

Scotland's Premier Whisky Regions: A Comparative Case Study of Place Branding

By
Susie Pryor
and
Andrew Martin*

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Washburn University
School of Business
1700 SW College Ave.
Topeka, KS 66621
785-670-1308
www.washburn.edu/sobu

* Susie Pryor is assistant professor of marketing, Washburn University, School of Business, Topeka, KS. Andrew Martin is Director of Scottish Centre of Tourism, Aberdeen Business School, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen Scotland. Comments should be directed to Susie Pryor, School of Business, Washburn University, 1700 SW College Ave. Topeka, Kansas 66621, 785-670-1601, susie.pryor@washburn.edu.

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Susie Pryor
Assistant Professor
School of Business
Washburn University
1700 SW College Avenue
Topeka, Kansas USA
Tel: 785 670 1601
email: susie.pryor@washburn.edu

Andrew Martin
Director
Scottish Centre of Tourism
Aberdeen Business School
The Robert Gordon University
Garthdee
Aberdeen Scotland
AB10 7QE
Tel: 44 1224 263036
email: a.martin@rgu.ac.uk

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, tourism has emerged as among the most important economic sectors in the global marketplace and a key means by which social and cultural phenomena are diffused. Moreover, it is a sector that is expected to continue to expand substantially. Attendant to this growth has been intensified competition among nations, regions, communities, and other specific locales for finite and valuable resources. This has resulted in heightened sensitivity to competitive pressures, leading some places to seek marketing solutions beyond conventional tourism promotion. One such solution is the branding of places.

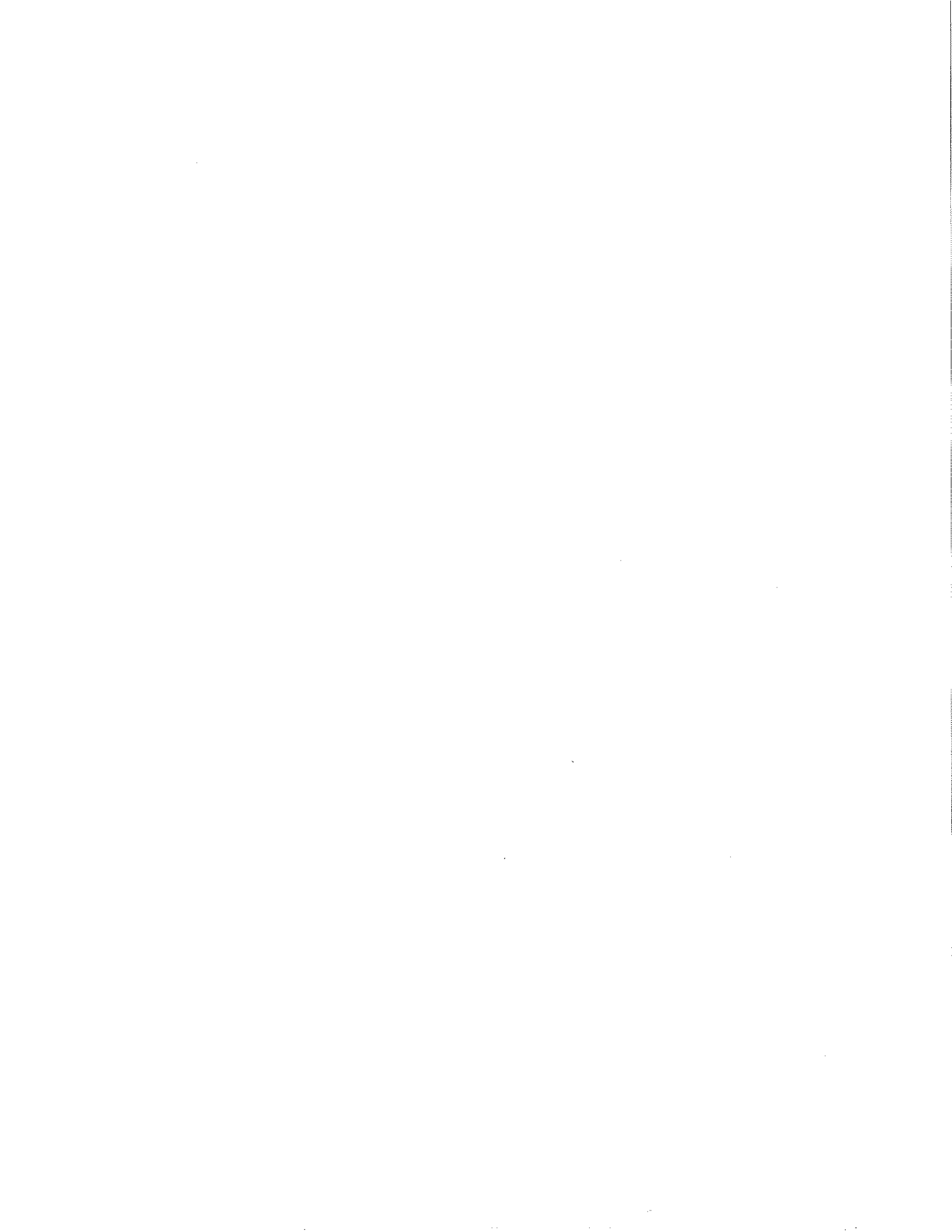
Among marketing scholars, widespread interest in place branding has generated a significant body of work. This literature is rich and varied, reflecting both private and public sector perspectives, practitioner and academic interest, and diverse conceptual orientations. From a theoretical viewpoint, there is general consensus that places are amenable to branding but differ from products in important ways and, hence, place branding is a special case of branding that may differ from other areas of application (e.g., products and corporations), requiring additional theoretical development and development of unique branding processes.

