Buletinul Ştiinţific al Universităţii Politehnica Timişoara
Seria Limbi moderne

Scientific Bulletin of the Politehnica University of Timişoara
Transactions on Modern Languages

Vol. 25, Special Issue: Language, Communication and Society / 2026

The Digital Scent of a Lemon: Constructing Product Identity in Limoncello Brands' Online Storytelling

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Abstract: This article investigates how Limoncello is discursively and multimodally constructed on the websites of iconic Italian brands targeting non-Italian prospective consumers. As a geographically and culturally marked product, Limoncello offers a productive case for examining how digital brand communication shapes product identity through the interaction of verbal and non-verbal resources. The study focuses on the websites of the five main Italian Limoncello producers identified by the Consortium for the Protection of PGI Sorrento Lemons (*Consorzio di Tutela del Limone di Sorrento IGP*) and analyzes the lexical, semantic, visual, and compositional choices through which these brands represent their products online. Methodologically, the article combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. A multimodal digital corpus was compiled from the selected websites; verbal data were processed using TALL – Text Analysis for All, while non-verbal data were examined through a multimodal analytical framework. The findings show that Limoncello's product identity is constructed through recurring patterns related to territorial origin, production practices, tradition, artisanal expertise, and corporate legitimacy.

Keywords: brand storytelling, text analysis, TALL, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Limoncello.

1. Introduction

Food is not only consumed as a material product but also communicated as (one of the aspects of) culture and cultural identity (Barthes 2019 [1961]). Not only do individuals consume food as nourishment, they also build their self and collective identity through food, reinforcing legacies, creating communities or distancing themselves from those communities (see Rüdiger and Mühleisen 2020). As any other

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kind of community, also those born about and around food are “imagined communities” (Anderson 2006), meaning their identity is discursively constructed. Although Anderson’s work does not deal specifically with food or food communities, his notion of imagined communities is analytically useful for the present study. Originally developed to explain how collectivities are symbolically produced through shared narratives and mediated forms of belonging, the concept helps illuminate how food communities, too, may be constituted through common imaginaries, values, and practices rather than through direct face-to-face interaction alone. As a matter of fact, the ways in which people ‘tell’ food, the ways in which food is commodified (also) through language, and the ways people charge food with symbolic and cultural values that go beyond nutrition, such as tradition, typicality, authenticity, and belonging, suggest that food and language are inextricably tied together (see Tovares and Gordon 2021; Counihan, Van Esterik, and Julier 2019).

This article explores how Limoncello, a very popular liqueur made from lemon peels infused in alcohol, is discursively portrayed through digital storytelling on some of its producers’ websites. In contemporary promotional discourse, Limoncello is rarely presented as a simple beverage; rather, it is framed through stories of local roots, artisanal expertise, family tradition, Mediterranean lifestyle, and geographical and cultural belonging. In branding contexts, these values are not just seen as characteristics strategically, and discursively, attributed to food products, rather, they are leveraged as narrative resources that support brands claims of authenticity and genuineness. Thus, the article aims at finding and assessing what communicative patterns are used by Limoncello brands to present the product identity on their promotional websites.

In recent work on digital food and beverage communication, food-related content has increasingly been understood not as a neutral container of information, but as a strategically designed space in which products are charged with cultural, moral, and affective values. Culinary websites, blogs, social-media platforms, digital documentaries, and corporate brand websites all present food-related experiences through storytelling strategies that weave together narration, visuality, evaluation, and self-positioning (see LeBesco and Naccarato 2018; Cesiri 2020; Gordon and Tovares 2021). For this reason, analysing food discourse requires attention not only to verbal content, but also to the visual, narrative, and design resources through which food products are made meaningful (see Matwick and Matwick 2019; Jones and Comfort 2019; Rüdiger 2021).

Since contemporary brand communication is inherently multimodal, a multimodal perspective makes it possible to examine how verbal language interacts with images, layout, colour, typography, and website structure in the construction of product identity. Analysing Limoncello’s online representation therefore means considering not only what is said about the product, but also how verbal and non-verbal elements work together to shape its symbolic appeal.

Drawing on these premises, the article addresses three interrelated research questions:

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1. How is Limoncello narrativized in digital brand communication, and how is product identity constructed and conveyed?
2. Which lexical and semantic patterns structure the online representation of Limoncello and contribute to the construction of its product identity?
3. How do verbal and non-verbal resources cooperate in the multimodal construction of Limoncello's product identity?

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodological Tools

2.1 Statistics-based text analysis and corpus-informed discourse research

The development of computer-assisted text analysis has been gradual and non-linear (Popping 2000). On the one hand, in the edited volume *A Companion to Digital Humanities* (2008), Schreibman, Siemens and Unsworth aim at offering a broad overview on computer-assisted study of the humanities, as they trace both its history and its application and transversality to several disciplines (i.e. linguistics, history, philology, etc). Susan Hockey (2008) and Rockwell and Sinclair (2016), on the other hand, are more focused on text-analysis and on providing a genealogy for the development of automated tools from early concordance-oriented tools to statistics-based approaches. Even though neither one of them provides a specific, diachronic, taxonomy of computational tools, they make it clear that the field evolved from concordance-based tools toward broader analytical environments.

