals in the wine industry.

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This section outlines a comprehensive theoretical framework grounded in six major sociological and communication theories, including: symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934 & Blumer, 1969), commodification of culture (Cohen, 1988), cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), authenticity theory (Trilling, 1972), staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1979) and semiotics theory (Saussure, 1916 & Peirce, 1931). These theories are instrumental in dissecting the intricate balance Greek winemakers must strike between preserving cultural authenticity and modifying linguistic choices on wine labels to suit diverse global markets. The framework offers a strong foundation for analysing the particular example of Greek wine labels, enabling a thorough investigation into how cultural components are conveyed and understood across various consumer groups, as well as identifying strategies to promote authenticity.

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism, established by George Herbert Mead and subsequently expanded upon by Herbert Blumer, focuses on the subjective interpretations that individuals assign to objects, events, and behaviours. As stated by Blumer, “humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). This idea suggests that these meanings originate from social interactions and undergo modification via interpretation. Mead's concepts highlight the significance of social interaction in the formation of individual identity, the ‘self’ and the functioning of society. He claims, “the self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity” (Mead,

1934, p. 135). This emphasises the ever-changing quality of identity and significance as outcomes of social interaction.

Blumer (1988) argues that symbolic interactionism has three core principles: meaning, language, and thought. Meaning is derived from interaction with others, and language enables people to negotiate and communicate these meanings, while their thoughts adapt and understand them. “The meaning of things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows” (Blumer, 1969, p. 4). In the context of Greek winemakers, symbolic interactionism can be seen in the meanings ascribed to wine labels, as symbols and names can carry significant cultural meaning. Moreover, symbolic interactionism helps explain how consumers interpret and respond to these labels. Consumers' views on authenticity and quality are influenced by their social interactions and cultural settings. The labels serve as representations that communicate the cultural and historical importance of the wines, influencing customer decisions and reactions.

Semiotic theory

An additional theory that is inextricably linked to symbolism is the semiotic theory. While symbolic interactionism focuses on social interactions and the subjective meaning derived from them, semiotics encompasses the study of signs and symbols in all types of communication, not only confined to social interactions. The field of semiotics, which focuses on the analysis of signs and symbols, was established by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure proposed that the connection between a signifier (the form of a word or image) and the signified (the concept that it signifies) is random yet collectively accepted throughout society. Peirce further

developed this concept by introducing the notion of the interpretant, which refers to the observer's comprehension of the sign (Saussure, 1916 & Peirce, 1931).

Saussure's dyadic concept of the sign, consisting of the signifier and the signified, highlights the idea that meaning is formed via the use of language and societal agreements. Peirce's triadic model incorporates the concept of the interpretant, acknowledging that meaning is not static but rather subject to interpretation by people within specific contexts. Saussure indicates, "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image" (Saussure, 1916, p. 66). Peirce further explains this concept by proposing the notion that signs are comprehended within a semiotic triangle consisting of the sign itself (representamen), the object it represents (referent), and the interpretant (the understanding or interpretation of the sign). Semiotics is used in wine labelling to communicate cultural and regional identity, while symbols, colors, and names on labels act as signifiers of the wine's origin and quality, as well as its cultural history and authenticity.

Authenticity and staged authenticity

Lionel Trilling's Authenticity Theory delves into the notion of adhering to one's true personality and original background. Trilling (1972, p. 93) asserts, "To be authentic is to be genuine, to be true to oneself." This idea differentiates between true authenticity and the performative elements of exhibiting authenticity, as it represents dedication to honesty and uniqueness, rejecting shallow or artificial portrayals. Trilling asserts that authenticity is not only a superficial adherence to societal standards, but rather an interior harmony with one's genuine self and cultural background. This theory will be used to assess the degree to which Greek wine labels accurately represent the cultural heritage and identity of the winemakers, as opposed to being a

deliberately crafted image intended to attract foreign markets. For instance, this study will look at how winemakers use traditional Greek names, symbols, and narratives on their labels to maintain an authentic connection to their heritage, or if they deliberately choose to do otherwise.

Added to that, Dean MacCannell's concept of staged authenticity comes to supplement the previous theory, as it examines the deliberate curation of cultural events, especially in the context of tourism, for the sake of consumption. MacCannell explains, “to the degree that this packaging alters the nature of the product, the authenticity sought by the visitor becomes ‘staged authenticity’ provided by the host” (1979, p. 596). Staged authenticity refers to the deliberate presentation of cultural aspects in a manner that is intended to look genuine to those who are not part of that culture, frequently concealing the true nature of the culture being portrayed. This concept questions the idea of direct cultural encounters and emphasises the artificial character of most cultural displays. MacCannell's theory highlights the importance of cultural intermediaries, such as wineries, in influencing and promoting cultural goods. These intermediaries carefully select and present cultural aspects in a way that satisfies consumer expectations, using stereotypical symbols and expressions for instance, resulting in a constructed form of authenticity that may deviate from actual cultural practices.

Commodification of culture

Another theory connected to the notion of the staged authenticity is the commodification of culture, which refers to the process by which cultural symbols, traditions, and practices are packaged and sold as commodities. Erik Cohen (1988) introduces the concept of “emergent authenticity,” suggesting that what is initially perceived as contrived can become authentic over time, and therefore authenticity is negotiable. Cohen states, “a cultural product, or trait thereof,

which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognized as authentic” (Cohen, 1988, p. 279-280).

Cohen's framework suggests that cultural elements can gain legitimacy and authenticity through their acceptance and integration into everyday life. This process involves a negotiation between preserving traditional values and adapting to commercial demands. By examining specific wine labels in combination with Cohen's theory, this study will investigate how cultural elements like symbols, names, traditions, and practices are packaged and marketed. This also includes examining which of these elements are emphasized more and how they are presented on the label to better match up with consumer and client expectations. The analysis will investigate whether these cultural indicators are used authentically or if they have been altered in ways that may initially seem staged and unnatural for certain markets, such as the Greek market, but might eventually be accepted as genuine.

Cultural capital

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital is related to the non-financial social assets that boost social mobility. These assets include several aspects such as education, intelligence, style of speaking, clothing, and appearance. Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital plays a crucial role in sustaining and perpetuating inequality in society (Bourdieu, 1984). Cultural capital can be embodied (long-lasting behaviours of the mind and body), objectified (cultural goods), and institutionalized (academic qualifications). Bourdieu states, “Cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Bourdieu's approach highlights the significance of cultural capital for impacting social hierarchies and power relations. This statement emphasises

the use of cultural knowledge and abilities to acquire societal benefits, as well as the ability of cultural commodities, such as wine, to encapsulate and convey cultural capital.

Cultural capital enhances an individual's social status and is transmitted throughout generations, hence strengthening social hierarchies. Cultural capital has great importance in the wine sector, since it highly values expertise in wine, knowledge of its origins, and the customs associated with winemaking. Winemakers that hold and communicate this cultural capital via their labels and marketing strategies may increase the perceived worth and status of their wines. For example, in the case of Greek wines, a producer from the Naoussa region in Greece, where the PDO variety “Xinomavro” is produced, might choose to display the toponym, the variety, and specific characteristics of this grape on the label. By including this kind of information, the winemaker can communicate the cultural capital of the wine, enhancing its perceived worth, value, and authenticity, setting it apart from others from the same region.

