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MASTER THESIS

**"Bringing Wine to Life: A Case Study on Integrated Marketing Communication
Strategies Behind a Product Launch at Simonsig, Stellenbosch."**

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Abstract

The present thesis explores into the strategies of integrated marketing communication (IMC) employed during the launch of “The Grapesmith Maritimo” at Simonsig Family Vineyards. It highlights the significance of aligning digital and traditional marketing to improve consumer engagement and brand loyalty in the context of wine tourism. Leveraging IMC becomes essential in creating a cohesive brand experience that appeals to both domestic and foreign markets as digital technology influences marketing environments. This study explores how different marketing channels work together and how storytelling can be a powerful tool for developing brand narratives that appeal to a target audience.

“The Grapesmith Maritimo” is a wine that pays homage to South Africa's rich wine history and is inspired by maritime explorers. It is employed as a benchmark to assess how effective these marketing tactics are. This study uses primary data from internal stakeholders as well as secondary data from social media analytics and promotional materials to evaluate how IMC promotes maintaining brand loyalty and enhancing the consumer experience. The case study's insights provide an understanding of the challenges and achievements of integrating IMC in a competitive marketplace, with significant implications for academic researchers and business professionals working in the wine tourism field.

Keywords: IMC, Product Launch, Wine Tourism, Digital Marketing Strategies, Brand Engagement.

List of abbreviation

IMC: Integrated Marketing and Communication

D2C: Direct to Consumers

PR: Public relations

UPS: Unique Selling Point

AR: Augmented Reality

R: South African Currency (Rand); as the 31st of May 2024; 1€=20R

KPI: Key Performance Indicators

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly altered marketing strategies in numerous industries, including the wine sector. Integrated marketing and communication strategies are becoming increasingly necessary as the lines between digital and traditional marketing blur aiming to provide customers with engaging and consistent experiences. This thesis investigates how IMC strategies were used at Simonsig Family Vineyard to introduce “The Grapesmith Maritimo”, a new wine. With the objective of improving the wine tourism experience, it focuses in particular on the synergy between digital technologies and conventional marketing techniques. This study adds to our understanding of the digital transformation of the wine tourism industry while also examining the effects of these integrated initiatives on customer engagement and brand loyalty.

This study provides insights into how online and offline marketing channels may be combined effectively to create a cohesive brand experience that appeals to both domestic and foreign consumers by analysing “The Grapesmith Maritimo” launch. The case study method offers an extensive setting for examining the effectiveness and difficulties of IMC strategies in an evolving industry landscape by enabling a thorough investigation of the practical application of theoretical marketing models.

By providing an in-depth comprehension of the strategic components of effective wine marketing and providing useful advice for employing digital tools to improve customer interactions and brand visibility in a highly competitive sector, the findings are meant to be useful to both academic scholars and industry practitioners.

Context and Importance of Wine Tourism

Within the global travel and hospitality industry, wine tourism has grown to be a significant sector that presents special chances for regional development and cultural preservation. This section extends beyond simple wine tasting, encompassing deep interactions with the natural and cultural contexts of wine-producing regions, which significantly support local economies and encourage sustainable viticultural practices.

With recent developments, wine tourism has moved away from traditional vineyard visits and towards more immersive experiences. These days, the activities range from visiting wineries to taking part in regional wine festivals and helping with the seasonal harvest. Each of these events is meant to enhance the traveller's experience and incorporate the history and cultural significance of the region's wines. According to the famous study of Gilmore & Pine, (1998), “Welcome to the Experience Economy”, these kinds of immersive experiences leave a lasting impression, generating a unique economic opportunity that is essential for local economic development and raising wine areas' profile internationally.

The strategic significance of wine tourism is emphasised by Mitchell and Hall (2006), who point out that it plays a major role in marketing and direct wine sales, which in turn help to promote regional and cultural identities.

In their contribution to this discourse, Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2012) describe how wine tourism's core component of sensory experiences serves as a foundation for comprehending consumer behaviour in this niche market. According to their research, one of the most important tools that marketers can use to increase consumer engagement and happiness is the hedonic and experiential aspects of wine tourism, which include the smell of wines, the atmosphere of the vineyard, and in-person encounters with winemakers (Bruwer & Alant, 2009). Each visit is made more memorable by this sensory connection, which also fits in with larger trends in consumer behaviour that place a high value on authenticity and customised experiences.

These developments in consumer behaviour are reflected in the evolution of wine tourism towards sophisticated and narrative-driven marketing. In wine tourism, the strategic application of integrated marketing communications facilitates the development of cohesive marketing messages and guarantees their resonant impact across various consumer touchpoints, ultimately optimising engagement and augmenting total marketing efficacy.

Importance of Integrated Marketing and communication in wine tourism

Sophisticated Integrated Marketing Communications strategies that align the brand message across several channels are essential for achieving the best possible customer engagement and targeting in the wine tourism business. A flawless and engaging visitor experience depends on the combination of digital and traditional marketing strategies. Kitchen & Tourky, (2022) state that ensuring messaging consistency and carefully aligning promotional activities are the keys to building strong brand equity in this competitive industry. Nesterenko et al., (2023) further note that wineries can integrate several channels to reach a wider audience and tailor interactions and content to meet various consumer needs.

The strategic application of IMC in wine tourism increases engagement and broadens the client base through a range of touchpoints. Every interaction with customers, whether digitally or in person at live events and tastings, presents an opportunity to deepen relationships, fostering loyalty and increasing brand memory. Therefore, integrated marketing communications incorporate more than just using a variety of media. It involves developing a cohesive narrative that connects with the target market, making the most of every channel's advantages to achieve maximum impact, and ensuring a recurrent and memorable brand story.

Implementing Integrated Marketing Communications in Wine Launches

Simonsig's Maritimo wine launch is an excellent example of how these IMC tactics might be applied. The campaign was carefully planned, starting with an essential review of "The Grapesmith" range's current methods. This ensured a unified strategy that was successfully applied across a variety of

channels, including trade, social media, and public relations. This emphasizes how crucial it is to have a strong foundation for a campaign's success across both traditional and digital media. The cooperative effort to prepare the roll-out across several channels emphasizes the importance of combining traditional strength with digital agility in the fragmented media landscape of today.

The Maritimo marketing campaign placed a strong emphasis on storytelling, a technique that has become more and more important in the wine tourism sector. The marketing coordinator highlighted that stories showcasing Maritimo's distinctive features and its contribution to sustainability influenced every aspect of the campaign. In addition to helping Maritimo stand out in a highly competitive sector, our narrative-driven strategy touched an emotional connection with customers, strengthening their bond and engagement with the brand. Such techniques highlight the shift towards experiential marketing in wine tourism, where the story behind the wine becomes equally important as the wine itself.

Context and Background on Simonsig Family Vineyards and the Grapesmith Collection

“The Grapesmith Collection”, of which Maritimo is the newest entry, is an example of the dedication to innovation, combining Mediterranean and Rhône varieties in a way that reflects the uniqueness of the South African terroir. This collection targets a niche market, attracted by authenticity and quality. Studies like the one from Kirkman et al., (2013) have shown how wine tourism not only supports direct wine sales but also plays a vital role in the international visibility of wineries, contributing significantly to the local economy and strengthening Simonsig's positioning as a leader in wine tourism innovation (Priilaid et al., 2020). Both of these studies underline the importance of wine tourism strategies that can transform wine experiences and promote international recognition, perfectly in line with Simonsig's and The Grapesmith Collection's approach.

The Grapesmith Maritimo Wine Launch

Maritimo wine, introduced under Simonsig's “The Grapesmith” label, encapsulates a strategic blend of historical homage and contemporary winemaking. Inspired by the maritime explorers who historically shaped the Cape's winemaking heritage, Maritimo was created to reflect this adventurous spirit. The strategic use of digital marketing tools and storytelling aimed to enhance the visibility and appeal of the wine both locally and internationally, as underscored by Batra & Keller, (2016) and Kitchen et al., (2004). The adoption of unique experiences for visitors, described by Priilaid et al., (2020), and the efficient use of digital media to increase brand visibility, as explained by Capitello et al., (2014), have fostered emotional connections with the public through well-coordinated narratives that resonate across multiple consumer touchpoints. These storytelling and digital marketing strategies align perfectly with the context of wine tourism, which, according to Kirkman et al., (2013), plays a crucial role in promoting wineries along the Stellenbosch Wine Route, contributing significantly to the local economy and the international recognition of the region.

This multifaceted approach to launching Maritimo demonstrates not only Simonsig's commitment to creating quality wines but also their ability to blend traditional winemaking techniques with modern marketing strategies to enhance customer experiences and satisfaction, amplifying their impact in the competitive wine market.

Research objectives

This thesis aims to conduct a thorough analysis of the Integrated Marketing Communications strategies employed during the launch of Maritimo wine, investigating how these strategies impact consumer engagement and brand loyalty within the context of wine tourism. The subsequent sections will detail the methodology used for market analysis, explore the strategic execution of the launch, and evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies against established marketing and business objectives.