Helme-Guizon and Gavard-Perret (2004) point out that textual-data-analysis software may be broadly divided into tools designed to synthesize large volumes of data rapidly and tools aimed at more in-depth *corpus* analysis; within the latter group, further distinctions emerge between discourse-oriented software such as Alceste (Reinert 1990) and more explicitly lexical-statistical environments such as Spad-T (Systéme portable d'analyse de données) (Lebart et al. 1993).

Against this background, more recent tools such as TALL - *Text Analysis for All* (Aria et al. 2026) can be seen as part of the ongoing evolution of computer-assisted text analysis, insofar as they make *corpus* exploration and the identification of recurrent lexical and semantic patterns more accessible to non-specialist researchers. In this sense, TALL may be understood not as a break from earlier traditions, but as a contemporary development that reworks established text-analytic procedures in a more user-friendly environment. Indeed, Aria et al. (2022; 2024a; 2024b) maintain that approaches such as correspondence analysis, factorial analysis, and clustering have laid the groundwork for more efficient forms of automated textual investigation. Within this framework, programming environments such as R and Python have become central to contemporary text analysis and visualisation. As an R-Shiny application, TALL has been designed to integrate the main stages of textual analysis within a single environment, from data import and preprocessing to statistical exploration and visualisation. In its most recent version, the software has been further developed as an interactive platform for exploring, modelling, and visualising textual data, with multilingual support and a broader range of analytical functions (i.e: co-

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occurrence analysis, topic modelling, and other corpus exploration procedures) (see Aria et al. 2026).

In this article TALL is presented as the tool for the quantitative exploration of the *corpus* compiled from the selected Limoncello producers' websites; its results are then interpreted within a broader *corpus*-informed multimodal discourse-analytic perspective. As a matter of fact, while statistical text analysis does not in itself account for discourse meanings, it provides a systematic basis for identifying recurrent lexical patterns, semantic associations, and textual regularities that can then be interpreted qualitatively within a discourse-analytic framework. Unlike tools mainly designed for concordance-based corpus querying, TALL was selected here as an exploratory text-analysis environment aimed at identifying recurrent lexical associations, co-occurrence patterns and thematic clusters that could be subsequently integrated with the qualitative multimodal interpretation.

2.2 Multimodal Brand Storytelling

As Jewitt (2009) observes, communication must be understood as something that goes beyond verbal expression, since representation and interaction are realised through multiple signifying means working together rather than through words in isolation. Within this perspective, images, typography, colour, spatial arrangement, gaze, navigation paths, and other design elements are not supplementary embellishments, but constitutive resources in the production of meaning. Grounding in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1978; 1985), Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) extend that approach beyond language and apply its framework to visual design in order to address communication not just in terms of what is said, but also in terms of what is shown (representational metafunction), how viewers are positioned and interact with what is shown (interactive metafunction) and how elements are arranged into a coherent, meaningful whole (textual metafunction). Although later scholarship has problematized the universal reach of Kress and van Leeuwen's model (see Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala 2017; Stöckl 2023), their framework remains a valuable heuristic for examining how visual meaning is structured in corporate websites, where the persuasive force of the message often depends on the coordination of product imagery, textual description, graphic hierarchy, and page architecture. It is in this pragmatic sense that their approach is adopted here.

To move from this general social-semiotic framework to the analysis of concrete multimodal artefacts, it is useful to consider more specific models of image-text interaction. In this respect, Martinec and Salway's model of image-text relations (2005) provides a particularly valuable bridge, as it shows how verbal and visual components may stand in relations of relative equality or inequality, and how one mode may elaborate, extend, or specify the semantic contribution of the other. Their model makes it possible to obtain a more nuanced analysis, to the extent that they point out how different semiotic resources cooperate locally, for example within a webpage, in the case-study under scrutiny here, and how meaning emerges from their

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interplay rather than from each mode in isolation. This perspective connects closely with Stöckl's point that multimodality should be approached in terms of intermodal coherence, that is, as the strategic integration of semiotic resources into mutually reinforcing ensembles rather than their simple juxtaposition (Stöckl 2022, 2024a, 2024b).

Bateman's (2008) model of multimodal documents moves from this line of inquiry showing that complex artefacts need to be read simultaneously as functional, generic, structural, and materially realised objects, thus allowing the analyst to connect communicative purpose with page organisation and concrete design choices. From this perspective, as the analysis section shows in much detail, Limoncello brands' storytelling can be understood as a multimodal practice of design in which the Limoncello's product identity is not simply stated, but semiotically assembled across modes. Yet, these multimodal configurations not only organise meaning, but they also organise narration.

