

THE COUNTRY BRAND IMAGE, THE COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN IMAGE AND THE ROMANIAN WINES IMAGE. AN EXPLORATORY APPROACH

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Abstract

This paper describes the results of an exploratory research on the Romanian country brand image, the country-of-origin image and the Romanian wines image. It is part of a larger study that includes, in addition to the exploratory research, case studies (Chile and France) and a quantitative research on a sample of 325 wine consumers from various countries. Qualitative research involved conducting non-directive interviews based on an interview guide on a sample of 21 wine experts from various countries - Italy, France, UK, Austria, etc., managers of wine companies, oenologists, brand managers etc. Our results show that the country brand and the country-of-origin image impact the Romanian wines image, influencing the perception of wine quality and wine image as a result of the generalization or halo effect. Furthermore, as shown in the literature review, it is possible to build the image of the country brand starting from the image of wines and their promotion in various markets alongside their origin (the case of Chile, Argentina, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia etc.). This article is original because it considers, in addition to the country-of-origin image and the image of its products, the general image of the country brand as a generic construct.

Key words: *country brand image, country-of-origin, Romanian wines image, wine quality, perception*

JEL Classification: *M30, M31*

I. INTRODUCTION

The academic and business literature find the country brand image construct important, but there is no consensus regarding its conceptualization and operationalization (Laroche et al., 2005; Zeugner-Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). Image is studied in relation to its object: the general image of the country, the product-country couple image and the image of the products of a country. There are correlations between the image of the country of origin and the image of products made in a country, but there is less concern with analyzing the influence of the country brand, seen as a generic construct, on the first two theoretical constructs. The generic construct of country brand, considered similar to the corporate brand image or the product brand image, has several dimensions: awareness / familiarity; preference; associations; the degree to which the country is taken into account in the assessment; the decision to invest / do business / visit the country; the inclination to engage in advocacy.

The "Associations" dimension of the country brand image includes the status of the respective country, meaning the experiences associated with that country, that comprise elements such as: the value system, the quality of life, the business potential, the traditions and culture, tourism and "made in" (The FutureBrand Team, 2013). There are also studies that take into consideration the cognitive, affective, conative and normative dimensions of the country brand image (Zeugner-Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009). Along with the dimensions included in the Country Brand Index model, some authors propose to take into account the perception of the people in the analyzed country, including their perceived attractiveness and perceived skills (Anholt, 2007, Cofârlea, 2015).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The country brand

The concept of country brand image has received a great interest from the academic and business literature, but no consensus was reached regarding its conceptualization and operationalization (Laroche et al., 2005; Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009).

The specialized literature definitions reveal three distinct sets of definitions that differ on the subject on which the definition of the image is focused: the general country image definitions; the product-country couple image definitions; the image of products originating from a certain country definitions. The first set of definitions refers to the country image or the country brand image as a generic construct comprising generalized perceptions or images created not only by the representative products, but also by the degree of economic and political maturity of the country, relations and historical events of the country, culture and traditions, the degree of technological skills and industrialization (Allred et al.,1999). From this perspective, the country brand is synonymous with the brand of a nation, an idea found by The New York Times Magazine in 2005 as one of the most notable of the year (Kaneva, 2011).

In the specialized literature, the operationalization of the country brand image is obtained starting from cognitive and affective dimensions. The cognitive dimension is defined as "the sum of descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs regarding a certain country" (Martin and Eroglu, 1993, p. 193), while the affective dimension is considered to be the sum of emotions and feelings generated by a certain country (Verlegh, 2001).

A large amount of the studies identified in the literature focuses on the country brand models and tries to investigate the image of the country abroad, either from the business environment perspective, or from an academic perspective, or from both perspectives. The models bellow focus mainly on the country brand from the business environment perspective, due to the need of organizations to evaluate the country brand, to establish rankings of country brands starting from various criteria (Mariutti and Tench, 2015).