Internship experience at Simonsig Family Vineyards

During my internship at Simonsig Family Vineyards, I had the opportunity to immerse myself deeply in the marketing dynamics of the Maritimo wine launch. This experience offered me a privileged observation point to actively participate in the strategic marketing processes of one of South Africa's most renowned wineries.

My main tasks included:

- **Strategic Planning:** Support in the definition and implementation of the marketing strategy for The Grapesmith Maritimo, including market research, identification of target markets/target personas, and competitor analysis. This required aligning the product with market needs and expectations.
- **Content Creation:** Collaboration with the marketing team and a designer to develop content that would tell Maritimo's story, including narratives on social media, promotional materials, and website content.
- **Events Coordination:** Organizing launch events and tastings that introduced Maritimo to wine lovers and stakeholders. These events were fundamental in generating interest and interaction with the brand.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Interaction with various stakeholders such as oenologists, tasting room managers, PR, and marketing professionals to ensure a coherent approach to the wine launch and other promotional activities.
- **Performance Analysis:** Monitoring and analysing the marketing campaign through analytical tools to understand consumer engagement and the overall effectiveness of the campaign.

This experience was crucial in providing me with practical insights into the complexity of launching a new product in the competitive wine sector and has formed the foundations for the research and analysis conducted in this thesis.

Additional activities and responsibilities during the internship:

- Content creation and revision for the new website: Creation and revision of new technical sheets with a redesigned layout for the different wine collections, enhancing the online presentation of the products (Annex 1, Fig.1-3).
- Creation of terroir content: Assisted in developing new sections for wine descriptions on the website, enriching the narrative and providing consumers with valuable information about the wine's terroir.
- Monthly coordination meetings: Participated in monthly meetings with various team managers to discuss developments and company strategies, gaining a comprehensive understanding of Simonsig's operations.
- Tasting room support: Assisted the tasting room staff with training to enhance their skills in presenting and selling wine to visitors, crucial for the direct-to-consumer experience.
- Production of promotional materials: Contributed to the creation of a new promotional video for the winery, assisting with the script, filming, and acting.

Methodology

The present section outlines the implementation of a mixed approach to investigate the integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies implemented during the Maritimo wine launch at Simonsig. The method provides a thorough examination of strategic marketing applications in the wine tourism industry, merging theoretical frameworks with a real-world case study.

Important ideas from consumer behavior, wine tourism, and integrated marketing communications form the foundation of this study's theoretical framework. These theories support the development of a fundamental knowledge that will interpret the collected qualitative data, emphasizing the application of theoretical concepts in practical scenarios. The Maritimo launch case study at Simonsig was chosen due to its creative application of IMC principles, offering a modern illustration of wine industry marketing strategies. The case study's data comes from press releases, digital marketing content, and promotional materials that were used throughout the launch. These sources provide deep insights into the marketing dynamics in action.

One of the main methods used to obtain primary data is the interview. The goal of creating the interview guide was to collect in-depth information about the strategic use of IMC, the processes involved in making decisions, and the results of these marketing tactics. Important stakeholders including Johan Malan, owner and winemaker of the company, Jeanine, the wine tourism manager, Tania, the coordinator of direct-to-consumer sales, Alexa, the national sales manager and Catherine, the Marketing Coordinator represent the participants in this study. Their viewpoints are quite helpful in comprehending the internal tactics and results of the marketing campaigns. For thorough reference, a comprehensive interview guide template is included in the Annexes section (Annexe 2).

A range of marketing materials related to the Maritimo launch, such as printed brochures, social media posts, and web content, are subjected to content analysis. The primary goals of this research are to pinpoint the main ideas, analyse the coherence of the messaging, and assess how well promotional information is integrated into various marketing channels. This will determine how well the brand's story and value propositions are communicated in the promotional materials.

A descriptive analysis, which includes a full description of the documented campaigns, is a further component of the process. By comparing the results to the theoretical frameworks covered in the literature research, this analysis will assist in identifying recurring themes and distinctive approaches within the sector.

Lastly, to assess how well IMC improves wine tourist experiences, the results of the practical case study were combined with the theoretical understanding. The thesis includes suggestions for improved wine tourism practices and future marketing strategies based on this synthesis. In order to maintain confidentiality and integrity in research, ethical norms are strictly adhered to during the entire data collection and treatment procedure.

Literature review

Integrated Marketing and Communication in the wine industry

The concept of Integrated Marketing and Communication encompasses a strategic approach that ensures that all communication channels and messages are carefully linked together. In essence, IMC integrates all promotional tools so that they work together harmoniously. In the context of the wine industry, IMC goes beyond advertising and promotion to encompass all consumer touchpoints, harmonizing the digital and traditional marketing spheres (Smith & Taylor, 2004). For example, Charters et al., (2009) examine how wine producers use websites to communicate their brand identity and suggest that digital platforms play an important role in the wine industry's communication strategy. Furthermore, Capitello et al., (2014) highlight storytelling's role in wine marketing, a key element of IMC, enabling wineries to engage consumers through compelling narratives about the wine's heritage and production process.

Wine Tourism as a Marketing Channel

Wine tourism offers a lucrative channel for marketing and direct wine sales to consumers and plays a crucial role in promoting regional and cultural identities (Getz & Brown, 2006). Telfer, (2001) highlights the symbiotic relationship between wine production and wine tourism development, noting that well-executed wine tourism strategies can significantly contribute to economic stability and regional improvement. Furthermore, research such as that by Bruwer & Alant, (2009) points out the beneficial effects of wine tourism on entire regions, impacting not only the wineries but also the local hospitality and retail sectors.

Product launch strategies in the wine industry

Product launch strategies in the wine industry often involve careful planning and innovative marketing to capture the attention of both existing and potential new customers. As described in an article by Park, (2022) for Ekos, a market-leading management software designed for beverage businesses, the introduction of a new wine product can be used as an opportunity to revitalize a brand and gain a competitive advantage in a saturated market. For example, the strategic launch of the wine Maritimo can be seen not only as an attempt to introduce a new product to the market but also as the creation of an experience that aligns with the adventurous spirit of its target market (Lund et al., 2018).

The book "Marketing Management" by Kotler & Keller, (2015) amply demonstrates that successful product launches are often supported by strong marketing strategies that include public relations, events, and digital efforts that create anticipation and interest before the launch. The role of digital media in the release of new products has become increasingly important, with social media platforms enabling wineries to reach a global audience more efficiently (Lund et al., 2018).

Linking Marketing Strategies to Wine Tourism

The tourist experience can be greatly improved by integrating marketing methods with wine tourism activities, which can transform a routine wine purchase into an unforgettable occasion. In order to engage guests and leave a lasting impression, this integration frequently entails a blend of social, recreational, and educational activities (Hall, 2000). For instance, Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, (2012) discuss the impact of sensory experiences on the wine tourism experience, suggesting that marketing efforts can be tailored to create an atmospheric experience that complements the wine tasting itself. Similarly, Alebaki & Iakovidou, (2011) emphasize the importance of thematic wine tourism events that integrate cultural and gastronomic elements, which not only enhance the wine tourism experience but also serve as effective marketing tools.

The literature review concludes by highlighting the significance of integrated marketing techniques in raising wine tourism's success. Wine tourism sites can enhance their ability to draw and hold the interest of tourists by comprehending and implementing these principles, providing them with a full experience that surpasses the act of wine tasting. Now, this analysis will look at how these tactics were used particularly for the Maritimo wine launch, with an emphasis on how marketing communications strategies were integrated, how memorable travel experiences were created, and how these tactics were in line with larger business objectives.

Case Study: Launch of Maritimo

Introduction to “The Grapesmith Collection”

The following description is extracted from the brand presentation document for “The Grapesmith Collection” and has been crafted by me alongside the marketing team, drawing on an interview with Johan Malan, owner and winemaker at Simonsig Family Vineyards (Annexe 3).

The Grapesmith range showcases Simonsig's pioneering spirit in exploring new viticultural frontiers, highlighted by Johan Malan's expertise and interest in Mediterranean and Rhône grape varieties. Second-generation owner Johan says, "The Grapesmith collection is our response to exploring new grape possibilities." The collection's first offerings are the Marsanne-Roussanne blend 'Die Kluisenaar' and 'Mediterraneo,' a unique blend made mostly of Marsanne and Roussanne with additions of Grenache Blanc, Bourboulenc, and Verdelho from different vintages.

2021 has seen an additional advance in Simonsig's venture into Rhône cultivars. This medium-bodied red wine features a compass rose engraved on the bottle as a tribute to the brave sailors guided by the Portuguese Vasco Da Gama, who circumnavigated Africa's southern tip for the first time in 1488. Maritimo is a sophisticated and approachable blend of Syrah, Grenache Noir, Marselan, and Mourvèdre. It has a subtle perfumed aroma and vibrant fruit flavours. It reflects current trends towards approachable, chillable red wines. "Mourvèdre, ripening late, provided a broader window for optimal picking times," Johan notes, elaborating on the deliberate farming that led to the creation of Maritimo.