Since brand storytelling is treated here not just as a multimodal practice of design, but also as a narrative one, this study relies on Alexandra Georgakopoulou's work on big and small narratives (2007) to address the narrative mechanisms leveraged to present (and, eventually, sell) Limoncello's product identity. Although Georgakopoulou's work is primarily concerned with narrative and identity work in everyday discourse rather than with food branding itself, her distinction between big and small narratives is adapted here to analyse corporate websites on two interconnected levels. More in detail, big stories are understood as the broader, relatively stable narratives through which brands present themselves as authentic, rooted, traditional, or historically continuous. Small stories, by contrast, refer to shorter and more situated narrative fragments: a production detail, a reference to a founder, a caption, a visual scene, or a webpage section that evokes a specific moment, place, or practice. In promotional discourse, these smaller narrative units are often just as important as the master narrative, because they provide texture, immediacy, and recognisability, allowing the brand to appear lived, credible and close to stakeholders (see Aaker 1996; Mogaji 2019). For this reason, an approach combining food discourse studies, multimodal social semiotics, and big/small narrative analysis offers a particularly suitable framework for examining how corporate websites construct product identity through the coordinated deployment of verbal and non-verbal resources.

The multimodal analysis operationalises Kress and van Leeuwen's categories of representation, composition, information value, and salience. Representation concerns what is visually depicted and whether the image presents actions, participants, symbolic attributes, or conceptual associations. Composition refers to the spatial organization of elements within the webpage section. Information value concerns the meaning potential associated with placement, for instance Given/New or Ideal/Real structures. Salience refers to the degree to which specific elements attract attention through size, colour, contrast, focus, or positioning. The analysis also considers image-text relations through anchorage, relay, and intermodal coherence or

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resonance, in order to examine how product identity is constructed through the alignment of verbal and visual resources.

2.3 Corpus design and description

The corpus compiled for this study was designed to investigate corporate self-presentation in digital Limoncello branding, in order to explore which linguistic, multimodal and narrative aspects are leveraged to construct product identity for prospective consumers (and, possibly, for a broader stakeholder group). Accordingly, the corpus was built by selecting the Limoncello brands listed on the website of the *Consorzio di Tutela del Limone di Sorrento IGP* (Consortium for the Protection of Sorrento Lemon PGI), namely Casoni, Limoncello di Capri, Lucano, Piemme, and Villa Massa. Verbal and non-verbal materials were collected from the "About us" sections, "Our story" sections or equivalent narratives on the companies' websites. This criterion was adopted in order to ensure methodological transparency and thematic coherence. Indeed, the Consortium is an institutionally validated point of reference for identifying producers that are meaningfully connected to the territorial and cultural identity of the product, as it serves as an official body, responsible for recognizing, safeguarding and promoting Sorrento Lemon PGI. Drawing the sample from this source reduced arbitrariness in *corpus* construction and allowed the analysis to focus on brands operating within a shared framework of geographical provenance, heritage value, and product legitimacy. The aim, therefore, was not to provide an exhaustive overview of all existing Limoncello producers, but to examine a selected and coherent group of brands whose digital communication is closely tied to the discourse of place-based quality and local tradition. Since it includes both verbal and non-verbal materials, the corpus is multimodal by design. Textual and visual materials have not been treated as separate datasets belonging to related communicative spheres, but as interdependent components of the same digital discourse. This clarification is methodologically significant because, in online branding communication, meaning is not conveyed by verbal text alone, nor by isolated visuals, but by the alignment of multiple semiotic resources within a common discursive environment (see Catenaccio et al. 2021). The verbal component comprised 6,781 tokens. Since the aim of the study was to trace recurrent patterns in the discourse of authenticity and product identity rather than to examine morphosyntactic variation, the quantitative analysis was conducted on lemmas, which amounted to 1,494. The verbal texts from the five selected websites were extracted and saved as five .txt files; they were then uploaded to TALL and tokenized through the Georgetown University Multilayer (GUM) corpus treebank. The corpus was pre-processed by tagging adjectives, nouns, proper nouns, verbs, and automatically extracted multi-words. These data were used to obtain two main outputs: a co-word analysis and a thematic map. The co-word analysis tracks recurrent co-occurrences among lexical items, revealing which concepts are repeatedly activated together and therefore participate in shared semantic frames; the thematic map positions themes in relation to criteria of centrality and internal density.

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The visual component used as the close-analysis dataset consisted of three representative website screenshots, one from Villa Massa, one from Piemme, and one from Casoni, chosen because they exemplify different strategies for constructing product identity: material authenticity, through the relation between lemons and product; place-based authenticity, through landscape and heritage; historical legitimacy, through archival imagery.

3. Analysis and Discussion of Results

3.1. Lexical and thematic patterns in Limoncello brand discourse

This section discusses the results of the TALL analysis, focusing on the co-word network and thematic map generated from the lemmatized corpus. The aim is to identify the main lexical and semantic domains through which Limoncello product identity is constructed on the selected websites. The co-word network and the thematic map are interpreted here as complementary outputs: the former helps identify recurrent lexical associations among lemmas, while the latter clarifies how strongly and how systematically these semantic areas are elaborated within the corpus. This distinction is particularly useful for the study of brand communication, as co-word analyses and thematic maps make it possible to detect the conceptual networks that organize brands' self-presentation and to differentiate central narrative domains from more marginal motifs.

