



QUERY FORM

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ARTICLE TITLE: Wine, family businesses and web: marketing strategies to compete effectively
AUTHORS: Lea Iaia, Paola Scorrano, Monica Fait and Federica Cavallo

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a. please edit Camp (1989) in (2006) ref. is ok; please edit Miglietta (2014) in (2016)

b. ATECO is a number code for enterprises and 2007 is the new codification - is not a citation :

c. "A Survey on the Wine Industry" is the English translation of the Italian title "Indagine sul settore vinicolo".
REF is: Mediobanca (2015), "Indagine sul settore vinicolo. Ufficio Studi Mediobanca", available at: www.mbres.it/ita/mb_pubblicazioni/vinicole.htm (accessed 15 January 2016).

| No. | Queries |
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| Q1 ok Olsen and Hermsmeyer | Please check the change in spelling from Olsen <i>et al.</i> (2008) to Olsen and Hermsmeyer (2008) as per the reference list in the sentence "In a relational logic, in fact, wine...through such channels" is correct. Else provide complete publication details for Olsen <i>et al.</i> (2008). |
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| Q7 | Please provide conference date in reference: Pitt <i>et al.</i> (2011) 9 - 10 June |
| Q8 | Please provide date in reference: Wilder (1999) Information Week, San Francisco, July 26 |



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Wine, family businesses and web: marketing strategies to compete effectively

Wine, family
businesses
and web

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to deepen the web marketing strategies used by wine family businesses (FBs) with the aim to identify the role assigned to websites, the online models and the competitive strategies implemented through them.

Design/methodology/approach – In order to examine the content and structure of the information found on the website of selected FBs, an ad hoc analysis model was designed and validated with the support of marketing and industry experts through an inspecting focus group (Mich, 2007).

Findings – The subsequent observation of the websites of the businesses studied showed that family-run Italian wineries use their websites mainly to present information about the business and as a relational tool through edutainment activities; FBs yet neglect the potential of e-commerce.

Research limitations/implications – The study highlights the importance and the attention that FBs, among others, should dedicate to the role of web communications within their communications strategy. Although this path has allowed the traits essential to launch effective online communications for FBs, the small number of businesses surveyed (ten) does not permit a theoretical generalisation of the results. Thus, we expect to integrate the information obtained from this preliminary study with in-depth interviews with the digital strategists for the companies examined or by increasing the number of FBs studied.

Originality/value – The paper provides an evaluation model to effectively organise the websites' contents; wine businesses should consider and customise these essential elements with the brand's specific details.

Keywords Family firms, Wine industry, Website, Online strategies, Web communication

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

If one wanted to measure the impact the online world has on the winemaking industry, it would probably be enough to quantify the virtual contents available online (data collection survey conducted by the authors on 20 March 2016, using the search engine Google.com and the keyword "wine"): the topic "wine" is found in approximately 21 million videos, 6.5 million images and 800 million pages gathered on Google, 9 million videos on YouTube and more than 400,000 apps. To confirm the importance of the internet, there are 58.5 million regular drinkers (those who drink at least once a month), which, worldwide, search for information online. More than 51 per cent of them express their opinions through the web (Wine Intelligence, 2015) and contribute via word-of-mouth, thereby influencing other users.

Albeit with a slight delay with respect to foreign competitors, the Italian wine industry has begun to use an internet-oriented approach into its communication strategies (Fleishmanhillard and Osservatorio E-Commerce Politecnico Di Milano, 2015). Besides, given the strong interference of the management in the company communication and the high incidence of family-run businesses in the wine industry worldwide (Sieger *et al.*, 2015; Vrontis *et al.*, 2016; Culasso *et al.*, 2015; Morck and Yeung, 2003; Astrachan and Shanker, 2003; Faccio *et al.*, 2001; Claessens *et al.*, 2000; La Porta *et al.*, 1999) and within Italy (Corbetta *et al.*, 2015), this change generates a great interest in understanding the characterisation of web communication for this sector.

In fact, both the academic wine literature and industry are even more focussing on the need for effective winery websites (Velikova *et al.*, 2011), trying to develop a model to measure it, although it is not a standard model.