Methodology

Introduction

In this section, the procedures followed to carry out this research will be thoroughly explained. Initially, information about the participants, participant selection and researcher reflexivity are provided, followed by a detailed description of the data collection and an overview of the interview content. Finally, this section presents the considerations that were considered when structuring the data analysis.

Participants

Qualitative semi-structured interviews are conducted with on three participants. Greek was used as the communication language and an average of thirty-one minutes was spent on each interview. All three of them were conducted via Microsoft Teams, chosen for its convenience in terms of time and distance, as well as its automated transcription feature for the Greek language, which was crucial in saving time and energy. When it comes to the participants, all individuals involved are affiliated with the wine industry, occupying roles either as winery owners or members of the marketing teams of such establishments. The criteria for selecting participants were guided by considerations such as the operational dynamics and scale of the wineries, their geographic dispersion, and the roles held by these individuals within each winery. It is worth acknowledging that prior to finalizing the selection of participants, a preliminary review of their respective websites was conducted to determine the presence of wine labels that exhibited particular linguistic elements and symbols deemed relevant to this thesis. Additionally, the participant selection was

limited to only three individuals, aiming to facilitate an in-depth investigation and thorough case study analysis within the constraints of the research timeframe.

An important note to be said about the participants and their relationship with the researcher: all participants come from Greece and are professionally active in the city where the researcher comes from. Consequently, it is likely that they had been acquainted for an extended duration prior to the initiation of this endeavour. The interviews and any information provided by the participants may have been biased due to their personal connections with the researcher, such as being fellow citizens, family acquaintances, or friends. A benefit of this interaction between participants and the researcher was that it fostered a feeling of intimacy throughout the interviews and enabled participants to express themselves openly and truthfully. As an individual with a profound passion for the wine industry, particularly as a Greek, stories and examples pertaining to the different types of wines and regions in Greece, as well as in general, were easily comprehensible even without extensive background knowledge. This facilitated a conversational ambiance during the interview and enabled a more comprehensive examination of the data. The objective of this study is to maintain a high level of impartiality, while still acknowledging the researcher's standpoint. The study will openly state any bias or impacted viewpoint that is important to maintain transparency while discussing the findings.

Data collection and processing

Firstly, an information letter was distributed among participants to help them gain sufficient comprehension of the research topic and what would be expected of them. The purpose of the research was reiterated to the participants at the commencement of the interview, and they were requested to grant permission to record the conversation for academic usage only. Verbal

consent was obtained, ensuring participants were aware of their rights, including anonymity and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews were performed remotely using the Teams platform, with both audio and video recordings. The primary focus of the interviews was to investigate various aspects related to the balance between cultural authenticity and market adaptation in Greek wine labeling. Firstly, an information letter was distributed among participants to help them gain sufficient comprehension of the research topic and what would be expected of them. The purpose of the research was reiterated to the participants at the commencement of the interview, and they were requested to grant permission to record the conversation for academic usage only. Verbal consent was obtained, ensuring participants were aware of their rights, including anonymity and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews were performed remotely using the Teams platform, with both audio and video recordings. The primary focus of the interviews was to investigate various aspects related to the balance between cultural authenticity and market adaptation in Greek wine labeling.

At the start of the interviews, the researcher presented the notion of cultural authenticity within the framework of Greek wines. The participants were then prompted to discuss their winery's approach to maintaining cultural authenticity while also accommodating international market cultures. The participants engaged in a conversation on the reasons over the use of Greek names, whether in transliterated or translated form, and the consequences of these choices on their branding strategy. In addition, participants were asked on the importance of Greek letters and their impact on consumer views and they provided instances of linguistic and visual components that they consider enhancing the cultural authenticity of wine labels. Participants also discussed the deliberate use of typical Greek cultural elements or stereotypes in their wine labels to attract and connect with consumers, both in the Greek market and abroad, as shown in [Appendix 1](#). Due to

the semi-structured nature of the interviews, supplementary questions were posed in response to the information supplied by the participants. Additionally, participants provided examples of various labels during the interviews to support their statements. These labels were collected and compiled into a corpus, as shown in [Appendix 2](#). This corpus allowed the researcher to visualize the examples the participants discussed and use these labels for greater precision.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed using the Teams transcription tool. Given the small sample size of three interviews, the analysis was conducted manually to ensure a more nuanced understanding of the data. Based on the responses, four main categories were identified: cultural authenticity and market adaptation, linguistic choices, symbolism and visual elements and consumer perceptions and expectations. Each interview was revisited multiple times to highlight quotes relevant to each category as this process ensured that all significant themes and patterns were captured. By following this data collection and processing methodology, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives, thoughts and procedures on maintaining cultural authenticity in wine labeling while meeting global market demands, giving also an explanation behind the use of transliterated names in international markets and foreign names in the Greek market.

Results and discussion

This section delves into the practical and real-life experiences of Greek winemakers as reflected in their wine labeling practices. It connects these experiences to the following aspects of cultural authenticity and market dynamics: cultural authenticity and market adaptation, linguistic choices, symbolism and visual elements and consumer perceptions and expectations. The main focus lies on making these concepts less abstract by illustrating how they are influenced by the real-life decisions and challenges faced by the participants of this study. By grounding the analysis in concrete examples from the interviews, this section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate balance between maintaining cultural heritage and adapting to the demands of the global wine market, in combination with the theoretical framework already presented in the relevant section.

Before providing a definition of the term “cultural authenticity” and thoroughly delving into it, it is important to clarify once again the term authenticity. MacCannell (1979) first introduced the idea of “staged authenticity” in the context of tourism. He observed that hosts present and sometimes commodify their culture, including themselves, to create an attractive package for tourists. MacCannell explains, “to the degree that this packaging alters the nature of the product, the authenticity sought by the visitor becomes ‘staged authenticity’ provided by the host” (1979, p.596). This concept illustrates how tourists, in their search for authentic experiences, often end up encountering a curated version of reality. According to MacCannell, these experiences cannot be deemed authentic, even if participants believe they are (Wang 1999).

In contrast, Crick argues that all cultures are, to some extent, “staged” and thus inherently inauthentic. He states, “Cultures are invented, remade and the elements reorganized” (Crick 1989,

p.65). Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) provide numerous examples showing how newly created cultural practices can become important traditions over time, with their origins either forgotten or idealized. Cohen introduces the term “emergent authenticity” to describe this evolutionary process, suggesting that authenticity is “negotiable.” He notes, “a cultural product, or trait thereof, which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognized as authentic” (1988, p.279-280). This discussion on staged authenticity provides a comprehensive understanding of how cultural representations evolve and are perceived. Therefore, the cultural authenticity referred to in this study might itself be a product of staged authenticity that has occurred over previous years, making it nearly impossible to deem it inaccurate or staged at this point. Finally, it is important to highlight the profound interconnectedness between the theories used to elucidate the results and the four different categories into which the findings have been categorised. There could be situations when certain results can be assigned to many theories or categories that go beyond their original allocations. Nevertheless, the distribution was carried out in a discerning manner, guaranteeing that the results were assigned to the categories and theories that are most closely associated.