After a visit to Paso Robles, California, Johan became even more committed to these varieties after he noticed their potential to produce outstanding 'New World' wines. Since then, these grapes have grown to represent the Malan family's proactive approach to sustainable viticulture and have become the flagship of “The Grapesmith” range. "These hardy varieties withstand heat and drought, making them well-suited to our changing climate" Johan remarks, highlighting the modifications that have been implemented in reaction to climate change.

“The Grapesmith” wines are limited-production masterpieces that convey the unique attributes of their varieties. Only four to ten barrels are filled in each batch, which demonstrates the Malan family's commitment to quality and innovation. "Our winemaking process, including techniques like whole-bunch pressing and ageing in both barrels and amphorae, allows each wine to express the genuine character of its terroir," Johan adds, emphasizing the artisanal methods that elevate the nuanced profiles of these wines. The careful grape selection and vinification methods used in Maritimo's production, such as co-fermentation and carbonic maceration, demonstrate Simonsig's dedication to creating complex and expressive wines. According to Johan, "This is just one chapter in our ongoing journey of viticultural exploration and excellence, a journey that continues to push the boundaries of the South African wine industry."

Strategic Marketing Analysis for Maritimo:

- **Target Market:** Maritimo aims to appeal to sophisticated wine enthusiasts who value distinctive wines that require minimum intervention. These customers are usually middle-aged, value sustainability, and have a great respect for the art and craft involved in winemaking. Their enthusiasm for wine tourism, cultural awareness, and extensive travel make them an ideal fit for “The Grapesmith” collection's experience branding.

- **Positioning and Unique Value Propositions (USPs):** Maritimo is marketed as a premium, innovative wine that provides a distinctive experience in contrast to other options. It appeals to customers who are eager for discovery and narrative in their wine choices by utilizing the historical and adventurous narratives tied to its marine theme. Among its USPs there is a unique combination of Rhône cultivars adapted to the climate of South Africa, and its artisanal production techniques, which highlight the grape types' expressive potential and environmental sustainability.

- **SWOT analysis:** In the SWOT analysis of “The Grapesmith Maritimo” launch, we critically examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the product and its market strategy (Table 1).

Table 1: SWOT analysis of Maritimo

<i>Analysis</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Strengths</i>	- Unique Product Offering: Distinct blend of Rhône-style varietals adapted to South African climates, attracting niche wine enthusiasts.
	- Brand Heritage and Expertise: Long-standing reputation and historical significance in South African wine, pioneer of Cap Classique.
	- Sustainable Practices: Focus on sustainability and Fairtrade certification to meet growing consumer demand for eco-friendly products.
<i>Weaknesses</i>	- Market Education: Need for significant consumer education due to lesser-known varietals.
	- High Production Costs: Artisanal, small-batch production leads to higher costs, which may affect pricing strategy and market positioning.
	- Limited Scalability: Difficulty in scaling up production while maintaining quality and exclusivity.

<i>Opportunities</i>	- Growing Interest in Wine Tourism: Opportunities to market through vineyard visits, tastings, and exclusive tours.
	- Growth of E-commerce and Digital Marketing: Possibility of reaching a worldwide audience via online channels, particularly tech-savvy consumers. Maritimo, with its rich storytelling and quality production, is particularly well-positioned to capitalise on digital marketing trends.
	- Partnerships and Collaborations: In wealthy areas, brand positioning can be improved by strategic collaborations with premium dining establishments and luxury accommodations.
<i>Threats</i>	- Competitive Market: High competition requires distinct and effective marketing strategies.
	- Economic Fluctuations: Global economic changes could impact consumer spending, especially in the luxury sector.
	- Climate Change: Dependency on specific climatic conditions for grape growing; unpredictable weather can disrupt grape yield and quality.

Personal Comment on the SWOT Analysis

The Grapesmith Collection's strategic position in a challenging and competitive market is clarified by this SWOT analysis. The collection's highlights, especially its distinctive blends and rich history, target to sophisticated wine connoisseurs and showcase Simonsig's dedication to quality and creativity. As Catherine, the Marketing Coordinator, pointed out, compelling storytelling and a strong brand narrative are crucial for overcoming intrinsic disadvantages like low consumer awareness and expensive manufacturing costs. This narrative raises customers' awareness of the lesser-known varietals while also improving the wines' perceived value. The collection has several obstacles to overcome, such as the high manufacturing costs of artisanal, small-batch production and the requirement for in-depth market education. In order to minimize the potential negative consequences of these factors on pricing strategy and market positioning, intentional actions must be adopted. As the Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) Sales Manager pointed out, one strategy is to deal with the main issue of raising considerable consumer awareness for niche products such as Maritimo. The difficulty of capturing the physical sensation of wine tasting via digital media increases this problem. Therefore, in order to get beyond these obstacles and successfully attract a particular target demographic, innovative marketing methods are essential.

The National Sales Manager's strategies are also essential in solving these issues. Target market identification, price alignment, extending distribution channels by adding the Grapesmith wines to Meridian's portfolio (the winery's largest distributor in South Africa), and holding promotional events are important tactics. These initiatives promote message consistency, increase market penetration, and boost sales growth in a number of geographic areas.

Opportunities for growth abound, especially with the growth of wine tourism and the use of e-commerce. These chances, nevertheless, call for a strategic alignment with industry trends and consumer expectations. Tailoring experiences and incentives to the specific needs of a niche market may be a highly effective way to engage consumers, as Tanya's insights from the D2C perspective suggest.

However, there are many potential risks associated with external threats, like climate change and swings in the economy. Because of these dangers, the brand must take a proactive role in the market and highlight its resilience and sustainable operations. The brand's positioning and accessibility can be further enhanced through the smart use of partnerships and collaborations, particularly with the luxury dining and accommodation sectors.

Timeline description

Maritimo's launch schedule exemplifies a strategic marketing and product introduction technique distinguished by meticulous planning and organized implementation (Table 2). Each stage of the launch, from preparatory phases to execution, is carefully designed to ensure that every aspect of the product rollout is handled precisely, aligning with Simonsig's high standards for excellence and attention to detail.

Initial Preparations: Finalizing and distributing essential marketing materials and product designs constitute the main focus of the initial preparations. These activities, including the strategic alignment of pricing with existing white varietals in the Grapesmith collection, set a solid foundation for subsequent phases. Distribution channels were expanded significantly, incorporating the Grapesmith wines into the Meridian portfolio, which notably increased the distribution footprint. This synchronization of all components ensures optimal impact by adhering to precise deadlines, highlighting the critical role of timing in the execution of marketing plans (Pomarici, 2016).

Implementation Phase: The implementation phase is meticulously planned to elevate market readiness and anticipation. Comprehensive training sessions for sales teams and targeted email campaigns are scheduled to ensure that all parties are fully prepared and informed. National sales strategies include targeted market introductions and promotional activities such as tastings, which are crucial for engaging potential customers (Capitello et al., 2014).

Building Momentum: As part of building momentum towards the launch, social media ads and newsletters are strategically timed to peak potential customers' interest. This phase also involves aligning sales tactics across different regions, ensuring consistent marketing and messaging through trade presenters and physical tastings, as conducted by Brand Ambassadors with regional teams of Meridian Wine Merchants.

Public and Trade Launch Events: The culmination of these efforts is the product's introduction to the market at both trade and public launch events. Events at "The Tasting Room" played a significant role, enhancing brand awareness and allowing direct consumer engagement through product sampling, which is a powerful sales tactic. These events serve as crucial points of contact for establishing a direct connection between Maritimo and its stakeholders, significantly boosting the company's visibility in the marketplace (Silva & Rebelo, 2019).

This methodical approach not only enhances consumer satisfaction and experience but also reflects Simonsig's dedication to innovation and quality in the wine industry. The strategic use of national sales tactics, coupled with direct consumer engagement at events, ensures a smooth market introduction (Vrontis et al., 2010).