The academic purpose of this research, then, concerned the identification and summarisation of the elements thought to be essential for a correct website evaluation based on the academic literature, while the managerial purpose was to support the wine family business (FB) into the creation of an effective website thanks to a framework which is an online guide for the wine sector.

So, this study advances the literature of online marketing strategies used by FBs with the purpose of identifying the features used and the role assigned to websites in company communication, which define their distinguishing elements and the marketing strategies implemented by such businesses.

Theoretical background

Website strategies for the wine sector

Like other industries, the growing tendency for consumers to use the internet as a means to find information about winemaking brands and products before making a choice has also brought about changes in wine businesses' communication strategies. This is also taking into account the fact that the website rises to become the first and only point of contact between the business and current or potential consumers (Velikova *et al.*, 2011).

The academic literature, favouring various analytical methods, often has focussed on investigating the strategies implemented by wineries and wine producing regions, examining the way company websites are used in particular (Duquesnois and Gurău, 2008; Begalli *et al.*, 2009; McNeill, 2007; Stricker *et al.*, 2007; Bruwer and Wood, 2005; Sellitto and Martin, 2003; Gebauer and Ginsburg, 2003; Giraud-Héraud *et al.*, 2001; Stening and Lockshin, 2001).

Such studies have supported the finding that the perceived value of a product increases through use of the internet (Giraud-Héraud *et al.*, 2001), as the company co-creates value for the consumer, acting upon two levers: the wine's quality and direct online contact. Using the tangible and intangible elements of the product, in a service-dominant logic (Vandecandelaere, 2006), the business generates a user experience based on his preferences; this allows the company to involve him, satisfy his expectations and create loyalty (relational approach; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; O'Neill and Charters, 2000).

In particular, Gurău and Duquesnois (2011) summarise the process of co-creation of value through the web, trying to understand how to enhance the commercial offer, focussed on various assets, such as the product's quality, the brand's reputation, and the value proposition. In addition, the authors highlighted a few: marketing strategies which can be launched through online tools; and functionality able to increase the value of the consumer's experience.

One of the first research dedicated to this theme was made by Richardson (2002), who posited the existence of three main website types, distinguishable according to their purely informative qualities, on the presence of pre-established forms on the site used to request and purchase products, until reaching more complex platforms which allow the consumer to make purchases with entire autonomy. The main goals of the websites studied, then, were divided into four points: direct sales, although not always measurable; direct marketing, in which the descriptions of the wines, the history, the production process and tasting instructions (value added) of the product act as support for the representatives for the promotion of the brand and its products, especially in foreign markets; tourist promotion, by way of the virtuous circle that connects a visit to the wine cellars and the places of production, as the wine tourist is considered "a valuable potential customer to be educated and exploited"; indirect marketing, in which the web is used as a means to convey up-to-date and credible information, substituting brochures, and thanks to which wholesalers can show clients products and offers in the company portfolio and the winemaker's partners.

These website purposes allow consumers to be added to a network of information (networking), involving them more or less intensely (involvement) in a continuous dialogue

about their needs (personal needs), which keeps them constantly informed on initiatives, products and events promoted at the winemaker's cellars, also urging them to visit (motivation).

Besides, the synergetic combination of the above-mentioned strategies play a determining role in the creation of a high level of satisfaction in relation to the customer experience (Gurău and Duquesnois, 2011; Shanka and Taylor, 2004; Dodd, 1999). In a relational logic, in fact, wine tourism has an influential weight on direct sales, as well as social media contribute to the offer presentation and the comprehension of the brand's performance through such channels (Velikova *et al.*, 2011; Pitt *et al.*, 2011; Watts *et al.*, 2008; Olsen and Hermsmeijer, 2008).

Q1

Wine company websites: objectives and characteristics

According to the strategies that the business decides to implement, introducing the company's website into its communication and some of the features that the site includes (Taylor *et al.*, 2010; Madill and Neilson, 2010; Begalli *et al.*, 2009; Ness, 2006; Yuan *et al.*, 2004), its role may vary and can be traced back to a few key objectives (Notta and Vlachvei, 2013; Madill and Neilson, 2010; Palmatier *et al.*, 2006; Heide and Wathne, 2006; Haag *et al.*, 2006): to provide information; to sell the product without an intermediate; to develop dynamic, creative activities which directly intercept the end consumer to establish a long-term, interactive relationship with users (Quinton and Harridge-March, 2010).