Future Brand has developed a model of brand power that takes into account the following dimensions of the country brand: awareness/ familiarity; preferences; associations; the degree to which the country is taken into account in the assessment process; the decision to invest/ to conduct business/ to visit the country; the disposition to engage in advocacy actions in order to promote the country. The 'Associations' dimension or country brand image includes the following sub-dimensions: country status; created experiences. In turn, the country's status perception is given by:

- the perception of values- political liberty, environmental standards, tolerance (religious, ethnic etc).
- the quality of life- healthcare and education; life standards; safety; the desire to live/study in that country.
- the business potential: attractive for business projects; advanced technologies; proper infrastructure.

The second sub-dimension, the offered experiences, also includes a number of sub-dimensions: - heritage (traditions and culture) - important historical events, traditions, arts and culture; the natural beauty (landscapes, beautiful, surprising and wild places).

- tourism- quality- value for money; variety of tourist attractions; resorts and accommodation options; the desire to spend the holiday in that country; local food and gastronomy.

- made in- produces authentic and high qualitative products; creates unique products; brings the desire to buy products made in that country.

Table 1. Country brand models

Model	Authors	Variables and dimensions
Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index SM (the hexagon pattern, 2002)	Simon Anholt (2007)	exports, governance, culture and heritage, people, investments, immigration and tourism (in the context of the present research, the wines exportation and their image could constitute variable components of the country brand).
The FutureBrand Country Brand Index	The FutureBrand Team (2013)	life quality, values, heritage and culture, a country providing favourable conditions for the business environment and tourism.
Brand-Bonding Spectrum – BBS	Mihailovich (2006)	focuses on relations that reveal various levels of cooperation between the nation brand and organisational and products brands (e.g. companies, products, people, events or places)
The East West Nation Brand Perception Indexes and Reports	Experts Perceptions Metrics and East West Communications	Country analysis through news from various articles. Global media sources were monitored, approximately 5 million sources from 242 countries
Nation Brand Architecture Model- NBAR	Dinnie (2009)	tourism, exports (wine export for Romania), foreign investments (in developing oenology, viticulture and oeno-tourism), attracting talents (attracting valuable oenologists), sports, regions, cities and landscapes; products and services; specific departments (is the wine department specific/representative for Romania?); employees and students from universities, clubs and national teams' skills; cultural and political representatives.
Country RepTrak TM	Students from Lugano and Fombrun	advanced economy, attractive environment, governmental efficiency, favorable behaviours and self-image

CBSI - Country Brand Strength Index	Fetscherin (2010)	exports (wines), tourism (oenotourism), direct foreign investments, immigration and governance.
Nation Brand Molecule -NBM	Rojaz-Méndez (2013)	economy, tourism, geography and nature, culture and heritage, society, science, technology and governance.

(Source: adapted from Mariutti, Tench, 2015)

The image of the country of origin

The country of origin of a product is an extrinsic cue (Thorelli et al., 1989), which, similar to brand name, has an influence on consumers' perceptions and leads consumers to cognitive elaboration (Hong and Wyer, 1989).

Previous researches have shown that preconceptions and attitudes about one country's citizens tend to influence the evaluations of the products originating from that country (Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 2000; Wang and Yang, 2008). There is a considerable interest regarding the impact that the country of origin has over the perception of the quality of the products (Solomon et al., 2010). Numerous empirical studies show that the products originating from industrialized countries benefit from the positive image of their countries, both in domestic and international trade markets, while products originating from emerging countries suffer from the negative image of their own countries of origin (Usunier and Cestre, 2008).

The perception of product quality starting from the country brand refers to the subjective assessments of consumers regarding the general excellence or superiority of the products of a certain country (Zeithaml, 1988, Zeugner-Roth et al., 2008), consumers having different perceptions regarding the quality of the products originating from different countries.