Table 2: Timeline for “The Grapesmith Maritimo” wine launch

Phase	Activities and dead lines	Deadlines/Dates
Pre-launch preparations	Finalization and receipt of label artwork, crosses, packshots, and renders.	March 15
	Finalization and submission of tasting notes.	March 15
	Finalization of packaging concept.	March 13
	Completion and submission of trade presenter and lifestyle images.	March 15
Launch Implementation	All images, fact sheets, and "story" information sent to Meridian marketing. Stock availability.	March 15
	Completion of training for Meridian and internal teams.	End of March
	Soft launch date.	April 1
	Finalization of insert for media drop.	April 15
	Packaging of media drops.	End of April
	Sending out focused media packs from the farm.	May 2-5
Marketing Support Activities	Preparation of support materials for the tasting room, such as posters and table talkers.	March 27
	Management of the guest list for the event.	April 15
	Execution of a social media campaign that introduces the range in March, followed by a teaser and reveal at the end of April.	April 15
	Newsletters activities: -introducing the range in a teaser; -invitation to the public event; -reveal of the product.	End of February End of March Mid/late April
Public and Trade Launch Events	Tasting Room soft launch	April 1
	Public launch event.	April 21
	Trade launch event.	April 22

Marketing and Communication Strategies

Communication Channels

In order to completely engage the target audience, Simonsig's approach for the Maritimo launch leveraged a multi-channel strategy that included digital and physical experiences:

1. **Social media:** Aligned with modern Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) approaches, Simonsig's strategy effectively utilized social media platforms to enhance brand interaction and market presence during the Maritimo launch. Rehman et al., (2022) discuss how social media, by offering new communication channels and methods, revolutionises IMC, turning it into a consumer-generated medium that allows for real-time, two-way interactions. Leveraging platforms like Facebook and Instagram, Simonsig provided engaging content that included teasers and in-depth articles about Maritimo's features, enhancing consumer interaction and participation through likes, shares, and comments. This strategy not only amplified the launch's narrative but also fostered a genuine connection with potential customers by aligning with the adventurous theme of Maritimo, which showcased the wine in natural settings and highlighted its premium nature. (Annexe 5, Fig.5-8)
2. **Public and Trade Presentations:** Held at "The Tasting Room" in Pretoria, these events were tailored to different audiences—the public and industry professionals. This two-pronged strategy raised Maritimo's visibility among devoted customers and significant wine community sectors, promoting a deeper understanding and acknowledgement of the brand's distinctive attributes. As described by Lima et al., (2021), emotions play a critical role in the success of wine marketing events, enhancing the overall experience and engagement of participants.
3. **Influencers:** In the context of Maritimo Wine's launch, influencer engagement played a pivotal role in shaping purchasing decisions. Influencers, as defined by Kotler and Keller (2015), are key players who affect buying decisions by helping to define specifications and providing information for evaluating alternatives. In the wine industry, where choices are abundant and consumer loyalty is hard to secure, influencers help in distilling the multitude of information and often guide potential customers towards making a decision. For the Maritimo launch, Simonsig capitalised on this by engaging with influencers who were not just wine connoisseurs but also lifestyle influencers who could reach a broader audience. This aligns with Kotler and Keller's observation that small sellers focus intensely on reaching key buying influencers, while larger sellers aim for a broad, in-depth approach to cover as many influencers as possible.

4. **Media and Press:** The media serves as a vital marketing channel, extending the reach and enhancing the credibility of product launches. According to Kotler and Keller (2015), media channels are instrumental in building brand visibility and credibility, offering a platform that can transform public perceptions and foster broader market acceptance. By engaging with authoritative wine industry publications, Simonsig ensured that Maritimo's introduction was communicated with depth and integrity, leveraging media expertise to attract and educate potential consumers.
5. **Newsletter:** To overcome the difficulties in educating consumers about Maritimo, a distinctive addition to the South African wine landscape, a well-planned mailing campaign was crucial. During the critical pre-launch and launch phases, the newsletter engaged and informed potential customers with regular updates, exclusive offers, and behind-the-scenes stories (Annex 4, Fig. 4). These direct-to-customer interactions were essential in creating anticipation and familiarity with Maritimo's unique qualities, as the D2C Sales Manager pointed out, and in doing so, they fostered a relationship that made up for the online platform's incapacity to provide a physical tasting experience. Email marketing is known to prompt purchases effectively and build long-term customer relationships, making it a critical component of integrated marketing communications (Batra & Keller, 2016).

Content Strategy and Storytelling

Simonsig developed an extensive content strategy that highlighted Maritimo's heritage and USPs through storytelling:

- **Unified Narrative Across Platforms:** From the trade presenter to the tasting notes and social media posts, every piece of promotional material presented a story that connected Maritimo to the spirit of adventure and marine exploration. By connecting the wine to travel and discovery, this storytelling technique aims to engage and involve customers. Influencer content and media materials placed a special emphasis on storytelling, pairing the tale of discovery with textual and visual components that emphasized the wine's distinctive heritage and excellence. Effective storytelling in digital marketing may dramatically increase engagement and establish close emotional bonds with the audience, (Behzadi & Bakhtiary, 2023).
- **Media and Influencer Kits:** The storytelling strategy relied heavily on these kits. These components increased the campaign's digital reach by supporting the story of adventure and encouraging social media sharing. Lund et al., (2018) assert that brand awareness and customer interaction can be significantly increased by integrating narrative into social media strategy. To implement this approach, special media drops were tailored for influencers and the media, designed to leverage their reach and enhance brand visibility. Influencers, carefully selected for

their lifestyle focus, connections with Simonsig and established enthusiasm for wine, received a package that included a bottle of Maritimo adorned with a tag featuring the wine's logo—a compass rose—and an enticing phrase such as 'Uncork your true North'. This package also contained a stemless glass with The Grapesmith sticker and a themed postcard designed to evoke the spirit of adventure, enriching the narrative around the wine. In contrast, media packages were crafted to encourage comprehensive reviews and included three bottles from “The Grapesmith Collection”, though these packages did not include the glass. This strategic differentiation in media drops catered to the specific content creation styles of influencers versus traditional media. This shows the value of a well-thought-out strategy that blends conventional media's authoritative voice with influencers' real-life stories. (Annexe 6, Fig.9-13)

- **Interactive and Engaging Content:** Innovative direct-to-customer interaction strategies, such as special social media giveaways, are a key component of the campaign, helping to overcome the difficulty of raising consumer awareness for Maritimo, a unique product in the South African wine sector. The D2C Sales Manager discusses the significance of interactive content that connects with the target audience and the challenge of capturing the tactile experience of wine tasting online. A free stemless glass will be provided to the first five customers who make purchases from the online store, and a recipe book from a well-known local food and wine influencer will be given to a randomly chosen individual who interacts with the campaign on Instagram. These tactics not only keep customers engaged but also successfully close the gap between online engagement and tangible product experience.

Role of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)

Simonsig employed an integrated marketing communications strategy for Maritimo's debut, ensuring message consistency across all channels and interactions. This tactic was essential for creating a unified brand image and clearly communicating the unique features of the product:

- **Consistency Across Channels:** Simonsig made sure that the brand message was impactful and obvious by sticking to the notion of exploration and adventure across a variety of channels. A new product must have a strong brand recall to be successfully launched in a crowded market, and this consistency helped to achieve this objective. Effective use of digital platforms can greatly improve consumer interaction and brand visibility, as mentioned by Nesterenko et al., (2023).
- **Coordinated Marketing Efforts:** By combining several marketing elements, such as direct influencer engagements, physical events, and digital campaigns, a synergistic effect was produced which increased the launch's total impact. Together, the elements formed an integrated marketing campaign that effectively communicated Maritimo's value proposition. Chaniago & Ariyani, (2023) provide strong evidence for integrating different marketing communication technologies; emphasizing the need for a cohesive marketing strategy to improve sales and communication efficiency.

- **Enhanced Consumer Engagement:** Kitchen et al., (2004) state that integrated marketing communications (IMC) is essential in today's marketing environment because it makes sure that all messages and forms of communication are carefully connected, improving the customer experience and engagement at every touchpoint. This strategy works particularly well in the wine tourism industry, where customer involvement may greatly increase sales and brand loyalty. Porcu et al., (2017) contribute to the discussion by emphasising the quantifiable advantages of an IMC strategy applied across the entire company in fostering more robust customer connections.

Simonsig made sure that every component of its marketing campaign for the Maritimo launch was cohesive and created a story that would appeal to the target demographic by implementing a strong integrated marketing communications strategy. This all-encompassing strategy greatly enhanced the launch's success by increasing the brand's exposure and fostering a closer relationship with customers.

Wine Tourism and Customer Experience: The Launch of Maritimo

Enhancing Simonsig's Wine Tourism Offerings through Maritimo Launch

The introduction of Maritimo wine significantly enhanced Simonsig's wine tourism offerings. The estate's rich history was combined with innovative marketing strategies to create a unique guest experience. Launch initiatives for the wine were thoughtfully designed to inform and involve wine enthusiasts, demonstrating a strong dedication to customer involvement and narrative.

Integration into Existing Tours and Special Tastings

Over Easter weekend, Simonsig's tasting room hosted a soft Maritimo launch, with a focus on The Grapesmith wines. To improve the educational component of the tasting experience, a tasting sheet was specially designed by the marketing team (Annexe 7, Fig.14). It featured symbolic crosses of each wine and brief narration. This engagement strategy is consistent with research by Bruwer & Alant, (2009), who highlight the value of including instructional components in wine tourism to improve visitor satisfaction and wine sales.

Staff Engagement and Training

The Grapesmith collection, especially Maritimo, was the subject of in-depth training for staff members on the storytelling and marketing aspects. This training, which included meetings with the winemaker, made sure that employees could properly highlight the distinctive qualities of the wine, enhancing the experience for guests. Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2012), who address the effect of skilled staff on the quality of the wine tourist experience, support this technique.

Trade Presentation and Public Events:

The Pretoria-based "The Tasting Room" strategic event had a major role in increasing brand awareness and developing stronger relationships within the wine tourism industry. The division of the event into two phases—a public tasting and an industry-only session—enabled targeted participation. This approach is supported by the findings of Getz and Brown (2006), who observe that customised events are successful in drawing in certain audience segments. Furthermore, Lima et al. (2021) draw attention to the significance of emotions in wine marketing events, emphasising how these factors can greatly increase consumer involvement and satisfaction.