From the point of view of the information conveyed, websites have an important function, since they influence consumers' decisions about the brand, type of wine and price they are willing to pay, even in relation to when the wine is consumed and advice on wine and food pairings. The evaluation of a website thus focusses on its completeness and depth (Bansal *et al.*, 2004; Evanschitzky *et al.*, 2004; Gefen, 2002; Szymanski and Hise, 2000), that is, on its effectiveness, understood to mean the ability to direct the company's target audience to the positioning and brand image the company is aiming for (Madill and Neilson, 2010), as well as to create satisfaction among users (O'Neill and Charters, 2000; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). The information that the consumer expects generally concerns the business (its history, the producer's bio, the company's mission statement, production, etc.), the wine (awards, recognitions, etc.), news and educational opportunity (Taylor *et al.*, 2010).

The existence of sales component in the virtual channel allows the business to clarify the aspects considered indispensable to the user placing his/her trust in the company's website and completing the online purchase. Consequently, the verification of the presence of privacy and security policies, on payment methods and product delivery methods (Nielsen, 2000; Schlosser *et al.*, 2006) allow for a proper assessment of the website.

Finally, to give life to a relationship with consumers, both current and potential, bringing the latter to become loyal to the brand, the company should launch interactive activities which create engagement. This objective is further expanded with the verification of the existence of a community in which users can share their experiences as consumers and exchange advice which is functional to the generation of new purchases, or stay in contact with the winemaker through 2.0 tools (Sautter *et al.*, 2004; McWilliam, 2000), also as a result of events participated in first-hand.

The importance of the proper organisation discussed up to this point, in terms of the content and development of a variable level of interaction with the end user, determines the perception that the latter will have about the website's quality. As much as the elements indicated help shape the consumer's experience, they have an even greater influence on the user's perception of the winemaker. The website's quality is an important predictor of the increase in trust in the winemaker and the perception of the quality of its wine (Nowak and Newton, 2008).

Methodology

Framework and research questions

Based on an analysis of the academic literature identified in the above paragraph, the elements chosen to evaluate the contents' architecture and the usage level of wine business websites have been identified and are proposed below (see Table I).

The presence of the identified elements primarily allows us to understand the strategies adopted by the wine producers, closely linked to the role assigned to the website in company communication (Notta and Vlachvei, 2013; Sun *et al.*, 2012; Iaia, Fait, Scorrano, Maizza and Cavallo, 2016; Madill and Neilson, 2010; Canavan *et al.*, 2007; Palmatier *et al.*, 2006; Heide and Wathne, 2006; Haag *et al.*, 2006), which is categorised as follows:

- Informative (cfr. "2.1 Informational level" in the table): the website supplies information on the business, its production process, its products, as well as news, awards and recognitions, and even offers contact information and the company's location (e.g. telephone number, address, e-mail).
- Interactive (cfr. "2.2 Interactive level"), by which the business establishes a relationship with the user, offering him/her the educational opportunity to expand his/her knowledge as wine enthusiasts, activities held at the winery to promote wine tourism and activities in the region to incentivise a visit, the subscription to a newsletter and the website's integration with social media to create an online community.
- Transactional (cfr. "2.3 Transactional level"), in which a platform for the promotional marketing and sales of the winemaker's products is provided.

In addition, adopting the improvement of the use of content and the ease of navigation as a perspective (Notta and Vlachvei, 2013; Velikova *et al.*, 2011; Gurău and Duquesnois, 2011; Cyr, 2008; Begalli *et al.*, 2009; Bruwer and Wood, 2005), the website's technical navigation in a strict sense, the possibility of viewing content in multiple languages and of clearly understanding which brand the website belonged to (thanks to the presence of a company logo) were considered additional fundamental aspects ("1. Navigation design" in Table I).

In accordance with the literature and considering the proposed theoretical framework, this work is thus intended to respond to the following research question:

- RQ1.* What are the contents of the Italian, family-run, wine business's websites and the role entrusted to them? What are the communication strategies pursued over the web?