Some previous researches highlight consumers' preference for foreign brands over domestic brands as a result of favorable experience or as a result of their affinity for certain foreign countries (Oberecker and Diamantopoulos 2011; Sun et al., 2017). Other researches show that stereotypes about countries encourage domestic brands due to economic and socio-psychological reasons (Sun et al., 2017). Despite the inconsistency of these results, it is estimated that in emerging countries, such as China, India, Tunisia, Romania etc, consumers prefer foreign brands, especially those originating from developed countries, to the detriment of those from their own countries (Hamzaoui Essoussi and Merunka 2007). Consumers from these countries prefer brands from developed countries because they associate them with the general technological development of the respective countries, high quality products, products with a strong symbolic value and consider them signs of the Western lifestyle they aspire to (Sun et al., 2017). Sometimes, on those markets foreign names specific to Western countries (Germany, Denmark, Switzerland) are used in order to benefit from their positive connotation. The association between the preferences for foreign brands in emerging markets and the favorable associations for the country of origin was also noted by Melnyk et al. (2012). When a country has a favorable image or is known to own a specific expertise for a product category, the brands from that country benefit from the favorable image and perceived expertise of that country (Lee et al., 2016). Consequently, the positive image of a country can create a competitive advantage for the product, just as the negative image of that country can constitute a strong impediment for the penetration of products into the foreign markets, even if the consumers' perceptions are wrong (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Magnusson et al. 2014). Moreover, research shows that the country of origin effect leads to the development of relationships between the country's image and beliefs concerning the products only when they are perceived as congruent with the country's image (eg: France, for luxury fashion, Japan, for its electronic products), otherwise, the relationship between the image of the country of origin and the image of the products is weak (Josiassen, 2010).

There are also studies in tourism marketing that have found exactly the reverse effect, where the favorable beliefs about the product generates favorable perceptions about the country of origin and the desire to visit it (Lee and Lockshin 2012 ; Lee et al., 2015). This perspective is of interest for the current research, because one of the research problems is to determine the extent to which the perceived quality and the image of Romanian wines influence the image of the country brand.

Previous research found that consumers generally form and maintain stereotypical images of products based on their country of origin (Bilkey and Nes, 1982 in Forbes, 2014). Stereotypical images are typically applicable to a specific class of products, they cannot be generalized to all the product categories that come from a country (Roth and Romeo, 1992).

Consumers use the country of origin as a clue in a heuristic assessment in order to assign meanings to other product attributes (Goldberg and Baumgartner, 2002). The country of origin is used by consumers as a cue to reduce the perceived risk of purchase and to assess the social acceptability of the purchased products (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002).

The product-country of origin image that consumers develop affects the purchase intentions and, in particular, the assessment of product quality. There are strong associations between wine, as a product, and the

country of origin, previous research often found that the country of origin is an important variable, a top selection criterion (Keown and Casey, 1995, Halstead, 2002).

The place occupied by the country of origin among the variables that consumers take into account when making the purchase decision is an extensively treated topic in the specialized literature (Keown and Casey, 1995 ; Halstead, 2002 ; Felzensztein and Dinnie, 2005; Orth, et al., 2005; Balestrini and Gamble, 2006; Hamlin and Leith, 2006; Goodman, Lockshin and Cohen, 2007; Goodman et al., 2008; Forbes, 2014).

Thus, in a study conducted on a sample of wine consumers from Northern Ireland the country of origin was the most important factor when choosing wine (Keown and Casey, 1995), while in another study, conducted on a sample of Scottish wine consumers, the country of origin was the second import criterion in the process of choosing wine (Felzensztein and Dinnie, 2006).

The country of origin is the second most important criterion for Chinese consumers when deciding to buy wine (Balestrini and Gamble, 2006). According to the study, origin is more important when the wine is bought for special occasions than when it is bought for private consumption. Chinese consumers are also taking into account the country of origin in order to form an opinion about the wine's quality.

Wall and Heslop (1986) studied the perception of Canadian consumers regarding domestic and foreign wines and they found that local wines are perceived as having a lower quality than wines from France, Italy, Germany or Spain. Orth et al. (2015) highlight in their study conducted on a sample of American wine consumers, a strong relationship between the country of origin and the perception of wine quality. The authors have found that California's wines are preferred, followed by those from France, Italy, Australia, Oregon, Chile, Spain, Washington, with New Zealand wines occupying the last place among preferences. Hamlin and Leith (2006) used experimental methods to determine the effect of the country of origin over consumer's ratings in four countries, resulting that the origin of wine has a significant impact over the perception of the quality in both UK and New Zealand.

