STUDY ON BRAND STRATEGIES AND BRAND ARCHITECTURE IN THE WINE INDUSTRY – CASE STUDY: DRĂGĂȘANI VINEYARD, VALCEA COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract

Given the growing importance of brands in the wine industry, the purpose of this study is to conduct an analysis of brand strategies and brand architecture used by Romanian wine producers in the Dragășani Vineyard. Academic literature has been reviewed to present the up-to-date theoretical concepts that underpin this research. The research methodology was based on the „honeycomb model", and the research strategy was qualitative. Secondary data were collected from 13 wine producers in the Dragășani Vineyard. The main results of this study focus on the number of brands in each producer's portfolio, the brand strategies and architecture they use, the brand elements that contribute to increasing brand awareness and equity, as well as the means and elements used for differentiation strategy. The study reflects the growing importance that producers in the Dragășani Vineyard place on brands, as well as the increasing need for them to adopt a unified and integrated approach to brand portfolio management.

Key words: *brands, brands in wine industry, brand strategy, brand portfolio, brand architecture, brand elements*

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this study is to conduct a multi-criteria analysis of the brands developed and marketed by wine producers in the Dragășani Vineyard. The main criteria used for analysis are: brand strategy, brand architecture, and the brand elements employed by these wine producers.

This multi-criteria analysis is justified by the increasing importance of brands in the wine industry, both at the local and international levels. These wine markets are dynamic, volatile, and highly competitive. This is because wine is distinct from other agricultural products. Unlike milk, flour, fruits, or vegetables, consumers seek information about when, where, and how the wine was made, and these represent important criteria in their purchasing decisions [16].

In an attempt to define the wine brand, [29] proposes the following version: „a wine product is something made in a winery; a brand is something that is bought by the consumer. A wine can be copied by a competitor; a successful brand is unique."

On the other hand, the wine brand is also defined as „the perception of the wine product and its name in the consumer's mind" [23]. A wine brand is much more than a wine label. Building a brand is crucial in a wine market where the consumer can be overwhelmed by too many options [34], and the wine market is particularly challenging for brand differentiation due to the presence of thousands of brands [17]. Traditionally, the wine industry has had a dual approach: a brand strategy versus an appellation strategy [22]. Many observers believe that a brand-oriented approach is more suitable to meet the current expectations of consumers, while others argue that a system-based approach using appellations is more effective, especially with educated consumers. Brand strategies in the wine industry tend to focus more on product characteristics and attributes and their ability to stimulate greater consumption among consumers [34].

Next, we aim to summarize the academic literature regarding brand strategy and portfolio, brand architecture and elements. A company must define its brand strategy,

which impacts all its products. This strategy will also guide the branding of new products [21]. The brand strategy reflects the number and nature of common and distinctive elements of a brand applied to various products sold by the company [21]. These are a crucial factor in determining the strength of association between the brand, the company, and any other existing brands [20]. It guides marketers on what brand names, logos, symbols to apply to new and existing products [20]. Combining the product-brand matrix and brand hierarchy with customer, company, and competition considerations helps formulate an optimal brand strategy [20].

Every company has five options when it comes to brand strategy. It can pursue line extensions, brand extensions, multiple brands, new brands and co-brands [21]. There are also three main branding options for a new product: creating a new brand, adopting or modifying an existing brand, or combining an existing brand with a new brand [20].

The traditional approach to brand management has focused on individual brands, but in recent times, managers have shifted their attention to managing and increasing the value of the entire brand portfolio of the company [26]. Companies' desire to expand, to respond to changing consumer needs, and develop new distribution channels is often achieved by adding new brands to their portfolio, thereby justifying the increased importance of brand portfolio strategy [19], [14]. Brand portfolio gains exceptional importance when a company is faced with aggressive growth objectives or impending mergers, acquisitions, and alliances. It allows to the companies to formulate a distinct strategy for each brand, assess the necessity for repositioning and recognize brands that are underperforming [32]. Consequently, the role of managers no longer revolves solely around creating strong brands but also involves managing complex brand portfolios [31]. Some researchers equate brand strategy and brand architecture [21]. Brand architecture defines both the boundaries and complexity of the brand and helps us to find answers to questions such as:

what different products should have the same brand name? How many variations of that brand name should we use? [20]. There is also a nuanced approach [1], where brand architecture is defined as a „structural organization of the brand portfolio that specifies the roles of brands and the nature of relationships between brands". It enables brands to grow, expand, support each other, thereby increasing the value of individual brands and the overall portfolio [26]. Brand architecture serves as a mechanism of the company which assist consumers to understand its offer of products and services and to structure them in their mind [28].

