

Georgia – the Cradle of Wine: How Does Cultural and Historical Heritage Influence a Country’s Marketing?

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Abstract. This paper examines how Georgia uses the “Cradle of Wine” narrative in country marketing and in the digital presentation of cultural heritage. Through qualitative content analysis of official tourism communication, wine-promotion materials, and selected mediated texts, it shows that heritage works differently across audiences: familiar publics respond to recognition cues, whereas unfamiliar markets require clearer explanation and stronger quality proof. The study proposes recognition-first, proof-first, and hybrid communication strategies. It also argues that digital and media-based visibility can support the broader safeguarding environment of living heritage by strengthening awareness, legitimacy, and international recognition of traditional practices.

Keywords: Country Marketing, Heritage Marketing, Georgian Wine, Nation Branding, Authenticity.

1 Introduction

In contemporary international competition, countries market not only products and destinations but also meanings. They seek to make themselves legible through narratives that condense history, culture and value into recognisable signals for tourists, investors and consumers (Abuseridze et al., 2022; Abuseridze et al., 2024; Katamadze et al., 2024). Wine offers an especially revealing field for studying this process because it is marketed through origin, memory, ritual, expertise and geography at the same time. A bottle of wine is never presented as a purely functional good. It carries claims about place, continuity, authenticity and distinction. For that reason, wine is one of the clearest sectors in which cultural-historical heritage can be turned into a marketing resource.

Georgia is a particularly strong case for this kind of analysis. In official communication, the country is repeatedly framed as the “Cradle of Wine”, the place where wine-making began and where wine remains embedded in everyday social life. A central element of this narrative is the **qvevri**, a large earthenware vessel buried in the ground and used for the fermentation, ageing, and storage of wine. The broader social setting of Georgian wine culture is often conveyed through the **supra**, the traditional Georgian

feast structured by hospitality and ritualised toasting, and through the **marani**, the household wine cellar or wine space associated with family production, storage, and the transmission of winemaking practices across generations.

That narrative is not built on a single promotional slogan. It is supported by several layers of institutional and symbolic recognition. The Law of Georgia on Vine and Wine defines viticulture and winemaking as a “historic, cultural, and economic priority sector” (Law of Georgia on Vine and Wine, 1998). UNESCO inscribed the ancient Georgian traditional qvevri wine-making method on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013, emphasising intergenerational transmission and the continued social relevance of the practice (UNESCO, 2013). Archaeological research published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* added further weight to the origin narrative by identifying chemical and archaeobotanical evidence of grape wine in Georgia in the early Neolithic, around 6000–5800 BC (McGovern et al., 2017). Together, these legal, cultural, and scientific elements create unusually dense support for the external marketing use of heritage.

In the present context, this heritage narrative circulates not only through conventional promotion, but also through digital communication environments. Georgia’s wine story is presented through official tourism portals, the website of the National Wine Agency, online news items, and mediated screen formats that extend the visibility of Georgian wine culture beyond physical exhibitions and tastings. This is especially important for intangible cultural heritage, whose international legibility increasingly depends on digital access, repeated online exposure, and explanatory media framing.

At the same time, Georgian wine is not a purely symbolic object. It has a measurable place in the country’s external economic profile. According to the National Wine Agency’s annual report, in 2024 Georgia exported 95 million litres of wine worth USD 276.1 million, while exports of wine and other alcoholic beverages together generated USD 565 million (National Wine Agency of Georgia, 2025). Geostat likewise reports that exports of wine of fresh grapes reached USD 274.7 million in 2024, making wine one of Georgia’s leading domestic export items (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2025). In parallel, the state has continued to invest in external promotion through exhibitions, tastings, media work, and targeted campaigns in priority markets, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, the Baltic states, China, Japan, and South Korea (National Wine Agency of Georgia, 2025). Wine therefore sits at the intersection of culture, trade, tourism, and public diplomacy.