Role of Off-Site Events

Detailed Analysis of Specific Off-Site Events

The venue's distinctive urban location, which mimics a typical vineyard tasting room, was the driving force behind the strategic choice to hold off-site events for the Maritimo launch at "The Tasting Room" in Pretoria. This environment made wine tourism in the city immersive and therefore available to a wider range of people who might not normally travel to wine regions.

- **Public Launch Event (April 21):** Scheduled for a Sunday to draw a more casual audience tickets for this event, which cost R550 per person, were purposefully held on that day. Owner and winemaker of Simonsig Johan Malan led and hosted a carefully picked wine-tasting session throughout the event, which gave the whole experience a more genuine and intimate feel. Simonsig's premium Cap Classique, Cuvée Royale, was served to begin the tasting, which included three wines from the Grapesmith line paired with various canapés. Additionally, the marketing coordinator and the national sales manager were present to ensure everything ran properly and that attendance engagement was maximised. The aesthetic and convivial atmosphere of the event, which are key factors in a successful wine tourism experience, align with Haller et al., (2020), who emphasize the importance of creating an attractive and enjoyable environment. (Annexe 8, Fig.15-17)
- **Trade Launch Event (April 22nd):** This event, which catered to industry professionals such as distributors, restaurant owners, and sommeliers, was scheduled on a Monday in order to accommodate the guests' professional schedules, who are generally more available for industry-focused events on weekdays. Free admission emphasised the event's focus on business interaction and networking above straight sales. Johan Malan conducted the tasting, much like at the public launch, offering detailed insights into the characteristics of each wine and the winemaking process. The National Sales Manager and Marketing Coordinator from Simonsig made sure everything was handled professionally and led conversations about partnership opportunities and commercial prospects. This is consistent with the findings of Mitchell & Hall, (2006), who emphasise the strategic value of industry experts attending targeted events to expand their business networks and prospects for business. Furthermore, Lima et al., (2021) highlight the significance of emotions in wine marketing events, which have the potential to significantly raise consumer involvement and satisfaction (Annexe 9, Fig. 18-19).

The audience was purposefully divided into multiple segments on different days in order to customize the experience to each group's unique interests and goals—improving recreational engagement on Sunday and building business partnerships on Monday. This strategy not only enhanced the launch's effect but also demonstrated Maritimo wine's adaptability as a wine fit for both informal consumption and formal recognition.

Effectiveness of These Events in Promoting the Product and the Brand

Responses to the public launch were highly positive, highlighting the excellent level of communication with Johan Malan and the exceptional wine-tasting experience provided. This occasion greatly increased consumer understanding of the Grapesmith collection and raised awareness of the brand. The effective use of social media throughout the event suggested that attendees had a greater interest in wine tourism, indicating that the event had succeeded in successfully interacting with its intended audience. Lund et al., (2018) provide support for the above, highlighting the effectiveness of social media storytelling in raising brand awareness and consumer interaction.

With significant industry stakeholders, the Trade Launch was crucial in fostering new connections and enhancing current ones. The variety of product knowledge imparted and the quality of networking possibilities made achievable by Simonsig's management's attendance were well received by the participants. The event proved to be successful in improving Maritimo's commercial prospects within the industry as it generated a number of follow-up inquiries and possible sales leads. The importance of wine-tasting events and exhibitions in promoting wine brands is highlighted by Vrontis et al., (2010) and Lima et al., (2021) emphasise the importance of emotions in wine marketing events, which can be leveraged to create memorable urban wine tourism experiences.

Wine Tourism Perspective in an Urban Setting (Pretoria Tasting Room)

For a month, the Tasting Room was transformed into a Simonsig-themed space, demonstrating a creative approach to urban wine tourism. It created a vineyard-like ambience right in the middle of Pretoria, replicating the immersive experience of a winery-tasting area. This environment made wine tourism more approachable and attractive for city people by providing the perfect backdrop for its introduction. This strategy aligns with findings by Bruwer et al. (2013), who emphasize the significance of creating a memorable and positive winery experience to enhance consumer brand loyalty. Additionally Brochado et al., (2019) highlight the importance of a multisensory experience in wine tourism, which can be effectively recreated in urban settings to engage visitors. Furthermore, Mitchell and Hall (2006) discuss the evolving nature of wine tourism and the need for innovative approaches to make wine experiences more accessible, which supports the strategy of transforming urban spaces for wine tourism.

Employee Education in the Urban Replication of Winery Experience

In-depth training was provided to The Tasting Room's regular employees ahead of the occasion. The main subjects of training classes led by Simonsig's brand ambassadors were the rich histories of the wines, winemaking techniques, and consumer interaction strategies. This preparation was necessary to ensure that the off-site venue offered an experience consistent with Simonsig's brand standards and wine tourism services. This aligns with the research conducted by Haller et al. (2020), which highlights the importance of personnel training in delivering an exceptional wine tourism experience.

Event Performance and Feedback

Maritimo's market presence was significantly affected by the activities held at "The Tasting Room" in Pretoria, where 30 tickets were sold for the public launch and 17 bottles of Maritimo were sold off-con during the event. With the exception of sponsored wine, the Tasting Room sold 42 bottles of Maritimo during the month. In addition, during the take-over month 61 Grapesmith tastings were purchased, demonstrating the brand's efficient entry into a new market. With sales of R148,000, the Simonsig takeover of The Tasting Room in Pretoria was a great success overall. Free stock cost R60,000, and two trade events cost an additional R22,000. As the Tasting Room manager notes: "It was a successful month for us, we received positive feedback from our waiters, who mentioned that clients were excited about Simonsig being the wine of the month. We had returning customers who enjoyed trying different tastings throughout the month. We also received positive feedback from clients about the OffCon wine, as they found the prices accessible. The Maritimo was particularly enjoyed during tastings, with customers noting its unique qualities for red wine and describing it as well-balanced".

Evaluation of Outcomes

In evaluating the outcomes of the Maritimo launch, several key performance indicators (KPIs) were considered to determine the impact of the launch on brand visibility, customer engagement, and sales performance. These indicators included sales data, visitor numbers to both the events and subsequent winery tours, media coverage, and social media engagement metrics.

Media Impact and Influencer Engagement

Digitally, the Maritimo wine received a lot of attention on social media, especially on Instagram, where an ad campaign was conducted on the Simonsig page to increase the reach and the number of impressions; at the cost of R942 from May 9th to May 31st 2024. (Annexe 10).

Maritimo posts altogether gained 23,804 impressions and 8674 accounts were reached. A teaser reel with images of wineries received 12,000 views and almost 200 likes. A significant number of people liked other postings regarding the tasting events in Pretoria, with an average of 100 to 150 likes for each post, suggesting consistent interest in and engagement with the brand. Even while just six out of ten influencers shared content about Maritimo, their posts and reels attracted a wide audience and garnered notable views and conversations despite differing degrees of engagement.

In the meantime, traditional media attention is still growing, and as in-depth evaluations are expected to appear, expectations become greater for longer-term advantages that will guarantee Maritimo's and the larger Grapesmith collection's continuous popularity.

Visitors numbers and sales performances

The initial launch event at The Tasting Room in Pretoria showcased impressive sales of Maritimo, with 17 bottles sold off-con at the event itself and a total of 42 bottles sold throughout the entire month. This accounted for approximately 3.1% of the total 1,349 bottles sold during the focus month, underscoring Maritimo as a significant contributor, especially considering its recent introduction and its composition of less than 1% of the total production. The event also facilitated 61 Grapesmith tastings, highlighting the brand's successful introduction to a new audience. Additionally, at Simonsig's own Tasting Room, 12 dedicated Grapesmith tastings were conducted, and 36 bottles of Maritimo were sold by mid-May.

Online sales from January to May 2024 totaled R120,791.86. "The Grapesmith Collection" contributed R4,736.00 in May alone, representing approximately 16.2% of the total gross online sales for that month, with Maritimo accounting for 10 units and Mediterraneo for 6 units—an impressive result considering that in the previous months (January to April), only one bottle from the collection was sold.

By the end of May, a total of 92 bottles of Maritimo had been sold, indicating a promising start just one month after the launch. For comparison, other wines in "The Grapesmith" range showed long-term sales with Mediterraneo selling 398 bottles and Die Kluisenaar 191 bottles from July 2023 to May 2024, demonstrating how the promotion has significantly added value.

Feedback and Comments

Responses to the Maritimo debut were highly favorable, as evidenced by the positive responses from visitors and employees at various locations. Maritimo was commended by wine advisers at Simonsig's Tasting Room for being a mix that is both unique and easy to drink. They also pointed out that Maritimo appeals well as a standalone but also pairs well with food. The Tasting Room manager in Pretoria, Shandrine, gave a positive assessment of the month's events, emphasizing both the unique attributes of Maritimo and the general enthusiasm surrounding Simonsig's products. This view was shared by the National Sales Manager, who praised the productive teamwork that produced outstanding sales results and positive market reaction during the emphasis month. When taken as a whole, these data point to a well-received product that improves the Simonsig brand experience and encourages consumer loyalty.

