

Reputation Management on the Internet: Content and Impact of Oregon Wineries' Websites and Facebook Pages

Sharon L. Wagner

Linfield College, United States of America
(swagner@linfield.edu)

Lisa M. Weidman

Linfield College, United States of America
(lweidma@linfield.edu)

Abstract

Purpose: The objectives of this exploratory study were to: 1) examine how Oregon, USA, wineries manage the reputation of their individual brands and the reputation of Oregon as a wine region on Facebook; 2) assess the frequency and content of consumer responses to reputation factors embedded in Facebook messages; and 3) compare the wineries' use of Facebook to their use of their websites to communicate reputation messages.

Design: Content analyses were conducted on the Facebook pages and websites of 20 Oregon wineries, assessing the presence of 16 reputation factors relevant to the winery and to the Oregon wine region. Consumer responses to wineries' Facebook posts were analyzed for intention to buy wine or visit a winery. Online engagement actions (i.e., Facebook likes, comments and shares) also were captured for analysis.

Findings: Wineries employed their Web and Facebook pages to promote their own brand much more frequently than to promote the Oregon regional brand. The organic/sustainable reputation factor was associated with the highest number of online engagement actions. Intentions to buy a winery's wine or visit the winery were frequently associated with Facebook posts mentioning product quality, winery status, organic/sustainable, and sense of place. More wineries discussed reputation factors characteristic of the Oregon region on their websites than on their Facebook pages.

Practical Implications: Online communication is a critical component of reputation management. Wineries have an opportunity to strategically align their website and social media messaging for maximum impact on brand awareness and customer loyalty.

Key words: reputation management, regional reputation, social media, social networking sites, Facebook

1. INTRODUCTION

A positive reputation, or corporate brand, is a critical asset of a winery or wine region. Favorable reputation is associated with a number of benefits such as profitability and the ability to charge premium prices. Over the long term, effective management of reputation is essential for building sustainable competitive advantage.

Wine reputation is enhanced by the stories that are communicated about wines and wineries. The winery website is one commonly used channel for transmitting a narrative that helps build and maintain reputation. Today, many wineries also use social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook and Twitter, to communicate with customers, prospects, and other stakeholders. However, the extent to which wineries use SNSs to shape their reputation is largely unexplored, as is the effectiveness of these communication channels for managing wine reputation.

The study reported in this paper explored Internet-based reputation management in the wine region of Oregon, USA. We examined the extent to which Oregon's wineries deliver reputation-focused messages via their Facebook pages and how consumers respond to those messages, while also comparing the Facebook messaging to the reputation-related content of the wineries' websites.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Reputation and Reputation Management

Reputation is a multidimensional, aggregate perception resulting from multiple constituent groups and multiple interactions over time (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011; Walker, 2010). It is the corporate brand (Kitchen & Laurence, 2003), "the overall estimation in which a company is held" (Fombrun, 1996, p. 37).

Strong, favorable reputation is associated with investor satisfaction and loyalty (Helm, 2007) and with the ability to charge premium prices (Vergin and Qoronfleh, 1998). Companies with positive reputations are more likely than others to be positioned for sustainable competitive advantage, by reducing competitive rivalry and barriers to market entry (Caves and Porter, 1997; Milgrom and Roberts, 1982), and as evidenced by achieving superior financial performance and sustaining it over time (Deephouse, 2000; Roberts & Dowling, 2002; Sabate & Puente, 2003).

2.2. Regionality and Wine Reputation

While most research on reputation has been focused on individual companies, aggregate reputation is another area of focus. Aggregations include industry reputation (Barnett, 2000; Barnett and Hoffman, 2008) and country reputation (Kang & Yang, 2010; Passow, et al., 2005; Reuber & Fischer, 2011). In the study of wine reputation, there is considerable interest in the geographic region in which wine is produced.