Sample identification

To define the analysis sample, it was assumed that the adoption of suitable online marketing and communication strategies could increase the visibility and awareness of a brand, with direct reflection upon the business's performance. Adopting a benchmarking logic (Camp, 1989; Lankford, 2000), the top thirty Italian wine producers who registered the highest numbers of sales in the industry from 2010-2014 were chosen.

In this regard, the criteria reported below were input into the AIDA database (www.bvdinfo.com) on 16 May 2016:

- (1) the ATECO (2007) code 11.02, which refers to companies which produce wine from grapes; and
- (2) the geographical location within Italy.

The data set returned by AIDA was integrated, where necessary, with data from a report titled "Immagina sul settore vinicolo" (A Survey on the Wine Industry, 2015) by Mediobanca.

- 1. Navigation design
 - 1.1. Technical navigation
 - 1.1.1. Map of site
 - 1.1.2. Search engine
 - 1.1.3. Homepage button
 - 1.2. Language
 - 1.2.1. 1 Language (Italian)
 - 1.2.2. 2 Languages
 - 1.2.3. +2 Languages
 - 1.3. Company logo
- 2. Website usage levels
 - 2.1. Informational level
 - 2.1.1. Company information
 - 2.1.1.1. History about producer/winery
 - 2.1.1.2. Mission and vision statement
 - 2.1.1.3. Governance model
 - 2.1.1.4. Contacts
 - 2.1.2. Wine production information
 - 2.1.2.1. Vineyards
 - 2.1.2.2. Facilities
 - 2.1.2.3. Certifications
 - 2.1.3. Offer information
 - 2.1.3.1. Product information
 - 2.1.3.2. Brand information
 - 2.1.4. News and events
 - 2.1.5. Awards
 - 2.2. Interactive level
 - 2.2.1. Educational opportunity
 - 2.2.1.1. Food and wine combination
 - 2.2.1.2. Wine tasting information
 - 2.2.2. Activities at winery
 - 2.2.3. Activities linked with territory
 - 2.2.3.1. Accommodation facilities
 - 2.2.3.2. Restaurants
 - 2.2.3.3. Local tourist attractions
 - 2.2.4. Newsletter
 - 2.2.5. Social media integration
 - 2.2.5.1. Facebook
 - 2.2.5.2. Twitter
 - 2.2.5.3. YouTube
 - 2.2.5.4. LinkedIn
 - 2.2.5.5. Instagram
 - 2.2.5.6. Google+
 - 2.2.5.7. Pinterest
 - 2.2.5.8. Flickr
 - 2.2.5.9. Tripadvisor
 - 2.2.5.10. Forum
 - 2.2.5.11. Blog
 - 2.2.5.12. Wine club subscription
 - 2.2.5.13. E-mail
 - 2.3. Transactional level
 - 2.3.1. E-commerce availability
 - 2.3.1.1. Payment methods
 - 2.3.1.2. Delivery time
 - 2.3.1.3. Delivery costs
 - 2.3.1.4. Privacy

Table I.
Content organisation
of the Wine business
websites

From that data set of 30 businesses, those not present in every year of the five-year period studied were eliminated. As such, the sample size was reduced to 22 businesses.

Finally, only businesses classified as “family owned” were selected, for a final number of ten cases analysed (see Table II).

The organisation of a focus group and analysis of the online communication content

In order to validate the analysis model and the attributes identified in the academic literature (see Table I), adapting them for the cognitive demands of the case studies used, an examining focus group was organised (Mich, 2007). A few experts in the winemaking industry (two sommeliers, two entrepreneurs) and in business communication (two university researchers, a sociologist, two digital strategists) participated in the meeting, held 5 June 2016. The focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes and involved two steps: presentation of the research objectives; and discussion and validation of the model to adopt for the websites’ analysis (see Table I).

The last step was the analysis of the online communication of family-owned wineries through a study of the contents and organisation of their websites.

Findings

The study of the selected websites (see Table II) was carried out by observing each sections found in the table previously analysed (Table I).

The discussion focusses on the elements proposed (Table I) in at least 50 per cent of the website studied, with the aim of identify the online communication strategies mainly used by wine FBs.

Navigation design (code 1.)