Insights Gained

The increase in sales and high engagement rates on social media not only demonstrate Maritimo's market success but also suggest a strengthened brand perception among consumers. These metrics highlight the resonance of the integrated marketing strategies, not just in reaching a broad audience but in meaningfully engaging with them. These findings underscore the importance of immersive, narrative-driven marketing tactics that blend traditional and digital approaches effectively. The off-site gatherings proved how successful it is to mix narrative with real-world activities like food pairings and tastings. Feedback from participants and trade experts emphasized how important immersive experiences are for raising customer happiness and engagement levels. With careful planning and close collaboration with venue partners, issues like guaranteeing consistent messaging and handling logistics were handled.

Discussion on the Integration and Effectiveness of IMC and Tourism Strategies

This section reviews the ways in which the integrated marketing communications (IMC) tactics used by Simonsig Family Vineyards during the Maritimo launch contribute to and build upon the amount of academic material already in existence, with a focus on the techniques' applicability to the wine tourism industry.

Comparison of Findings with Literature

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) in Wine Tourism

The results of this thesis demonstrate how important it is for IMC to improve wine tourism, which is in line with the theoretical perspectives that Kitchen & Tourky, (2022) have put forward. In contrast to earlier research, this study emphasises the creative application of digital storytelling tools to develop a unified brand narrative that was essential for capturing the attention of a worldwide audience and consistent across various platforms. This study expands on the findings of Lund et al., (2018) by showing that digital storytelling combined with sensory marketing tactics can greatly increase customer engagement above and beyond conventional marketing techniques.

Wine Tourism as a Marketing Channel

This case study effectively demonstrated how IMC tactics may be integrated with wine tourist operations. In addition to improving the overall visitor experience, Maritimo's inclusion in Simonsig's special tastings and tours also provided a live platform for customer education, supporting and expanding on the research conducted by Bruwer & Alant, (2009). Our findings suggest that active engagement in storytelling and product narratives boosts customer happiness and retention, in contrast to earlier research that placed an emphasis on passive interactions with consumers.

Impact of Promotional Events

Maritimo was greatly aided by the strategic events held at "The Tasting Room" in Pretoria. This study extends the conclusions of Getz & Brown, (2006) by demonstrating the critical impact that emotions play in experiential marketing. According to our research, immersive storytelling and tailored customer interactions—two topics that were not thoroughly discussed in the prior literature—strongly reinforce the emotional connections that Lima et al., (2021) highlight in wine marketing events.

Combining Wine Tourism and IMC

According to our research, Simonsig's integration of IMC methods with wine tourism proved to be very effective. This supports the arguments made by Nesterenko et al., (2023), but our case study offers an actual illustration of how this kind of integration might result in measurable gains in brand equity and consumer loyalty. Future tactics could make even better use of this integration by combining virtual and augmented reality technologies to produce experiences that are more immersive.

Effectiveness of Digital and Traditional Marketing Strategies

This study supports the claim made by Batra & Keller (2016) on the efficacy of combining traditional and digital marketing methods, but it goes one step further by demonstrating how this combination can be maximised in the context of wine tourism. Through memorable physical experiences, the dual strategy reinforced consumer relations in addition to generating buzz.

Role of Storytelling in Marketing Communications

Our results validate Behzadi & Bakhtiary, (2023) and show how narratives about maritime exploration and adventure can considerably differentiate a product. Our findings emphasise the crucial importance of storytelling. According to this study, storytelling is essential to successful marketing communications in the wine business—not simply a nice-to-have.

Theoretical Insights and Practical Implications

The integrated marketing communications model proposed by Nesterenko et al. (2023) is further developed upon in this study, which emphasises the critical role that consistent messaging across a variety of marketing channels plays in the building of strong brand equity. More importantly, the results show how Pine II & Gilmore, (2013) notion of the Experience Economy can be used practically in the wine tourism industry. In addition to improving the product's sensory appeal, Simonsig Family Vineyards created an immersive experience for their customers by integrating the Maritimo launch into a story that highlights maritime exploration and adventure. This strategy shows a departure from traditional marketing techniques in favour of developing memorable experiences that connect with customers on a more profound emotional level, strengthening brand relationships and encouraging brand loyalty.

In summary, this thesis sets a new benchmark for how creative marketing techniques might improve wine tourism while also validating current theoretical frameworks. It suggests more investigation into the use of innovative technologies in narrative and client interaction, offering fascinating new opportunities for the wine tourism industry.

Considering these findings, the following suggestions are made in an effort to maximise the potential of new technology and improve the effectiveness of marketing tactics used in the wine tourism sector. These recommendations attempt to expand on the aspects of the Maritimo launch that were successful and target areas where more work could result in significant advantages.

Raccomandations and Proposal

This part presents a number of creative ideas and strategic recommendations in light of the issues previously mentioned in the SWOT analysis, such as market education, high production costs, restricted scalability, economic fluctuations, and climate change. These recommendations are meant to tackle these issues while also improving the entire wine tourist experience at Simonsig Family Vineyards and upcoming product launches.

Recommendations for future Launches

Future events should keep utilising the power of storytelling, especially for unique products like Maritimo, by providing in-depth talks about the heritage and method of the production of the wines. For professionals in the field who can further promote the unique attributes of the brand, this strategy is quite helpful. Enhancing alliances with locations that support the brand's principles can also greatly increase the success of events. This includes regular training for venue staff on product details and the brand story to enhance customer interactions.

It is advisable to interact with the media and press more in order to increase the effect and reach of events. Making sure that established wine and lifestyle journalists cover these events can help spread the brand's story to a larger audience and provide long-lasting positive publicity. Creating materials and seminars to introduce consumers to lesser-known varietals and the distinctive features of The Grapesmith Collection is essential from an educational perspective. Expanding strategic alliances with upscale restaurants and lodging facilities is necessary to boost brand awareness and penetrate new markets. Additionally, campaign targeting might be improved by continuing to engage in digital marketing methods and improving them through social media analytics.

Proposals for Future Product Launches and Immersive Experiences:

Immersive Cooking Experiences with a French Chef

- Concept: Lead culinary workshops that mix wine with food to create a more complex sensory experience.
- Execution: Promote these gatherings as special occasions that showcase the gastronomic adaptability of “The Grapesmith” wines. Work together with a well-known French chef to increase customers' awareness and comprehension of wine and food pairings.
- Benefits: Offers an immersive experience that goes beyond wine tasting and increases consumer involvement.

"Be a Grapesmith for the Day" Events

- Concept: Provide wine blending classes where attendees, with the assistance of Simonsig's winemakers, can build their own blend.
- Execution: Hold these events in a variety of settings, such as a vineyard for a real-deal experience, urban areas to draw in city people, or as convenient at-home kits.
- Benefits: Offers a practical, instructive experience that strengthens the bond between customers and the business.

Merchandising and Loyalty Incentives

- Concept: Create a range of products with a Grapesmith design, like custom wine glasses, aprons, or wine coolers.
- Execution: Include these goods in a loyalty scheme where points may be exchanged for goods or special access.
- Benefits: Encourages continued involvement through loyalty rewards and preserves brand presence in consumers' homes.

Loyalty Program Initiative

- Concept: Encourage tourists to sign up for the loyalty programme by giving them a personalised postcard in exchange for a Grapesmith tasting or bottle.
- Execution: Send out a postcard encouraging clients to register for the Simonsig Circle loyalty programme and build a profile on the company website, along with a unique code (e.g., #FindYourTrueNorth 2024) and a note of gratitude.
- Benefits: Increases client interaction and promotes recurring business and purchases.

Leveraging Digital Platforms for Enhanced Engagement

- Concept: Increase the digital footprint by including behind-the-scenes videos, interactive webinars, or virtual tastings.
- Execution: Make use of augmented reality (AR) to make labels come to life by offering films or virtual narratives about "The Grapesmith" exciting past.
- Benefits: Through cutting-edge digital experiences, raise engagement and establish new benchmarks for wine marketing.

By addressing the identified challenges through these strategic recommendations and innovative proposals, Simonsig Family Vineyards can continue to enhance its marketing efforts and wine tourism offerings, creating memorable and immersive experiences that attract and retain a diverse consumer base. The ultimate goal is to find a good centre point in the Experience Economy, as outlined by Gilmore & Pine (1998), ensuring that each visitor's journey is both engaging and unforgettable.

Conclusion

The introduction of Maritimo at Simonsig Family Vineyards is a prime example of how integrated marketing communications (IMC) can be applied successfully. It also emphasises how important digital integration and storytelling are to developing customer engagement and brand loyalty in the wine tourism sector. This thesis has demonstrated that in order to create an intuitive consumer journey and turn traditional and digital marketing into memorable consumer experiences that improve brand perception and directly increase wine sales, cohesive and collaborative marketing strategies across a variety of platforms are essential.