Cultural authenticity and adaptation

To begin with, this section aims to answer the primary research question by highlighting the significant meaning of expressing Greek culture in wine labels, driven by both personal pride and market demands. Over the years, researchers typically define authenticity as being ‘original’ (Newman & Bloom, 2012) or being ‘true to the self or identity’ (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). A more concrete definition can be given to cultural authenticity, as being authentic and faithful to the cultural traditions, values, and heritage of a specific community. It includes the faithful

representation and preservation of cultural aspects, avoiding their weakening or distortion, especially when faced with external influences or economic exploitation, without this implying that they do not constitute cultural capital (Bordeaux, 1986). In the realm of Greek wine labels, cultural authenticity pertains to the precise and respectful portrayal of a wine's cultural lineage, including the traditions, history, and regional characteristics associated with its production (Beverland, 2006). This includes the visual and verbal components on the label that communicate the wine's source, the techniques used in its production, and the cultural importance of its location. Nevertheless, winemakers aiming to promote this wine on a global scale encounter crucial choices that have the potential to modify these elements. According to the interview findings, contemporary winemakers are placing a growing emphasis on preserving and expressing their cultural legacy. They place great emphasis on the significance of showcasing Greek culture via their wine labels, as seen in Quote 1.

Quote 1

“We are interested in expressing our culture outwardly. For example, our traditions and generally our character. That’s what has made us what we are today.”

Participants also underscored the deep pride Greek producers take in their identity. This pride in Greek heritage drives their decisions regarding wine labeling, ensuring that the essence of Greek culture is effectively communicated through their products. Their commitment to the expression of their culture, their unique and real culture through traditions, implies the use of symbols to promote their authenticity.

Quote 2

“I think that we, Greek producers, are very proud of our Greek identity, and we all try to promote our Greekness and maintain this cultural differentiation.”

This sentiment reflects a strong inclination towards preserving cultural authenticity, driven by both personal pride and market forces. In addition, quote number two also exemplifies Trilling's (1972) focus on retaining authenticity and being loyal to one's cultural heritage, even in the face of market forces, thereby highlighting the importance of being genuine. Market dynamics and customer demands also play a significant role. For instance, there was a period where French and Spanish wines were highly popular in Greece, because of their supreme status and quality. Following that period, there emerged a strong inclination to maintain the Greek authenticity, significantly influenced, once again, by market dynamics:

Quote 3

“When the first exports began...the customer said, ‘I'm not interested in those [foreign wines]. Give me a 100% Xinomavro¹, give me a 100% Assyrtiko². So, the market essentially guides us.”

This shift illustrates how market demand has reinforced the focus on Greek cultural elements, leading to a resurgence in the promotion of indigenous grape varieties and regional identities. In theory, these wines have always been authentic, since they are produced from a fully Greek variety, without blending. However, they could also be seen as commodities, created by emerging authenticity driven by market forces and trends (Cohen, 1988). After Greek winemakers recognized that the market favored local Greek varieties over blended ones, they engaged in discussions to develop a strategy for preserving and successfully promoting their unique culture. One participant stated:

¹ “Xinomavro” is the principal red wine grape of the uplands of Naoussa in the regional unit of Imathia, and around Amyntaio, in Macedonia, Greece.

² “Assyrtiko” is a white Greek wine grape indigenous to the island of Santorini.

Quote 4

“We made the strategic plan, set it as a goal for Greek wine, and today we are able to talk about recognizable Greek varieties and regions like Naoussa, Santorini, Kefalonia, etc.”

This comes to supplement the previous statement. Indeed, following the change in market demand towards Greek varieties, it seems that Greek producers have cooperated, during a conference about creating common marketing plans, for northern winemakers held in 2010, so that through the strong symbolism of well-known Greek wine-producing regions like Nemea, Naoussa, Kefalonia etc., they have been able to create a cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and enhance the perceived value of their wines. In the case of Naoussa, for instance, when it comes to 100% Xinomavro wine, the winemakers have agreed to use exclusively Burgundy-type bottles, and to use the words “Naoussa” and “Xinomavro” in clear letters on the front of the label. In this way, a homogenized and consistent wine is created, which is now easily recognizable and stands out on the shelves. However, the balance between cultural authenticity and market appeal is complex. The third participant mentions the challenge of aligning traditional Greek elements with modern market expectations. For instance, while labels including traditional Greek female names like “Amalia” (Greek: Αμαλία) are maintained for their strong brand recognition, their strong Greek identity and symbolism, newer products like “Dilofos” (Greek: Δίλοφος), meaning “Two Hills”, are introduced with French names to appeal to different consumer bases, as “Deux Collines.” The participant explains:

Quote 5

“The name ‘Deux Collines’ has a significant semantic uniqueness for us... When we rebranded the wine, we included the name ‘Collines’ in the title to help with storytelling.”

The winemaker in question produces a wine called “Deux Collines”, featuring a blend of “Cabernet Sauvignon”, “Merlot”, and “Kolliniatiko.” “Kolliniatiko” is a variety cultivated in a region named “Kollines³”, which is located in close proximity to the winery. This geographic connection was emphasized by the participant in their narrative, noting that the French word “collines”, meaning hills, closely resembles the name of the Greek location. This intriguing detail captures the attention of wine enthusiasts and enriches the storytelling aspect of the wine's origin, for marketing purposes.

This is a clear example of a winery adapting to international markets by incorporating French names, while striving to maintain cultural authenticity. Moreover, it is yet another commodification of culture, but this time with staged authenticity. In this case, the winery is trying to give prestige to the wine and create a strong cultural capital by using a French name, technique that is unfamiliar to the audience in Greece. From the context during the interview, it was understood that the goal is to create a strong line of Greek wines with French names, which in the long run will be recognized as authentic in the Greek market, and beyond. In other words, they are trying to transform the foreign, for Greek standards, symbolism of French words into a normality and authenticity in the Greek market, bringing these wines in contact with the Greek buying public, through the process of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). The ultimate goal is to create a strong objectified cultural capital that will make these wines different from the rest. However, it is important to highlight the effort to express Greek culture and authenticity through the association of French words with Greek, confirming what was said in Quote 1 and 2.

³ Kollines (Greek: Κολλίνες) is a village and a community in the municipal unit of Skiritida, Arcadia, Greece.

One more instance of Greek winemakers' commitment to preserving Greek cultural elements on their wine labels is exemplified by the case of “Ble Tracter.” In the English edition, the winery's name is prominently displayed at the top of the label, with Greek lettering presented in an elegant and detailed font. This intentional decision highlights the focus on preserving cultural genuineness while also appealing to a wider, global audience. That example would probably fit better in the ‘Symbolism and Visual Elements’ section, but the producer in the course of the



interview shared the mindset behind the design of the label, making it more suitable for this section. In particular, the participant said:

Quote 6

“We had a very big discussion internally about whether to write it in Greek or in English. I said: listen guys, we're going to write ‘Kir-Yianni’ above in handwriting in a nice way and below it will be the dubbed version. At the top it will be written in Greek because it's basically the symbol and it highlights the Greekness of the product and underneath it will say the name in Latin.”

The example of “Ble Tracter” demonstrates the commitment of Greek winemakers to maintain the traditional Greek aspects in their wine labels, even when they address an international audience. The given instance illustrates the use of semiotics, symbolic and visual components, to maintain cultural authenticity while simultaneously attracting a wider audience. The producer’s choice to prominently use Greek letters on the label also emphasizes the significance of cultural identity in branding.