Regionality, or the reputation of a geographic region for producing wines with a particular style (Easingwood et al., 2011), has been identified as an important factor in consumer attitudes and behavior toward wine (e.g., Bicknell & MacDonald, 2012; Combris et al., 1997; Easingwood et al., 2011; Landon and Smith, 1997, 1998; Schamel, 2006; Schamel & Anderson, 2003). An explanation for the central importance of region in wine reputation has been provided by Bicknell and MacDonald (2012), who have noted that as an experience good, a wine's attributes are best communicated to the consumer when the wine is consumed. Purchase of wine, however, often takes place before consumption, so the consumer must rely on proxy indicators of a wine's attributes when considering a purchase. Among the key proxy indicators is the reputation of the region in which the wine was

produced.

Research on regional wine reputation generally takes one of two forms: research comparing reputation or status among wine regions, and research focusing on the reputation of a particular region. Among the comparative studies is the work of Schamel (2006) who has provided evidence that regional reputation is more influential in pricing among Old World wines than among New World wines. In another study, Schamel and Anderson (2003) have highlighted increasing regional differentiation in Australia as compared to New Zealand, along with the impact of that differentiation on price premia. In the U.S., Benjamin and Podolny (1999) have examined the relative status of various wine regions in California, along with perceptions of quality, and Atkin and Johnson (2010) found that country and region were more influential than appellation in U.S. consumer judgments about wine quality.

Studies focused on the reputation of a particular wine region include the work of Benfratello et al. (2009), who found that reputational factors were more influential than sensory characteristics in driving market pricing for two Italian wines. Bicknell & MacDonald (2012) identified a pricing model for New Zealand wines that was influenced by regional reputation of various wine regions along with expert judgments of quality. Noev (2005) demonstrated the importance of regional reputation in the pricing of Bulgarian wines, and also noted the impact of varietal specialization on regional reputation. Easingwood, et al. (2011) identified three drivers of regional reputation (specialization, discussion by opinion formers, and well-defined wine style) among Australian wines. In a U.S. study of three constituent groups (wine producers, wine consumers, and wine industry professionals), Wagner et al. (2013) identified key factors in Oregon wine reputation, including handcrafted/artisanal, organic/sustainable, small family farms, community/collaboration, and stewardship of the land.

2.3. Websites, Social Media, and Reputation

The impact of marketing and public relations efforts on corporate reputation is well documented (e.g., Kioussis et al., 2007). The World Wide Web has opened a multitude of new communication channels that organizations can use to cultivate a positive reputation. A company's own website can be used to tell the company's story. That is, it can convey strategic reputation-focused messages or signals to customers and potential customers about such factors as company and product quality, sustainability efforts and regional reputation (Gill et al., 2008; Müller & Chandon, 2004; Reuber & Fischer, 2011). Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, forums, and online videos present additional opportunities (and challenges) for reputation management (Jones et al., 2009; Thach, 2009). In addition to posting reputation-shaping messages online, companies can use these technologies to their advantage by monitoring and responding to user-generated content (Del Vecchio et al., 2011).

Like websites, social networking sites provide opportunities to send reputation signals to customers, prospects and other stakeholders. Kesavan et al. (2013) cited examples of companies (e.g., Starbucks and Toyota) that have employed various social-media platforms to inform consumers about their corporate social responsibility initiatives, thereby enhancing corporate reputation. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest allow for direct, timely, and even personalized communication with these constituencies. Once a customer or prospect opts to like or follow a company's page or channel, two-way communication is opened. This can be especially useful for quickly resolving customer service issues before they go "viral" (Fathi, 2008). Companies can also learn about their customers from what they say on social media. In a study of public trust of two large consumer-oriented organizations, Bertrand (2013) found that "social media insights can complement traditional customer-satisfaction, brand-loyalty and trust surveys by giving a different perspective, which is based on the observation of spontaneous and candid statements by existing or prospective customers" (p. 335).

Evidence that social-media marketing can have a positive influence on consumer behaviors is also beginning to appear in the literature. For example, Smith (2013) found that positive customer experiences with a brand's content on Facebook led to a higher likelihood of intention to act upon that content (e.g., posting a positive comment or sharing content with others). Szolnoki et al. (2013) reported that among Facebook fans of one prominent German winery, 75% reported that a recommendation on Facebook could positively impact their wine-buying behavior. Over a three-year period, 30 Facebook fans of the same winery spent 17% more on wines purchased from the winery than non-Facebook fans.