Pryor and Grossbart (2007) define place branding as a process of inscribing to a place symbols and images that represent that set of central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics that actors have ascribed to that place, thereby creating a focus of identity. They argue that an important characteristic of successful place branding is recognition of place brands as socially and culturally embedded and co-created and reified by a wide range of social actors. They reject conventional (product-oriented) branding models as largely incompatible with the notion of the



branding of places in terms of product development, brand equity, brand building, and brand management. This paper presents a comparative case study of two branded whisky regions in Scotland to examine how both places and products may in fact reflect social and cultural influences and to begin to identify some of the processes through which co-creation and reification of brand meanings may occur.

Findings suggest that Scotland's whisky regions shape—and are shaped by—their natural and economic environments; these impact social relations and influence cultural interpretations. With the explosion of interest in Scotch whisky, these regions have emerged as important sites of subcultural activity, helping to define and position individual brands and regionally-prescribed brand clusters. Though these regions house natural competitors in a relatively crowded marketplace, whisky regions function in many respects like “family brands,” providing consumers with information about cultural attributes of individual brands. Consumers and firms use specific processes, including consumption rituals and the development of brandfests and brand communities to create and reify the ideas and values that are associated with whisky, whisky brands, and whisky regions.



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Introduction

Over the past two decades, tourism has emerged as one of the most important economic sectors in the global marketplace and a key means by which social and cultural phenomena are diffused. International tourism grew by 5% in the first quarter of 2008, one point above the long-term trend, despite concerns that uncertainty over the global economic condition might affect consumer confidence and hurt tourism demand (World Tourism Organization, 2008). Attendant to this growth has been intensified competition among nations, regions, communities, and other specific locales for finite and valuable resources (Kotler, Asplund, Rein, & Haider, 1999; van den Berg & Braun, 1999; Warnaby, Bennison, Davies, & Hughes, 2002). These resources include economic, human, social, and cultural capital, in the form of tourism and investment dollars, business development, events, skilled labor, leaders, desirable citizens and neighbors, and influence (Anholt, 2002). This heightened sensitivity to competitive pressures has led some places to seek marketing solutions beyond conventional tourism promotion. One such solution is the branding of places.