The co-word analysis shown in Figure 1 below suggests that the discourse about and around Limoncello is organized around a few main semantic nuclei within the selected corpus, and that territorial identity is one of the strongest among them. Here, nodes represent lemmas that are generally more prominent in the corpus, lines connecting nodes indicate lexical ties, and colours mark thematic clusters. The word "limoncello" sits near the centre of the interrelated networks, which is expected, but it is connected to several different semantic areas. This means that the product appears to be framed through multiple discourses at once rather than through one single dominant narrative.

The orange cluster on the left indicates that the websites strongly anchor Limoncello in a specific territory. The nodes "capri," "sorrento," "island," "peninsula," "grow" and so forth show that territoriality does not emerge through abstract labels like locality or origin, but through concrete toponyms and landscape words.

A second strong cluster is the corporate/product cluster on the upper right, in red. Here the nodes "company," "liqueur," "casoni," "italy," "distillery," "factory," "family," "artisan" suggest that Limoncello online communication is not just built on tradition and terroir, but also on producer identity, manufacturing legitimacy, and brand positioning.

Another cluster, at the bottom centre, in green, concerns ingredients and production. In this case nodes as "peel," "aroma," "fruit," "water," "alcohol," "infusion," "process," "produce" stand for material authenticity. The semantic cluster suggests that the product is legitimized through references to how it is made and what it is made from. Then there are two less dense networks: a more heritage-oriented one

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with terms highlighted by the nodes “tradition,” “typical,” “product” (on the right, in violet) and a method-oriented one (on the bottom right, in brown) represented by nodes like: “method,” “quality,” “use”. They suggest, respectively, that Limoncello narratives are also built around the semantic pillars of tradition and typicality and artisanal skills, but these are not the primary organizing principles of the discourse.

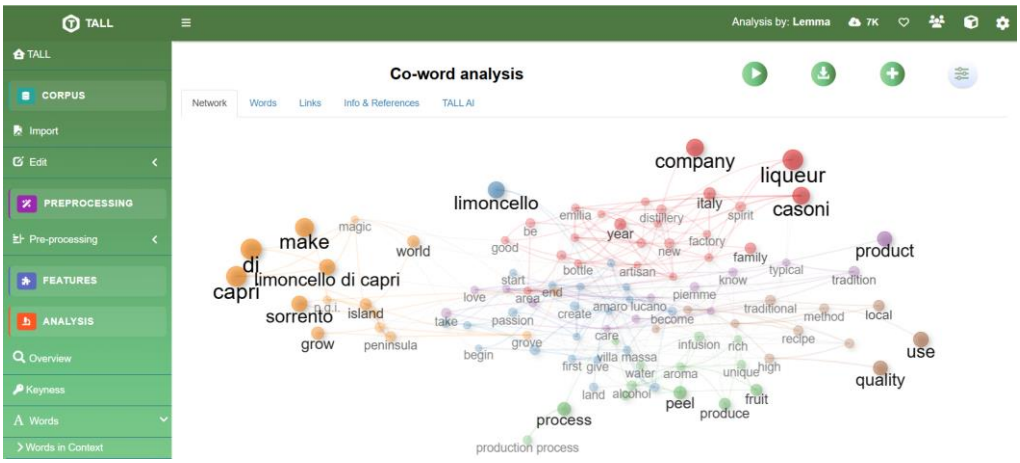


Figure 1. Co-word Network of Limoncello Brand Discourse (TALL Output).

While the co-word analysis indicates that Limoncello is built around six semantic clusters displaying different levels of internal density and different lexical ties, the thematic map below (Figure 2) offers an overview of the role played by each of these semantic clusters, representing visually how important and how internally developed each cluster is throughout the corpus.

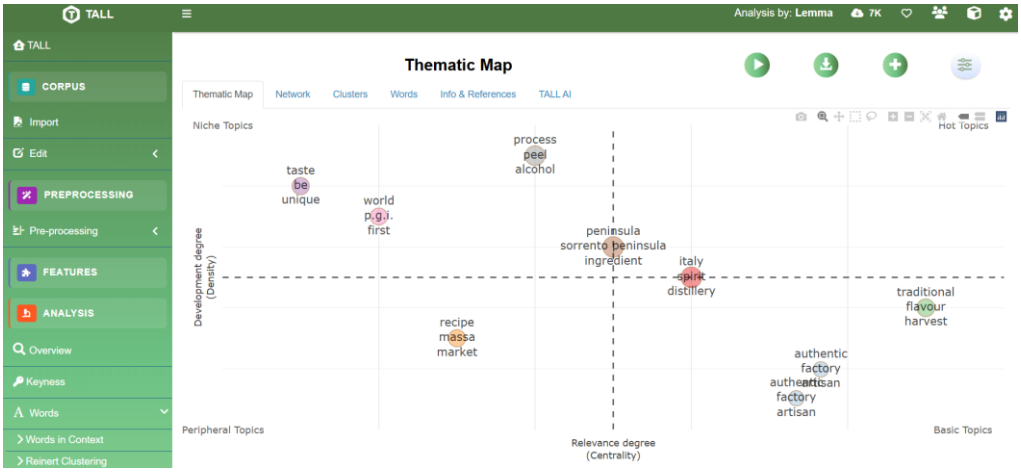


Figure 2. Thematic Map of Limoncello Brand Discourse (TALL Output).