In the study of Forbes (2014), that aimed to determine whether consumers use the country of origin as a clue when deciding to buy wine, 14% of respondents used the country of origin along with seven other variables to decide upon what wine to buy. It also turned out that the country of origin ranks as the fourth most important criterion in consumers choice and it is considered the only important criterion by 9% of respondents. Although only 9% of respondents stated that they use the country of origin as a useful clue in choosing a certain wine, most respondents identify it accurately, which means that the country of origin is a criterion used subconsciously. D'Alessandro and Pecotich (2013) support the importance of the country of origin as an extrinsic feature used in wine selection. Surprisingly, not only the novice consumer relates to the country of origin, but also the wine expert is influenced by it.

The importance of the extrinsic factors could be much more important for the consumer than it was initially thought. The extrinsic factors in the wine-world are indicators of quality, but their relevance can even replace the intrinsic quality of the wine. The consumer may prefer a lower quality wine as long as he considers the price and the country of origin important (Veale and Quester, 2008).

The image of wine

Literature addressing the subject of consumer wine choice is generally based on the dichotomy of intrinsic and extrinsic attributes, but other elements, such as the occasion of consumption (Halstead, 2002; Martinez-Carrasco Martinez et al., 2006, Milovan-Ciuta et al., 2019), the environmentally friendly character (Mueller and Remaud, 2010; Sirieix and Remaud, 2010) or safety and trust are also considered (Loveless et al., 2010). Consumers' perceptions of wines originating from foreign countries differ depending on the taste, label and attributes of the packaging (design and aesthetics) and are influenced by the selling prices and the quality-price ratio. Thus, wines from some countries are seen as more expensive, but also of better quality, while wines from other countries are associated with average or low price, but also with a medium or lower quality (Corsi et al., 2011).

The importance of intrinsic and extrinsic features varies depending on the occasion of consumption (Hall et al., 2001). Martinez-Carrasco Martinez et al. (2006) have found differences between formal occasions of consumption (in the restaurant) and informal consumption (buying wine from stores and consuming it at home).

In their research, Corsi et al. (2012) identify attributes that can be used when measuring the image of wine:

- taste profile and distinctiveness: particular, common, boring, easy to drink, homogeneous, similar, exciting, provocative, elegant, complex
- types of wines: red, white, rose
- packaging and label design: modern, classic, unique, undifferentiated, easy to understand
- prices: good quality-price ratio, cheap, expensive
- consumption occasions: for dinner, relaxation, special occasions, in fine restaurants, as gifts, matching food
- safety and reliability: reliable, quality control, variable quality, uncertainty, manufacturers/region credibility

- environmentally friendly: natural, unpolluted, non-polluting, sustainable.

Crouch et al. (2016) conducted a study in which they determined the influences of the country of origin on the evaluation and preferences for wines. The research included a qualitative survey (21 focus-groups with 138 respondents) and a quantitative survey (on a sample of 2039 respondents, where the questionnaires were operated online). In the first study, the authors have found out that the affect on the country of origin, together with their associations with the country, its population and gastronomy influence consumers' responses. In their analysis, the authors included wines from several countries and respondents from seven countries: China, India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Korea, USA and Great Britain.

In the second study, the quantitative one, Crouch et al. (2016) examined how the origin influences assessments and preferences emotionally and cognitively (associations with the country, with its population and with its gastronomy). Respondents generally associate countries with a refined gastronomy with the production of fine wines. Therefore, France is mentioned as having the finest wines, while Italy is mentioned as producing, sometimes, the best wines. The French people are perceived, similarly, to Italians, as being sophisticated, passionate, well educated. The study proved that the negative associations of a country does not affect the perception regarding its ability to produce fine wines. Thus, Italy is perceived as chaotic, old and inefficient and the Italians are considered to be temperamental, emotional, but also passionate artisans, who know how to produce quality products in several categories, including wines and gastronomy. France is associated with the word famous, with high quality brands, history and knowing what fine things mean. Australia is associated by the respondents with 'a highly desired holiday destination', 'action-oriented', an 'exciting place'. The words associated to Australia are hot, though, strong, exciting, and the Australians are associated with the words heavy, tanned, tough, friendly, funny.

III. THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The exploratory research from this article is part of a larger study, that includes the analysis of case studies, the qualitative research and a quantitative research. According to the specialized literature, previous studies (Papadopoulos și Heslop, 2002; Jenes, 2012) have used both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to analyse the image of the country brand.