Among marketing scholars, widespread interest in place branding has generated a significant body of work (Anholt, 2002; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002; Warnaby, Bennison, Davis, & Hughes, 2002). This literature is rich and varied, reflecting both private and public sector perspectives, practitioner and academic interest, and diverse conceptual orientations. From a theoretical viewpoint, the literature on place branding has made several key contributions to the development of place branding theory. These include a general consensus that places are amenable to branding but differ from products in theoretically important ways (Anholt, 2002)

and a result, place branding is a special case of branding that may differ from other areas of application (e.g., products and corporations), requiring additional theoretical development (Ashworth, 1993; Warnaby et al., 2002) and development of unique branding processes.

Pryor and Grossbart (2007) define place branding as a process of inscribing to a place symbols and images that represent a set of central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics that actors have ascribed to that place, thereby creating a focus of identity. They argue that an important characteristic of successful place branding is recognition of place brands as socially and culturally embedded, co-created and reified by a wide range of social actors. They reject conventional (product-oriented) branding models as largely incompatible with the notion of the branding of places in terms of product development, brand equity, brand building, and brand management.

The purpose of this paper is to explore both places and products as vessels of social and cultural influences and to begin to identify some of the processes through which co-creation and reification of brand meanings may occur. It draws on data collected for a comparative case study of two branded whisky regions in Scotland and is organized as follows. First, brief overviews of the Scotch whisky industry and the whisky regions which form the context for this study are provided. Second, the methodology is presented. Third, key findings are highlighted. Finally, implications are discussed, in terms of tourism, specifically, and place branding, more broadly.

The Whiskies of Scotland

Scotch whisky is a spirit made of cereals, water and yeast that has been distilled and matured in Scotland for no fewer than three years. It is important to Scotland's economy. The industry not only contributes substantially to the balance of trade, but it also drives tourism and produces jobs—many in economically fragile rural areas. In 2004, the industry was credited with

generating £800 million (approximately \$1.6 billion) in income and providing 41,000 Scottish jobs (Scotch Whisky, 2004).

Scotch remains one of Britain's principal exports. In 2004, 953 million bottles were exported worldwide and exports rose 15% (Delves, 2007). Single malt production continues to grow and thrive in an increasingly complex and competitive global economy, and the broad appeal of the industry continues to stimulate entrepreneurial enthusiasm. Distilleries that have been "moth-balled" for decades are being rapidly brought back to life through private investment.

Scotch whisky has also become increasingly important to Scotland's tourism industry. Data recently released by the Scotch Whisky Association (2008) reveals that 1,233,696 visitors toured a distillery in 2007, a 2.6% increase over the previous three years, spending more than £22.4 million (or nearly \$50 million dollars) at whisky visitor attractions across Scotland. This figure includes sales of tour tickets, retail sales from distillery shops and café sales. These expenditures represent a 17.8% increase over the same period. The average visitor spent £18.70 (approximately at a distillery, a figure three times higher than the national average of £6.07 spent at a tourist attraction). These data demonstrate the disproportionately highly positive impact on the economy that Scotland's fifty distillery visitor centers and whisky-themed attractions create. Distilleries also contribute positively to tourists' experience of Scotland. More than 60% of distillery visitor centers hold a four or five star rating by VisitScotland's quality assurance team and some 23% of the five star visitor attractions in Scotland are distilleries.

Whisky may, then, be constructively understood as a commodity, an export, and a veritable economic engine. Today, Scotch comprises more than 2,500 individual brands (Delves, 2007), each attempting to create a distinct brand identity. These brand identities are often derived

from local or regional history, geography, or mythology, reflecting the extent to which the place of origin is viewed as intrinsic to the product itself—just as the identity of Scotch is intrinsically enmeshed in the identity of Scotland. Whisky is a powerful and iconic symbol of Scottish culture (Martin & McBoyle, 2006; McBoyle, 1996).

In Scotland, the whisky industry resides within clusters of distilleries in the distinct whisky regions which mark her landscape. This structure may be historically traced to the Wash Action of 1784 which delineated the industry simply between Highland and Lowland distilleries. By the mid-1800s, four regions were identifiable, including Highland, Islay, Campbeltown, and Lowland, although some writers simply referred to Eastern and Western malts. The whiskies of Speyside, known frequently mere as ‘Glenlivet’ were written about from as early as 1820. Today, (with some variation) authorities typically classify malts as Highland (North, South, East, West and Central), Lowland, Islay, and Speyside (and divide Speyside into Glenlivet, Strathsepy, Dufftown, Rothes, and Elgin). Some continue to classify Campbeltown as a region, though where there were once 32 distilleries, there now remain but two.