Overall, the conclusions drawn from these quotes indicate that Greek winemakers are committed to preserving cultural authenticity, either by using staged (MacCannell, 1979) and emergent authenticity (Cohen, 1988) techniques , like the “Deux Collines” example, or staying

true to the original Greek culture (Trilling 1972), like the winery's name written in the Greek script. They achieve this by carefully selecting semiotic elements like names in this case, that reflect Greek culture while also considering market trends and consumer preferences. This balanced approach allows them to maintain their cultural identity while remaining competitive in the global market. Moreover, the example of the "Amalia" label illustrates how cultural authenticity can be preserved in international markets through consistent branding that emphasizes Greek origins. By using Latin characters for a Greek name that is easily pronounceable by non-Greek speakers, it's immediately differentiated from other wines and a potential objectified cultural capital is on the making.

Linguistic choices

This section will investigate one of the sub-questions, specifically focusing more on the use of transliterated names in international markets. The language selections used on wine labels are of utmost importance in effectively communicating authenticity and attracting a wide range of consumers. Greek winemakers have the difficulty of striking a balance between using Greek and other languages to accommodate the needs of both local and global customers. Two of the three wineries included in this research use French names for their labels. A participant offered an explanation, expressing:

Quote 7

"Our winery's philosophy is very close to France since my father made all his steps there. He studied oenology in France [...] he worked on his first wines there and brought the French culture to Arcadia⁴. French names were always in his mind."

⁴ Location in Peloponnese, Greece.

It is obvious that the participant's father, influenced by French culture after his stay there, attempts to blend French and Greek culture. Of course, this may be a case of commodification of the two cultures (Gohen, 1988) , since a French label for a Greek wine cannot theoretically be considered authentic for the time being, but as mentioned above, over time it may be considered an emerging authenticity. From a historical point of view, interviews revealed that during the 1970s and 1980s, many Greek winemakers traveled to France to study oenology and begin their careers in the wine industry. Upon returning to Greece, they infused their wines with French practices and culture, including the adoption of French names, some of which persist to this day. However, as acknowledged, over the years, there has been a shift back towards Greek cultural elements, and French names are now considered entirely foreign. Following that period, there emerged a strong inclination to maintain cultural authenticity, significantly influenced by market dynamics:

Quote 8

“In the 80s, all Greek wineries were trying to have a French flair... Then in the 90s, there came a revolution of small producers who, while still using Greek names, were trying to stand out because that's what the Greek market demanded.”

This shift emphasises the significance of language in mirroring cultural identity and market preferences and perhaps it is at this moment that wine producers realized the need of establishing a solid cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) for wine, achieved via the manifestation of Greek authenticity (Trilling, 1972). The adoption of Greek names and terms is not merely a trend but a reflection of a deeper cultural pride and a strategic response to market demand. The same participant mentioned:

Quote 9

“A wine that I call 'two olives' in Greek [Greek: Δύο Ελιές] will not be called ‘Two Olives’ but will be called ‘Dio Elies’, and whoever understood, good for them.”

This approach emphasises the symbolic significance of the Greek language in branding. The use of Greek vocabulary, even when transcribed in the Latin script, imparts a sense of genuineness and distinctiveness that sets Greek wines apart in the international market. Furthermore, another participant emphasises the intentional decision to use Greek names, even when transliterated, a practice sometimes referred to as “Greeklish”⁵, in order to preserve cultural authenticity. The individual asserts:

Quote 10

“Our main product, which is ‘Naoussa’, is released in the market as ‘Kokkinos Naoussa Xinomavro’, which is a completely Greek name with the PDO⁶ Naoussa and our surname.”

However, the use of Greeklish is a threat for the Greek language and its heritage, as “‘Greeklish’ became widely known in the 1990s, was read as a ‘danger’ to the Greek language at the turn of the century, but is still widely used today” (Androutsopoulos, 2016, p.221). The promotion of labels in this script should in no way be seen as something authentically Greek. Instead, it should be seen as a way of commercializing Greek culture, or perhaps as a staged authenticity that cannot be characterized as emerging, since Greeks themselves have not fully accepted it to date. Furthermore, according to the world regulations on wine names, and the semiotic elements that must be on a label, when it comes to a wine from a PDO or PGI⁷ variety,

⁵ A system for transliterating Greek into the Latin alphabet, either phonetically (for example, transliterating ‘Νίκη’ as ‘Niki’) or orthographically (for example, transliterating ‘Νίκη’ as ‘Nikh’)

⁶ Protected Designation of Origin

⁷ Protected Geographical Indication

the wine maker is obliged to present on the label the place where the wine was created, for example, as shown in a previous quote, Naoussa or Santorini. This helps to make it more apparent that the wine is Greek, and by extension helps to make it appear culturally authentic. On the other hand, another authentic solution to this matter, as one participant emphasizes, is the strategic use of bilingual labels across all markets to cater to diverse audiences and enhance inclusivity within the Greek market, thereby attracting a broader range of visitors:

Quote 11

“In Greece, we have Greek on the front and bilingual on the back, and for exports, English on the front and on the back, the same bilingual label.”

This practice ensures that Greek cultural elements are preserved while also meeting regulatory and consumer expectations in different regions. This is also happening for financial reason, as one participant states:

Quote 12

“It’s cheaper to use the same labels. Some winemakers use bilingual labels with Greek and English, but not always. It’s not common to use Greek characters abroad.”

In rare instances, as noted by the participants during the interviews, some producers prefer to have a single label for all markets, which is either bilingual or even trilingual. In such cases, the Greek name and script are prominently displayed to stand out. A notable example is the label “Earth and Sky,” where the Greek name “Yi kai Ouranos” («Γη και Ουρανός») is presented in a larger font, followed by the English translation, and then the French “Terre et



Ciel.” This approach ensures inclusivity while giving the impression, through the use of different fonts, that certain languages—and by extension, cultures—are prioritized. However, as in the previous case, such a label lacks authenticity, as it presents the commodification of three languages, so that it appears as a prestigious wine, creating a strong objectified cultural capital, accessible to a wider audience. After all the interviews, it is clear that the use of terms and words in different languages, especially in French, which is a country with a very strong presence in the wine industry, implies adding some kind of prestige and quality to the wine.

Contrary to this approach, and in alignment with the philosophy discussed earlier concerning Greek winemakers who pursued their education in France, numerous Greek wines in the domestic market bear French and English names. This practice imparts a distinctive character to the wines and suggests that they are influenced by marketing and storytelling strategies. Given that English and, more so, French, have minimal similarities in script and pronunciation with Greek, these names appear entirely foreign. This observation is corroborated by the statements made by participants in the interviews. One of the wineries utilizing French names remarked:

Quote 13

“Our estate philosophy is very close to that of France... We wanted to continue this series with similar names. ‘Gris de nuit,’ meaning gray of the night, is essentially in the same storytelling category as ‘Blanc de Gris.’ Then, the rebranding of ‘Dilofos’ as ‘Deux Collines’ came to complete the trilogy.”

The adoption of foreign names for Greek wines is a strategic decision aimed at differentiating products in a crowded market, again hoping to create a staged authenticity that will eventually emerge and be accepted in the Greek market (Cohen, 1988). Wineries strategically use exotic and culturally significant names to create a compelling story that resonates with both local

and international customers, especially in a very tourist-oriented country like Greece. Furthermore, the inclusion of names in a theme series, as emphasised in the participant's statement, indicates that wineries feel that customers appreciate a consistent and uninterrupted narrative in wine branding. As a result, this consistent storytelling helps create a memorable and captivating brand encounter, reinforcing the bond between the product and its buyers.