Yet the existence of a strong heritage narrative does not automatically explain how that narrative works in country marketing. The same message can be persuasive in one market and insufficient in another. In some audiences, “Georgian wine” already carries associations of quality, conviviality and tradition, whether because of historical familiarity, repeated contact or inherited cultural memory. In others, Georgian wine has to compete in a cognitive space dominated by France, Spain or Italy, where the country’s historic claim may attract attention but may not by itself generate trust. This raises a more precise analytical question than the general proposition that heritage matters. The problem is not whether heritage is useful, but under what communicative conditions it becomes persuasive.

This paper therefore asks how Georgia's "Cradle of Wine" narrative functions across audiences with different levels of prior familiarity. The aim is to explain how cultural and historical heritage is converted into a country-marketing asset and to identify the kinds of textual framing that make this asset effective in different market environments. More specifically, the article examines which heritage markers are used most consistently in official, semi-official, and digitally accessible public communication, how these markers are combined with quality signals, and how the balance between recognition, explanation, and proof changes depending on the implied audience. In doing so, the paper also addresses how digital presentation contributes to the wider visibility, interpretability, and public recognition of a living heritage practice. (Fig. 1.)

The article makes a modest but clear contribution. First, it brings together country marketing, heritage marketing and wine-origin studies in one applied case. Second, it introduces the analytical notion of heritage familiarity as a practical segmentation tool. Third, it develops a small typology of communication strategies: recognition-first, proof-first and hybrid. The central argument is straightforward. Heritage is a strong marketing asset only when its message is aligned with the audience's prior familiarity and supported by the appropriate degree of quality proof. Where familiarity is high, heritage can work through recognition and shared meaning. Where familiarity is low, it must be translated into more widely legible signals of credibility and quality.

The article is organised as follows. The next section outlines the conceptual framework and situates the Georgian case within the literature on country marketing, heritage marketing and authenticity. The third section explains the corpus and method. The fourth section presents the results of the qualitative content analysis. The fifth section discusses the implications for brand governance and export promotion. The conclusion summarises the main findings, notes the study's limitations and suggests directions for future research.

2 Conceptual Framework

2.1 Country Marketing, Nation Branding and The Symbolic Economy of Origin

Country marketing and nation-branding scholarship has shown that states increasingly rely on culture, food, lifestyle and selective historical narratives in order to improve external visibility and build favourable associations around exports and destinations. This is especially visible where tangible economic sectors overlap with symbolic production (Dorokhova et al., 2025; Popova et al., 2022; Sushchenko et al., 2025). Wine belongs to precisely this category. Unlike many other consumer goods, it is rarely judged without reference to place. Even when consumers cannot explain the technical basis of quality, they often rely on country and region as shortcuts. Origin reduces uncertainty. It helps organise expectations before the product is tasted.

The country-of-origin literature is particularly relevant here because it demonstrates that not all wine-producing countries occupy the same place in consumers' mental

maps. Research on wine traders’ expectations suggests that representations of established wine countries are usually more stable and more detailed, while less familiar countries are more dependent on broad national images and secondary cues (Rodrigues et al., 2020). This creates a structural asymmetry. France, Spain or Italy do not have to introduce themselves to global consumers as wine civilisations from the beginning. Smaller or less canonised producers must work harder to explain why their origin matters. Georgia occupies an unusual position in this regard. Historically, it can claim exceptional depth. In market perception, however, it is often encountered as a challenger brand in relation to more dominant reference regions.

That tension makes the Georgian case analytically productive. It shows that country marketing is not only about building visibility; it is also about managing interpretive distance. A country may possess a strong cultural story but still face weak automatic recognition in export markets. When that happens, country marketing has to do two things at once: differentiate and reassure. Heritage helps with the first task. Quality signals help with the second.