2.4. Research on Social Media in the Wine Industry

Studies involving wine and social media have documented increasing adoption of social platforms by wineries, with Facebook taking the lead. For example, Szolnoki et al. (2013) found that as of 2012, among German wineries with an online presence, 67% were using social media (up from 55% in 2011), and 40% intended to increase their social media activities in the future. Among those using social media for business purposes, more used Facebook (70%) than any other platform. Bouquet's most recent survey (2012) of American and French wineries found that 94% of American respondents had a Facebook account and 75% had a Twitter account, while the percentages for French respondents were 61% and 48%, respectively.

A number of recent studies have endeavored to measure the use and effectiveness of social media for wine marketing. Nicholls (2012) identified four common communication strategies used by 12 leading U.K. alcohol brands, including three wine brands: "real-world tie-ins" (promoting brand-sponsored offline events); "interactive games" (surveys, quizzes and competitions with prizes); "sponsored online events" (links to brand-specific content posted elsewhere on the Internet); and "invitations to drink" on specific days of the week (p. 487). Similarly, Szolnoki et al. (2013) found that the German wineries used social media to "distribute information about their estates' events (84%), to promote their wines (63%), ... to gain new customers and to serve existing customers" (pp. 5-6). Dolan et al. (2013) found essentially the same objectives in their analysis of the Facebook pages of 14 South Australian wine brands: "increasing visitation through promotion of events, communicating sales and promotion of products and thirdly, relationship and community building amongst consumers" (p. 3). Another research focus has been measurement of the overall social-media buzz about a winery or wine varietal (e.g., Begalli et al., 2012; Claster et al., 2010; Farshid et al., 2012; Pitt et al., 2011; Reyneke et al., 2011).

The extent to which wineries use social media—or even their websites—to manage wine reputation appears to be a largely unexplored area, despite the known value of a positive reputation and the widespread adoption of these communication channels. In a review of research on consumer behavior related to wine, Lockshin & Corsi (2012) found only five peer-reviewed papers and articles on "the use and outcomes of social media for wine marketing" (p. 15), none of which focused on reputation management. The authors called for more research on Internet retailing, consumer behavior online and the best ways for wineries to use social media, given the growing importance of these channels for communicating with consumers.

2.5. Research Questions

Seeing the need for a better understanding of this area of winery reputation management, we embarked on an exploratory study of how wineries are using their social networking accounts to shape and manage their own reputation and the reputation of their region. The study is focused on the reputation of Oregon wine, building on the work of Wagner et al. (2013), who identified several reputation factors characteristic of the Oregon wine region.

After some investigation, Facebook was chosen as the focus of this research. More Oregon wineries use Facebook than other social networking sites, and for most of them, it was their first. Thus, we expected that the content on Facebook would be more sophisticated in terms of marketing and reputation management than content on other platforms.

As noted earlier, regional reputation has particular significance in the wine industry, as consumers often use the reputation of a wine region as one factor in wine purchase decisions. So in addition to promoting the reputation of one's own winery, we were also interested in how wineries promote the reputation of the Oregon wine region. Thus, our first two research questions were:

RQ1: Which *winery-specific* reputation factors are Oregon wineries promoting on Facebook?

RQ2: Which *regional* reputation factors are Oregon wineries promoting on Facebook?

The third research question explored the impact of reputation building on consumer behavior. Because social networking enables two-way communication between wineries and their customers, we sought to observe the relationship between wineries' reputation messages and consumers' online behavior and statements of behavioral intent in response to those messages.

RQ3: How do consumers respond to the reputation messages on Oregon winery Facebook pages?

The last two research questions were focused on assessing the reputation factors promoted on Oregon winery websites and determining whether wineries were telling a consistent story on both public communication tools: websites and Facebook pages.

