Introduction

Academic ‘business’ disciplines such as marketing and management and related sectoral specialities (e.g. human resources, tourism or hospitality) have, until recently, largely neglected the notion of culture per se and, even more so, the intersection of wine with culture. Their focus on culture from the 1970s onwards was not aimed at understanding the dimensions of a culture (‘intrinsic culture’), but rather at helping organisations function better in different cultures (e.g. staff management, marketing products, financial control); this we can term instrumental culture.

This chapter examines the lack of attention to intrinsic culture, the evolution of interest in ‘culture’ in the business disciplines and the emergence of a nascent, more wine-relevant intrinsic view of culture within tourism and consumer behaviour.

The origins and evolution of the idea of culture in the business disciplines

Among several antecedents to the business academe, economics is the most prominent. Thus, like economics in the twentieth century, these disciplines were positivist. Researchers attempted to establish them as ‘sciences’ and focused on quantitative analysis to model, measure and predict efficiency, sales or profitability. Because it is difficult to model and quantify, culture had a minor place in this evolution, which concentrated on predictive rules for the management of enterprises. The study of consumer choice exemplified this neglect. The dominant model was ‘information processing’. Consumers are seen as rational beings who evaluate available information about competing products and, within the context of price, make a rational choice of the most satisfying product for their requirements. Cultural context, social norms, myths and taboos were perceived to have little or no relevance to the decisions consumers would make.

The business disciplines subsequently drew from other disciplines. Psychology became significant. (Experimental psychology was also positivist.) Only later, from the 1970s onwards, did the influence of anthropology, sociology and even geography and history begin to challenge the dominant, positivist paradigm (and later, integrate with it). Until then, to the extent that culture was considered, it was merely a background factor which produced a level of uncertainty in the data used.

There were two key results of the positivist origins of the business disciplines in the context of their understanding and use of culture. First, culture became the focus of a type of good in...
product-focused fields (e.g., marketing, tourism). Its definition concentrated on civilisation, refinement or good taste rather than the broader notion of the nature of a particular society or group as used in this Handbook; thus, culture management or cultural tourism (originally) would be about high art or a material environment. Only later, especially in tourism (see later in this chapter) did understanding widen to include engagement with the cultural environment of particular groups of individuals. Fine wine could, conceivably, be included in the first category of refined goods (along with fine dining); wine as the product of a specific social milieu was considered irrelevant.

The second development from the positivist approach was the influence of Edward Hall’s notion of high-context and low-context cultures (Hall 1976) and then the work of Geert Hofstede (Hofstede 1980, 1991; Hofstede et al. 2010). Hofstede used a large international database of IBM employees to establish national (cultural) differences in approach to organisations and management. There were originally four dimensions (Hofstede 1980) – power distance, individualism or collectivism, masculine versus feminine attitudes and uncertainty avoidance – subsequently joined by a fifth (long-term versus short-term orientation) (Hofstede 1991) and then a sixth (indulgence versus restraint) (Hofstede et al. 2010). The analyses of national differences challenged the prevailing view of a single global model of organisations and revolutionised our understanding of management and marketing. However, they also reinforced the positivist approach to ‘culture’ as instrumental rather than intrinsic (and thus a subject worth studying in itself); given the focus of the business disciplines, this was both inevitable and necessary. However, the instrumental approach tended to reduce cultures to ciphers (often by applying Hofstede’s analysis) which need to be managed for desired outcomes (Hofstede 1991). First designed for organisational science, this approach has also been widely used in marketing as the dominant paradigm. Thus, for instance, Seidemann et al. (2017), in an exploration of wine as a gift, use both Hall and Hofstede to explain that role for wine in China. Nevertheless, some streams of contemporary marketing thought view Hofstede’s approach as both essentialist (and thus universal) and static, rather than historically and interculturally dynamic.

**The evolution and use of culture in marketing**

One would expect marketing to have a major focus on culture, given its concentration on consumers and (sometimes) producers. However, a typical marketing textbook devotes perhaps a few pages to culture. Over the last 30 years, marketing thought has evolved away from the product (thus the producer) and sales and towards consumers and their experience (Gilmore and Pine 1999). A result of this is that the significance of intermediaries is often minimised, although their role (and thus their cultural context) are significant for products like wine (see later in this chapter).

**Consumer behaviour and consumer culture theory**

It is within the field of consumer behaviour that culture (albeit often unacknowledged) is most relevant to marketing. Important here – amongst other influences – is the work first of Levy (1959) and subsequently of Appadurai (1986). Following on from them, researchers have explored not merely what products do for people but also what they mean and the meanings which people ascribe to them (semitical works include – amongst many others – Belk 1988; Belk et al. 1991; Holbrook and Hirschman 1980; McCracken 1986; Solomon 1983). Although this ‘interpretivist’ stream of research did not always explicitly focus on culture, its exploration of symbolic meaning is rooted in an approach, often phenomenological, which seeks to understand the society which fosters those consumers and shapes their worldview.

