Communication orientations on Facebook:
How do consumers perceive brand posts?

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Abstract:

Purpose: To present quantitative results exploring wine brand communication orientations on the social media platform Facebook, and to examine how consumers perceive different orientations of communication.

Design/method/approach: An online quantitative survey was implemented to 1099 wine consumers. The consumers were exposed to a number of posts which varied in their communication orientation, indicating their perception of each post.

Findings: We found empirical support for the typology proposed by Dolan, Goodman and Habel (2013) as consumers do perceive different types of communication as different orientations and there is the overlap that was proposed in this earlier work.

Practical Implications: Wine brand marketers should examine how consumers perceive their posts, what may be intended as relationship driven might in fact be perceived by consumers as sales driven. The examples shown in this research give some insight into how different perceptions of consumers are and shows that what might appear obvious to the marketers is not necessarily how the consumer perceives communication.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Communication Orientation, Facebook

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1. INTRODUCTION

The conceptual typology shown in Figure 1 (Dolan, Goodman & Habel 2013) proposed that wine brand communication on Facebook did not fall exclusively into a one domain. Brands may have a one, two or multi-dimensional orientation. Understanding and exploring such orientations, including the value of each orientation in terms of consumer response provides an important platform for researchers and practitioners within this area. As social media developed from a 'personal social' to an environment in which brands and organisations 'joined in' the conversation, it is important to assess if consumers do indeed see different types of communication as being oriented to either of the three domains in Figure 1. Previous research (Dolan, Goodman, 2011) used a Netnographic approach (Kozinets 2002) to identify a typology of social media marketing communication. Research (Dolan, Goodman & Habel 2012, 2013) to develop this into a communication orientation was conducted using qualitative in depth interviews to propose the typology shown in Figure 1. Whilst the qualitative insights derived from in-depth interviews with wine consumers and netnography of Facebook pages supported the proposition of this typology, further research was needed using a quantitative approach to confirm if in fact consumers did perceive different types of communication as having a different orientation. Given the space limitations of this paper, the method and results only are presented, for the literature and conceptual model see the papers cited above.

Figure 1: The Brand Communication Orientations

2. METHOD

This study used an online Qualitrics survey to determine wine consumers perceptions of Facebook posts. The survey was completed by 1099 wine consumers, obtained through a paying panel provider and screened for Facebook use and wine consumption behaviour as well as a proportionate age split. A secondary data set was collected from 233 Winery Brand Managers. Using a database of Australian wineries, we emailed address to 'the marketing person that looks after social media for your winery'. Respondents were exposed to 18 different Facebook posts. These posts were embedded into the survey using screenshots from Facebook pages. Each communication orientation had three different posts that had text only, and three that had an image and text. Respondents were presented with posts in blocks of six, at the start of each block they were presented with a 'definition' of what constituted a Sales, Customer and Event Oriented post; the definitions, shown in Figure 2 below, were compiled from work undertaken in focus groups after the in-depth interviews used in Dolan, Goodman and Habel (2012).   A 'slider' scale was used, enabling respondents to allocate a percentage to which they felt the post was aligned to the relevant communication orientation. Data were exported to Excel and Euler diagrams were prepared. Euler diagrams are a means of representing sets and their relationships; they are closely related to Venn diagrams in that they show area proportions and overlap of sets (Flower & Howse 2002; Stapleton et al 2007). This enables us to present data in line with the original Venn diagram typology proposed. In the tables below, No. refers to the number of respondents that indicated a score in that orientation and the percentage being the average score given.

Figure 2: Brief given to respondents

Option 1: *Sales Orientation:*

These types of posts involve the wine brand trying to *sell*. Information may include product availability, promotions, wine reviews, sales and exclusive discounts.

Option 2: *Customer Orientation:*

These types of posts involve the brand trying to build a relationship with you. They may post photos, links and comments with Information that may not actually be relevant to selling the product, but rather giving an insight into the brand from a friendly perspective.

Option 3: *Event Orientation:*

These types of posts involve the brand promoting events. They may be events at the winery, or events in the local region that the brand is supporting.

If you think a post is two types of orientations, or even three, you can use the sliding scale to determine the percentage of each orientation.

3. RESULTS

Due to space limitations, this paper presents a selection of key posts used in the Qualtrics survey which vary in their degree of sales, event and customer orientations. Each post is combined with the relevant Euler diagram, which reflects the consumer perceptions of the post.