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Overall, the map suggests that the online discourse around Limoncello is built on a few major semantic areas: production, territorial origin, tradition/flavor, and authentic-artisanal branding. But these themes do not play the same role. What is noticeable is that authenticity does appear as one of the themes throughout the corpus (Basic Topics' Quadrant in Figure 2), but not as the most developed theme. By contrast, territory and production-related vocabulary seem more structurally established.

A close reading of the map indicates that the semantic cluster identified by the labelling triplet "traditional – flavor – harvest" (lower right quadrant) is a basic theme: central to the discourse, but not very densely developed. This means that ideas of tradition, sensory value, and agricultural origin are clearly important across the corpus, but they are not explored in a very complex or specialized way. They function more like a core background vocabulary of product promotion. It follows that tradition is present, but in a rather conventional branding form. Something similar happens with the semantic cluster identified by the labelling triplet "authentic – artisan – factory", even though, in this case, the theme is lower in density. This suggests that authenticity is central, but lexically underdeveloped. In other words, the selected websites rely on the idea of authenticity, but they do not elaborate it through a very rich semantic network. It appears as a broad branding claim but is not directly and deeply addressed at a narrative level. The duplication of the cluster is to be attributed to the fact that adjacent themes may display partially overlapping representative labels when they are semantically close and occupy nearby positions on the centrality-density plane. The cluster marked by the labelling triplet "italy – spirit – distillery" is very close to the centre, suggesting it is a transversal core theme, playing a bridging function in the *corpus*. Indeed, it connects several other themes and helps define the product in general terms. Another cluster visualized near the center is the one marked by the labelling triplet "peninsula - sorrento peninsula – ingredient", which suggests that territorial identity is not marginal, as the Co-word analysis also showed. The reference to Sorrento Peninsula is not tucked away in a niche corner: it occupies a fairly central place in the discourse, meaning place is one of the organizing principles of the corpus. As for the cluster marked by the labels "process – peel – alcohol", its position on the map (upper left quadrant) suggests that it is well developed, but it is not among the most central themes. This implies that, while technical production language is relatively cohesive, production discourses are more specialized than central. The other clusters in the upper left quadrant suggest that those themes are internally coherent, but even more specialized promotional themes if compared to the "process – peel - alcohol" cluster. These themes are significant, but they are not the main backbone of the *corpus*. Differently, the cluster marked by the labels "recipe – massa – market", in the lower left quadrant, signals that the theme referring to recipes and commercial framing is not especially central and not highly developed, so it does not structure the discourse strongly.

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The TALL outputs show that, from both a lexical and a thematic point of view, the corpus revolves around three especially important semantic domains:

1. national/territorial framing: italy, peninsula
2. branding values: traditional, authentic
3. production discourse: process, peel

Thus, at a verbal level, Limoncello is not represented only as a drink, but as a product whose meaning is built through discourses anchored in place, legitimacy, and method of production.

3.2 Multimodal construction of product identity on producers' websites

Building on the methodological categories outlined above, this section examines how product identity is visually and verbally constructed in three representative website screenshots. The examples were selected from the multimodal corpus because they foreground three different identity-building strategies: material authenticity through the relation between lemons and product, place-based authenticity through landscape and heritage, and historical legitimacy through archival imagery. The goal of the multimodal analysis is not merely to comment on visual content, but to clarify how visual choices help stabilize product identity and, to a larger extent, brand identity. Statistical and multimodal analysis are presented sequentially but relationally: while the previous section identified the discursive architecture of Limoncello narrations, this section examines how that architecture is visually enacted and narratively intensified.

The first screenshot under scrutiny (Figure 3 below) has been collected from the Villa Massa website. Immediately, it offers an association between raw material and finished product. At a representational level (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), the bottle with the liqueur, floating on a transparent liquid with lemons, anchors the drink to the fruit from which it derives and activates a chain of associations between lemons, infusion, extraction, and natural ingredients. In terms of composition (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 175), the headline frames the entire website section as a statement of excellence, exclusivity, and legitimacy: not only are the lemons presented as superior, but the product itself is implicitly constructed as superior because it derives from them. In other words, the headline works metonymically: it names the lemons, but it elevates the whole branded product by transferring the value of the raw material to the bottle. On the visual side, the image is mostly conceptual rather than narrative (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 79), since there are no human actors and no clear vectors of action. The bottle is displayed in a symbolic way: it is surrounded by lemons, light, and liquid reflections, all of which function as symbolic attributes of freshness, naturalness, Mediterranean abundance, and sensorial richness. The bottle is the most salient element because of its size, central placement, sharp outline, and vertical orientation; the lemons are numerous and visually immersive, but they ultimately direct attention back to the product, which appears as their distilled essence.

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From the point of view of information value (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 177), the verbal text on the left provides the interpretive premise: the lemons are exclusive to Sorrento and Capri, PGI-certified, authentic, and traditionally cultivated. This is the discursive basis on which the viewer is asked to understand the image. On the right, the bottle appears as the 'New': the branded, marketable outcome of that already-established quality.