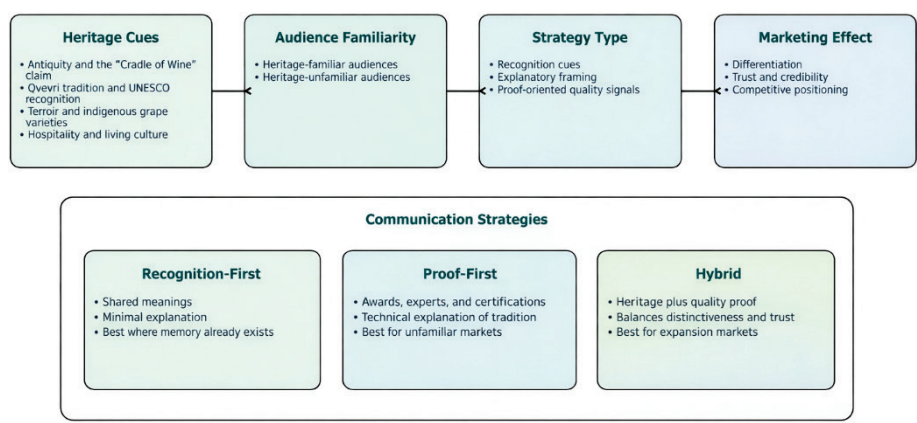


Fig. 1. Flowchart of communication strategies.

2.2 Heritage Marketing and Authenticity as Persuasive Resources

Heritage marketing literature provides a second important lens. The basic insight of this literature is that the past can generate present value when it is framed as relevant, credible and emotionally meaningful. Heritage is not simply age. It is a claim about continuity, identity and legitimacy. Studies of brand heritage show that references to a brand’s past can increase trust and attachment when they are perceived as authentic and coherent (Rose et al., 2016; Pecot et al., 2022). In other words, the past matters not because it is old, but because it signals durability, embeddedness and symbolic substance.

This argument is highly relevant to wine. In wine marketing, age and continuity often function as premium cues, but they only become persuasive when the audience can connect them to a recognisable form. The material form may be the bottle, the cellar,

the label, the vineyard landscape or the method of production. In the Georgian case, the qvevri plays exactly this role. It translates a very long chronology into a visible and narratable object. The qvevri is useful in marketing not only because it is old, but because it makes antiquity tangible. It allows historical depth to be condensed into an image, a process and a sensory expectation.

Authenticity research further sharpens this point. Consumers usually do not reward historical claims in the abstract. They respond to cues that make authenticity believable: consistency over time, expert endorsement, correspondence between story and practice, and recognisable markers of non-artificial continuity. In destination marketing, UNESCO labels can serve as one such cue because they provide institutional validation for practices that might otherwise appear as local folklore. In the Georgian case, the UNESCO inscription of qvevri winemaking is especially useful because it links history to a living social practice rather than to a museum object (UNESCO, 2013).

Digital presentation and the safeguarding environment of living heritage. For living heritage, presentation is not external to preservation. UNESCO's 2003 Convention defines safeguarding as including identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, and revitalization. The same framework also treats awareness-raising and public recognition as core purposes of safeguarding. In this sense, digital presentation matters analytically because it expands access to heritage narratives, makes practices more legible to distant audiences, and strengthens the public environment in which cultural traditions are valued, recognised, and reproduced. This does not mean that digital visibility automatically preserves a tradition. Rather, it means that online presentation, institutional websites, and mediated cultural formats can support the broader safeguarding ecology of intangible cultural heritage by increasing awareness, legitimacy, and interpretive access.

2.3 Heritage Familiarity as an Audience Condition

To examine how the Georgian wine narrative travels across markets, this paper uses the term heritage familiarity. The term refers to the extent to which audiences already possess a working interpretive frame for understanding Georgian wine as a culturally meaningful category. Heritage familiarity does not require expert knowledge. It can rest on repeated exposure, inherited memory, historical trade patterns, tourism encounters, restaurant mediation or diaspora experience. What matters is that the country-product connection is not completely new.