Qualitative research is considered to be the first step in the development of a comprehensive list of dimensions and sub-dimensions of a country's image (Hooley et al., 1988). Methods and techniques such as non-directive or semi-directive interviews, focus groups, words association technique, images association technique or exploratory techniques are considered.

Starting from the reviews of the specialized literature, Kilduff and Nunnez Tabales (2016) made a synthesis of qualitative and quantitative researches regarding the evaluation of the country brand (table 2).

Table 2. Synthesis of the research types used in the country brand evaluation

Authors	Year	Countries analysed	Type of research
Kotler et al.	1993	Not specified	Qualitative
Papadopoulos et al.	2000	Germany, Australia, Canada, USA, Spain, Japan, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Hungary, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Sweden	Quantitative
Kotler a and Gertner	2002	Not specified	Qualitative
Gilmore	2002	Spain	Qualitative
Jaworski, S.P. and Fosher, D.	2003	Not specified	Qualitative
Anholt	2003	Not specified	Qualitative
Fan	2005	Not specified	Qualitative
Fan	2010	Not specified	Qualitative
Anholt	2010	Not specified	Qualitative

(Source: adapted from Kilduff and Núñez Tabales, 2016)

Jenes (2012) also makes a synthesis of the techniques used in the qualitative research regarding the country brand image (table 3).

Table 3. Synthesis of the qualitative studies regarding the country brand image

Qualitative studies - Interviews and focus groups	Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Li et al., 1997; Allred et al., 1999; Verlegh, 2001; Ittersum et al., 2003; Lala and Allred and Chakraborty, 2007
Qualitative studies - interviews with experts	Desborde, 1990; Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Li et al., 1997; Ittersum et al., 2003; Lala and Allred and Chakraborty, 2007

Qualitative studies - content analysis	Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002; Kleppe and Mossberg, 2005; Hanna and Rowley, 2008
Qualitative studies - in-depth interviews	Ittersum et al., 2003; Puaschunder et al., 2004
Other methods, exploratory methods, tests, interviews, image associations	Schweiger, 1988, 1990, 1992; Schewiger and Kurz, 1997, Weber and Grundhöfer, 1991; Kühn, 1993; Chao and Rajendran, 1993; Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Verlegh, 2001; Mittelstaedt et al., 2004; Brijs, 2006; d'Astous and Boujbel, 2007

(Source: adapted from Jenes, 2012)

The exploratory research was carried out through a semi-structured interview, based on an interview guide which included topics arranged according to the funnel principle, from general to particular, formulated to avoid, as much as possible, influencing the respondents' answers. The time interval in which the interviews took place was January, 2019 - March, 2019. The research sample had 21 respondents, experts in the field of wine, from different countries.

Data analysis involved the use of thematic analysis, which aimed to reduce and understand the qualitative data by identifying key ideas. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), there are three phases in the qualitative data research. Data reduction involves the selection, simplification, conceptualization and transformation of data, practically, data coding. Data presentation involves assembling data in a compact, easily observable form, and the elaboration and verification of conclusions involves the identification of regularities, explanations, causal relationships, etc. between the collected data and checking their credibility by comparing them with existing theories in the specialized literature (Cotîrlea, 2015). The data codification, in order to reduce data size, involves the identification of repetitive elements and the development of codes based on the information provided by the interviewed subjects. Basically, the codes were developed based on the perceptions of the subjects regarding the country brand image, but also on aspects related to the image of wines, their choice. The relevant contents were well-chosen and the repetitive aspects were identified, after which they were framed in main themes. Conclusions were drawn by identifying regularities and plausible explanations that appeared during the interviews, after grouping the obtained information.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the semi-structured interview reveal that all the respondents have visited Romania (Table 4). Although the expertise of most of them justifies a professional visit to fairs or responding to the invitations of some wineries, it is not the case for all 21 respondents, which indicates that, although it has not entered the mainstream of wine-producing countries, Romania is known for a level above expectations among wine professionals (Q13). Regarding the hypothesis that an improved image of Romanian wine could help improve the image of the country of origin, experts confirm that this is possible, and that it has happened in countries such as Chile, Argentina, South Africa, Slovenia and Georgia, although they are countries known for their human rights, democracy or economic issues. Australia and New Zealand are also mentioned in this study, even if they are countries which have not faced such problems, but which have grown enormously in popularity and have become wine tourism destinations after they began to massively export wine (Q12).