Consequently, there is an implicit assumption that cultural authenticity is negotiable and can be eventually balanced with marketability. By integrating foreign elements into their branding, wineries might be prioritizing contemporary market trends over a strict adherence to cultural authenticity. This approach reflects a nuanced understanding that, in the global marketplace, the blending of authentic cultural elements with appealing foreign names can create a compelling and sophisticated brand identity that resonates broadly with diverse consumer bases. The following quote from a winemaker highlights the nuanced approach to using foreign names, illustrating the complex interplay between tradition, market logic, and personal preference:

Quote 14

“Yes, look, I released this product (‘L’esprit du Lac’) because there was an old product that we called “Lac des Roches.” So, this product had a certain logic, a “French” logic, let's say, and a bit of self-mockery. That's why I called it L'esprit du Lac.’ It was a very big exception because I do not usually use foreign names because I don't like that approach very much.”

The naming of “L’esprit du Lac” was influenced by an earlier product called “Lac des Roches”, indicating a continuity in branding that leverages historical recognition and established consumer familiarity. The winemaker's willingness, despite their commitment to using Greek names, to make an exception for “L’esprit du Lac” suggests that adapting to market demands, even when it contradicts personal preferences, can be necessary for commercial success. MacCannell's

(1979) concept claims that authenticity is often staged in order to construct a captivating and commercially viable storyline. Here, the winemaker's decision to use a French name and rationale serves as a conspicuous demonstration of deliberately staged authenticity. The product's presentation is designed to coincide with the aesthetic and cultural preferences of the target market. The winemaker chose the French name “L'esprit du Lac” to match an existing product line and to meet the expectations of a market that values French cultural characteristics more than Greek ones. This is not to say that this wine is generally not authentic, but when it comes to Greek culture, it is indeed not. It also demonstrates a conscious decision to carefully select and organise the presentation of the product to align with a particular story that will appeal to purchasers, thus creating a sense of authenticity for the product. However, this strategy does not always yield positive results. For instance, in the case of the rebranding of the former “Dilofos” («Δίλοφος») label to “Deux Collines,” the change was met with dissatisfaction, as shared by one participant:

Quote 15

“‘Dilofos’ had become a classic wine. However, the French series (‘Deux Collines’) is more playful, targeting younger consumers, and the marketing reflects this playfulness. We observed that in some markets, traditional markets like in Cyprus, ‘Deux Collines’ did not do well. The French name was too foreign for them, and we faced similar issues in other countries with our French labels. This raised the question of why a Greek winery, which emphasizes Greek varieties, would adopt such an approach. Our analysis revealed a correlation between sales and the reception of the labels in various markets.”

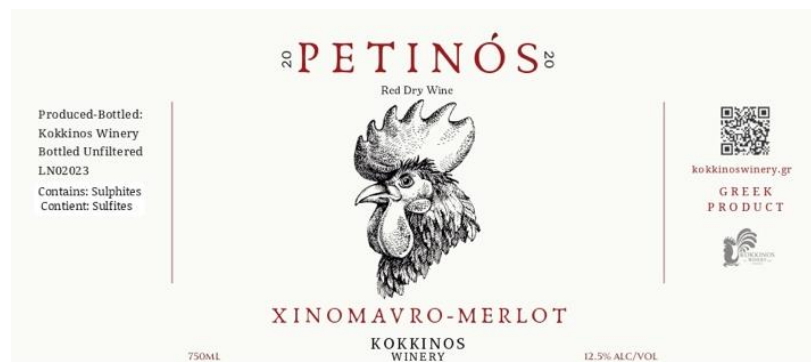
The findings reveal that thorough market research is crucial before implementing rebranding strategies. Understanding the cultural nuances and consumer preferences in each market is essential to avoid missteps, especially in traditional markets with a strong preference for authenticity, where consumers may perceive foreign names as inauthentic or incompatible with their cultural values. In other words, foreign names and semiotics can create a cultural disconnect,

leading to negative perceptions and reduced sales. Additionally, perceptions of foreign names and the debate over cultural authenticity or adaptation to diverse markets are influenced by the age of consumers, as quote 14 reveals:

Quote 16

“Although ‘Petinos’ was liked and seemed interesting, there is still a cultural preference for foreign names among older, traditional generations, those over 50 years old. They do not wish to remove the ‘Black, White, and Pink Rooster’ from their portfolio. In contrast, the 20-40 age group is much more interested in ‘Petinos’.”

In this instance, this participant intends to undertake a rebranding initiative contrary to the previously mentioned approach, transitioning their labels from foreign names to Greek ones. Specifically, labels such as “Black Rooster”, “White Rooster” and “Pink Rooster” are currently in the process of being renamed to “Petinos” (Greek: Πετεινός), which means rooster in Greek. The name will be presented in Latin characters and will include an accent on the final “o” to match the Greek script and facilitate correct pronunciation by non-Greek speakers, and the color of the font will indicate the variety of the grape, as can be seen below:



Adapting to cultural authenticity will resonate well with younger consumers, who may value authenticity and local heritage more than older generations, as they are more open to changes. As claimed by Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent (2010), “younger consumers have a greater propensity to change their preferred brand, a form of innovativeness that benefits relatively recent entrants, whereas older consumers exhibit a propensity to remain attached for a longer duration to the same preferred brand” (p. 112). There is an underlying assumption that older consumers' resistance to changing established foreign names is rooted in nostalgia and a long-standing familiarity with the brand, and this resistance could pose a challenge in markets heavily dominated by this demographic.

Symbolism and visual elements

This section answers the primary research question, creating a connection between symbolism and authenticity. Symbolism and visual elements play a critical role in branding by shaping consumer perceptions and emotional connections with a brand. They help communicate brand identity, evoke specific emotions, and influence purchase intentions. “The symbolic quality of brand packages carries great importance because a mismatch between consumer expectations and the meaning communicated by a package possibly damages a brand’s value and reputation” (Machiels et al., 2019, p. 3). Semiotics, in combination with symbolism in branding, strengthens consumer self-concepts and personalities, while also brand communications must be advance past basic messages to communicate a whole concept of living based on symbolic values and meanings (Tan & Ming, 2003). Wine labels, in this case, serve as an essential communication apparatus between the producer and the buyer, conveying critical information about the wine's origin, grape varieties, and producer qualifications. The design of these labels, including the use

of symbols, colors, and imagery, plays a significant role in forming buyer perceptions and preferences (Crichton-Fock et al., 2023), and for well-established wineries, rebranding the visual aspects of the labels is not always welcomed, as one participant mentioned:

Quote 17

'Dionysus' is the logo for 'Mantinia', which is a traditional element. Although we wanted to remove it for a more minimalist label, it received negative reactions, especially from older generations who were attached to the traditional style. Changing labels is harder for established brands like ours."