This category is useful because it captures a distinction that is often present in practice but under-specified in theory. In some markets, Georgian wine benefits from a residual base of recognition. Consumers may not know the details of qvevri production or the differences between Rkatsiteli and Saperavi, but they do not treat "Georgia" as an unknown proposition. In other markets, Georgian wine enters a more crowded and asymmetrical field in which Old World reference countries dominate the quality imagination. There, heritage must first establish relevance before it can generate preference.

The communicative implications are substantial. Where heritage familiarity is relatively high, communication can rely more heavily on recognition. Symbols may remain compressed. Hospitality, continuity and cultural warmth can be foregrounded without extended explanation. Where familiarity is low, the same symbols need translation. Qvevri must be explained as a method rather than named as a self-sufficient sign. Antiquity must be tied to institutional or scientific recognition. Distinctiveness must be accompanied by proof that it is not merely picturesque but quality-bearing.

2.4 Working Expectation of the Study

On this basis, the article proceeds with a simple working expectation. The “Cradle of Wine” narrative is unlikely to function uniformly across audiences. Its effectiveness depends on whether the audience already recognises Georgian wine as a meaningful category and on whether the communication supplements heritage with the kinds of trust signals that are legible in that market. This expectation does not presume that heritage is weak. On the contrary, the claim is that heritage is strongest when it is adapted rather than repeated mechanically.

3 Data and Method

The paper uses qualitative content analysis to examine how Georgia’s wine heritage is narrated in public-facing communication. The choice of method follows from the research question. The article is concerned not with measuring sales effects directly, but with reconstructing the communicative logic through which heritage is turned into a country-marketing instrument. For that purpose, a qualitative reading of texts is more appropriate than a large-scale quantitative design.

The corpus was assembled through purposive sampling and includes three groups of materials. The first group consists of official destination-marketing texts, especially English-language materials published on the Georgia Travel portal. These texts are important because they present Georgia to international audiences who may have very different levels of familiarity with the country and its wine culture. The second group consists of public-facing wine-promotion and export-oriented materials produced by the National Wine Agency, including annual reports, quarterly reports and campaign announcements. These documents are especially valuable because they combine narrative framing with information on markets, professional activities and strategic priorities. The third group includes selected mediating texts in which Georgian wine heritage appears within broader public culture, such as official communication surrounding the second season of the Apple TV series *Drops of God*. This third layer is not central to the dataset numerically, but it is analytically useful because it shows how the heritage message is amplified by external cultural formats (National Wine Agency of Georgia, 2026).

The sampled materials were selected according to three inclusion criteria. First, the text had to refer explicitly or implicitly to the idea that Georgia is the birthplace, cradle or oldest region of wine. Second, the text had to contain at least one identifiable heritage

marker, such as qvevri, indigenous grape varieties, supra, hospitality, continuity or deep historical time. Third, the text had to be intended for an external or semi-external public rather than for purely technical administration, and had to be available through public communication channels, including official websites, online institutional reports, or widely accessible mediated formats. This meant prioritising promotional, explanatory and representational materials over internal regulatory documentation.

The coding frame was organised around three clusters. The first cluster covered heritage markers: antiquity, continuity, qvevri, endemic varieties, terroir, supra, marani, ritualised hospitality and claims of uniqueness. The second cluster covered quality signals: awards, certifications, critics, expert references, exhibitions, tastings, export success, premium language and other trust-building cues. The third cluster covered audience-address cues. Here the analysis distinguished between recognition-oriented language, which assumes or lightly activates familiarity; explanatory language, which clarifies unknown practices or terms; and proof-oriented language, which provides external validation or professional endorsement.

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4 Results

4.1 The Narrative Core: From Antiquity to Market Legibility

Across the corpus, the “Cradle of Wine” narrative shows a stable internal sequence. The first move is chronological distinction. Georgia is introduced as exceptionally old within the world history of wine. This claim appears in direct formulations such as “oldest wine region” or “8,000-year-old tradition” and is often reinforced by references to archaeological findings or by the symbolic authority of UNESCO (Georgia Travel,

2022; McGovern et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2013). The second move is material embodiment. Antiquity is anchored in the qvevri, which functions as a concrete object through which historical continuity can be visualised and narrated. The third move is social embedding. Wine is linked to the **supra**, the traditional Georgian feast structured by hospitality and ritualised toasting, as well as to the **marani**, understood here as the household wine cellar or wine space associated with family production and storage, so that the tradition appears as lived culture rather than as a technical curiosity. The final move is contemporary relevance. The story is connected to tourism, export success, tastings, international exhibitions or premium consumption.