Academic literature is abundant with terminologies and brand architecture structures, many of which are similar [1], [30], [19], but despite the common elements, these approaches vary in terminology and level of detail [34]. One of the most important models for brand architecture structure is the „brand relationship spectrum" [1]. It proposes four strategies and nine sub strategies for organizing brand portfolios. The location on the spectrum indicates the extent to which brands differentiate in implementing their strategies and, eventually, in the perceptions of consumers. For devising effective brand strategies, understanding each of these primary and subordinate strategies is crucial [1]. Despite the criticisms [32], this model is considered to be the most comprehensive and complex in the study of brand architecture [34]. Brand portfolio strategy and brand architecture, though sharing similarities in market approach, hold distinct places in addressing consumer needs. Each company must tailor its brand portfolio strategy to align with market, product, or customer needs, while weighing the inherent risks and opportunities in each market.

On the other hand, brand architecture should not be mismanaged when deciding the optimal operational approach, such as practices for product positioning. Brand architecture serves as a blueprint for how consumers mentally categorize which product best suits their needs at a given life stage. Once this alignment is achieved, consumers

can then navigate through the company's brand portfolio [28]. Brand elements (brand identities) are those items that serve for brand identification and differentiation. The main elements include: brand name, URLs, logos, symbols, characters, slogans, jingles, and packaging. They have the role to enhance brand awareness and increase brand equity [20]. Six criteria are proposed for selecting brand elements: memorability, meaning, likability, transferability, adaptability, and protectability [20]. Also, some specific considerations are linked to brand items.

First, packaging/labelling. Structural changes in the European food industry entail an increased need for competitiveness, and packaging (labelling) is an item that can make a difference for many products in this industry [27]. Often associated with or used as a synonym for a brand, the label on a wine bottle is the tangible evidence of the brand. Along with the brand name, image, picture and logo, a label provides information about the wine's style (taste and aroma), a description of it, food pairing options, awards and medals won, producer, wine region, and production year [25, 34]. While the front label is typically considered for evocation, the back label is expected to provide technical information [2]. Secondly- the geographical indication is a distinctive sign allowing producers to secure their established reputation against imitation and fraud [34]. However, trade brands are rights held individually, while the geographical indication can be considered an asset belonging to a certain group of companies [18]. It is considered [34] that the PDO/PGI certification scheme is primarily a mechanism for protecting the interests of national/regional producers, rather than a marketing tool.

Third- the awards won at wine exhibitions and competitions and the scores received from some wine gurus. All of these can be classified as third-party endorsement brands. According to the content of the information provided by the third-party endorsement brands, these can be classified into three main categories: factual certification, evaluative certification, and warranty certification. The wine exhibition awards and the scores belong to the group of evaluative certifications that provide specific evaluation of attributes [25]. They are of particular interest to retailers and producers as they are considered to be easily recognizable and support consumer choice by communicating superior quality.

In this context, the paper aimed to carry out an analysis of brand strategies and brand architecture used by Romanian wine producers in the Drăgășani Vineyard, Romania.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This analysis targets the wine producers from the Drăgășani Vineyard. This vineyard is part of the wine-growing region of the Muntenia and Oltenia Hills and is the oldest vineyard in Oltenia. The controlled designation of origin "Drăgășani" is attributed to wines made from grapes produced in the area demarcated for this designation. This area extends between the Getic Sub Carpathians to the north and the Romanian Plain to the south and southeast.

