

Small Wineries Social Media Use

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The complexity of the wine market implies that consumers often seek more information before buying. Indeed, compared to other alcoholic beverages, wine is very present on the web. The wine industry is not an exception as to how it relates to ICTs, even if, in the beginning, it was reluctant to fully embrace this disruptive technology. The outreach to ICTs and especially to social media (SM) allows wineries to benefit from multiple opportunities (e.g., crowdfunding). Considering the global outreach of the wine industry, wineries are also required to integrate ICTs continuously and directly into their work processes and learn how to capitalise on online opportunities to stand out. Thousands of wineries around the world are using their websites and SM tools to sell wine online. This online presence allows wineries to provide consumers with information, facilitate sales, and manage relationships with wine consumers and wine tourists.

acceptance and use of technology

French wineries

social media usage

strategic alignment

1. Importance of Social Media Usage

The importance of SM is growing in the lives of individuals as well as in the business world. SM includes a variety of online platforms, such as business networking sites (LinkedIn), social networking sites (Facebook), microblogging sites (Twitter), photo sharing sites (Instagram), video sharing sites (YouTube), and commerce communities (Amazon.com). These platforms allow companies to interact with their customers and stakeholders, as they are usually sources of requests, suggestions, or complaints ^[1]. Many internet users utilise two or more SMs ^[2]. SM constitutes an extension of word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing ^[3]. Thus, strategically, SM offers an opportunity to develop strong customer–supplier relationships, and it is crucial for businesses to engage in SM.

Furthermore, recent research has promoted enterprise social networking usage for business or commercial purposes ^{[4][5]}. Many top firms, such as Deloitte, General Motors, HP, IBM, and Microsoft, implemented enterprise social networking to encourage employees to share personal and professional information ^[6]. Nevertheless, SM services can also be seen as appropriate tools for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with limited resources because they provide affordable channels for marketing ^[7]. However, the wine industry, mainly composed of SMEs, is an exception as to how it relates to SM. Accordingly, there is a niche for research on the factors impacting wine SMEs' SM use.

2. Social Media Usage in the Wine Industry

Wine professionals recognise digital marketing tools, including websites, newsletters, and SM, as very important solutions in the face of global challenges in the wine industry [8]. In this context, wine business and wine tourism require substantial marketing support, especially through SM (e.g., Facebook) [9][10][11][12]. SM marketing is defined as “building a social network of fans, followers, and connections using proper and interesting content that allows businesses to reach and engage more people and drive more sales” [13] (p. 4). As SM provides not only advertisement but also interactive communication with consumers, it has become a significant part of the marketing approaches of wineries all over the world [14][15][16]. SM is the cornerstone of wineries’ marketing-oriented approach [17] and an appropriate and valuable tool to reach wine consumers [18][13][19][20]. European wineries are increasingly present online and especially on SM. Thus, the biggest Spanish wineries have been present on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram (in descending order of presence) [21]. Greek and German wineries have also accelerated their presence on SM, but there is still a great potential for improvement in their digital marketing strategies [22]. In France, although the consumer is increasingly present on SM and wineries gradually get used to new technologies, there is still a low presence of small wineries on SM [23].

Wineries’ digital strategies can have three types (or stages) linked to the nature of communication: informative, interactive, and transactional. The role of SM is important [24]. SM attracts a certain type of consumer. Brunner and Siegrist (2011) [25] found that enjoyment-oriented consumers are the most active users of SM. Furthermore, SM is the perfect place for word of mouth, which has a great effect on wine quality and price perceptions [26]. Indeed, SM marketing is positively related to online or offline wine purchasing [18][19][20] and is also crucial to interact with consumers [14], and consumer’s objective and subjective knowledge moderates the relationship between SM usage and online wine purchasing [27]. Moreover, SM allows not only the presentation of the company’s offer [17][28] but also the establishment of a long-term relationship with the consumer, stimulating trust and loyalty to the brand [29]. Furthermore, SM can help wineries to disseminate important information and values, such as CSR (e.g., [10]). These studies show that most wineries use SM for two main objectives: SM as a wine sales channel and SM as a communication channel. However, it is still unclear how different types of SM are used to achieve strategic objectives.

Different research has been conducted about SM usage in the wine industry around the world. Hoffmann et al. (2016) [16] show that the majority of the United States wineries and their German counterparts recognise the importance of SM usage in the wine industry. Szolnoki et al. (2014) [30] investigate the use of SM by wineries in Germany. They reveal that 60% of German wineries communicate with their customers using SM and that Facebook is the most important SM used by German wineries, followed by Twitter and YouTube. Szolnoki et al. (2014) [30] also point out that Facebook fans are disposed to receiving sales offers from their supported winery, suggesting that SM may constitute a potential wine sales channel. Based on six leading Italian wineries, Capitello et al. (2014) [31] explore, among others, their SM tactics. They underline that the social network most used by these wineries is Facebook, as it obtains the highest attendance of customers. These companies adopt a friendly, communicative approach, and the promotion of events, trivia, and news is privileged by them. In terms of content, games, or quizzes, references to celebrities or festive occasions and consumption usage are often developed. Recently, in the context of the Sicilian wine industry using Facebook as a strategic marketing tool, Galati et al. (2017) [10] demonstrate that small firms directed by managers with a higher educational level are more involved in

SM as they record high values of intensity, richness, and responsiveness. From a customer's perspective, Beninger et al. (2014) [32] analyse the content of influential wine blogs and indicate that readers are often interested in wine attributes and the experiences surrounding wine promoted by wine bloggers. However, to the best of our knowledge, SM usage has not been studied in France, even though the French wine industry is one of the top three producers of wine in the world [33]. Only recently have the digital practices of wineries in this particular market been studied through creating an evaluation grid of winery websites [34]. Thus, there is a need to investigate not only website usage but also SM usage of wineries.

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