In this paper, two regions are examined. These include the Isle of Islay, off the southwest coast of Scotland, and Scotland’s Malt Whisky Trail in the Moray area of Scotland, stretching between Aberdeen and Inverness. Both areas are home to internationally-recognized brands. Although the small Isle of Islay covers only 250 square miles, it has boasted as many as 20 working distilleries. Today there are eight. These include Bowmore, Ardbeg, Bruichladdich, Caol Ila, Laphroaig, Bunnahabhain, Lagavulin and, most recently, Kilchoman. Only Bruichladdich and Kilchoman are locally owned; the rest are part of larger conglomerates. Each distillery is uniquely beautiful and each is situated in a remarkable setting. Most are painted a

brilliant white, their names proclaimed in large, black letters, set in stark relief against the sea or the surrounding countryside.

Scotland's Malt Whisky Trail, in contrast, was initiated as a tourism venture in 1972, in response to increased public interest in whisky making. Distilleries in Speyside began offering visitor centers. The regional tourist association oversaw production of a promotional brochure for the region's attractions, referring to the distilleries of Glenfiddich, Glenfarclas and Strathisla as delimiting "The Whisky Trail." Subsequently renamed the Malt Whisky Trail, the association sought to promote awareness of participating distilleries and their products and encourage visitors to explore the countryside away from main tourist routes. Currently, the Malt Whisky Trail comprises eight distilleries, including Benromach, Dallas Dhu, Glen Moray, Glen Grant, Strathisla, Glenfiddich, Cardhu and Glenlivet, and Speyside Cooperage.

This region, considered the heartland of malt whisky distillation, features granite mountains, fertile countryside and lush forestation. The Speyside area is crisscrossed by narrow lanes bracketed by hedgerows and stone fences, dotted with tidy cottages and equally tidy hamlets, made brilliant by gorse and punctuated at intervals by medieval castles and, of interest here, whisky distilleries.

Method

This study adopted the research methods of cultural anthropologists who are concerned with the habits and customs of societies. Cultural studies of economic institutions and activities suggest that economic activities evolve from shared social norms and discernible and predictable patterns of behavior. It is through these norms and behaviors that economic value and meanings arise (Fisher & Downey, 2006).

Data collection spanned nine years. Specific data collection activities included participant and nonparticipant observation, depth and field interviews with consumers and producers of whisky, and systematic analysis of printed textual materials and photographs. Observational activities took place through visits to distilleries, on distillery tours, and at whisky festivals. Several hundred hours were committed to concerted fieldwork. Field interviews took place in each of these areas, as well as at social events, at railway and bus stations, and in pubs, among other places. More than 200 field interviews were conducted. Depth interviews with consumers and producers of whisky took place largely at distilleries and were generally conducted only to isolate a particular theme or clarify an issue. Twenty such interviews were conducted, nine with producers and twelve with consumers of whisky. Materials examined included books, web sites, and blogs about Scotch, the whisky regions of interest, and Scotland itself. Forty books, 12 web sites, 8 blogs, and 60 news accounts were included in the analysis. Photographs examined included those taken by the researchers as well as photographic collections accessed on the Internet, including both photographic provided by individuals as well as whisky experts and whisky producers. The researchers took 912 photographs and downloaded another 852.

Findings

Findings are discussed in terms of social and cultural influences on whisky and whisky regions and some of the process. The purpose of this paper is to explore both places and products as vessels of social and cultural influences and the activities and processes used by consumers and marketers to co-create and reify brand identity in the context of Scotch whisky and Scottish whisky regions.

Localizing Whisky

Whisky is understood by consumers and marketers to reflect its place of origin. One can contrast the whiskies of Islay with those of the Malt Whisky Trail not merely in terms of taste, but also in terms of the legends which surround each and the consumer sentiments expressed. These distinctions are based in geography, history, and culture.