Romania's integration into the European Union was also a step forward in improving the country's image, according to 14 (66%) of respondents. Among those who answered "No", two said that Romania's image has improved after European Union integration, but independent of this fact, rather as a result of its own efforts (Q11).

When asked about the potential methods of promoting Romanian wine, respondents (33%) consider that, in general, foreign consumers do not have any information about it and that a media campaign is needed to inform about this product, both by publishing articles / materials in foreign media, as well as by organizing visits of foreign journalists in Romania (Q10). Other methods of promotion considered useful are oenological tourism, the development of online and social media communication, as well as the co-optation of international personalities as ambassadors of the Romanian Wine brand (20%).

Regarding the wine's country of origin at the time of purchase, 19 out of 21 respondents (90%) said that it does not matter, the price, the variety, the brand awareness being more important. 4 respondents (20%) admitted that the country of origin can be a more important criterion when purchasing from specialized stores (Q9).

Regarding local skills in winemaking, there is a significant difference between the categories of respondents and a precarious balance between a positive and a negative image, with more than a third of the answers being "we have no information about ...", this segment will, in the future, decide over the construction

of a positive or negative image on Romanian wine (Q8). In other words, Romanian wine’s image is not well shaped in the foreign consumer’s mind.

Among the favorable associations resulting from the study, we noted: Romanian wines are of good quality (20%), there is high competence among oenologists (10%), there is a good quality / price ratio (10%). At the same time, the results of the study highlight several negative associations. Negative attitudes: low quality (15%), the need for a technological update and modern trends alignment (10%), Romania produces semi-sweet and sweet wines (10%). The study also reveals other useful elements: there is no information about the skills of Romanian oenologists (40%) or about Romanian grape varieties (20%), the image of wines suffers from the remembrance of wines produced during the communist period that ended 20 years ago (15 %). Respondents mentioned: the good quality / price ratio (50%), trust and history of products (20%), the quality of manufacturing and very good agricultural products (20%) as strengths of the "Made in Romania" brand. Other attributes associated with the "Made in Romania" brand are: original, exotic, pure, wild (Q7).

The interviews also highlighted weaknesses of the "Made in Romania" brand, such as: lack or insufficiency of integrated marketing communication campaigns, a strategic approach in wine marketing, the consequence being that the products are not known on the external markets (45%); Other weaknesses revealed by the qualitative research are: products are cheap, undifferentiated, there is lack of innovation (35%), distrust in products, no quality guarantee, the poor quality (25%). Regarding the image of the ‘Romania’ brand, the following strengths were revealed (Q5): wild nature, beautiful landscapes (85%), friendly and hospitable country (40%), cultural diversity, openness, cosmopolitan spirit (35%), economic growth (30%), gastronomy, organic, traditions, history (35%). Discussions with foreign wine experts on the negative country brand associations were dominated by topics such as infrastructure and corruption (Q4): poverty (40%), political instability (35%), corruption (30%), infrastructure (20%), bureaucracy (20%).

The perception regarding Romanians, showed a transfer of attributes from the country brand. Thus, Romanians are perceived as friendly (30%), well educated (30%), competent (20%), open and cheerful (45%). At the same time, respondents attribute negative characteristics to Romanians, a respondent from Cyprus, which is a popular holiday destination for Romanians with medium and low incomes, from the more developed urban or rural areas, described them as "rude, noisy, uneducated" (Q3). In terms of general perception (Q2), Romania is perceived as being wild, undiscovered, authentic (45%), is associated with Dracula (25%), gastro-oenology (20%), Bucharest, Transylvania and with its night life (with 15% each). The Carpathian Mountains represent the most famous tourist attraction (55% of the answers), followed by the Bran Castle (20%), The People's House, the Black Sea and by Transylvania (each with 10% of the answers) (Q1).

