

# South Australian Wine Brands on Facebook: An Exploration of Communication Orientations

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- *Purpose: This paper introduces the procedure of “netnography” in social media research and presents the preliminary findings from a qualitative study which involved analysis of 14 South Australian wine brands on Facebook. We conceptualise a framework of “brand communication orientations”, depicting that brands may have a one, two or multi-dimensional orientation, setting a framework for brands and companies operating within social media.*
  - *Design: We utilise publicly available information on Facebook, within the structured qualitative research framework of netnography. This analysis was conducted in order to provide an objective and insightful view of brand activities on Facebook, prior to conducting further research in the area. Analysis included identifying and exploring 14 wine brands’ type of use, frequency of use, type of activity, as well as observation of consumer interaction on Facebook over a four week period.*
  - *Findings: The analysis shows that South Australian wine brands engage in social media sites with three primary orientations; increasing visitation through promotion of events, communicating sales and promotion of products and thirdly, relationship and community building amongst consumers.*
  - *Practical implications: This research provides a guideline for managers in determining their approach to online communication. Further, we aim to provide a methodological contribution through the use of netnography to understand and explore online brand communities.*

**Key words:** Social media, Facebook, brand management, online communication.

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In today's interactive marketplace, there is a strong emphasis on the importance and potential of social media engagement to build, maintain and communicate great brands (Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010). Technology and the internet are fundamentally changing the way the world interacts and communicates, particularly having an impact on branding (Keller, 2009). Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Foursquare are experiencing high growth rates, providing an interactive communication platform for both consumers and businesses, offering a new potential for companies to develop brand equity (Boyd and Ellison, 2008, Doohwang et al., 2011). Consumers are now more likely to be influenced by someone in their social network than a celebrity in an advertisement (Poynter, 2008). Additionally, a recent study exploring consumer engagement in social media sites published by DEI Worldwide found that 70 percent of consumers now visit social media sites to retrieve brand and product information, with almost half (49%) making a purchase decision based on information found on social media sites (DEI Worldwide 2008). For the purpose of this study, brand profile pages and consumer engagement with small to medium sized wine producers are investigated. Competition in this industry segment is high (Monday and Wood-Harper, 2010) with large brands competing for a significant proportion of sales. Smaller producers, which make up nearly 90 percent of the industry's producers (Winebiz, 2011) are increasingly recognising the importance of social media use, in an attempt to reach consumers in a direct and personalised manner.

## **1. PURPOSE**

Whilst there is an excess of popular press regarding social media use and recommended business strategies, academic research in the area of social media that could provide marketing managers with direction as to best incorporate this media into integrated marketing communications is scarce (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Brand communication and engagement using social media sites such as Facebook provides a significant opportunity for marketers to build brand awareness and loyalty, shape attitudes and impact purchase behaviour, positively contributing to the development of brand equity (Keller, 2009). Brand communication on Facebook provides a significant new opportunity for marketers to directly communicate and interact with consumers. This paper presents the preliminary findings from a qualitative study which involved analysis of 14 South Australian wine brands on Facebook. This paper conceptualises a framework of "brand communication orientations", depicting that brands may have a one, two or multi-dimensional orientation, setting a framework for brands and companies operating within social media.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Given the newness of this field of research in regard to the context of social media communications, an exploratory, qualitative study was designed to attain rich data. Netnography was applied as the research method. The process of netnography utilises publicly available information found in online discussion groups to 'identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant online groups' (Kozinets, 2002, p.62). This preliminary research was conducted in order to provide the researcher with an objective and insightful view into branding activities on Facebook, prior to conducting further research in the area. Kozinets (1998, 2002, 2006) defines netnography, or 'internet based ethnography' as a 'new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study the cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications' (Kozinets, 2002, p.62). The process of netnography utilises publicly available information found in online discussion groups to 'identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant online groups'

(Kozinets, 2002, p.62). For the purpose of this study, netnography was deemed as an appropriate qualitative method in order to provide a preliminary insight brand profile pages and consumer interaction on Facebook. This preliminary research was conducted in order to provide the researcher with an objective and insightful view into branding activities on Facebook, prior to conducting further research in the area. The method steps undertaken in the netnography are summarised below in Table 1.