The most important wine producers that are part of the Drăgășani Vineyard are: Crama Avincis, Crama Bauer, Crama Stirbey, Domeniul Drăgași, Crama Venetic, Casa de vinuri Isărescu, Casa de vinuri Iordache, Casa de vinuri Negrini, Via Sandu, Crama Cepari, Crama Spârleni, Crama Mennini, Ferma Măgureni [24]. The research methodology is based on the honeycomb model developed by [35]. This model has six distinct stages: research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, research plan, data collection and analysis. From the viewpoint of research philosophy, the epistemological approach is interpretivist and the ontological approach is based on subjectivism [35]. The research approach is inductive strategy is of a qualitative type (which implies an "inside-out" approach) and is based on an open research question. The type of research is exploratory and its plan combines elements of an action plan and case study.

The data used are secondary being collected from websites of the wine producers from the Drăgășani Vineyard. The data interpretation is

qualitative with elements of quantitative analysis. For the analysis of strategies and brand portfolios, the starting point was the definitions proposed by [21], while for the analysis of brand architecture, the brand relationship spectrum model developed by [1] was used, which involves the existence of four basic strategies and nine sub-strategies. These are: 1) House of Brands (with the sub-strategies Not-Connected and Shadow Endorser); 2) Endorsed Brands (with the sub-strategies Token Endorsement, Linked Name, and Strong Endorsement); 3) Sub-brands (with the sub-strategies Co-Drivers and Master Brand as Driver); and 4) Branded House (with the sub-strategies Different Identity and Same Identity). Finally, for the analysis of brand elements, the starting point was the evaluation criteria proposed by [20].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The entire analysis of this study is summarized in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Analysis of wine producers in Drăgășani Vineyard (part 1)

Criteria		Casa de vinuri Iordache	Casa de vinuri Isărescu	Casa de vinuri Negrini	Crama Avincis	Crama Bauer	Crama Cepari
No. of Brands In Portfolio		1 (Casa de vinuri Iordache)	3 (Casa Isărescu; Casa Isărescu Rezervă; Casa Isărescu Vintage)	3 (Negrini; Negrini Hexagon; Ag/um)	4 (Avincis; Avincis Cuvee; Domnul de Rouă; Vila Dobrușa)	3 (Bauer; Bauer Ceva Nou; Bauer Altceva)	3 (Crama Cepari; Criva; Salcament)
Wine Type	White	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Red	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Rose	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Sparkling				x	x	
Brand Strategy	Line Extension	x	x	x	x	x	
	Brand Extension						
	Multi Brands			x	x		x
	New Brands						
	Co-Brands						
Brand Architecture - House of Brands	Not Connected						x
	Shadow Endorser			x	x		x
Brand Architecture - Endorsed Brands	Token Endorsement						
	Linked Name						
	Strong Endorsement						
Brand Architecture - Sub-Brands	Co-Drivers						
	Master Brand as Driver		x	x	x	x	
Brand Architecture - Branded House	Different Identity						
	Same Identity	x	x	x	x	x	x
Brand Elements - Corporate Brand Name		Casa de vinuri Iordache	Casa Isărescu	Negrini	Avincis	Crama Bauer	Crama Cepari
Brand Elements - Brand Name	Vineyard Name				x	x	x
	Winemaker Name	x	x	x	x		
	Other Name			x	x		x
Brand Elements - Front Label	Logo	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Picture/Visual	x	x		x		x
	Prize/Points						
	IGP/DOP	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Grape Variety	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Wine Sweetness	x	x	x	x	x	x
Brand Elements - Back Label	Region/Place		x	x	x	x	x
	Grape Variety		x	x	x	x	x
	Description of the wine		x	x	x	x	x
	No. of bottles per vintage		x	x	x	x	x
	Food pairing		x	x	x	x	x
	Wine Sweetness		x	x	x	x	x
Brand Elements - Slogan/Differentiator		Tradition ("Founded in 1880")					

Source: Own research.