Islay is an island which has historically been owned by “outsiders” who have sought to make money off its agriculture, so Islay has always been subject to outside market forces. For current residents, however, this reality is remote. Whisky, from the viewpoint of those we talked with, has opened the door to the outside world in recent years in more immediate ways. Increases in sales have benefitted the island and its inhabitants. It has led to the enhancement of ferry services and the increase in whisky tourists has resulted in an expansion of goods and services offerings for locals.

There is a natural and symbiotic relationship between Islay and its whisky. Though Islay is endowed with rich deposits of peat, it is assaulted by wind, rain, and sea. Yet, the small island’s pockets and coves provide harbors for its distilleries and the sea and the soil contribute to the distinct character of the single malts, which are noted for their peaty flavor. The island’s relative remoteness leaves it dependent upon the sea for favorable conditions for movement of goods to and from the mainland. Distilleries take care to minimize negative effects on the surrounding seashore and wildlife.

The sea, peat, and the remoteness of Islay feature in the daily life of Islay. The sea provides both challenges and a source of livelihood. Peat is used to dry barley and heat homes. Plumbing the sea for its treasures, cutting peat, and, to a lesser extent, working in production in distilleries, all require physical strength and stamina, and these are largely the activities of men. Women work in the service industries, so it is predominantly men who vie for coveted

positions in the distilleries and men who have most immediately experienced changes in the industry. Operational efficiencies have diminished the need for manual labor. Moreover, long-standing social rituals, such as drinking a dram at the beginning and end of one's shift, have been dropped or altered. The camaraderie created by groups of men sharing the rigors of the work and then enjoying together its rich rewards marked the now gone golden era of whisky production. However, a new era, marked perhaps by increased entrepreneurship, is anticipated.

Informants describe the strong sense of community that remains among those working the various and competing distilleries. These men went to school together, know one another socially, and help one another. Distilleries share human and mechanical resources and assist one another as needed. They also collaborate annually to help Islay produce her Feis Ile, the Islay Festival of Malt and Music and jointly provide financial support for the local pipe band. (In fact, though the Port Ellen Pipe Band bears the name Black Bottle, the band receives financial support from most of Islay's distilleries.)

Islay's distilleries reside within a relatively closed and close-knit social structure. This is apparent as one spends time on the small island, traveling her narrow winding roads, hiking her rugged open spaces, shopping in the small villages main streets, and her restaurants and pubs. One is immediately drawn into the community of 3,000, nearly all of whom wave to you as you share those precipitous roads. Faces become familiar as you ride the local buses. Striking, too, is the apparent bondedness between the tourists, who speak a wide range of European languages but share an appreciation of the malts of Islay. This is in evidence, too, in the stories shared by distillery tour guides, at ceidlihs, and in daily interactions.

The stories that surround the Islay malts are often tales of adversity, sometimes set against the sea, other times against market forces -- some depicting daring sea exploits, others

daring entrepreneurial ventures. Each situates tiny Islay against daunting and more powerful opposition. Andrew Jefford wrote of Islay malts:

Among malt whiskies, [they] are more palpably marked with the place of their birth than any others. Savage, stern, uncompromising: Islay is the conscience of Scotch (Jefford, 2004, p. 3).

Visitors to Islay fall in love with the people, the place, and the product, her whiskies are so intertwined with their birthplace that it is impossible to understand the product without reference to the place.

Speyside single malts are noted for their elegance and complexity, and often a refined smokiness, which is reflected in the architecture from which they arise. The distilleries of the Malt Whisky Trail, though varied in appearance, are imposing, substantial, and possess a sort of gravity and a sense of entitlement. Some, like Glen Grant and Glen Moray are baronial in appearance. Others, such as Benromach, feature the white, stark appearance of the Islay distilleries.

Although six of the seven distilleries on Islay are owned by large conglomerates, her distilleries are perceived as “less corporate” than those of the Malt Whisky Trail. Consumers suggest this is due, in part, to the greater sense of transparency offered by the Islay distillers. The Islay distillers, for example, all offer tours and tastings and allow photography. Although the distilleries on the Malt Whisky Trail also offer tours and tastings, many of their neighbor distilleries do not. The distilleries of Speyside are criticized for limiting photography. This reifies the view that the Speyside distilleries are less accessible, more corporate, and less local.