RQ4: Which winery-specific and regional reputation factors are Oregon wineries promoting on their websites?

RQ5: Is website- and Facebook-based reputation messaging consistent?

3. METHOD

The authors conducted two, simultaneous content analyses in the summer of 2013: one of Oregon winery websites and one of the same wineries' Facebook walls, examining both for messages on qualities about which the winery wants to be known, or wants all of Oregon to be known. The content analysis of Facebook also examined the amount and nature of consumer responses to winery posts.

3.1. Sampling method

There are more than 540 wineries in the state of Oregon (Oregon Wine Board, 2014). The majority have websites, but they differ substantially in the extent to which they are active on Facebook. When selecting wineries for inclusion in the study, we were guided by the goal of obtaining a sufficient amount of data for meaningful analyses. Thus, we sought out wineries with the most Facebook activity. After examining several indicators of activity (e.g., when the page was created, frequency of posting, date of most recent post, and number of page "likes"), we determined that the number of page likes (or fans) was the metric most reflective of regular use of Facebook over a period of time, as businesses typically accumulate fans by using and promoting their Facebook pages. We ranked Oregon wineries by this metric and selected the top 20 for inclusion in the study. The top-ranked Oregon winery had 12,277 likes, and the 20th-ranked winery had 2,235. All of these wineries had posted at least once per week in the months prior to selection and had maintained a business page on Facebook for at least a year. This method of selection resulted in considerable variety in terms of winery size, length of time in business and location; in fact, the wineries in the sample represent most of the wine-

producing areas of Oregon.

The recording unit for website data collection was the Web page; each page was a case to be assessed for the presence or absence of reputation factors. We standardized data collection by examining all first- and second-level pages of each winery’s site. We defined a first-level page as the homepage of the website (that is, the landing page at the winery’s Web address) and a second-level page as one that is listed on the homepage and can be accessed with one click (such as “About Us,” “History,” and “Our Wines”). This selection technique resulted in a sample of 267 Web pages (20 first-level and 247 second-level pages).

The recording unit for the Facebook portion of the study was “conversation,” defined as a status update posted by the winery on its own Facebook page and up to five comments posted in response by others. We limited our analysis to the text portion of the status updates, while noting when photos, videos, and links were attached to those updates. We did not analyze follow-up comments posted by the winery itself. For the Facebook analysis, we standardized data collection by capturing and analyzing the 50 most recent conversations, starting at June 30, 2013, and working backward through each winery’s Facebook timeline. This process resulted in a sample of 1,000 winery posts and 1,257 responses, or comments, with post dates ranging from August 22, 2012, to June 30, 2013.

3.2. Coding Scheme

3.2.1. Independent variables (winery messaging)

As noted above, the independent variables selected for examination in this study were derived largely from Wagner et al. (2013), who identified five common elements of the Oregon wine reputation. These factors were community/collaboration, organic/sustainable, stewardship of the land (broadened for the current study to include any reference to the terroir, and labeled “sense of place”), small family farms (broadened to include all small-scale operations), and handcrafted/artisanal (broadened to refer to all winemaking styles). To these five we added three more factors that are not specific to the wine industry but are commonly used in reputation research: product quality, product value and status of the brand or organization (i.e., winery). Brief descriptions of how these eight independent variables were operationalized in the present study are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Reputation Factors Used in Web Page and Facebook Coding*

Community/Collaboration: Pertaining to a winery and one or more other wine industry entities that collaborate, support and/or are part of a regional wine community (e.g., regarding production, harvest, marketing, events).
Organic/Sustainable: Pertaining to a vineyard and/or winery indicating that the grapes are grown or the vineyard or winery is managed in an eco-friendly, sustainable way and/or that the wine is made sustainably.
Product Quality: Pertaining to a winery’s wine, indicating it is of high quality, generally or in a specific way. Includes references to high ratings or scores given by wine reviewers and to high-quality vintages and award-winning wines.
Product Value: Pertaining to a winery’s wine indicating that it is a good value: (i.e., good quality for the price or provides a good experience for the price).
Sense of Place: Pertaining to the geographical location of a winery and/or vineyards, or perceptions associated with the location. May include characteristics/unique qualities, terroir, landscape, descriptions of emotions evoked by location.
Small-Scale Operations: Pertaining to a winery indicating a small or boutique operation. May include references to limited production, small production, small farm, small vineyards or small estate.