This sequence is important because it does more than present facts. It converts deep history into market-readable meaning. Antiquity creates distinction, but on its own it would remain abstract. Qvevri provides a memorable image. Hospitality gives the story warmth and social depth. Contemporary promotion supplies present-tense relevance. The overall effect is to make Georgia legible not simply as a country that has long produced wine, but as a place where wine can still be consumed as culture.

Official destination-marketing texts illustrate this process especially clearly. They do not separate history from experience. Instead, they move from the ancient to the sensorial in one continuous narrative. The visitor is invited to encounter a place where a very old practice remains visible in cellars, family tables and regional landscapes. This is a strong country-marketing move because it allows a national story to be experienced through a product category that is already globally associated with place and distinction.

4.2 Heritage Markers in the Corpus

Four heritage markers dominate the dataset. The first is antiquity. This is the broadest and most foundational marker. It appears in references to 8,000 years of tradition, in origin claims and in the repeated idea that Georgia is not simply an old producer but an origin point of viticulture. Antiquity gives the entire narrative its hierarchy of meaning. It distinguishes Georgia from competitors not by scale but by temporal depth.

The second marker is the qvevri tradition. In the corpus, qvevri is more than a production vessel. It acts as a condensed sign of authenticity because it brings together craft, material culture, continuity and difference. Qvevri is useful for communication precisely because it can be explained in two registers at once. In a heritage register, it is ancient and culturally distinctive. In a quality register, it is a production method that affects fermentation, maturation and sensory profile. This duality makes it central to the Georgian wine message (Table 1).

The third marker is varietal and territorial uniqueness. Official materials frequently refer to the large number of indigenous grape varieties and to distinctive wine regions. This expands the narrative from a single emblematic method to a wider biodiversity and terroir-based story. The effect is to prevent the “Cradle of Wine” idea from becoming too singular or static. Georgia is not presented only as old; it is also presented as diverse.

The fourth marker is hospitality and social ritual. The supra, toasting culture and family winemaking appear regularly in destination-oriented texts. These references give Georgian wine a social life.

Table 1. Qualitative coding summary, based on the content analysis and audience-familiarity comparison.

Code category	Heritage-familiar audience	Heritage-unfamiliar audience
Antiquity / origin claim	High	Medium
Qvevri tradition	High	Medium
Hospitality / cultural memory	High	Low
Terroir / indigenous varieties	Medium	Medium
Awards / acknowledgment	Low	High
Expert view / sommelier cues	Low	High
Certification / export legitimacy	Low	High
Explanatory detail	Low	High
Comparison with established regions	Low	Medium

They connect the product to embodied practices of welcome, conversation and belonging. In marketing terms, this is important because it turns wine into an experience and an invitation. Heritage becomes less distant and more relational.

4.3 Recognition-First Communication and the Logic of Familiarity

A first communication pattern in the corpus can be described as recognition-first. In these materials, heritage is presented in a relatively compressed way. The text does not spend much time justifying why Georgian wine should matter. It assumes that the basic proposition is already acceptable or at least intuitively plausible. The rhetorical burden is therefore low. Antiquity is stated, qvevri is named, and the rest of the narrative proceeds through warm and culturally resonant associations.

This pattern is especially likely to resonate in audiences with some degree of prior familiarity. Research on the Polish case is instructive here. Beriashvili (2019) suggests that Georgian qvevri wine enjoys positive associations in Poland even though specific knowledge remains uneven. This is important. A market does not need high specialist awareness for recognition-first communication to work. It only needs enough accumulated familiarity for the heritage cues to feel meaningful rather than alien.