The analysis shows a high level of attention to the navigation experience (Navigation design, code 1.1.) offered to the user, thanks to the presence of a search engine (code 1.1.2.) in 70 per cent of the cases, and to the homepage button on every page (code 1.1.3.) in

| | Company name and place | Company website |
|----|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 | ANTINORI Firenze – Tuscany | www.antinori.it |
| 2 | CASA VINICOLA BOTTER CARLO & C. Fossalta di Piave (Ve) – Veneto | www.botter.it/it/ |
| 3 | CASA VINICOLA ZONIN Gambellara (VI) – Veneto | www.zonin1821.it |
| 4 | COMPAGNIA DE’ FRESCOBALDI (°) Florence – Tuscany | www.frescobaldi.it/it-it/home.aspx |
| 5 | CONTRI SPUMANTI Cazzano Di Tramigna (Vr) – Veneto | contrispumanti.com |
| 6 | ENOITALIA San Martino Buon Albergo (VR) – Veneto | www.enoitalia.it |
| 7 | FRATELLI MARTINI SECONDO LUIGI Cosasno Belbo (CN) – Piedmont | www.fratellimartini.it |
| 8 | CAMPARI Group (S) (wines) Milano – Lombardia | www.camparigroup.com/it |
| 9 | GRUPPO SANTA MARGHERITA Fossalta di Portogruaro (VE) – Veneto | www.santamargherita.com/it/ |
| 10 | MASI AGRICOLA (°) S. Ambrogio Di Valpolicella (Vr) – Veneto | www.masi.it |

Table II.
The organisation of content by the family-owned wineries in the study

100 per cent of the websites examined; moreover, this coincides in each case with the company logo (code 1.4), present in 100 per cent, thus encouraging brand awareness.

With reference to foreign languages (Language, code 1.2), it is interesting to note that 60 per cent of the winemakers provide content in Italian and English (2 languages, code 1.2.2). Only one website offered only Italian-speaking content, while the remaining 30 per cent of the cases offered a multi-lingual choice, which highlighted their internationalisation towards the usual European markets (such as Germany and France) and the emerging markets such as China (Antinori, Compagnia de' Frescobaldi, Fratelli Martini Secondo Luigi), Russia (Compagnia de' Frescobaldi, Fratelli Martini Secondo Luigi) and Japan (Compagnia de' Frescobaldi).

Website usage levels (code 2.)

In relation to the Informational level (code 2.1.), we focussed our attention on the main information categories around which the company website is organised.

The company description (company information, code 2.1.1.) is characterised by the presence of a "Family" section, where one can find the narration of the history (100 per cent of the cases; code 2.1.1.1.) and the explanation of the mission statement and of the vision (90 per cent; code 2.1.1.2.) which is connected not only to the company, but to the family itself. Antinori, for example, separates the "Family" section from the company section. Fratelli Martini enriches the "Company" section with the "Family" and "Roots" sub-sections, which contain, respectively, the stories of the people who helped create and develop the FB and the history of the company. Zonin, in addition to having "Company" and "History" sections, has another header titled "Family" where the family members and their roles are presented (cfr. www.zonin1821.it/chi-siamo/famiglia-zonin/). In its "Company" section, Frescobaldi dedicates a space to the family photo gallery, which contains pictures of the family members who are part of the company, each of which links to a dedicated webpage.

In terms of the contacts category (code 2.1.1.4.), on the homepage, the wineries display the address of their legal headquarters (50 per cent) and supply other details in the dedicated section (called "Contacts"), which contains the business e-mail address also.

The wine production information (code 2.1.2.) is concentrated on the initiatives which create added value for the end consumer, such as certifications (70 per cent; code 2.1.2.3.) or information related to "sustainability" (which thus include the concepts of quality, health, safety, protection of biodiversity, less waste of resources such as water and fewer carbon dioxide emissions).