Winemaking Style: Pertaining to a winery’s wine and/or processes associated with producing the wine (grape growing methods, winemaking, bottling, winemaker’s style or philosophy, specific winemaking techniques.).
Winery Status: Pertaining to a vineyard and/or winery indicating high status, including references to people holding it in high regard and/or association with high-status people or high-status events.
Other Reputation Factors: Other messages conveyed by the winery about how it should be perceived.

*Definitions reference individual wineries; parallel coding for the Oregon region referenced aggregations of Oregon wineries.

In both content analyses, references to these eight reputation factors were recorded. To assess the extent to which the wineries were promoting the reputation of Oregon as a wine region as opposed to their own reputation, we distinguished between messages about the individual winery’s reputation and those about the region, thus doubling the number of independent variables to 16 (e.g., “winery organic/sustainable” and “Oregon organic/sustainable”). Any reputation message referring to more than one winery located in Oregon was defined as a regional (Oregon) reputation message, whether the message referred to just a few wineries, all of the wineries in a viticultural area, or all of the wineries in the state. For each Web page and Facebook post, the reputation factors were coded as either present or absent, regardless of how many times they appeared on that one page or post. Coders were instructed to record any other aspect of reputation observed on the Web pages and Facebook posts in an “other” category.

3.2.2. Dependent variables (consumer responses)

We used several measures to assess how consumers respond to winery reputation messages on Facebook. First, we collected three metrics that are automatically tallied by Facebook: the number of likes, comments, and shares associated with each status update. Borrowing from Facebook terminology and common marketing parlance, we refer to these three metrics as “online engagement actions”. Then we analyzed the consumer comments to see if they expressed an intent to buy the winery’s wine (“will buy wine”) or to visit the winery’s tasting room or attend a winery event (“will visit winery”).

3.3. Intercoder Reliability Testing

Before beginning the content analyses, we engaged in a rigorous, iterative process of developing coding instructions and training our coding team, which consisted of the authors and four paid research assistants. After approximately six hours of training, the coders independently coded 10% of each sample (Web pages and Facebook posts) to test the reliability of the coding instrument. One of the authors and one assistant coded the Web pages; the other author and three assistants coded the Facebook conversations.

Krippendorff’s α (alpha) was chosen to assess intercoder reliability because it can be used for nominal-through ratio-level data, as well as small sample sizes and any number of coders (Krippendorff, 2009). Reliability coefficients for the Facebook analysis ranged from .89 through 1.0 for the 16 reputation factors and six response variables. For the Web pages, reliability coefficients ranged from .86 through 1.0. These coefficients were sufficiently high to proceed with the study (Lombard et al., 2010). The research assistants conducted the remainder of the coding. Detailed information regarding the coding instrument, procedures and instructions can be obtained by emailing the authors.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Tests of Research Questions

4.1.1. Research Questions 1 and 2: Winery-specific and regional reputation factors on Facebook

To explore Research Questions 1 and 2 (Which *winery-specific* reputation factors are Oregon wineries promoting on Facebook? and Which *regional* reputation factors are Oregon wineries promoting on Facebook?), we calculated the percent of status updates that promoted each of the eight reputation factors. As shown in Table 2, the representation of each winery-specific reputation factor was low. References to product quality appeared in the highest number of status updates (7.9%); all other reputation factors (including incidences of “community service,” “humor,” and “fun” messages that fell into the “Other Reputation Factor” category) appeared in fewer than 5% of status updates. The incidence of regional reputation factors was even lower, ranging from 0.0% to 2.2% across the factors.