In recognition-first communication, symbols remain dense and under-explained. Qvevri appears as a sign that can stand on its own. Hospitality and supra are invoked as intuitive markers of a rich wine culture rather than as concepts that need long explanation. The country-product connection is treated as already available. This strategy has a practical advantage. It preserves atmosphere and avoids overburdening the text with

didactic explanation. Its weakness, however, is that it assumes too much where familiarity is not already present.

4.4 Proof-First Communication and the Problem of Trust

A second pattern in the corpus can be described as proof-first. Here the narrative still uses heritage, but it surrounds that heritage with explicit validation. The text explains more, names professional mediators, cites institutions or points to measurable indicators such as export performance and international activity. This pattern appears especially clearly in National Wine Agency materials directed towards export promotion in strategic markets. The Agency's annual reporting and campaign announcements emphasise exhibitions, tastings, media cooperation, masterclasses, expert visits and targeted promotion across different countries (National Wine Agency of Georgia, 2025). The digital layer of this promotion is also explicit. The National Wine Agency notes that its initiatives receive coverage across print, electronic, social, and television media platforms and points readers directly to its institutional website, Facebook page, and YouTube channel. This matters analytically because proof-first communication in heritage-unfamiliar markets does not rely on narrative alone; it also depends on digitally distributed visibility and repeated mediated validation.

This approach is particularly important in heritage-unfamiliar environments. There, the main challenge is not to produce emotional resonance alone, but to establish credibility. The heritage claim can attract interest, yet interest is not the same as trust. An unfamiliar consumer may find the idea of very ancient wine compelling and still remain uncertain about present-day quality, stylistic profile or food relevance. Proof-first communication addresses this gap. It explains that the tradition is not merely symbolic; it is institutionally recognised, professionally curated and commercially active.

The qvevri again plays a central role, but in a different way than in recognition-first communication. Instead of functioning mainly as an emblem, it is translated into process. The audience is told what qvevri is, how it is used and why it matters. Antiquity is similarly translated into recognised authority through UNESCO and archaeological science. The underlying logic is clear. The more distant the audience from the heritage itself, the more the text must supply bridges from difference to credibility.

4.5 Hybrid Communication and Mediated Legitimacy

The third and strongest pattern is hybrid communication. This strategy combines symbolic depth with quality proof instead of privileging one at the expense of the other. It preserves the distinctiveness of the "Cradle of Wine" message while ensuring that the narrative is anchored in widely legible validation. Hybrid communication appears whenever official texts place heritage beside export figures, professional outreach, expert mediation or prestigious cultural platforms.

The official communication around the second season of *Drops of God* is an instructive example. The National Wine Agency presented the series as an opportunity to expose global audiences to Georgian wine culture and gastronomy (National Wine Agency of Georgia, 2026). The significance of this example lies not in entertainment

value alone. Drops of God belongs to a prestige format associated with elite wine knowledge, competition and discernment. When Georgian wine enters such a format, the heritage narrative is indirectly legitimised by an already recognised culture of expertise. The result is neither purely folkloric representation nor purely technical trade communication. It is mediated legitimacy.

The same hybrid logic is visible in annual reporting more generally. Heritage language is maintained, but it appears next to budget figures, market priorities, tasting events and export results. This matters because it prevents the Georgian story from being trapped in a dichotomy between culture and commerce. Instead, the materials present heritage as a source of commercial value precisely because it can be institutionalised, communicated and verified.

When the three strategies are considered together, a broader pattern becomes visible. Heritage itself is never absent. What changes is the weight assigned to recognition, explanation and proof. Familiarity reduces the need for translation. Unfamiliarity raises the need for explicit validation. This confirms the paper's main expectation. Georgia's wine heritage is highly usable in country marketing, but its usability is conditional. It depends on how close or distant the audience stands from the narrative that Georgian institutions take as central.