Within the verbal block itself, there is also a small Ideal/Real structure (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 186): the headline at the top, "THE WORLD'S FINEST LEMONS," functions as the Ideal, that is a condensed, evaluative, almost aspirational claim. The paragraph below provides the Real, that is the factual grounding for that claim through references to geographical specificity, PGI certification, authenticity, and cultivation techniques. This strengthens the persuasive effect, because the text does not leave the superlative unsupported: it immediately legitimizes it.

The relation between verbal and non-verbal text is therefore not one of simple repetition: the verbal text specifies and legitimizes (i.e: it names the lemon variety, locates it geographically, and invokes certification and authenticity). The visual text intensifies and materializes those meanings: it does not explain PGI or tradition, but it makes the product look bright, abundant, and sensorially desirable. Together, they create a strong intersemiotic relation of reinforcement and transfer of value.

Most importantly, the verbal claim about lemons is transferred to the product through visual proximity: since the bottle is immersed among the lemons, the viewer is encouraged to read the product as inseparable from its raw material and place of origin. The lemons are not just ingredients, they become the visible guarantee of the bottle's quality. This means the multimodal unit constructs product identity not promoting an abstract discourse of authenticity, but providing material proofs of authenticity, embodied in the product image.



Figure 3. Villa Massa website: a hint for process and procedure.

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From a narrative perspective, this image can be read as a small story centred on "making", in the sense outlined in the methodology section through Georgakopoulou's framework (2007). It does not recount the full history of the brand or the complete technical sequence of production; rather, it isolates a meaningful moment that stands for a larger process. This fragmentary visual episode supports the broader brand myth of artisanal transformation. It gives the discourse temporal and material concreteness without abandoning aesthetic appeal.

The second example shows a screenshot (Figure 4 below) collected from the Piemme website. Unlike the Villa Massa example, it does not foreground the finished product; rather, it constructs product identity indirectly, through the visual and verbal evocation of place, heritage, and continuity. At a representational level (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), the image on the left depicts a lemon grove framed by branches, foliage, and fruit, with a glimpse of architecture and the Neapolitan Gulf in the background. Since there are no human participants and no explicit vectors of action, the representation is predominantly conceptual rather than narrative. The grove does not document a concrete action; it rather condenses a set of values associated with the product: naturalness, cultivation, rootedness in the territory, and Mediterranean abundance.

In terms of composition (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 179), the multimodal unit is organized around a clear left-right structure. From the point of view of information value, the image on the left can be read as the Given, that is, the visual premise on which the rest of the unit builds: the lemon grove stands for the natural and territorial foundation of the brand. On the right, the verbal text appears as the New, since it interprets and discursively frames that visual world. The headline, "It is the choice of a story, a place, a time," tells the viewer how to read the image: not simply as scenery, but as the sign of a historically and culturally saturated environment. In this sense, the verbal text transforms the grove into something more than agricultural landscape; it becomes an index of memory, tradition, and identity.

Also in this case, as in the previous one, there is an Ideal/Real structure within the verbal text (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 186). The short heading at the top, "PIEMME - PIACERE MEDITERRANEO," together with the large headline, functions as the Ideal, presenting an abstract and evaluative proposition about the brand: Piemme is not just choosing ingredients, but aligning itself with a story, a place, and a temporal continuity. The paragraphs below provide the Real, grounding this evocative statement in factual and historical detail: the company's foundation in 1969, the role of Sorrentine artisans, the handing down of recipes, the use of lemon peels, the combination of artisanal tradition and technological know-how, and the control of the entire production chain. As in the previous example, the persuasive force of the section lies in the fact that an evocative claim is immediately supported by concrete explanatory material.

Concerning the relation between verbal and visual text, it is one of complementarity: the image offers a sensory and affective visualization of place while

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the verbal text, in turn, expands this visual cue into a wider narrative of origin, continuity, and expertise.



Figure 4. Piemme website: place, heritage and temporal continuity as markers of product identity.

From the point of view of salience (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 201), the large blue headline is the most prominent verbal element, while the bright oranges and greens of the lemon grove dominate the visual field. This creates a strong balance between the two halves of the composition: the image attracts affective attention, while the headline directs interpretation. Most importantly, the multimodal unit constructs product identity without displaying the product itself. Instead of showing the bottle as proof of authenticity, as in the Villa Massa example, Piemme relies on the visual rhetoric of the grove and on the verbal rhetoric of tradition, craftsmanship, and controlled production. The result is a form of branding in which the product is implicitly presented as the distilled outcome of a long-standing relationship between environment, artisanal knowledge, and cultural continuity.

From a narrative perspective, the section may also be read as a small story in Georgakopoulou's sense (2007). It does not narrate a single event in full, but it assembles fragments of a broader story world: the grove, the artisans, the founding date, the inherited recipe, and the ongoing care for production. The webpage, therefore, does not tell a fully developed chronological narrative; rather, it offers a condensed, strategically selected version of brand history that is sufficient to position Piemme within a recognizable discourse of Mediterranean tradition and authenticity.