However, there is an intangible quality associated with these landlocked distilleries that is both compelling and reassuring. One feels one is walking through the halls of something substantive, historic, and meaningful. We had the great fortune to visit Strathisla on the last day

of the tourist season and enjoyed virtually a private tour with Tom, retired from production, but still young and smiling in the many photographs which adorn the distillery's walls. As he guides us on the familiar distillery tour, he lovingly strokes the copper kilns, shares tales from his youth, stops to speak to a local farmer, and eventually pulls out a bottle of a very fine, very old whisky. We sit in the country house comfort of the Strathisla reception area, before a dying fire, and feel that life is very good indeed.

On Islay, informants speak of stoicism, tradition, simplicity, and rugged independence. They drive Land Rover Defenders and Harleys. They talk of the soil and the sea, peat and the malting floor, of community-mindedness, collective responsibility, and the promise of new farm distilleries. They share with the newcomers their own views, experiences, and knowledge. Informants on the Malt Whisky Trail speak of barley, economic viability, regional concerns, agriculture, growth, the global economy. Those we interview on the street on the Malt Whisky Trail describe whisky as a drink to be consumed in the evening, at home. Connoisseurs talk of whisky and water and speak knowledgeably of the very best of brands. Visitors arrive in tour buses and leave laden with branded goods.

Despite these differences, there are also gross similarities. Both Islay and the Malt Whisky Trail struggle to resolve tensions. Both seek to modernize without compromising traditions. In both areas, for example, distillery tour guides decried the replacement of traditional stenciling on casks with bar codes. Both struggle to satisfy local needs while adapting to an expanding global marketplace. Both are unselfconsciously Scottish while acquiescing to the needs of an increasingly diverse consumer base. Both appear conscious of the natural resources upon which they are dependent and their responsibility to preserving the quality of the ecological

environment. Both view themselves as socially conscious and committed to the communities in which they reside.

Whisky Subcultures

In the context of consumer goods, normative consumer behaviors have been shown to result in important subcultures of consumption. Subcultures are distinctive subgroups of society that identify with a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or activity (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). They establish a set of shared values and beliefs and unique jargon, rituals and symbols. Consumer subcultures are important because it is through these that consumers ascribe cultural meanings, establish and reinforce standards of authenticity, and help to foster deep connections to specific goods, brands or services.

One of the most visible examples of a consumer subculture is that formed of Harley Davidson enthusiasts. This subculture has successfully created meanings associated with the brand that are pervasive and well-known by instituting a unique language, a shared ethos, norms of dress, and ritualized behaviors and events. Scholars of consumer behavior have found similar brand communities supporting such diverse brands as Star Trek, Apple computers, a number of automobile manufacturers, and personalities such as Barry Manilow.

Because this study is concerned with how consumers' and firms' norms and behaviors result in cultural meaning-making in the context of whisky, it examined the traditions, habits, and customs of regional whisky subcultures and their localized interpretations of whisky. The whisky regions studied exhibited the features of consumption subcultures. Each established a set of normative processes and exhibited cultural and social features that, while sometimes overlapping, were also unique.

The literature on consumer behavior varies in its presentation of findings as these relate to consumer subcultures. Some scholars discuss these in terms of a dramaturgical perspective (adopting the lingo of the theatre; cf, Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993), others through the lens of articulation theory (which is more thematic in its presentation; cf, Kozinets 2001), and still others at a broader level (identifying key cultural attributes; cf, Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This discussion takes the last approach, organizing findings in terms of social structure, shared beliefs and values, and unique jargon, rituals, and symbolic expression. These are summarized below, by region.