Table 2: Percent of Facebook Status Updates Containing Each Reputation Factor (n=1000)*

Winery Reputation Factor	Winery-Specific	Oregon/Regional
<i>Community/collaboration</i>	1.6%	2.2%
<i>Organic/sustainable</i>	1.7%	0.0%
<i>Product quality</i>	7.9%	0.5%
<i>Product value</i>	0.4%	0.0%
<i>Sense of place</i>	1.6%	0.4%
<i>Small-scale operations</i>	0.2%	0.0%
<i>Winemaking style</i>	0.6%	0.1%
<i>Winery status</i>	4.4%	0.2%
<i>Other: community service, humor, fun</i>	3.6%	0.2%
<i>One or more reputation factors</i>	22.0%	

*Categories are not independent; a status update could contain more than one winery and/or regional reputation factor.

4.1.2. Research Question 3: Response of consumers to reputation messages on Facebook

Research Question 3 asked “How do consumers respond to the reputation messages on Oregon winery Facebook pages?” The results for this question are depicted in Table 3. For each reputation factor, the average (per status update) number of likes, comments, and shares (online engagement actions) are reported. Some of the reputation factor averages are based on small sample sizes, which may lead to some instability in the data, however, the high number of online engagement actions associated with the organic/sustainable factor is noteworthy. The final two columns of the table report the percent of status updates that received at least one response indicating a consumer’s intent to buy the winery’s wine and to visit the winery, respectively. These behavioral intentions were associated with status updates containing four reputation factors: product quality, winery status, organic/sustainable, and sense of place.

Table 3: Consumer Responses to Facebook Status Updates With Reputation Factors*

Winery-Specific Reputation Factor (n)	Average Number of Online Engagement Actions per Status Update			Percent of Status Updates with at Least One Instance of Behavioral Intention in Response Comments	
	Likes	Comments	Shares	Will Buy Wine	Will Visit Winery
<i>Product quality (79)</i>	21.38	1.51	1.10	5.0%	30.0%
<i>Winery status (44)</i>	36.70	2.14	2.00	3.7%	3.7%
<i>Community/collaboration (13)</i>	16.08	0.54	1.31	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Organic/sustainable (17)</i>	66.59	4.18	3.12	0.0%	23.1%
<i>Product value (4)</i>	60.25	2.00	6.25	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Small-scale operations (2)</i>	75.00	3.50	0.00	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Winemaking style (6)</i>	13.17	2.17	0.67	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Sense of place (16)</i>	19.81	0.88	0.63	12.5%	12.5%

*Categories are not independent; status updates could contain more than one winery and/or regional reputation factor.

4.1.3. Research Question 4: Reputation factors promoted on websites

To investigate Research Question 4 (Which winery-specific reputation and regional reputation factors are Oregon wineries promoting on their websites?), the frequency of occurrence of each of the eight reputation factors was tallied, along with the incidence of “Other” reputation data. Table 4 depicts the percent of first- and second-level Web pages on which each winery-specific and Oregon reputation factor was represented.

Table 4: Percent of Winery Web Pages Containing Each Reputation Factor (n=267)

Reputation Factor	Winery-Specific	Oregon/Regional
<i>Community/collaboration</i>	14.6%	3.7%
<i>Organic/sustainable</i>	15.7%	0.0%
<i>Product quality</i>	39.0%	0.0%
<i>Product value</i>	1.5%	0.0%
<i>Sense of place</i>	22.8%	0.0%
<i>Small-scale operations</i>	3.7%	0.7%
<i>Winemaking style</i>	19.9%	0.0%
<i>Winery status</i>	7.1%	0.0%

<i>Other</i>	0.0%	0.0%
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*Categories are not independent; Web pages could contain more than one winery and/or regional reputation factor. All correlations between mean reputation scores for web pages and Facebook were nonsignificant.

All eight winery-specific reputation factors were represented to some extent on the Web pages. Winery-specific product quality was touted more than any other factor (on 39% of Web pages analyzed). There was virtually no representation of the regional reputation factors, with nonzero values for only two factors: Oregon community/collaboration and Oregon small-scale operations.