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The third example shows a screenshot from the Casoni website (Figure 5, below). Unlike the previous examples, this one does not foreground either the bottle or the raw material, and there is no representation of lemon groves or a landscape which reminds of them. In this case, indeed, brand and product identity is built through a discourse of longevity, family heritage, and territorial rootedness. At a representational level (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), the visual component on the right is predominantly conceptual rather than narrative, since it does not depict an unfolding action or identifiable participants engaged in a process. Instead, the old photograph of the townscape functions symbolically: it condenses meanings of historical continuity, local memory, and documentary authenticity. The built environment, the canal, and the church tower visually evoke a specific Italian locality, while the aged, monochromatic quality of the image suggests temporal distance and archival value. In this sense, the photograph does not merely illustrate a place; it frames that place as the origin site of the brand's legitimacy.



Figure 5. Casoni website: longevity, family history and place-based memory as markers of product identity.

In terms of composition, the multimodal unit is organized through a clear Left/Right structure. From the point of view of information value (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 177), the verbal block on the left provides the Given, that is the interpretive framework through which the image should be read. The headings and paragraphs introduce the central themes of the section: antiquity, generational transmission, family continuity, artisanal origins, and attachment to the region. On the right, the historical image appears as the New, since it visually materializes and confirms the verbal claim. The photograph therefore works as a form of evidential support: it gives a visible and apparently factual embodiment to what the text states discursively.

Within the verbal block itself, there is also a recognizable Ideal/Real organization (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 186). The heading "CASONI, SINCE 1814" functions as the Ideal, since it condenses the key value proposition of the section into a minimal and highly salient formula. The date is especially significant: it is not a neutral chronological detail, but a semiotic resource through which the brand claims authority, endurance, and historical prestige. The paragraph immediately below provides the Real, grounding that claim in a more detailed account of the company as one of Italy's oldest distilleries and liqueur factories, and stressing the

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transmission of know-how across generations. A second heading, “A TRUE STORY, THE STORY OF THE CASONI FAMILY,” reinforces this value frame by explicitly linking the company’s identity to family narrative and authenticity. The subsequent paragraph then further substantiates the claim by recounting the transformation of a local artisan business into a national and global leader. In this respect, the section moves from condensed evaluative claims to explanatory and legitimizing detail.

The relation between verbal and visual text is therefore of intersemiotic complementarity: the verbal text specifies the themes of heritage, family succession, regional attachment, and entrepreneurial development; the visual text, by contrast, materializes them through the archival photograph. In other words, the text tells the viewer that the brand has a long and authentic history, while the image makes that history appear tangible, visible, and socially grounded. The old town photograph acts as a visual warrant (see Stöckl 2024a, 2024b) for the discourse of authenticity: it suggests that the brand’s story is not invented for marketing purposes, but anchored in a real place and in historical time.

In terms of salience (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 201), the large golden heading “CASONI, SINCE 1814” is the most prominent verbal element. Its typography and colour immediately foreground the brand’s age as the dominant meaning of the section. On the visual side, the photograph attracts attention not through bright colour or dramatic contrast, but through its distinct modality (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 154): unlike the polished, contemporary aesthetics typical of commercial food branding, it adopts the appearance of an archival document. This lower-modality, historical look is itself meaningful, because it signals age, evidence, and continuity. The visual resource thus contributes to a rhetoric of authenticity based on historical proof rather than on sensorial appeal.

From a narrative perspective, the section may also be read as a small story in Georgakopoulou’s sense (2007). Once again, it does not recount a fully extended corporate history, but it offers a condensed narrative fragment built around a few strategically selected elements: the founding date, the family, the region, and the passage from local craftsmanship to broader commercial success. The historical photograph plays a crucial role in this narrative economy, because it provides a visual scene of origin that stands metonymically for the company’s past. In this way, the webpage turns corporate history into a compact and persuasive brand story, where temporal continuity and rootedness function as signs of reliability and quality.

3.3 Discussion of Results: product identity across lexical patterns and multimodal enactments

Taken together, the statistical and multimodal analyses suggest that the online discourse of Limoncello branding is organized around a relatively stable set of semantic and semiotic resources through which product identity is constructed and legitimized. At a lexical level, the TALL outputs show that the discourse does not rely on a single dominant semantic nucleus, but on an interplay among territorial anchoring, production-related vocabulary, and branding values such as tradition and

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authenticity. The co-word analysis suggests that Limoncello is discursively connected to place names, ingredients, artisanal procedures, and company-related terms, while the thematic map has clarified that these domains do not carry the same weight. In particular, authenticity emerges as a central but lexically underdeveloped theme, whereas territoriality and production appear as more structurally cohesive and better integrated dimensions of the *corpus*. This result suggests that the selected companies appear not to construct product identity primarily through explicit and repeated self-labelling, but through a wider lexical ecology in which authenticity is indirectly supported by references to origin, method, and legitimacy.