Table 4. The results of the thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with wine experts

Living in RO: No – 20 Yes – 1	Visit RO: Yes – 21 No - 0
In which countries do you consider that the image of the exported wine has improved the image of the country of origin? Chile - 8 Argentina -6 New Zealand -6 Slovenia -5 South Africa - 5 Austria - 5 Portugal - 3 Australia - 4 Georgia - 4 Greece - 3 Bulgaria - 3 Croatia - 3 Moldova - 3 Hungary - 3 Lebanon - 2 Macedonia - 2 Italy - 2 Crimea, Czech Republic, Armenia, Corsica, France, Israel, China - 1	If you were a consultant for the Romanian wine image, you would focus on... Visits to Romania for journalists / promotion in foreign media - 7 Promoting generic tourism, oenological tourism, city trips with tastings - 5 Social Media / online promotion - 5 Hiring brand ambassadors - 5 Participating in fairs - -4 Promoting local grape varieties -2 Organizing street festivals - -2 Promoting local gastronomy --2 Promoting the tradition and history of winemaking --2 International workshops, dinners, other direct interactions -- 2 Participation in international competitions -2 Promotion of producing regions - 1
Has Romania's image improved after EU integration? Yes - 14 I don't know - 1 No – 4	Does the country-of-origin matter in choosing a wine? Yes – 19 No - 2 NOTES Yes, in the supermarket – 2/Yes, in specialty stores -4
Romania's competences in wine production and trade There is no promotion, strategy or information about wines, oenologists, varieties, quality, country of origin - 6 Romanian wines have good quality -5 Romanian wines (including traditional varieties) are not known -4	Made in Romania (strengths) Good value for money - 10 Good wine - 5 Reliable manufacturers, with history - 4 Craftsmen who produce quality goods - 4

<p>Suffers from wines known 15-20 years ago or during the communist period -3 The perception of quality is negative -3 Romania produces semi-sweet and sweet wines -2 High competence of oenologists -2 There is a need for technological updating and adaptation to international trends -2 Wines known as good value for money for cheap and medium wines -2</p>	<p>High quality agricultural products, high agricultural potential - 4 Original, exotic, authentic -3 Wild nature - 3 Attractive design - 3 Purity of products - 2</p>
<p>Made in Romania (weaknesses) Romania is not known, it does not have marketing, branding, strategy - 9 Cheap products, without differentiation, without identity, without innovation - 7 Lack of trust, poor quality, no quality guarantees, no regulation - 5 Weak design - 3 Lack of specialists / brain drain - 2</p>	<p>Describe Romania (positive) Wild nature, beautiful landscapes, excursions at a good price - 17 Friendly and hospitable country - 8 Cultural diversity, openness, cosmopolitan - 7 Economic growth - 6 Gastronomy, organic ingredients -3 Large dimensions - 2 Traditions, history - 4 Funny / humor- 2</p>
<p>Describe Romania (negative) Poverty, rural underdevelopment, Uneven development - 8 Political instability / division - 7 Corruption - 6 Infrastructure problems - 4 Bureaucracy - 4 Crimes - 2</p>	<p>How are Romanians perceived ? Hospitable, friendly, warm - 7 Well educated - 6 Professionals, competent - 4 Diversity, openness - 3 Cheerful, with humor - 2 Good at foreign languages - 2</p>
<p>How Romania is perceived ? Beautiful country, landscapes, mountains, sea - 9 Dracula - 5 Gastronomy, wines - 4 Bucharest - 3 Transylvania - 3 Nightlife - 3 Heritage, history, folklore - 3 Authentic, wild - 3 Castles, churches - 2</p>	<p>Romania as a tourist destination Carpathian Mountains, wild nature, outdoor activities - 11 Destination of oenogastronomy - 5 Bran Castle - 4 People's House -2 Transylvania -2 Seaside destination - 2</p>

Below we presented excerpts from interviews with 2 respondents that reveal their image of Romania, in general, Romania as the country of origin of wines and the image of Romanian wines.