This is another good example of how different generations react to possible changes, but also another example of a commodified culture. The use of "Dionysus" as the logo of the label can also be seen as a stereotype that play a crucial role in shaping consumer responses toward brands. For instance, ethnic brand imagery can activate stereotypes, which may perpetuate negative or positive implicit biases depending on the viewer's political identity (Angle et al., 2017). It is true that stereotypes about a brand's country of origin are transferred to the brand itself. This transfer is robust and affects consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. In that sense brands perceived as typical of their country of origin are more likely to benefit from positive stereotype content transfer (Diamantopoulos et al., 2021). Almost all participants admitted that they use stereotypical visual elements in their labels on purpose, to attract tourists and foreigners in general. One participant said:

Quote 18

"For 'Santorini', we tried to evoke the island's image with the label. The door not only represents the door of our winery, but also symbolizes the Cycladic islands and the unique aspects of Greece that have made us famous. Since Santorini is 90% export-oriented, the labels are designed for an international audience."

As highlighted by the participant, the label for “Santorini” employs imagery that evokes the island’s distinctive character. The door symbol not only represents the winery but also the broader Cycladic islands, which are iconic of Greek culture. By highlighting unique cultural elements, brands can stand out and appeal to both domestic and international audiences. The design of labels with an international audience in mind, as in the case of “Santorini,” assumes that foreign consumers are drawn to authentic and recognizable cultural symbols, in search of a delicate wine associated with a specific cultural capital. This strategy indicates an understanding of the importance of cultural representation in branding for export-oriented products.

Offering supplementary examples of commodified culture enhances the argument by demonstrating a constant trend in the incorporation of culturally significant components in wine branding. As indicated by a participant, this method is apparent in the labels of “Naoussa” and “Naoussa”, both derived from the



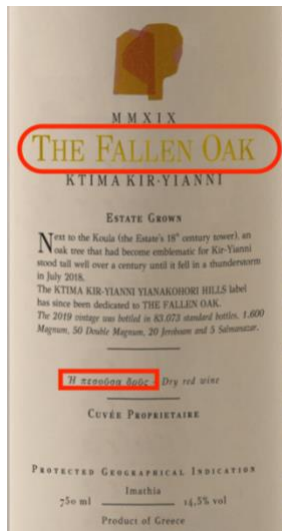
municipality of Naoussa, which is famous in Greece for its wines, namely the “Xinomavro” type. These labels have designs that portray the local tradition of “Genitsaroi kai Mpoules”

(«Γενίτσαροι και Μπούλες»), which is an annual cultural celebration in Naoussa. The inclusion of local cultural features in wine labels, in a deliberate

way, is a strategic approach aimed at increasing the authenticity and market attractiveness of the products, even if these features are considered stereotypical. This method utilises the abundant cultural legacy of the region to establish a unique brand identity. Additionally, it has a beneficial impact on consumer perceptions, enhancing the appeal of the items to both domestic and global markets, and distinguishing the wines in a fiercely competitive market.



The use of bilingual labels on wine bottles is an important aspect of wine branding, reflecting broader trends in cultural authenticity, linguistic choices and visual elements. One specific example that prompted the researcher to explore this topic in-depth is a wine produced by one of the participants, named “The Fallen Oak.” This wine utilizes a bilingual label where the Greek name is written in ancient Greek script. This example could fit into sections discussing



either ‘cultural authenticity’ or ‘linguistic choices.’ However, it is discussed here due to the significance of the ancient Greek script as a visual element. Globally, people recognize ancient Greek script, either from their education or from the philosophical and historical significance of ancient Greece. It's fair to say that ancient Greek is really a great example of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), because it appeals to more sophisticated people, and to engage in this writing, especially if not Greek, means that one has a real admiration for it, and perhaps wants to belong to

a certain group of people. The modern Greek translation of “The Fallen Oak” would be: “I pesmeni velanidia” (Greek: Η πεσμένη βελανιδιά), but in ancient Greek, it is rendered as: “I pesousa dris” (ancient Greek: ἡ πεσοῦσα δρυς). What the participant mentioned about this particular label when asked:

Quote 19

“Often customers say, ‘I like the Greek writing on the label’. And they mean it not as a name but as a visual element. It takes on a visual character, reflecting authenticity and quality.”

This previous example could also be seen as commodified culture, but in a more authentic way, as the producer deliberately chose to have on the label an ancient script no longer used and associated with the high class. Automatically, then, it is also a deliberate and well-orchestrated attempt to create a powerful objectified cultural capital. The inclusion of ancient Greek lettering on the wine label “The Fallen Oak” displays the worldwide acknowledgment and attraction towards ancient Greek culture. This decision is likely to increase the appeal of the wine to global consumers who appreciate historical and philosophical associations. Additionally, it sets the product apart in a competitive market by emphasizing its distinct cultural and historical origins. Another compelling illustration that reinforces the use of Greek letters only for their aesthetic allure is a Greek wine known as “Omega” which prominently showcases the Greek letter as its trademark and was mentioned as an example by one of the participants during the interview, as Quote 20 shows:



Quote 20

“If there's one thing we use, it's Greek letters, such as the lowercase ones. For example, ‘pi’ is recognizable, ‘alpha’ is also easy, and ‘omega’. There’s even a wine called ‘Omega’.”

Once again, this is an example of commodified culture at its very best. But also, this time, this is about a staged authenticity and a cultural capital created in Switzerland. “Omega SA” is an extremely famous luxury watch brand based in Switzerland, founded in 1903. So already, “Omega” is known to consumers around the world and the letter is associated with wealth. However, an important question arises: is “omega” associated with Greek culture or with Swiss culture nowadays? Although the answer may lie in the educational level of each consumer, it is certainly a loan that the Swiss took from Greek culture and may now be considered a counter-loan

by Greek winemakers, so that they make use of this letter in Greek wines. The use of Greek letters is not only attributed to their visual appeal, but they also possess considerable symbolic value as well. Some letters of the Greek alphabet have extensive recognition and are frequently used as symbols in the fields of mathematics and sciences, hence enhancing their appeal and acknowledgment, as stated by another participant:

Quote 21

“The ‘omega’, the ‘delta’, the ‘alpha’, the ‘lambda’, and the ‘pi’ are widespread all over the world. Therefore, based on this, I believe that we give value to the Greek language and create a foundation so that, in the future, foreign consumers will gradually be able to read and understand these letters.”

The above example is in fact the outcome of symbolic interactionism; the interaction of individuals with these letters in various disciplines results in these symbols acquiring a specific, and often universal, meaning. Universal because according to Blumer (1969), “in symbolic interactionism, society is viewed as consisting of interacting individuals who develop shared symbols and meanings” (p. 6). The incorporation of color schemes and design elements on wine labels is also a deliberate tactic to enhance the promotion of the cultural heritage associated with the wine's country of origin. In that way, by integrating the national colors and culturally relevant themes, vintners have the ability to establish a robust visual identity that deeply connects with consumers and sets their products apart in a fiercely competitive market. One individual in this study has effectively utilized this strategy, presenting a convincing example:

Quote 22

“We deliberately chose colors to evoke a sense of Greek identity: a blue capsule, a white label with blue elements, and some black elements. These choices are intended to reflect the palette of the Greek flag. Additionally, the words ‘Kokkinos’, ‘Naoussa’, ‘Xinomavro’, and ‘Greek Product’ are included to further emphasize that it is a Greek product.”

Therefore, promotion of the wine's origin culture is also achieved through the intentional use of culturally significant terminology and national colors on the wine label. This strategy has the potential to cultivate a sense of pride and connection among both domestic and international consumers. Additionally, it not only improves brand recognition but also cultivates a stronger bond with consumers who appreciate cultural authenticity. Furthermore, for wines specifically aimed at Greeks residing overseas, this could potentially be perceived as a chance to evoke emotional responses.