The cultural analysis of wine has tended to be more limited, usually to denote ethnic variation, such as an early study of Australian wine consumers (Hall et al. 1997), concluding that ethnic origin significantly affected the occasions of wine consumption. A later study on UK consumers did
include identity, ritual and wine as a form of material culture but finally focused primarily on buying behaviour (Ritchie 2007). More recent research on Generation Y analyses their consumption values (Mueller Loose and Remaud 2011), their relationship to images of wine (Velikova et al. 2016) and the appeal of pink wine (Velikova et al. 2015). Meanwhile, the burgeoning Chinese wine market has stimulated interest in that country’s cultural approach to wine, though the focus is still more instrumental than intrinsic (Capitello et al. 2017; Jenster and Cheng 2008; Liu and Murphy 2007; for an ‘intrinsic’ exception, see Smith Maguire and Lim 2015). Another Chinese study, which uses a semiotic approach to examine wine culture, is by Celhay et al. (2020). Celhay has also previously researched young Basque drinkers (2008), who developed the kalimoxto – a mix of Coca Cola and red wine – ostensibly as an exploration of generational identity, though its focus on a specific ethnic sub-group is noteworthy. Yet without defining it, all these studies use ‘culture’ as a variable assumed to explain difference rather than exploring wine’s place in a wider cultural framework.

More recently, a sub-domain of consumer behaviour – ‘consumer culture theory’ (CCT) – has concentrated explicitly on consumption’s more intrinsic cultural dimension. CCT is an extension of the interpretivist approach noted earlier (Arnould and Thompson 2005) and focuses explicitly on individuals’ emic (‘lived’) experiences with products within a specific culture, group or ‘tribe’; it concentrates on the relationship of identity to markets and how, structurally, consumption operates in different cultural contexts; it also has a clear historical perspective, noting that markets change with time in response to changing culture (Rokka 2021). So far, CCT has had a limited focus on the study of wine, with Beverland (2004, 2005, 2006), Rokka (2017; Rokka and Canniford 2016; also chapter 24 in this book) and Humphreys and Carpenter (2018 and chapter 39 in this book) as the exceptions who have begun work within this paradigm.

How marketing shapes culture

Rokka’s research examining how consumers use social media to influence champagne brand meaning highlights one area in which marketing has a recognised and direct interaction with culture: how, especially in the contemporary world, marketing shapes culture. The dramatic global expansion of consumer marketing in the late twentieth century (stimulated partly by the impact of modern marketing) means that now (as noted earlier), products lend meaning to consumers’ lives. It also means that they, in turn, impute meaning to products (e.g. Holt 2002; Schroeder and Salzer-Morling 2006; Solomon 1983). As a result, the culture of consumers (and a culture of consumption) help ‘shape’ brand meaning; in turn, brands affect a culture’s structure and evolution. However, with the exceptions of Rokka and Smith Maguire (2010), these approaches, emphasising the co-creation of meaning, have not been used widely to explain cultures of wine consumption and have mainly been used – again instrumentally – as a means of understanding value.

Tourism, wine and culture

Tourism (and hospitality, which overlaps with tourism), unlike other business disciplines, has focused more broadly on intrinsic rather than just instrumental culture, perhaps because much of the early research was sociological rather than commercial or economic – which is still the case. Researchers examine both cultural tourism (i.e. culture as an attraction) and the culture of tourist destinations (as the context for the tourism offer). The result is that wine tourism has provided substantial research examining the cultural context of both suppliers and consumers.

The first explicit examination of the intersection of culture with wine tourism was offered by Ravenscroft and van Westering (2001). They addressed the theoretical issues behind the significance of wine consumption as a social practice and, within this, the significance of tourism in wine consumption and especially the creation of social boundaries based on levels of wine knowledge and the
relationship between tourism and the personal journey. In the process, they identified the methods that Western connoisseurs used to assert their prestige. From a different perspective, Frochot (2001) examined the world of French winemakers and how they established brotherhoods which emerged in local wine regional cultures and have, over time, acted as convivial, cohesive institutions in rural regions and also powerful bodies in representing the regional wines; they fulfil both historical and cultural needs and economic requirements. At the same time, Williams and Kelly (2001) also reinforced the intimate relationship of culture to (rural) wine for some tourists.