Key findings show that the Maritimo launch's effective IMC implementation was made possible by a well-coordinated effort to coordinate material across numerous channels. This resulted in a consistent brand message and a compelling narrative that connected with a selective target audience. In the wine industry, storytelling has become a vital component of successful marketing communications. It utilises the distinct history and sensory attributes of wines to create powerful emotional bonds with consumers.

Furthermore, this study emphasises how strategically crucial wine tourism is as a strong experiential marketing channel that may greatly increase brand awareness and client retention. In order to sustain a competitive advantage and adjust to changing customer tastes and market situations, new insights into optimising these interactions were obtained through the integration of IMC with wine tourism operations.

The Maritimo case study provided valuable insights into many research directions, including the possible application of modern innovations such as virtual and augmented reality to improve customer interaction and storytelling in the wine tourism industry. These results have led to the formulation of strategic suggestions aimed at optimising the industry's usage of developing technologies and improving marketing tactics. The ultimate goal is to produce immersive and memorable experiences that draw in and keep a wide range of customers.

In conclusion, the Maritimo launch not only sets a benchmark for creative marketing techniques in wine tourism but also validates and expands upon existing theoretical frameworks. It offers a promising direction for future endeavours in the wine industry, emphasizing the continual need for innovative approaches that respond dynamically to the unique challenges and opportunities of the Experience Economy outlined by Gilmore & Pine, (1998).

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Annexes

Annexe 1. “The Grapesmith” Technical Sheets



Fig. 1: Maritimo Technical sheet

Fig. 2: Die Kluisenaar Technical Sheet

Fig 3: Mediterraneo Technical Sheet

Annexe 2. Interview transcripts

National Sales Manager

1. What role did national sales strategies play in the Maritimo launch?
2. How were sales strategies aligned across different regions?
3. Were the initial sales targets for Maritimo achieved?
4. What factors have been crucial for maintaining sales momentum post-launch?
5. How did the events at "The Tasting Room" fit into the national sales strategy?
6. What feedback did you receive from trade professionals during the Pretoria trade event?
7. In what ways did the Pretoria events impact the relationship with distributors and retailers?

D2C Manager

1. Could you explain your role in managing direct-to-customer sales strategies for Maritimo?
2. How was the Direct to Customer (D2C) strategy tailored for the Maritimo launch?
3. What challenges did you face in marketing Maritimo directly to consumers?
4. What promotional strategies proved most effective for D2C sales?
5. How do you measure customer engagement and sales effectiveness?

Marketing Coordinator

1. Could you describe your tasks as the Marketing Coordinator in the launch of Maritimo?
2. How was the marketing campaign for Maritimo conceptualized and executed?
3. What were the central messages of the Maritimo marketing campaign?
4. Which digital marketing tools were utilized for the launch?
5. What challenges were encountered during the marketing campaign?
6. How did you prepare for the off-site events at "The Tasting Room" in Pretoria?
7. What role did you play during the launch events in Pretoria and how did you address any challenges that arose on-site?
8. Can you describe any specific strategies used to engage attendees during the Pretoria events?

Wine Tourism Manager

1. Can you describe your primary responsibilities as the Wine Tourism Manager during the launch of Maritimo?
2. What were the primary goals for the Maritimo launch in terms of wine tourism?
3. How did the launch integrate into Simonsig's overall wine tourism strategy?
4. What kind of visitor feedback did you receive during/after the first month of the launch events?
5. What metrics do you use to evaluate the success of wine tourism events?

Annex 3. The Grapesmith Brand document (Source: Simonsig Brand Documents)



A voyage in a glass Introducing Maritimo 2021, the new North in The Grapesmith collection by the Malan family of Simonsig

Winemaking is an ancient craft, yet it consistently tells a tale of reinvention and manages to maintain its allure in contemporary society. Imbued with intrigue, wine's life force depends on winemakers with an adventurous vinous spirit and the pioneering nerve to chart new paths to ensure that wine continues to spark curiosity. These character traits are entrenched in the DNA of the Malan family of Simonsig Family Vineyards.

Based in the heart of the Stellenbosch winelands, the Malan family has firmly established a reputation as vinous voyagers. Their journey includes Kaapse Vonkel, the first South African bottle-fermented sparkling wine which gave birth to the Cap Classique category. This milestone opened many new worlds of taste in the industry, leading wine enthusiasts towards unconventional and thrilling interpretations of wine. The Malan family's thirst for exploration has firmly established them as pioneers, with the late Frans Malan inspiring a legacy of innovation that's honoured by son Johan and grandson Michael, third-generation cellar master at Simonsig.

A vinous exploration

An engaging reflection of this explorative spirit can be found in The Grapesmith collection, a range of wines which exemplifies Johan's interest in – and mastery of – Mediterranean and Rhône grape varieties. "The Grapesmith collection is our answer to new grape frontiers," second-generation owner Johan says. Maiden bottlings of the range include a Marsanne-Roussanne blend called Die Kluisenaar and Mediterraneo, a unique blend of mostly Marsanne and Roussanne, with Grenache Blanc and the lesser-known Bourboulenc and Verdelho in various vintages. The idiosyncratic complexity of these varieties quickly established their place in their wine repertoire. Mediterraneo 2015 was of such stature that it was included in the Cape Winemakers Guild Auction line-up in 2016 and subsequent bottlings have continued to beguile with their layered complexity and unconventional – and therefore utterly rewarding – taste profiles.

Simonsig's odyssey with Rhône varieties continues and this year the Malan family has introduced a third wine to The Grapesmith collection. **Maritimo 2021** is an elegant, medium-bodied red wine and its bottle is engraved with a compass rose that pays homage to the intrepid "maritimos" who were the first to sail around the southern tip of Africa in 1488. Considering the trend for chillable, accessible reds, the compass on the bottle is also an appropriate nod to intrepid wine explorers seeking a contemporary wine made with classic precision.

Only seven barrels of Maritimo have been made. It is a delicate red blend of Mourvèdre, Grenache Noir, Marselan and Syrah that is remarkably approachable yet complex, with layers of perfumed bramble and deliciously crunchy cherry freshness that add extra charm. "Mourvèdre emerged as the perfect candidate, ripening late with a wider window for earlier pickings," Johan says. "We also planted our own Grenache Noir and Marselan, so the plans were set in motion for Maritimo's birth."

An ongoing journey

Johan's interest in the grape varieties from the Châteauneuf-du-Pape region deepened significantly after a visit to Paso Robles, California. It was here that he discovered the exceptional potential of these grapes to produce 'New World' wines of remarkable quality.

Johan sourced and planted several of these varieties at Simonsig and they became the basis and “true north” of The Grapesmith line-up. This approach also speaks of the Malans’ sustainability mindset. “These robust varieties are particularly resilient to heat and drought, therefore introducing them to Simonsig’s soil is an appropriate response to climate change as evidenced by this year’s harvest which is the earliest on record,” elaborates Johan.

Wine odyssey in a glass

Johan’s vision was clear: to create wines bottled in small batches that thoroughly explore the intriguing layers offered by Mediterranean and Rhône varieties. “There’s a textural beauty – an undeniable mystique – that sets them apart,” he says.

Wines in The Grapesmith collection are undoubtedly flagbearers for the versatility and transportive nature of these niche varieties, which impress with their natural acidities, refined flavour and aromatic complexity.

It’s appropriate that Die Kluisenaar bears the Crusader’s Cross, inspired by an ancient tale of a crusading Rhône Valley soldier-turned-hermit who lived on the Hill of Hermitage and became a devoted servant of the surrounding vineyards. It’s with a similar devotion that Johan approaches the making of The Grapesmith wines. Limited quantities speak to this passion. The Southern Cross engraving on the Mediterraneo bottle is a symbolic asterism that guides wine lovers to a place where a passion for winemaking has created a world of vinous discovery.

Only four to 10 barrels each of The Grapesmith wines are bottled annually and they’re all outstanding examples of wines made by a winemaker with the confidence to explore vinicultural and viticultural possibilities. “These wines epitomise a delicate balance of nuance and restraint,” Johan says. “Employing whole-bunch pressing minimises extraction while enhancing purity. The juice, gently pressed and aged in barrels and partially in amphorae, undergoes spontaneous fermentation, allowing for an authentic expression of terroir and honouring the inherent character of the grape varieties. The result is wines of sublime balance and refined complexity.”

Maritimo builds on this experimentation in the cellar, with each grape variety being vinified in a distinctive manner prior to blending. Carbonic maceration, cofermentation of some varieties, time spent in seasoned French oak barrels, meticulous selection of each of the blending components and a period in concrete eggs ensure a delicately structured wine which simultaneously offers a sublime expression of fruit purity.

While Maritimo is another landmark in the Malan family’s vinous odyssey, Johan says the journey is far from over. “We’ve achieved this remarkable result after years of learning and experimentation. Our direction and goal remain unchanged: to continually improve and elevate quality while staying true to our South African roots. It’s an ongoing journey.”