Consumer perceptions and expectations

This last section, aims to add more to the sub-questions, focusing partly on the occasional use of foreign names and expressions in diverse markets. Greek winemakers must comprehend consumer perceptions and expectations to effectively manage the delicate equilibrium between cultural authenticity and commercial needs. The wine market on a worldwide scale is characterized by intense competition, as customers are more inclined towards goods that provide distinctive experiences and genuine associations with their origins. Greek winemakers must not only highlight the rich cultural history and unique characteristics of Greek wines, but also adjust to the particular tastes and demands of a wide range of global customers. Greek wine producers emphasize the importance of aligning their products with consumer expectations, especially in international markets where the majority of their sales occur. One of them explains:

Quote 23

“In general, what I want to convey to you is that as a winery we rely essentially on our sales abroad, because Greece is a small market that is also saturated in terms of wine.”

The reliance on international markets drives Greek winemakers to adapt their products to meet global consumer preferences. This strategy ensures that their wines remain competitive and appealing in a diverse and saturated global market. The insights from these markets help winemakers refine their products and marketing strategies to better cater to the tastes and preferences of international consumers. One of the key elements highlighted by the winemakers is the use of place names or toponyms. One of them mentioned:

Quote 24

“In recent years what has been great and continues to get great value, are the names of the places where the wines are produced. The toponyms. Foreign consumers have come to associate names and place names with varieties, so they expect to see names like Naoussa, Santorini, etc. on the label.”

This insight indicates that place names carry significant weight in establishing the wine's origin and authenticity, appealing to consumers who seek unique and culturally rich products, and creating at the same time a cultural capital for that specific region. Toponyms like Naoussa and Santorini not only indicate the geographical origin of the wine but also serve as markers of quality and tradition. These place names have become synonymous with specific grape varieties and wine styles, helping consumers make informed choices based on their preferences for certain regions. The strategy for labeling also varies depending on the target market. For instance, another participant mentions:

Quote 25

“In Germany, where we have many Greek customers, we send only Greek labels.”

This approach serves the nostalgic preferences of the Greek diaspora, which may prefer labels in its mother tongue, but could also be seen as an attempt to create an emerging Greek culture within German. With the introduction of Greek labels into the German market, perhaps in a few years they can be seen as a normal part of a broader and more inclusive aspect of German culture as a new emerging element (Cohen, 1988). On the other hand, in broader international markets, labels are often bilingual to cater to both local and Greek-speaking consumers. Labeling strategies tailored to specific markets help winemakers connect with different consumer bases more effectively. Greek labels resonate with diaspora communities, fostering a sense of connection to their heritage, while bilingual labels ensure broader accessibility and appeal in diverse markets. By catering to the linguistic and cultural preferences of different consumer groups, Greek winemakers can better connect with their target audiences and foster brand loyalty. Emphasizing the Greek origin and the identity of the winemaker is another crucial aspect. The same participant states:

Quote 26

“It is important for consumers to have ‘Greece’ written somewhere. The name of the winemaker may also be important. For example, in America the name Tselepos is well known, so we write ‘by Yiannis Tselepos’ or ‘by Tselepos wines’ on the labels. If it is a Greek variety, it is advisable to indicate the name of the variety in a prominent place.”

This highlights the dual strategy of promoting the wine's Greek heritage and leveraging the reputation of well-known winemakers to attract consumers. Highlighting the winemaker's name and the Greek origin of the wine adds a layer of authenticity and trust. This is a great example of symbolic interactionism in semiotics, as the name of the producer and the word “Greece” have already been associated with a specific and perhaps unique meaning in this market, and the winery is able to see this and commodify these cultural elements in an appropriate way to create a sense

of authenticity. Consumers often associate the winemaker's reputation with the quality of the wine, and prominently displaying this information can influence purchasing decisions. Interestingly, there is also a growing trend of using foreign expressions to attract consumers. One participant observes:

Quote 27

“Lately a certain terminology has been used a lot to attract consumers. This terminology is foreign expressions, for example: ‘cuvée exceptionnelle’, ‘family reserved’, ‘single vineyards’.”

These terms add a layer of prestige and exclusivity, aligning with global wine marketing practices that emphasize premium quality. by incorporating foreign elements that carry a cultural capital and thus create a staged authenticity that will eventually emerge in the Greek market. And based on how many wines, even in this survey, use such expressions, it is perhaps reasonable to say that this foreign culture has already emerged and been integrated into the Greek market. Greek winemakers also acknowledge that their products cater to a niche market. A winemaker explains:

Quote 28

“We are addressing the 1% of the market. We are not addressing the average consumer. So, we are targeting the consumer who knows, who will look for Greek wine, who wants something different, and therefore is ready to pay for Greek wine, which is perhaps a little more expensive. We will not go to the big supermarkets to put Greek wine. It won't sell.”

Targeting a niche market allows Greek winemakers to focus on consumers who appreciate and seek out unique, high-quality wines and therefore the use of standardised foreign expressions and phrases is justified to achieve this objective. These consumers are often more informed and willing to invest in high quality products, which makes them an ideal target for Greek wines and

establishes the foundation for the creation or further development of an already existing cultural capital associated with Greek wines.

The comprehensive analysis of consumer perceptions and expectations reveals that Greek winemakers effectively balance cultural authenticity with market demands through strategic labeling and marketing practices, by commodifying cultural elements in order to create setting for an emergent or staged culture. By understanding and adapting to consumer preferences, they can promote their cultural heritage while appealing to a global audience. The focus on place names, market-specific labeling, cultural and winemaker identity, foreign terminology, and niche market targeting ensures that Greek wines maintain their unique identity and remain competitive in the international market. This strategic approach not only preserves Greek cultural heritage but also creates a distinctive brand identity that resonates with consumers worldwide.

Conclusion

This study explores the complexities faced by Greek winemakers in balancing cultural authenticity and market dynamics through their wine labeling practices. By delving into the perspectives of winemakers, it highlights how these professionals navigate the intricate terrain of preserving cultural heritage while adapting to global market demands. However, the study's scope is limited as it primarily covers the viewpoints of winemakers. To provide a more comprehensive and concrete understanding of the issue, future research should incorporate the perspectives of consumers. By interviewing consumers, especially those from diverse markets, researchers can gain insights into how these labels are perceived and what cultural elements resonate most with them. This addition would offer a more balanced view and help validate the findings from the winemakers' perspectives.

The discussions embedded within the findings reveal several key themes and patterns that were not fully addressed in the initial analysis. One significant theme is the concept of staged authenticity versus emergent authenticity in cultural representation. As noted, while winemakers strive to maintain authenticity, their practices are influenced by market trends and consumer demands, leading to a form of authenticity that evolves over time. This evolution suggests that authenticity in wine labeling is not static, but a dynamic process influenced by various external factors. Another critical theme is the impact of linguistic choices on the perception of authenticity. The use of Greek, French, and English names on wine labels reflects not only the winemakers' heritage and personal histories but also strategic marketing decisions aimed at different consumer bases. This dual approach caters to both domestic and international markets, demonstrating the complex interplay between cultural preservation and marketability.