Figure 3. Sales oriented post

This post was expected to be perceived as sales oriented, with a large overlap to event oriented (Column AC). The post mentions the variety, vintage level, range, 'cellar door' and offers an exclusive tasting for Facebook fans. The overlap with the event orientation perception is expected to result from the mention of the Barossa Vintage Festival and use of a specific event date.

Table 1. Post Perceptions

	A	B	C	AB	AC	BC	ABC
Orientation	sales	customer	event	sales + customer	Sales +event	customer + event	Sales + customer +event
No.	780	429	509	267	253	138	39
Percentage	32.3	17.8	21.1	11.1	10.5	5.7	1.6

Sales orientation was the most commonly selected orientation for this post. This was followed by event orientation as expected. The high result for customer orientation was unexpected but may be explained by the fact that the post uses words like 'celebrate' and offers Facebook fans something special and personalised. Interestingly, whilst the event orientation score was higher than the customer orientation score (509 and 429 respectively, the sales + customer orientation score (column AB) was marginally higher than the sales + event (column AC) orientation score. We could also propose here that the length of written text in this post may contribute to the higher degree of overlap.

Figure 4: Customer oriented post

This post was expected to be perceived as customer oriented. We expected little overlap, as there is only a short piece of text shown. The text does not relate to the brand or product, has a friendly nature and uses the words 'hope' and 'happy' which we would expect to be associated with customer orientation. There is potential for event orientation perceptions given the post discuss Easter.
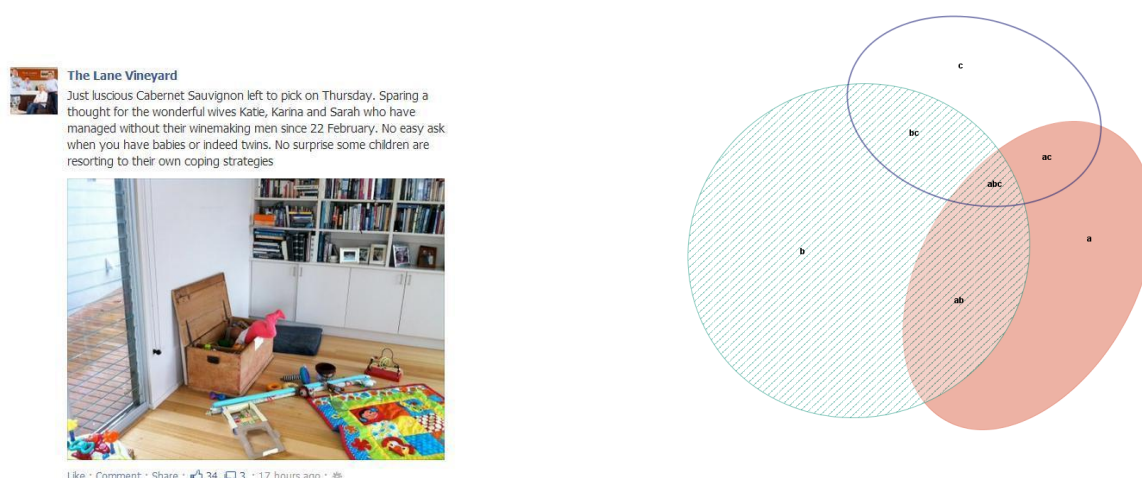
Table 2: Post perceptions

	A	B	C	AB	AC	BC	ABC
Orientation	sales	customer	event	sales + customer	sales + event	customer + event	sales + customer + event
No.	219	843	369	146	53	156	23
Percentage	12.1	46.6	20.4	8.1	2.9	8.6	1.3

Customer orientation, as shown in the blue ellipse was the most dominant orientation. This was followed by event orientation, the white ellipse, expected to appear as a result of the post referring to Easter. This was the only text only post that demonstrated a clear, dominant

orientation, indicating that the length of the post (text) may contribute to a lack of clarity regarding orientation.

The post shown in Figure 5 was expected to be perceived by respondents as customer oriented. This post discusses the families associated with the brand and makes no mention of a sale. The post does mention a grape variety however we don't expect this to contribute to a sales oriented perception based on the context of the post. Given that the post uses both text and a photo, we expected that respondents will be able to more clearly distinguish the orientation.