More recent studies have examined the comparative spatial structuring and social relationships of wine regions and wine tourism in France and Australia in the context of Bonnemaison’s cultural systems approach² (Mitchell et al. 2012) and the combining of wine with culture (specifically, the cultural values of a place) to create a transformative tourism experience (Sigala 2019). Fountain et al. (2020) have studied the cultural perspective of wine tourism providers in Burgundy, framing their research with cultural notions of place, particularly the tensions arising from globalisation and rural change. Even in wine tourism, however, the instrumental approach to culture remains at least as important as the intrinsic.

Directions for future research

A number of themes for future study emerge from this review of research on the interaction of wine business and culture.

Place branding and the management of terroir

Place branding has been widely researched at the intersection of marketing, tourism and non-business disciplines. The wine-related research has focused on terroir (see Chapters 8 and 11 in this volume), very much in conjunction with the idea of value (Charters et al. 2017) or branding (Fort and Fort 2006; Spielmann and Gelinas-Chebat 2012). Only occasionally have studies within the discipline of business gone behind the instrumental to examine the cultural construction of terroir as an idea (e.g. Charters 2019; Smith Maguire 2010). Nevertheless, place as a general concept (including terroir but also place attachment and the nature of place image) is ripe for further research. Specifically the interaction between ecosystem (on a large and a small scale), identity, geography, social history and structure and rural economy would be a fruitful area for exploration in the context of culture.

Authenticity

Terroir can be seen as one component of a larger theme currently significant in consumer research – authenticity, including consumers’ interpretation of and need for it, and producers’ portrayal of it. It is one lens for viewing culture. Beverland (2005, 2006) has done some fundamental work in the area and noted the importance of culture as a referent without specifically investigating how culture shapes authenticity. One study examined Russian ‘champagne’ in a historic-cultural context (Kniazeva and Charters 2014), and another looks at family heritage as a marketing frame for Australian producers (Strickland et al. 2013). Nevertheless, the wine, culture and authenticity nexus remains largely unexamined, with a specific need for taking the authenticity element of the triad out of a Western context (see, for instance, Seidemann et al., 2017).

Luxury

Luxury products as a category have been widely explored by business academics, including their cultural dimensions. Wine spans a range of product categories, including beverage, commodity,
premium and luxury. Luxury wine markets work well as a means of examining luxury as an expression of culture. Beverland’s studies, already noted (2004, 2005) are specifically focused on luxury wines and offer a useful starting point. Other business researchers have alluded to the cultural dimension of luxury (Ritchie 2007; Thach et al. 2018), and it is particularly important in the growing Chinese market (Seidemann et al. 2017; Cohen et al. in this volume). The management of wine as a luxury product is ripe for further cultural investigation.

Intermediaries

The business disciplines’ focus on consumers has neglected intermediaries, but they are necessarily important in wine business (Dodd 1997; Seidemann et al. 2017; Smith Maguire 2010; Spielmann et al. 2014; Thode et al. 2002), especially given the fragmented market and consumers’ difficulty in evaluating wine. Smith Maguire (2010, 2013; Smith Maguire and Zhang 2016) has focused on this and provided a strong cultural context for wine intermediaries, but the role warrants more attention, particularly the cultural factors influencing the consumer’s response to critics and writers and those intermediaries’ own cultural influences.

Taste

There has been substantial sociological investigation of the taste and taste construction (e.g. Grunow 1997), including in the area of wine (Smith Maguire 2018). Less has been done within the domain of business, but CCT is beginning to stimulate a research stream here (Arsel and Bean 2013; Maciel and Wallendorf 2017; Pomies et al. 2021), with a focus on the cultural construction of consumer taste. Wine, which one ‘tastes’ and which implies the use of ‘good taste’ as a means of discrimination (and, consequently, of consumption choice) is ideally placed for increasing our understanding of the intersection of culture and taste construction. This is especially relevant given the (sometimes contradictory) impact of physiological taste preferences as well as cultural drinking expectations and rituals (note here Cowan and Spielmann, 2017, on rituals in luxury consumption). Taste is one of the key drivers of culture and is strongly influenced by changes in markets; it also offers a framework for exploring differences in practices across various communities, and thus directly feeding back into cultural change.

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Notes

1 One exception to the lack of material at the intersection of wine, business and culture is my own work, Wine and Society: The Social and Cultural Context of a Drink (Elsevier, 2006), which considers inter alia some cultural factors on both production and consumption, many of which are addressed in this chapter. However, it was introductory rather than the product of detailed research and is now rather dated.

2 An ethno-geographical approach which posits that knowledge, techniques, beliefs and space are the four key ‘pillars’ which sustain a cultural system (Bonnemaison 2005).

References