This finding helps explain why the same message may seem powerful in one context and insufficient in another. It also suggests that the practical problem of Georgian wine marketing is not narrative invention. The story already exists and is unusually strong. The practical problem is narrative calibration (Fig. 2).

5 Discussion

The results point to a practical and theoretical issue at the heart of heritage-based country marketing. Heritage gives a country distinction, but distinction does not operate in a vacuum. It works through audience baselines of recognition, trust and interpretive readiness. In the Georgian case, this means that the "Cradle of Wine" narrative cannot be treated as a universally self-sufficient message. It is persuasive when it meets an audience already capable of reading its symbols or when it is supplemented by the kinds of proof that make those symbols credible in new settings.

This observation refines a frequent assumption in nation-branding discussions. It is often taken for granted that a culturally rich and historically grounded story is automatically an advantage. In one sense this is true: Georgia possesses a rare combination of legal recognition, living practice and scientific support around its wine narrative (Law of Georgia on Vine and Wine, 1998; McGovern et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2013). Yet marketing value emerges only when this depth is translated into messages that specific audiences can process. Heritage is therefore best understood not as a static asset but as a relational one. Its meaning depends on the receiver as well as on the sender.

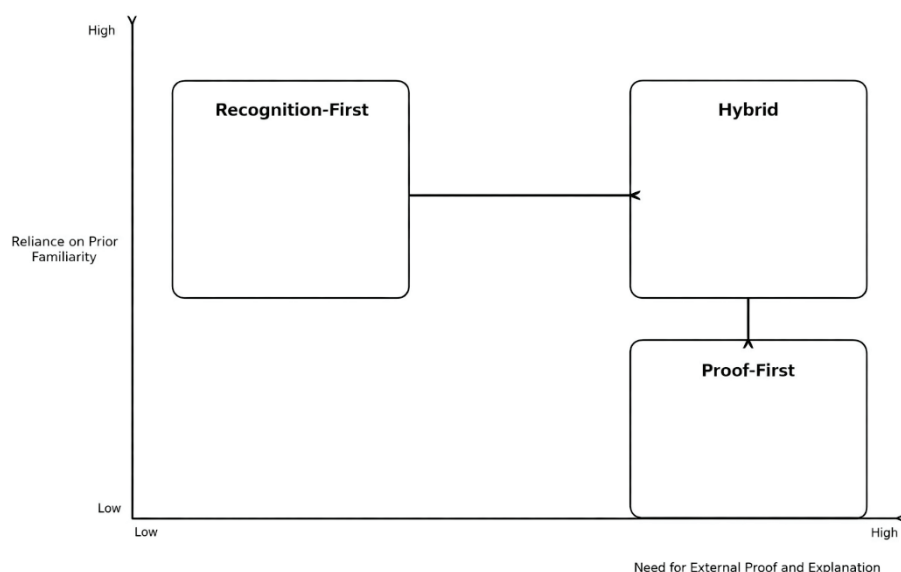


Fig. 2. Communication strategies matrix diagram.

This has direct implications for brand governance. In practice, the Georgian state, tourism bodies and wine institutions draw on a shared repertoire of symbols: antiquity, qvevri, indigenous grapes, regions, hospitality and continuity. The issue is not a lack of symbolic material. The issue is coordination and emphasis. In familiar markets, a recognition-first strategy may be efficient because it preserves density and atmosphere. In unfamiliar markets, a proof-first or hybrid strategy is likely to be more effective because it reduces uncertainty and anchors the story in professional trust cues. This implies that one national narrative may need several communicative grammars.

From a broader comparative perspective, the Georgian case also illustrates a challenge faced by many smaller countries with strong cultural capital but uneven market authority. Their problem is rarely the absence of distinctiveness. More often, it is the gap between symbolic richness and external recognition. Heritage can help close this gap, but only when supported by institutions capable of maintaining quality, curating external visibility and aligning tourism, export promotion and professional outreach. The National Wine Agency's activity pattern suggests movement in that direction, since it combines identity-based promotion with targeted market work, tastings, exhibitions and media engagement (National Wine Agency of Georgia, 2025).