	Islay	Malt Whisky Trail
Social structure	Loosely coupled; communal	Relationships are formalized, structured, contractual; distinct differences between distilleries in terms of current resources
Shared beliefs and values	Industriousness, relationship with sea, coping with adversity, adversely affected by EU	Agriculture, relationships with local farmers, economic engine
Unique jargon, rituals, and symbolic expression	Whisky tastings, distillery tours, peat, sea, cliffs, Gaelic, celtic cross	Whisky nosings, distillery tours, cooperage, natural resources, celtic knotwork

Distillery Tours, Whisky Festivals, Brand Communities and Brand Ambassadors

It is possible to identify many of the activities engaged in by consumers and firms and structural mechanisms within the whisky regions which affect how the regions and their whiskies are viewed. For example, the physical compactness of Islay clearly affects the underlying sense of camaraderie commented upon. Moreover, relationships among Islay's distilleries are more informal, for on the Malt Whisky Trail cooperating firms work through an organizational

structure to coordinate activities and agree upon the allocation of marketing funds. In both cases (and in other regions visited but not reported here), structural features contribute to the values held in this industry—values that favor tradition over modernization and reflect a strong sense of social responsibility to the immediate communities in which it is embedded.

In this study, whisky regions resembled other subcultures of consumption, creating specific customs and traditions, many of which were highly ritualistic. As with other consumption rituals, these include specific scripted behavior, identifiable participant roles, and the use of artifacts (usually items with symbolic meanings). In Scottish whisky regions, these rituals are apparent in distillery tours and festivals. There is a pattern to the distillery tour and a structure to the festival that consumers internalize and rely upon. Distilleries use regional symbols such as local landmarks, retired employees as tour guides, the Gaelic language, Celtic art and music, and other Scottish symbols to reinforce whisky as embedded in its local and national heritage. Through these processes, appropriate behaviors are passed from distilleries to consumers. These behaviors are reinforced through repetition and through consumer interactions. Consumers, in this context, play a significant role in educating one another about whisky and its consumption and the whisky region in which it is situated.

Whisky festivals provide a means of creating in consumers a sense of identification with individual distilleries, the product class of Scotch whisky, and the whisky region. They also facilitate, through ceidlihs and opportunities for informal interaction, a sense of bondedness among consumers. As in other consumer subcultures (e.g., that of Harley Davidson), these processes transfer values, teach appropriate behaviors, and reify habits and customs. The festivals of Islay and Speyside are alike in that both offer whisky tastings, distillery tours, and cultural and social venues. However, they differ, as well. Islay's festival occurs over a full seven

days and reservations for the limited hotel accommodations must be made nearly 10 months in advance. The festival attempts to meet the needs of all of the island's inhabitants and includes hiking, children's activities, choral music, as well as traditional distillery-related events.

Speyside's festival is more narrowly designed to highlight the features and rituals associated with whisky consumption.

Both festivals and distillery tours also offer consumers opportunities to don the garb of the consumer subculture. In some cases, this led consumers to purchase t-shirts, hats, laptop cases, lapel pins, and other items that connected them to one or more individual distilleries. In others, consumers purchased festival t-shirts. Still other consumers created a deeper sense of legitimacy by wearing the t-shirts of festivals past. More nuanced representations of legitimacy included the effective combining of subcultural garb. Harley riders from Germany and Land Rover Discovery owners from England both blended their subcultural identities by donning identifiers from different brand communities.

Other artifacts of subcultural life were also available for consumption. On Islay, for example, a member of the consumer subculture is likely to consume oysters doused in local whisky from local fisherman or enjoy the "world famous Bruichladdich burgers," local beef seasoned with malt. On the Malt Whisky Trail, consumers claim a preference for locally produced Angus beef and throng to the gift shops and boutiques which carry the work of local artisans.

Increasingly, individual distilleries have sought to create brand communities. One can, for example, be a "friend of Laphroaig," an Ardbeg "committee member," enjoying privileges of membership, not the least of which is a sense of deepened identification with the brand. Loyal consumers have used these mechanisms to engage more fully with the brand, the distillery, and

other consumers. These marketing initiatives (begun as “a lark” at Laphroaig, a distillery guide suggests) may be the means of creating a more sustained and less fleeting, sense of attachment than the camaraderie which occurs at the festival ceidlih. A similar—and similarly effective—device is the emergence of “brand ambassadors.” Laphroaig’s, for example, is instrumental in creating greater ties to the valued American consumers, placing his office in New York at their disposal.