Consider, for example, Campari, which under the "Sustainability" header lists "Sustainable Campari, Marketing and Responsible Practices, QHSE-Quality, Health, Safety Environment, Responsible Sourcing, Our Commitment to the Community", considering the concept of the company's social responsibility (taken up by Enoitalia also). In addition a space which indicates "Zonin is sustainable" on the homepage (next to "Zonin1821 is out in the world" and "Zonin1821 is social"), Zonin dedicates a page to "Sustainability" in the "Company" section, dividing it into: "Water Resources, Co₂ Emission Reductions, Biodiversity and Reforestation, Energy Resources, Research and Development". Frescobaldi (cfr. www.frescobaldi.com/mondo-frescobaldi/ecosostenibilita/) focusses on "Sustainability", explaining the various certifications held, such as AgriQualità, as further proof of the pursuit of "Sustainable Agriculture", and the "Forest Certification". These are joined by the numerous activities undertaken (including the implementation of "Green Energy Sources") which make theirs "Sustainable Production". Santa Margherita also talks about "Sustainability", in a dedicated section that presents their carbon neutrality project as well as the renewable resource energy production policy, the policies adopted in the vineyards, the technology used in the winery, and reforestation projects.

The offer information (code 2.1.3.) is focussed on the presentation of the product portfolio (70 per cent; product information, code 2.1.3.1.), in which the main information is reported,

such as: type of grape used, origin, alcohol by volume, serving temperature, description of the organoleptic characteristics and food pairings (this is true for Antinori, Fratelli Martini, Contri, Botter and Santa Margherita). The remaining part (30 per cent; brand information, code 2.1.3.2.), on the other hand, presents the partner brands and the products (think of the Campari Group, with the brands in the “Sparkling Wines” and “Still Wines” categories or of Enoitalia, which offers the brands Luna di Luna, Lady Lola, Ca’ Montini, Farmers of Wine, Voga Italia, Bella Bellina and Vite Mia through their respective logos, which act as links to each label’s website).

The News and events section (90 per cent; code 2.1.4.) is generally not kept up to date, with two exceptions (Zonin and Masi). This section summarises the events organised by the wineries, initiatives as well as recognitions received. The latter, along with the awards, can also be rediscovered in the wine descriptions or, as in 50 per cent of the cases examined, in dedicated sections of the website (Awards and recognitions, code 2.1.5.). In addition, in the News and events section, 50 per cent of the businesses examined (Masi, Zonin, Fratelli Martini, Frescobaldi and Antinori) promote visits to their cellars, and only two of them reserve a special section dedicated to wine tourism through a link to an external website.

Moving our attention to the Interactive level of the website (code 2.2.), 60 per cent of the winemakers launched Educational opportunities (code 2.2.1.), focussed in particular on proposing food and wine pairings (60 per cent; Food and wine pairings, code 2.2.1.1.) and wine tastings (40 per cent; Wine tasting information, code 2.2.1.2.). The goal being pursued is that of assisting the consumer in the choice of wine, especially if s/he is inexperienced, supplying selection criteria such as the name of the wine, the cru of origin or food pairings, through specialised tools integrated with the website or in the form of smartphone apps or tasting videos.

In this regard, Frescobaldi and Masi’s solutions (cfr. www.masi.it/ita/prodotti) are similar, as both customise the consumer’s search with browsers within the website, called “Find a wine”. These browsers allow for the selection of a product offered by the company based on the name, the cru of origin and other characteristics, thereby simplifying the choice the user has to make (especially for non-experts), with an additional criteria: “food pairings” (suggesting, e.g. the ideal wines for an aperitif or for meat dishes, fish dishes or desserts).

Other interesting initiatives are added to the above, capable of developing a high level of consumer engagement, such as those proposed by:

- (1) Santa Margherita (cfr. www.santamargherita.com/it/cultura-vino/wine-t-app), which includes a special section called “Culture & Wine”, where it is possible to consult a wine glossary, an app to download on a smartphone to test and improve consumer’s wine knowledge (Wine T’App), an online course to approach the tasting and, finally, recipes to combine with the wines offered by the company.
- (2) Frescobaldi, which involves the user through: Confessions of a Winelover (a column on anything relating to wine by Sergio di Loreto, Sales Manager for Alta Gamma in Italy), *La rubrica dell’enologo* (“The Winemaker’s column”, articles with technical information about wine), *Come fare a* (“How to”, useful tips for learning: “Sabrage”, “The correct way to open a wine bottle”, etc.), *Guida alla degustazione* (“Winetasting Guide” to be downloaded as a .pdf or used with the video-tastings), *Il glossario del vino* (“Wine Glossary”), *Le nostre ricette* (“Our Recipes”). These are flanked by *Una cena da raccontare* (“A Dinner to Talk About” – a game which involves the choice of a dish, paired with wine and the selection of a story connected to it; to receive the points earned during the game, the user must provide his/her information, such as name, city, age, e-mail, etc.), and *Degusta Vino* iPhone App (an app for wine tastings and finding the nearest wine-seller).
- (3) Masi, which offers a video of a tasting of their wines (under “Try it with us”) and recipes (“See the recipe”) for food pairings provided in the product’s data sheet.