The symbolism and visual elements on wine labels also play a crucial role in conveying cultural messages. The strategic use of national colors, traditional symbols, and recognizable Greek letters underscores the importance of visual identity in branding. These elements not only attract tourists and foreign consumers but also help establish a distinct brand identity rooted in Greek heritage. Consumer perceptions and expectations form another critical aspect of this discussion. The reliance on international markets necessitates a deep understanding of global consumer preferences. The findings reveal that place names, bilingual labels, and the reputation of winemakers significantly influence consumer choices. By aligning their products with these preferences, Greek winemakers can effectively balance cultural authenticity with commercial success.

To broaden this research and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between cultural authenticity and market dynamics in Greek wine labeling, several additional

approaches and areas of study should be considered. Future research should employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys to capture a broader range of consumer perspectives. Conducting in-depth interviews, surveys, and focus groups with consumers from various demographic backgrounds and geographic locations will reveal their perceptions of cultural authenticity in wine labels and the elements influencing their purchasing decisions. Comparative studies with other wine-producing countries and historical analyses of Greek wine labels can uncover evolving trends and practices. Moreover, a semiotic analysis such as the one carried out by Celhay and Remaud (2017) on Bordeaux wine labels could be an idea, but perhaps this time focusing on wine labels from Naoussa or Santorini, or even on a specific grape variety. Finally, interviewing owners of Greek restaurants and liquor stores abroad can offer valuable perspectives on how Greek wines are perceived and marketed in foreign markets. These suggestions will help identify best practices, inform policy, and enhance the global competitiveness of Greek wines while preserving their rich cultural heritage.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the intricate balance between cultural authenticity and market dynamics through the lens of Greek wine labels. By examining the experiences and strategies of Greek winemakers, the study has uncovered how linguistic choices and symbolic elements are employed to maintain cultural identity while appealing to diverse global markets. The research is underpinned by six theoretical frameworks: Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, 1934 & Blumer, 1969), Commodification of Culture (Cohen, 1988), Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1984), Authenticity Theory (Trilling, 1972), Staged Authenticity (MacCannell, 1979) and Semiotics Theory (Saussure, 1916 & Peirce, 1931). Collectively, they provide a robust understanding of how linguistic choices on wine labels contribute to both cultural identity and commercial success.

The findings indicate that Greek winemakers are deeply committed to preserving and showcasing their cultural heritage through their wine labels. This commitment is evident in the deliberate use of Greek names, symbols, and narratives that reflect the unique cultural aspects of their products. As one winemaker articulated, “we are interested in expressing our culture outwardly. For example, our traditions and generally our character. That’s what has made us what we are today.” This sentiment underscores the importance of cultural authenticity not only as a matter of personal pride but also as a strategic response to market dynamics. Furthermore, Greek winemakers often employ transliterations of Greek words to retain cultural essence and make their products readable for non-Greek speakers. For example, a winemaker highlighted, “a wine that I call ‘two olives’ in Greek [Δύο Ελιές] will not be called ‘Two Olives’ but will be called ‘Dio Elies’ and whoever understood, good for them.” This approach demonstrates how linguistic choices can maintain cultural authenticity and enhance the appeal of Greek wines in global markets.

The use of symbols and visual elements on wine labels plays a pivotal role in reflecting cultural identity. Greek winemakers strategically incorporate traditional motifs, national colors, and recognizable Greek letters to enhance the cultural resonance of their labels. The label for “Santorini”, for example, employs imagery that evokes the island’s distinctive character, with the door symbol representing both the winery itself and the broader Cycladic islands. This approach not only appeals to domestic consumers but also attracts international audiences by emphasizing unique cultural elements. Such strategies highlight the importance of visual identity in branding, as they help to establish a distinct and culturally rich brand image. The reliance also on place names, such as Naoussa and Santorini, and the inclusion of winemaker names significantly influence consumer choices. These elements serve as markers of quality and authenticity, helping to establish a strong brand identity. One winemaker noted, “in recent years, what has been great and continues to get great value are the names of the places where the wines are produced. The toponyms.” This insight underscores the importance of place names in conveying the wine’s origin and authenticity, appealing to consumers who seek unique and culturally rich products.

The study reveals that Greek winemakers navigate the tension between preserving cultural authenticity and adapting to global market demands through strategic linguistic and symbolic choices on wine labels, based on the theories analysed before. They strategically use emergent and staged authenticity in order to create a cultural capital among their customers, while they also commodify, sometimes in a stereotypical way, different characteristics of Greek culture in order to appeal to a wider audience. These findings suggest that maintaining cultural authenticity is not only a matter of heritage pride but also a strategic market response. By integrating traditional Greek elements with adaptive strategies for international markets, winemakers can create compelling narratives that resonate with diverse consumer bases. However, one of the main findings is that

authenticity is a negotiable concept, and it cannot be limited to just one definition. This is because it is perceived differently by various cultures, age groups, and ultimately, by each individual, shaped by their unique personal experiences.

Future research should incorporate consumer perspectives to validate these findings and explore the impact of cultural authenticity on purchasing behavior. Comparative studies with other wine-producing regions could provide further insights into effective branding strategies in the global wine market. Additionally, a semiotic analysis of labels from specific Greek regions or grape varieties could deepen the understanding of cultural representation in wine branding. The comprehensive analysis of Greek wine labels offers valuable insights for - intercultural - marketers seeking to enhance cultural relevance in label communication. By understanding the intricate balance between cultural authenticity and market demands, winemakers can effectively promote their heritage while achieving commercial success in a competitive global marketplace.

The present work is significant as it focuses on a crucial and sometimes disregarded element of worldwide trade, which is the preservation of cultural authenticity in an ever more interconnected globe. Producers often overlook the cultural implications of their goods, assuming that cultural considerations are inherent and do not need deliberate thought. This research showcases the feasibility of preserving cultural distinctiveness while engaging in the global market, despite the tendency for cultural manifestations to become more alike in the era of globalisation. The knowledge acquired from this study is very beneficial not only for the industry of wine, but for any business that aims to strike a balance between cultural legacy and commercial viability.

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Appendix 1: Interview questions

1. Can you share your winery's perspective on the balance between preserving cultural authenticity and adapting to foreign market cultures (for example Greek name, transliterated or translated)?
2. How do you define cultural authenticity in the context of Greek wine production and how do you achieve it?
3. What factors influence your decisions regarding the language(s) and symbols used on wine labels?
4. Can you provide examples of specific linguistic and visual elements that you believe contribute to cultural authenticity on your wine labels?
5. Are there any typical Greek cultural characteristics (stereotypes) that you intentionally incorporate into your wine labels?
6. Have you encountered any challenges or tensions in balancing cultural authenticity with market adaptation? If so, how do you navigate them?
7. How do you ensure that the use of elements of the Greek language enhances rather than alienates consumers in non-Greek-speaking markets?
8. Have you observed any differences in consumer responses to labels that emphasize Greek cultural elements compared to those that do not?
9. To what extent do you prioritize preserving cultural authenticity when designing wine labels?
10. How do you research and understand the preferences of your target consumers when designing wine labels?

11. What elements do you believe consumers expect to see on wine labels, particularly those purchasing Greek wines?
12. What is the significance or symbolism behind the usage of Greek letters on wine labels?
13. How do you believe the incorporation of Greek letters influences consumer perceptions and expectations of Greek wines?

Appendix 2: Corpus of wine labels