It became evident over the course of this study that consumers have sought opportunities to contribute to the dialogue about Scotch whisky outside the official means offered by distilleries, maintaining extensive web sites and blogs¹ and contributing photographic and videographic material on the Internet. These actions contribute to how whisky is understood and it may be anticipated that these forums will have substantial impact on whisky’s future marketplace meanings and symbols. It is through these that consumers most effectively challenge non-normative practices by both consumers (who might inappropriately consume whisky) or firms (who might deviate from ritual scripts).

Discussion

While it remains the convention of Scotch whisky connoisseurs to describe individual brand’s attributes in terms of nose, color, flavor, finish, age, distillation, strength, and other similar descriptors, experts also discuss distilleries in terms of their malting processes, physical location, access to water, and historic properties (changes in ownership, periods during which the distillery was dormant, etc.). Very little has been written, however, that socially or culturally situates whisky in the varied communities in which it is produced. Yet this study suggests that the we have about whisky and the things we associate with whisky are rooted in the place and

¹ See, for example, Malt Maniacs, available at <http://www.maltmaniacs.org> (accessed July 5, 2008); For Scotch Lovers, available at <http://www.forscotchlovers.com> (accessed July 5, 2008); and Dr. Scotch, available at <http://www.drscotch.com> (accessed June 5, 2008).

culture in which whisky is produced. It is from these that consumer subcultures draw meaning. It also suggests that there exists a more complex relationships between products and places than heretofore investigated. There is a precedent, however, for this view among connoisseurs of wine, coffee, and tea. In these industries, there exists the concept of *terroir*—a French term which loosely translated means “a sense of place” and is used to convey the idea that these goods embody unique qualities which reflect the sum of the characteristics of the local environment. *Terroir* comprises topography, climate, and soil conditions, but also human processes and inputs.

The consumption of whisky is contextualized social activity. Specific social and structural activities and processes play a part in defining how whisky is understood and consumed and contribute to consumers’ sense of bonding and identification with whisky as a product category, individual whisky brands, specific whisky regions, and Scotland, more generally.

Unlike other consumer subcultures, Scottish whisky’s subcultures of consumption reflect regional ways of life that are evident in and outside of the marketplace in the activities, language, foods, music, and dress of a group of people, and in their relations with others (Costa & Bamossy, 1995). Hence, product and place brand identities in the context of Scottish whisky are created, in part, through the activities in which marketplace actors engage—at distilleries, at festivals, in public and in private, on-line and interpersonally, juxtaposing history, media representations, and locally-relevant material.

All cultures produce myths; these are an important means by which members work through complex realities (Levi-Strauss, 1969). The myths of Islay differ from those of Speyside. Islay is at once a region that represents freedom from the social constraints of the mainland, sociability, community, sustainability, ruggedness, traditions, simplicity as well as globally-

oriented, participating fairly fully and successfully in a marketplace that is not always navigable or rational, but which offers significant economic opportunities. The Malt Whisky Trail is a region that represents tradition, quality, and a commanding presence in the Scottish whisky industry. Its myths are two-fold. Some are intertwined with the history of the development of Scotch whisky and the stories familiar in all of Scotland's whisky regions—the effects of excise taxation and American prohibition. Others have been told since 1972; they are the stories of a region which is dependent not only on whisky production but on the tourism whisky generates. It is a region newly aware of its vulnerabilities in a post-9/11 economy.

Ultimately, Scotland's whisky regions are shaped by—and shape—their natural and economic environments; they impact social relations and influence cultural interpretations. With the explosion of interest in Scotch whisky, these regions have emerged as important sites of subcultural activity, helping to define and position individual brands and regionally-prescribed brand clusters. Though these regions house natural competitors in a relatively crowded marketplace, whisky regions function in many respects like “family brands,” providing consumers with information about cultural attributes of individual brands. In return, these globally recognized Scotch whisky brands lend their status to these regions. Consumers understand, on multiple levels, distinctions between Islay and Speyside malts. Marketers of products and places are challenged to develop a similar depth of understanding regarding these complex and meaningful relationships and the processes through which they are built and sustained.

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