4.1.4. Research Question 5: Consistency of reputation messages on websites and Facebook

Research Question 5 was “Is website- and Facebook-based reputation messaging consistent?” Due to the lack of observed Oregon/regional reputation factors on both platforms, analysis of this question focused on the winery-specific factors. To make direct comparisons between website and Facebook messaging, we aggregated the results for the reputation factors to the winery level. Table 5 summarizes the extent to which the eight reputation factors were mentioned at least once by the 20 wineries in their 50 Facebook status updates and on the first- and second-level pages of their websites. Notably, more wineries discussed the five reputation factors found to be characteristic of the Oregon region (Wagner et al., 2013) on websites than on Facebook, whereas similar percentages of wineries mentioned the three universal reputation factors (i.e., quality, status and value) on the two platforms. Winery status was the only factor discussed by more wineries on Facebook than on websites.

Table 5: Percent of Wineries Communicating Each Winery-Specific Reputation Factor (n=20)

Reputation Factor	Percent of Wineries Mentioning Reputation Factor on Facebook	Percent of Wineries Mentioning Reputation Factor on Website
Community/collaboration	35.0%	85.0%
Organic/sustainable	45.0%	70.0%
Product quality	90.0%	90.0%
Product value	15.0%	20.0%
Sense of place	35.0%	75.0%
Small-scale operations	5.0%	40.0%
Winemaking style	30.0%	85.0%
Winery status	70.0%	55.0%

5. SUMMARY AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Developing and maintaining a reputation that is both positive and distinctive is a critical aspect of a company’s overall strategy for success. The importance of both a strong company reputation and a strong regional reputation is well understood in the wine industry. Among the marketing and public relations tools available to wineries, a website can be effective in shaping wine reputation. Social networking sites like Facebook present another channel through which to communicate and reinforce a winery’s or wine region’s distinctive characteristics.

In this study, we looked for five typical characteristics of Oregon's wine reputation and three universal reputation factors (quality, status and value) on the websites and Facebook pages of Oregon wineries that are active on Facebook. We found that these wineries discuss and promote their own reputation far more than they discuss and promote the reputation of the region as a whole. In fact, we found scant evidence of any effort to brand the Oregon wine region on either the Web pages or the Facebook pages of these 20 wineries. We also found that they promote seven of the eight reputation factors we studied on their websites more than on their Facebook pages. The one exception to this was status, which more wineries touted on Facebook than on their websites. Each of the reputation factors that we looked for appeared infrequently in winery Facebook messages, but collectively they appeared in 22% of the status updates we analyzed.

Wineries would do well to examine the correspondence between their website and social media messaging. Message consistency across communication channels is a central tenet of integrated marketing communications and corporate strategy, makes a brand more memorable, and can even lead consumers to view a brand as more authentic (Beverland & Luxton, 2005). Inconsistent messaging, on the other hand, represents a missed opportunity for wineries to shape perceptions of their brand and region, especially among younger consumers, who tend to use social media more than older consumers *and* represent the future of wine consumption (Nedelka, 2012; Olson, 2012).

This study is not without its limitations. Although the data examined here are more comprehensive than any other studies we have seen in this area (1000 conversations sampled across a time period covering up to 10 months of Facebook posts), the generalizability of findings may be limited because the number of wineries (20) was relatively small, and they were not selected through random sampling, nor were conversations. Nevertheless, we believe that our findings and methodology may be broadly applicable to the study of wine reputation. Because of the criteria we used to select wineries for inclusion in the study, we are confident that our findings represent the reputation-messaging realities of the most active Facebook-using wineries in Oregon, which may be considered the region's practice leaders in this area.

Further, we believe that the innovative methodology created in this study might be fruitfully applied to other wine regions in the assessment of reputation-management strategies. This exploratory study answers the call from Lockshin & Corsi (2012) for empirical research that may help wineries understand social media and its effective use. Analyzing social media "conversations" to understand both the strategies of the Facebook owner and the responses of consumers, and comparing social media content to baseline website content may continue to be useful approaches in deepening our understanding of wine reputation management.

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