Table 2. Analysis of wine producers in Drăgășani Vineyard (part 2)

Criteria		Crama Mennini	Crama Spârleni	Crama Știrbey	Crama Venetic	Domeniul Drăgași	Ferma Măgureni	Via Sandu
No. of Brands In Portfolio		7 (Moments; Domeniul Mennini; Le Reve; Paolo Mennini; Irruma; Stelle di Mare; Cu Bule)	2 (Șani/ Spârleni; Spârleni Selecții)	2 (Prince Știrbey; Vin Știrbey)	1 (Venetic)	2 (Arhon; Pelerin)	5 (Pasiuni; Lacrimi de Lună; Diamant; Inspirație; Orange)	2 (Via Sandu; Cab Stejar)
Wine Type	White	x	X	x	x	x	x	x
	Red	x	X	x	x	x	x	x
	Rose	x	X	x	x	x	x	x
	Sparkling			x				
Brand Strategy	Line Extension			x	x		x	
	Brand Extension							
	Multi Brands	x	X			x	x	x
	New Brands							
	Co-Brands							
Brand Architecture - House of Brands	Not Connected	x					x	x
	Shadow Endorser					x	x	
Brand Architecture - Endorsed Brands	Token Endorsement							
	Linked Name							
	Strong Endorsement		X					
Brand Architecture - Sub-Brands	Co-Drivers							
	Master Brand as Driver		X	x				
Brand Architecture - Branded House	Different Identity							
	Same Identity				x			
Brand Elements - Corporate Brand Name		Crama Mennini	Crama Spârleni	Crama Știrbey	Crama Venetic	Domeniul Drăgași	Ferma Măgureni	Via Sandu
Brand Elements - Brand Name	Vineyard Name	x	X		x			x
	Winemaker Name	x		x				
	Other Name	x	X			x	x	x
Brand Elements - Front Label	Logo	x	X	x	x	x	x	x
	Picture/Visual	x	X		x		x	x
	Prize/Points						x	
	IGP/DOP	x	X				x	x
	Grape Variety	x	X	x	x	x	x	x
	Wine Sweetness	x	X	x	x	x	x	x
Brand Elements - Back Label	Region/Place	x	X	x	x	x	x	
	Grape Variety	x	X	x	x	x	x	
	Description of the wine	x	X	x	x	x	x	
	No. of bottles per vintage	x		x		x		
	Food pairing	x				x		
	Wine Sweetness	x	X	x	x	x	x	
Brand Elements - Slogan/Differentiator		Aspirational ("Ho sognato di essere qui")	Tradition ("1892")	Tradition (Family crest)				

Source: Own calculation.

The thirteen producers in the Drăgășani Vineyard manage a total of 38 wine brands, with an average of 2.9 brands per producer. The distribution of the number of wine brands per producer is presented in Table 3. It is observed that the producers with 2 and 3 brands in their portfolio ([10], [11], [13], [33] and [4], [5], [7], [8] respectively) represent 62% of the total producers. In this context, [9] stands out, having no fewer than 7 brands in its portfolio.

Table 3. Distribution of the number of wine brands per producer

No of brands in portfolio	No of producers	% of Total producers
1	2	15.4%
2	4	30.8%
3	4	30.8%
4	1	7.7%
5	1	7.7%
6	0	0.0%
7	1	7.7%
Total no. of brands	**38**	
Total no. of producers	**13**	
Avg. no. of brands/producer	**2.9**	

Source: Own calculation.

Based on the type of wine produced (white, red, rose, and sparkling), the situation of the producers in the Drăgășani Vineyard is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Wine producers based on the type of wine

Wine type	No of Producers	% of Total Producers
White, Red, Rose	10	76.9%
White, Red, Rose, Sparkling	3	23.1%
Total number of producers	13	

Source: Own calculation.

It is observed that only 3 out of the 13 producers ([6], [7], [11]) produce all four varieties of wines (white, red, rose, and sparkling). Another noteworthy point here is that none of the producers have chosen a specialization strategy, to exclusively produce one among the four varieties.

From the perspective of brand strategy, 10 producers apply only one type of strategy: 5 of them apply line extension ([3], [4], [7], [11] [12]) and the other 5 apply a multi-brands strategy ([8], [9], [10], [13] [33]). The remaining 3 producers resort to a combination of line extension and multi-brands strategies ([5], [6], [15]) (Table 5).