Interview 1 (FG, consultant, Italy): “Romania’s image has changed a lot in Italy lately, in the years 1990-2000 it was much more related to the image of intense migration from Romania to Italy, the large number of Romanians coming to work being a source for several episodes of social unrest, especially in northern Italy. Although there are many Romanians working here, there are also many companies that have moved production to Romania, which has led to an even deeper consolidation of the relations. Regarding the presence of Romanian wine in Italy - it is still at a very low level, but this is applicable for all wine-producing countries in Europe. However, there is a degree of curiosity about the first-time experiences and we are dealing, lately, with a new image of Romanian wines, which is gaining more and more distinctions at international competitions. It has happened to me several times to bring to Italian tastings wines from the companies I advise in Romania, and the guests of the event to be very pleasantly impressed by their quality. I believe that the effect of corruption on wines is that it slows down access to funds, wastes energy and can become an obstacle to the spread of these products around the world. But wine means culture, in fact it is one of the most powerful means to spread the culture of a nation, and Romania has an enormous potential still unexplored, has many vineyards with local grapes, able not only to revive national pride, but also to communicate to the whole world the values of a unique civilization and extraordinary people.’

Interview 2 (R.S., Master of Wine, UK): “Unfortunately, Romanian wine is not acknowledged in the UK or France, it is rather ignored. Which is more of a good thing than a bad thing, because people of my generation remember a cheap and not at all good Pinot noir from Ceausescu's time, and this is an image that is difficult to repair ... Today's young people know nothing or almost nothing about it, and that is an opportunity. Lately, Transylvania has gained a positive image in terms of tourism. There are also negative, racist attitudes related to the immigration of the Roma population, but this not only has nothing to do with wine, but anyone who has ever met a Romanian knows what pleasant people they are. At the population level, however, it can be said that France and the United Kingdom expect products from Eastern countries to be cheap, with the exception of Tokaji wines, caviar and some vodka brands. As for the country's image, although politics and wine should not be mixed, I am afraid that people perceive immigration as a negative factor. Brexit, the resurgence of

nationalism in Austria, Poland or Hungary are clear evidences of this. But for Romania it is easier to fight with these conceptions by promoting its positive aspects (instead of contradicting the negative ones), which is also true for wine. Landscapes, people, gastronomy and lifestyle are all positive aspects for Romania. Wine can help improve Romania's image, but I don't think at the producer level - we have seen in the cases of Davino, Balla Geza and others: the existence of European-class wines is not enough. ... Rather an intense and generic promotion of Fetească varieties. How many wineries in Georgia do you think consumers can name? And yet they are familiar with Saperavi.”

V. CONCLUSION

This study, which is part of a larger study, is important because it led to familiarization with a subject that received little attention by researchers, the influence of the country brand, the country of origin on the image of wines. The study also provides the first elements regarding the consideration of the inverse influence, that of the image of products manufactured in a country on the image of the country brand.

Interviews with wine experts reveal the need to increase the notoriety of Romanian wines, which are little known in foreign markets, the lack or insufficiency of integrated marketing communication campaigns, or the lack of a strategic approach to wine marketing.

Respondents who are part of the sample also offered the first strategic and tactical solutions to increase the notoriety rate and build the image of wines: promoting generic tourism, oenological tourism, "city trip" with tastings, advertising and public relations campaigns in social media, hiring brand ambassadors, inviting foreign journalists to various events, organizing street festivals and promoting local gastronomy, in which wine occupies an important place, etc.

The study also highlighted the main points of differentiation that can be considered in the strategy of positioning the country brand: wild nature, beautiful landscapes, friendly and hospitable country, cultural diversity, openness, cosmopolitan spirit, gastronomy, bio, traditions, history. Along with these axes, the interviews show that in the strategy of positioning the country brand and the marketing campaigns that lead to its implementation, positive associations of people should be taken into account, Romanians being perceived as friendly, well educated, competent, open and cheerful.

Experts confirm that the image of wine can influence the image of the country brand, as it did in countries such as Chile, Argentina, South Africa, Slovenia and Georgia, although they are countries with human rights, democracy or economic issues. Australia and New Zealand are also examples of countries which have grown enormously in popularity and become wine tourism destinations after massive exporting of wine.

As a limitation of this study, since it is a qualitative study, we can mention the unrepresentativeness of the sample and the impossibility to generalize the obtained results.

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