Stage	Method Step	Practically
1	<i>Entree:</i> Identifying the online community relevant to the research question.	The online communication platform Facebook was selected based on its relevance to the research question, high 'traffic' and frequency of posting, detailed and descriptively rich data availability, and a range of between-member interactions.
2	<i>Data Collection Part One: Field Notes:</i>  <i>Data Collection Part Two: Written Communications:</i>	Description, reflection and analysis of what we observed throughout the research process.  The written communications occurring between the wine brands and consumers on Facebook; copied and pasted into a document, for analysis with NVivo 9.
3	<i>Data Classification:</i>	Primarily social or informational Primarily on, or off topic.
4	<i>Descriptive Coding:</i>	A preliminary range of descriptive codes were defined, for example as 'discussion regarding the wine' 'winemaking history' 'link to tasting notes'
5	<i>Interpretive Coding:</i>	Clustering descriptive codes into groups and interpreting the meaning of clusters.
6	<i>Overarching Themes Identified:</i> As related to the theoretical background and objectives of the study.	Three overarching themes were identified from this process.

**Table 1:** Netnography Method Steps

### 3. FINDINGS

Analysis included identifying and exploring the brand's type of use, frequency of use, type of activity, as well as observation of consumer interaction on Facebook over a four week period. Based on this research, a set of proposed types of social media use has been developed, whereby various wine brands have been categorised and grouped. The findings from this sample indicate that South Australian wine brands engage in social media sites with three primary orientations; increasing visitation through promotion of events, communicating sales and promotion of products and thirdly, relationship and community building amongst consumers. Comprehensive discussion of the actual pages and entries can be found in Dolan et al. (2011, 2012).

#### 3.1 Brand Communication Orientation 1: Event and visitation focus

Five wine brands were observed as being 'event and visitation focussed' with significant promotion of off-site and on-site events, music concerts, available facilities, wine tastings and corporate function. In this case, the brand representatives most commonly used social media to provide information on booking procedures, availability and pricing.

#### 3.2 Brand Communication Orientation 2: Sales and promotion focus

The second type of use, sales and promotional, was observed through five of the 14 wineries analysis, with information provided focusing largely on sales and promotional

discounts. Additionally, the brands used Facebook to inform users about product availability, sales incentives, wine reviews, and awards. Information of product specification and tasting notes were also frequently shared amongst brand users.

### 3.3 Brand Communication Orientation 3: Customer relationship focus

Wineries were observed to be utilising social media to develop a sense of community and build relationships with their consumers. Such wineries frequently used photos posted on the fan page of the local area and employees, depicting the culture of the brand. Wine brands also appear to utilise social media to demonstrate concern for the environment and region, promoting and sharing other local businesses, charities and events.

## 4. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

As a result of the analysis, we have established that wine brands did not fall exclusively into a given approach to communication. This paper gives insight to the consumer dimension of this and conceptualises a framework of ‘brand communication orientations’ in Figure 1.

### 4.1 Brand Communication Orientations

Brands may have a one, two or multi-dimensional orientation as shown in Figure 1. Understanding and exploring such orientations, including the value of each orientation in terms of consumer response provides an important platform for future research within this area. This research sets a framework for brands and companies operating within social media. In particular, our research has confirmed the importance of a multi-layered communication strategy and gone some way towards defining it. Based on our findings, we recommend that such a strategy should address consumer needs including product information, suitable brand imagery and interesting events and upcoming promotions.



**Figure 1:** The Brand Communication Orientations

The Venn diagram depicting the proposed brand communication orientations demonstrates the overlapping nature of online communication messages observed. We propose that various combinations of each ‘type of use’ will create diverse responses amongst consumers. The combined orientations are illustrated as A, B, C and D. Exploring and testing the optimal communication orientation provides a valuable direction for future research within this area.

Gauging consumer perceptions and response of to each of the three primary orientations is the next step for further research as well as measuring the differences between the combined orientations. This research provides a guideline for managers in determining their approach to online communication. Further, we aim to provide a methodological contribution through the use of netnography to understand and explore online brand communities.

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