Finally, it is worth noting the websites' low level of integration with social networking sites (Social media integration, code 2.2.5.); from the study of family-owned wine businesses, it is clear that the preferred platforms are Twitter (60 per cent), Facebook (50 per cent) and YouTube (50 per cent) exclusively.

On completion of the analysis of the Italian family-owned wineries in the study, the communication model summarised in Table III emerges.

Given that which is reported in Table III, it is interesting to point out a few peculiarities:

- (1) In terms of the connection with the land in which businesses are located, Zonin, as stated before, dedicates ample space to the promotion of its estates and thus to the particular details of the places which it has carefully chosen for its wine-producing vineyards. The same importance and intentions for their places of production are proposed by Antinori, Fratelli Martini, Santa Margherita, Botter, Frescobaldi and Masi. Among these, only Antinori (cfr. www.antinori.it/en/passione-in-evoluzione/hospitality) includes other hospitality structures spread throughout the region, such as restaurants, wine bars, etc.
- (2) On its website, Zonin1821 does not list its products, but rather emphasises (as you can see in the homepage, www.zonin1821.it), the estates where its grapes grow (each one of their websites is listed in the description pages), its international presence, its 2.0 spirit, sustainability, news highlights, events and the faces of family members in the business.
- (3) Despite the wealth of information presented in the websites' content and the dynamism with which the companies interact with consumers, none of them have their own e-commerce platform.

| | |
|--|------|
| 1. Navigation design | |
| 1.1. Technical navigation | |
| 1.1.2. Search engine | 70% |
| 1.1.3. Homepage button in each webpage | 100% |
| 1.2. Language | |
| 1.2.2. More than 2 languages | 60% |
| 1.3. Company logo | 100% |
| 2. Website usage levels | |
| 2.1 Informational level | |
| 2.1.1. Company information | |
| 2.1.1.1. History about producer/winery | 100% |
| 2.1.1.2. Mission and vision statement | 90% |
| 2.1.1.4. Contacts | 50% |
| 2.1.2. Wine production information | |
| 2.1.2.3. Certifications | 70% |
| 2.1.3. Offer information | |
| 2.1.3.1. Product information | 70% |
| 2.1.4. News and events | 90% |
| 2.1.5. Awards | 50% |
| 2.2 Interactive level | |
| 2.2.1. Educational opportunity | |
| 2.2.1.1. Food and wine combination | 60% |
| 2.2.5. Social media integration | |
| 2.2.5.1. Facebook | 50% |
| 2.2.5.2. Twitter | 60% |
| 2.2.5.3. YouTube | 50% |

Table III.
The organisation of
content by the family-
owned wineries
in the study

Discussion and managerial implications

The investigation of the family-owned businesses websites of the sample allowed to answer to the following questions:

RQ1. What are the contents of the Italian, family-run, wine business's websites and the role entrusted to them? What are the communication strategies pursued over the web?

The research carried out revealed that the Italian family-owned wineries examined show in their websites contents mainly related to:

- (1) the history, the mission and the vision of the company, according to its characteristics, with the purpose to supply general information about the business, according with the informational level (code 2.1.); and
- (2) suggestions for wine tastings and food pairings, especially by way of edutainment (Walldén and Soronen, 2008), as described into the interactive level (code 2.2).

If point 1 outlined that the typical elements of the wine industry, belonging to the informational level (2.1.) and customised according to the company's essence, such as the family-run nature of the business, are the bases for the brand awareness creation, Point 2 shows that the interactive level (code 2.2) moves from the possibility of learning with games, such as culinary challenges, transmitted via special applications for smartphones or posts on the main social media websites (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) are the key brick for involving users.