The Agency explicitly linked the series to the promotion and increased global recognition of Georgian wine. In this respect, *Drops of God* is relevant not only as a prestige cultural format, but also as a digitally distributed screen environment through which wine heritage travels to mass international audiences far beyond the reach of in-person events.

The analysis also helps clarify what is at stake when heritage is not translated carefully. Without sufficient explanation or proof, the message may slip into exoticism.

Georgian wine can then be perceived as interesting, ancient and picturesque, but not necessarily as a confident premium choice. This is precisely the point at which the language of authenticity must meet the language of quality. Qvevri, for example, should not appear only as an ethnographic curiosity. It should also be communicated as a meaningful production technique tied to flavour, craft and differentiation.

A further implication concerns popular culture and mediated representation. The Drops of God example suggests that third-party cultural platforms can amplify country marketing in ways that official campaigns alone cannot. They provide borrowed legitimacy and access audiences through genres already associated with expertise and taste. This does not replace institutional promotion, but it can strengthen it. In that sense, mediated appearances of Georgian wine deserve more attention in future research as part of the wider ecology of country branding.

From the perspective of digital presentation and preservation, the Georgian case shows that heritage communication can do more than stimulate market interest. When living traditions are presented through official portals, institutional websites, digital media coverage, and globally distributed screen formats, they become more visible, more interpretable, and more publicly recognisable across borders. In the UNESCO framework, safeguarding includes promotion, enhancement, transmission, and awareness-raising. For that reason, digital presentation should be understood here not as a substitute for community-based continuity, but as part of the broader environment that can support the social legitimacy and long-term visibility of intangible cultural heritage.

The present study remains limited. It does not include interviews with marketers, distributors or winemakers, and it does not test reception empirically in different markets. The familiar/unfamiliar distinction, while analytically useful, should therefore be treated as a heuristic rather than a hard market taxonomy. Even so, the findings are sufficient to support the article's central claim: heritage is most useful when it is calibrated to the audience's starting point rather than treated as a universally transparent message.

6 Conclusion

This paper examined how Georgia uses the idea of the “Cradle of Wine” in country marketing. Through a qualitative content analysis of official tourism communication, wine-promotion materials and selected mediating texts, it showed that the Georgian wine narrative is built around a stable cluster of markers: antiquity, qvevri, continuity, uniqueness and hospitality. These elements are consistently mobilised to present Georgia as a historically deep and culturally distinctive wine country.

The analysis demonstrated, however, that the effectiveness of this narrative is not uniform across audiences. Where some degree of familiarity already exists, heritage can work through recognition and shared meaning. Where familiarity is weaker, the same narrative requires translation into explanatory and proof-oriented language. On this basis, the paper identified three strategy types: recognition-first, proof-first and hybrid. The hybrid model appears the most robust because it preserves distinctiveness while providing the external validation needed in unfamiliar markets.

The wider implication is that cultural and historical heritage can be a strong marketing asset, but only under conditions of communicative fit. Heritage should not be treated as a universal shortcut. It has to be matched to the audience's level of familiarity and supported by quality cues that are legible in that audience's frame of reference. In the Georgian case, this is particularly important because the country possesses exceptional symbolic depth but must still compete within a global wine hierarchy shaped by more dominant reference regions.

The study's main limitation is that it analyses communication design rather than audience response. Future research could address this through interviews with state and industry actors, as well as through perception testing in markets with different familiarity profiles. Even with that limitation, the present analysis shows that Georgia's wine heritage is not merely a cultural backdrop. It is an active country-marketing resource whose effectiveness depends on how carefully it is narrated.

Seen from this angle, the Georgian case is relevant not only for country marketing, but also for the digital presentation of living heritage. It suggests that digital visibility, explanatory framing, and mediated circulation can strengthen the wider safeguarding environment of traditional cultural practices by expanding awareness and international recognition.

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