It’s also a journey that’s expertly navigated by the new generation of winemakers in the Simonsig cellar, with Michael proudly accepting the generational baton in the Malans’ voyage of winemaking excellence.

/ Ends.

Annexe 4. April Newsletter

A new wine has docked:
Introducing Maritimo 2021

From distant shores, guided by the compass rose, a voyager has docked - a wine imbued with the spirit of exploration and the promise of new wine horizons.

We are pleased to introduce the newest addition to The Grapesmith Collection - [Maritimo](#).



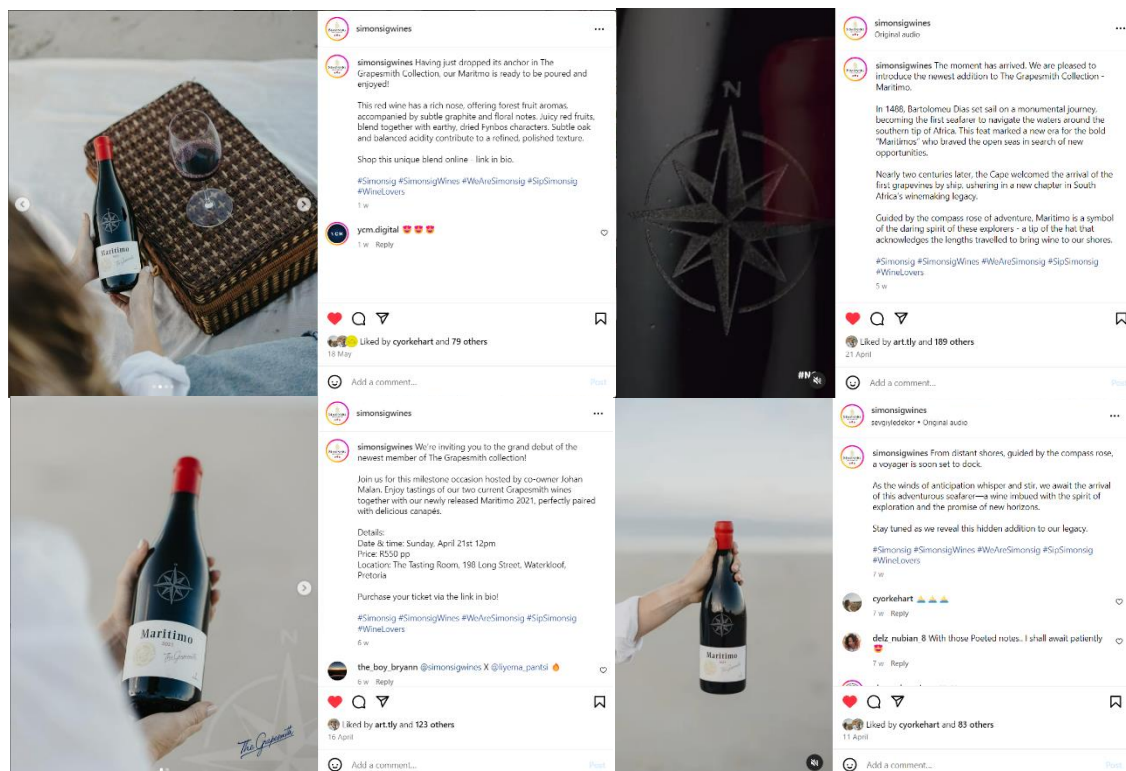
Only seven barrels of Maritimo have been made. It is a delicate red blend of Mourvèdre, Grenache Noir, Marselan and Syrah that is remarkably approachable yet complex, with layers of perfumed bramble and deliciously crunchy cherry freshness that add extra charm.

This wine is a testament to the boldness of the early seafarers. It is handcrafted with minimal intervention using whole bunch fermentation, indigenous yeasts, and concrete eggs. Enjoy the fruity fusion of this unique red blend and discover the vibrant expression of sunny Stellenbosch's terroir.

[Read the full story](#)

Fig.4: Extract from April's Simonsig Newsletter

Annex 5. Instagram Reels and Posts from the “Maritimo 2024” digital Campaign.



The collage displays four Instagram posts and two reels from the SimonsigWines account. The posts include text about the wine's launch, its unique blend, and its availability. The reels show a hand holding the Maritimo 2021 wine bottle and a compass rose. The posts are dated from April 11 to May 19, 2021.

Fig.5-8: Extract of Posts and Reels from Simonsig Instagram account part of the “Maritimo 2024” Digital Campaign

Annexe 6. Influencers and Media Kits



Fig.9-10: Postcard from Maritimo Media Drop

Fig.11: Maritimo's bottles with Compass Tag

Fig.12: Steamles Glass in tube and single bottle

Fig 13: Stickers layout

Annexe 7. The Grapesmith Tasting Sheet

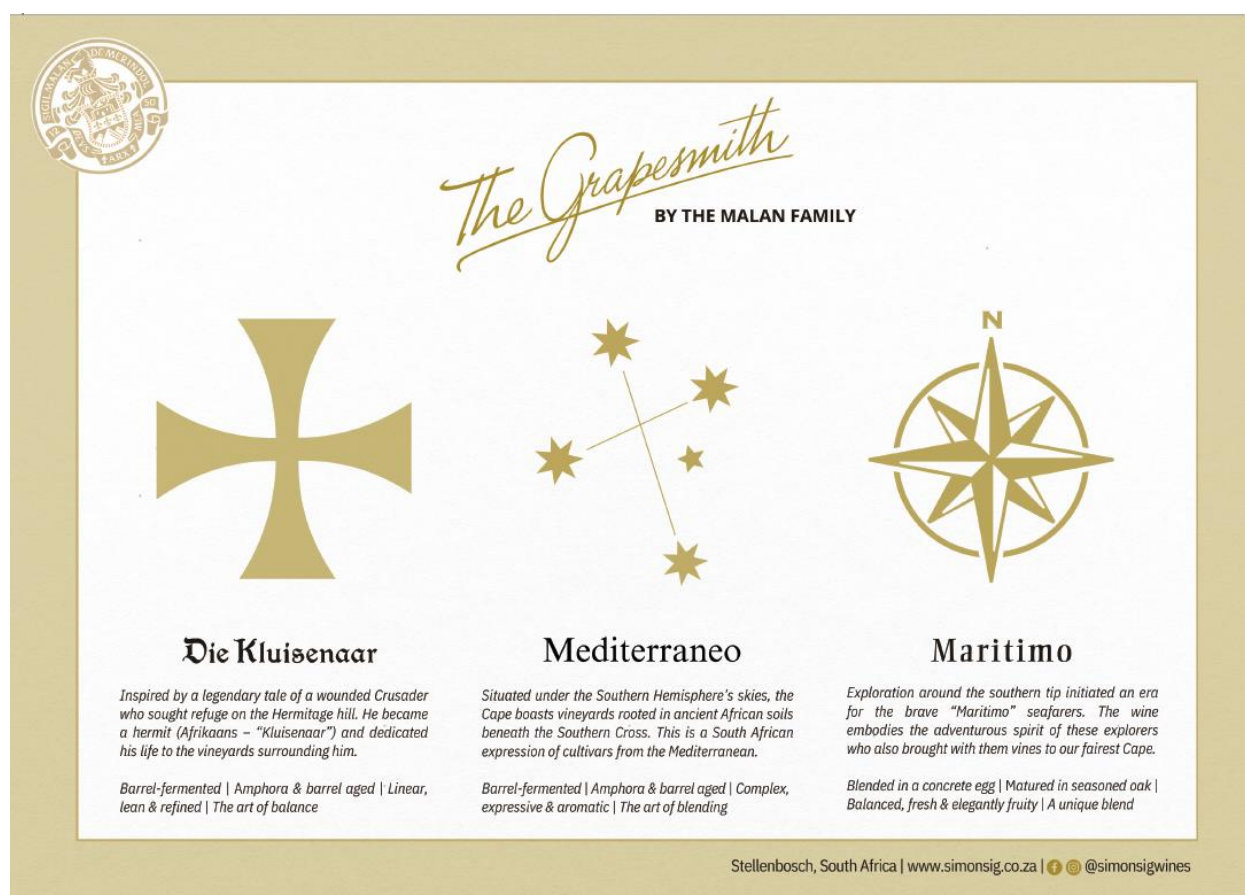


Fig 14: The Grapesmith Tasting sheet with logos and description of the corresponding wines.

Annexe 8. Photos public Public presentation Event



Fig.15: Line up of the wines for tasting at the Public Presentation.



Fig.16: Johan Malan explaining the wines to the public.



Fig.17: Canapés paired with wine.

Annexe 9. Trade presentation invite and Trade presentation description sheet



Fig.18: Trade presentation invite

Fig.19: Trade presentation description sheet

Annexe 10. Maritimo 2024 digital Campaign data

Ad set	Reach	Impressions	Cost per result	Amount spent	Ends	Schedule
Maritimo 2024	8,674	23,834	— Per Purchase	R942.32	May 31, 2024 🔥 1 day left	May 9, 2024 – May 31, 2024 22 days