Table 5. Applied brand strategies

Applied brand strategies	No. of producers	% of Total Producers
Line extension	5	38.5%
Multi-brands	5	38.5%
Line extension & Multi-brands	3	23.1%
Total number of producers	13	

Source: Own calculation.

In the case of brand architecture structure, 6 out of the 13 producers use a single brand architecture structure ([3], [9], [11], [12], [13], [33]), 4 of them use a double brand architecture structure ([4], [7], [10], [15]) and 3 use a triple brand architecture structure ([5], [6], [13]).

The most common brand architecture structure is the Branded House/Same Identity with 7 mentions ([3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [12]) followed by Sub brands/Master Brand as Driver with 6 mentions each ([4], [5], [6], [7], [10], [11]) (Table 6).

Table 6. Brand architecture structures used

Brand architecture structures used	Usage number	% of Total
Branded House - Same Identity	7	30.4%
Sub-brands - Master Brand as Driver	6	26.1%
House of Brands - Shadow Endorser	5	21.7%
House of Brands - Not Connected	4	17.4%
Endorsed Brands - Strong Endorsement	1	4.3%
Total no. of structures used	23	

Source: Own calculation.

From the viewpoint of brand names, the most commonly encountered approaches are those that use the name of the vineyard domain or a distinct name (with 7 instances each), followed by those based on the name of the producer (with 6 instances). There are only 2 producers ([6], [9]) who use all three options in choosing the brand name (the name of the vineyard domain, the name of the producer, and a distinct name).

In the case of front labels, there is only one producer [15] who uses the symbol of awards won at competitions as an indicator of product quality. However, it should be mentioned that all other producers use the symbol of the awards won or the scores given by wine gurus on presentation websites and their own online stores. Regarding the back labels, it should be noted that 2 out of the 13 producers do not use back labels at all, having the information concentrated on the front label.

Last but not least, it must be emphasized that only 4 out of the 13 producers use a slogan or a visual identity element as a means of differentiation from other producers (Table 7).

Table 7. Usage of slogan or visual element as mean of a differentiation strategy

Usage of slogan or visual element	Usage number	% of Total Producers	% of Producers using slogan or visual element
Not using slogan or visual element	9	69.2%	
Using slogan or visual element (from which)	4	30.8%	
Tradition as differentiation strategy	3		75.0%
Aspirational as differentiation strategy	1		25.0%
Total number of producers	13		

Source: Own calculation.

Three of the producers use tradition as a differentiating element [3], [10], [11], and one of them [9] uses an aspirational type of slogan

as a differentiating element. However, none of the producers use a slogan or a visual identity element as a means of differentiation at the brand level.

CONCLUSIONS

A first conclusion is that the wine producers from the Drăgăşani Vineyard recognize the importance of wine brands in the current context of the local and international market. The vast majority (85%) manage a limited number of brands (a maximum of 4), the exception being a single producer who has 7 brands in their portfolio.

A second conclusion is related to the fact that all producers make white, red and rose wines, and three of them also produce sparkling wine. It is surprising that none of the producers have chosen a specialization strategy, which might be particularly advisable for smaller companies with significantly limited financial resources, unable to sustain a wide variety of products and brands on the market.

A third conclusion concerns brand strategies, and producers use the extremes of these strategies (line extensions and multi brands). Regarding brand architecture, the structures used are not clear, evident, there are many confusions, overlaps, and intercalations. A detailed analysis of the product lines and brand portfolio combined with a brand audit could help producers in optimizing brand architecture and improving their financial performance.

The fourth conclusion relates to the very small number of producers/brands that use the awards received at wine competitions or the scores from wine gurus to signal the superior quality of their products on the label.

The fifth conclusion is related to the lack of slogans or visual identity elements that act as differentiators at the brand level. This is a situation that should concern producers, especially since the competition is fierce and the differentiation strategy is a guarantee of a strong brand and steady, substantial revenue. Producers are essentially obligated to invest in improving all the intangible elements that influence consumer choices.

In the end, it must be emphasized that producers need to adopt a unified and integrated approach to brand portfolio management, including from the broader perspective of integrating them under the umbrella of a sectoral brand or a country brand.

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