The multimodal analysis reinforces and further specifies this interpretation. If the quantitative analysis identifies the main discursive domains around which Limoncello is verbally organized, the screenshots show how those domains are visually stabilized and narratively intensified. Across the three examples discussed, product identity is consistently built through forms of intersemiotic reinforcement between written and visual resources. In the Villa Massa example, product identity is grounded in the visible proximity between lemons and the bottle, so that raw material and finished product are fused into a single visual proof of quality and naturalness. On the Piemme webpage, by contrast, product identity is shown by a metonymical displacement: from the bottle to the territory. Here, the lemon grove, together with the textual emphasis on story, place, and time, presents the product as the outcome of environmental rootedness and artisanal continuity. Finally, in the Casoni example, the product (and its identity) is historicized: it is produced through the conjunction of family narrative, longevity, and archival imagery, which makes age and local memory function as guarantees of reliability and prestige.

These three cases therefore reveal different multimodal realizations of a broader shared logic: product identity is constructed and legitimated by linking Limoncello to a recognizable origin, whether material, spatial, or historical.

What emerges is that product identity in Limoncello brand discourse should not be understood as a fixed or self-contained category. Rather, it appears as a composite semiotic construction produced through the articulation of several verbal and visual dimensions. The lexical analyses suggest that this identity is not built through a single, specialized vocabulary devoted exclusively to defining the product. The multimodal analyses help explain why: rather than being exhaustively formulated at the verbal level, product identity is often enacted through forms of semiotic evidence. Lemons stand for ingredients and production process, groves and coastlines stand for place and provenance, while archival photographs stand for continuity, heritage, and credibility. In this sense, the multimodal component does not merely complement the quantitative one; it clarifies a central pattern already anticipated by the lexical outputs, namely that product identity tends to emerge indirectly, through a network of more concrete discursive domains rather than through explicit definition.

A further point concerns the relationship between product identity and brand identity. While the quantitative outputs revolve around lexical clusters referring both to the product itself and to producer-related values, the multimodal analysis shows

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that these two levels are constantly intertwined. The product is never presented as an isolated commodity; rather, it is embedded within broader narratives of territory, family memory, artisanal expertise, and corporate heritage. This means that Limoncello is discursively constructed not simply as a beverage with identifiable sensorial or technical properties, but as a culturally saturated product whose meaning and value depend on its insertion into a wider story world. In this respect, the findings confirm that online food-and-beverage branding does not merely inform consumers about products, but transforms them into semiotic condensations of place, tradition, quality, and legitimacy.

4. Conclusions

This study set out to investigate how Limoncello is narrativized in digital brand communication, which lexical and semantic patterns contribute to the construction of its product identity, and how verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources cooperate in this process. The analysis has shown that, on the selected producers' websites, Limoncello is not presented merely as a beverage, but as a culturally meaningful product whose identity is built through recurrent references to place, tradition, family continuity, artisanal knowledge, and production practices. The TALL analysis indicates that this identity is organized around a limited but recurrent set of semantic domains, including territorial origin, production discourse, tradition, artisanal expertise, and corporate legitimacy. Within this configuration, authenticity is present across the corpus, but it is not the most semantically elaborated theme. Rather than being developed through a lexically independent and internally dense set of terms explicitly devoted to it, authenticity tends to emerge indirectly through more concrete lexical areas, especially those related to place, ingredients, and production. The multimodal analysis further refines this finding by showing that verbal and visual resources cooperate through relations of anchorage, relay, intermodal resonance, and semiotic layering, translating claims of authenticity, continuity, and legitimacy into material, spatial, or historical evidence. The findings also contribute to a broader understanding of food and beverage branding in digital environments. The selected websites do not simply promote a drink; they position Limoncello as a culturally meaningful product whose value depends on its connection to place, inherited know-how, and temporal continuity. The product is thus framed not only as consumable, but as narratively and symbolically dense (see Counihan et al. 2019). This confirms that online brand storytelling in the food sector works by transforming products into carriers of broader meanings (see Lebesco and Naccarato 2018), and that product identity in this context is constructed through the interaction of different representational resources. Authenticity, from this perspective, is best understood not as the sole organizing principle of the discourse, but as one of the value effects generated within this wider semiotic configuration.

The study presents some limitations: first, the *corpus* is relatively small and restricted to the official websites of five producers, which means that the analysis concerns highly curated forms of corporate self-presentation rather than wider public

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discourses or consumer interpretations. Second, the multimodal component, while analytically productive, is necessarily selective: only a limited number of screenshots could be discussed in detail, and website interfaces are dynamic objects that may change over time. Third, the analysis focuses on producers' communicative strategies, but does not address reception, that is, how audiences actually interpret and respond to the values and identity cues encoded in these websites. Drawing on these premises, further developments may therefore proceed in several directions.

Future research could expand the *corpus* to include social media content, e-commerce platforms, promotional videos, or user-generated discourse, in order to compare corporate self-representation with broader digital circulations of product identity. A comparative perspective could also prove fruitful, for instance by examining whether similar semiotic patterns characterize the online branding of other geographically marked Italian food and beverage products. Finally, a larger-scale multimodal *corpus* study, could help clarify more systematically how product identity is distributed across verbal and non-verbal resources in digital food communication, and how values such as authenticity are embedded within this broader process. In this perspective, the present study may be regarded as an initial step toward a more integrated account of how regional products are narrativized, aestheticized, and legitimized in online brand environments.

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