In contraposition with the informative and interactive levels, the last context explored, transactional level (code 2.3), is completely absent. It highlights the modest attention that companies pay to online product sales. This could be understandable when considering the several difficulties linked to international sales, often when referring to SMEs (Beynon-Davies *et al.*, 2003), because of the initial and maintenance costs (Wilder, 1999) and its strategic and operative management (Hasan and Abuelrub, 2011; Begalli *et al.*, 2009).

The elements stated above confirmed that the main goals of the wine FB websites' (Gurău and Duquesnois, 2011; Richardson, 2002) are, on one hand, the promotion of the brand and its products, domestically and internationally, using direct and indirect marketing strategies and, on the other, relational marketing. These approaches highlight the need for constant updates and the proper translation and contextualisation of the website's contents, based on the foreign market which the company wishes to appeal to. Proceeding in this way, such approaches play a fundamental role in the creation of a high level of satisfaction in the customer experience (Shanka and Taylor, 2004; Dodd, 1999) as they allow the company to obtain a high level of involvement with consumers (Involvement), based on the needs they express (Personal needs). This generates a dialogue which keeps consumers up to date on promoted initiatives, events and products at the winery, which then stimulates them to visit companies or retailers (Motivation). The use of social media sites, useful not only for the presentation of what the company has to offer (Velikova *et al.*, 2011; Pitt *et al.*, 2011; Watts *et al.*, 2008; Olsen and Hermsmeyer, 2008), allows the business to intercept the end consumer and establish a long-term relationship with him/her, creating trust and loyalty to the brand (Quinton and Harridge-March, 2010), thus highlighting the wineries' marketing oriented approach (Velikova *et al.*, 2011).

This research leads to the formation of a few observations regarding possible managerial implications. First, the importance and the attention wineries should dedicate to the role of web in their communication strategies. Today than ever before wineries need to associate tradition and innovation, for example with a storytelling of its history through the website, the first point of contact with the wine consumer in many cases. In fact, wine companies who supported their conventional strategies with internet-based activities were often able to maintain its

competitive advantage, achieve competitiveness and market success (Vrontis *et al.*, 2016; Iaia, Fait, Scorrano, Maizza and Cavallo, 2016; Iaia, Maizza, Fait and Scorrano, 2016).

Thus, family-owned wineries should: leverage the role that their history, traditions and culture have had in shaping the product, since the region may be considered a unique, irreproducible productive field which brings out the managerial characteristics of the companies which operate there; not overlook important components such as designations of origin and the importance that they take on; create a story with a common thread both in terms of the company and the product as well as the family, from which one can sense the effect that the family-run winery has had (and continues to have) on the region (Miglietta *et al.*, 2014) and the contribution the family has had on the business (innovation and sustainability).

Conclusions

This study allowed to identify the features used and the role assigned to websites in win FBs' communication, with their distinguishing elements and marketing strategies implemented by them.

The examination of academic literature on this topic brought to the generation of an evaluation model, subsequently validated with the support of experts, to effectively organise the websites' content, achieving the academic purpose of this study and advancing the literature of online marketing strategies used by FBs. On the other side, the framework developed could represent an online guide for wine FB, realising the managerial purpose to support them into the creation of an effective website.

From the analysis of the companies involved in the study, it is clear that there are still numerous opportunities which could arise from the implementation of a fully functional website.

Meanwhile the informative perspective is quite adequate, the interactive and transactional levels have got developing areas. The websites' potential, in fact, may be increased by establishing company profiles on social networking sites, using tools to create virtual communities (such as blogs, forums and wine clubs) and making use of online shops. These tools positively contribute to more efficient communication through the web portal because they allow consumers to continue on to buying online and to feel as they are part of a community, with a clear influence on the creation of a long-term relationship with the brand (Quinton and Harridge-March, 2010; Teaff *et al.*, 2005). This framework may support FBs' to reach various goals such as, for example, supplying information and increasing brand awareness and brand equity.

The limits of this study are attributable to the small number of wineries examined (ten), which does not allow for a theoretical generalisation of the results. However, the analysis carried out represent a recent picture of the online models adopted by the family-owned business in the Italian wine industry. This information may be usefully integrated with an additional level of web content analysis based, for example, on the experience – that is, on the textual content of the websites examined (using text mining). In future, it would be useful to compare the results obtained for the family-owned wineries with non-family owned businesses in the industry, which have similar characteristics (turnover, etc.) as our sample.

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