Figure 5: Customer oriented post
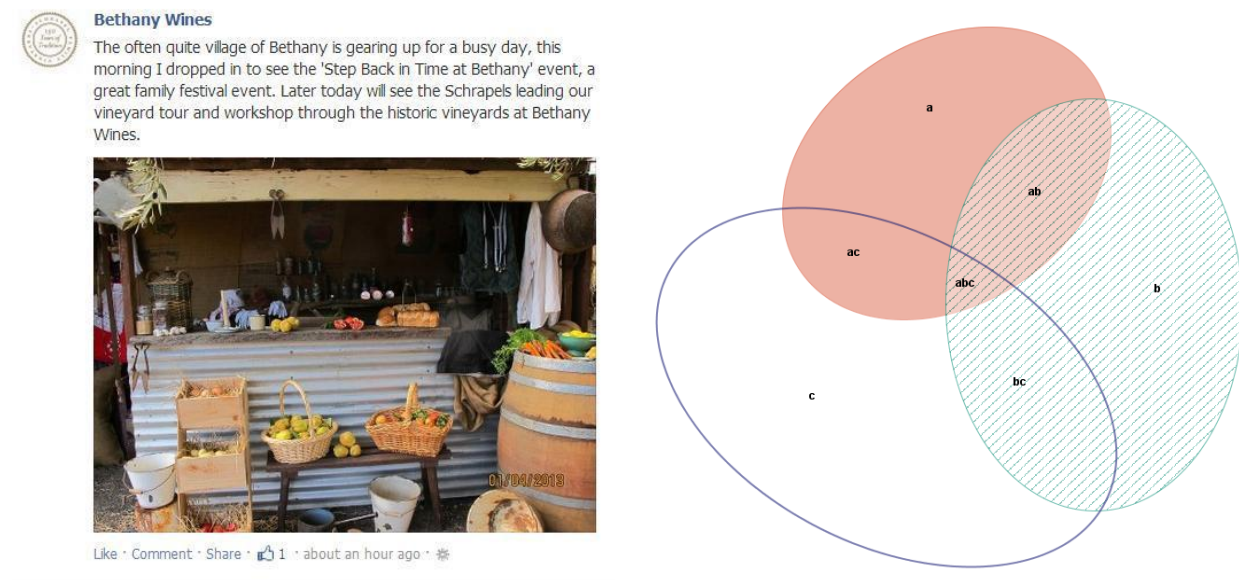

Table 3: Post perceptions

	A	B	C	AB	AC	BC	ABC
Orientation	sales	customer	event	sales + customer	sales + event	customer + event	sales + customer + event
No.	438	842	272	259	77	152	35
Percentage	21.1	40.6	13.1	12.5	3.7	7.3	1.7

Customer orientation was the strongest orientation as shown in the pale blue ellipse. There was some overlap with sales orientation, which was very unexpected (259 respondents) and suggests that as a brand operating in a social media space there is likely to be some perception of sales orientation, despite the lack of mention of product and pricing details which would be expected in a sales oriented post.

The post displayed in Figure 6 was expected to be perceived most frequently as event oriented. We expected this to be strong due to the use of an image taken at the event. In

addition, it includes the title of the event, the word 'event' and details of the tour and workshop. We expect there may be some overlap sales orientation if they perceive the post to be 'selling' the event. In addition, there may be some cross over with customer orientation given the tone of the post is friendly and personal
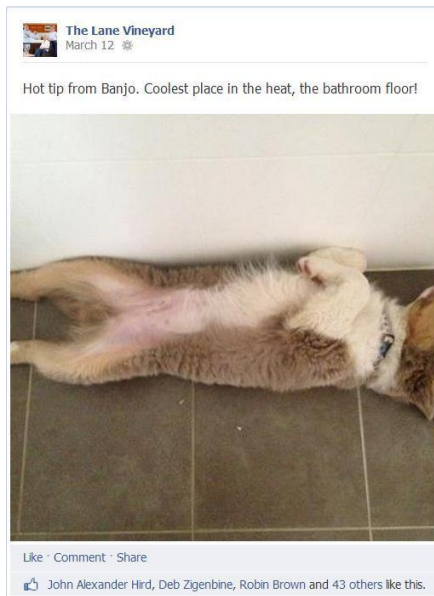
Figure 6: Event orientation

Table 4: Post perceptions

	A	B	C	AB	AC	BC	ABC
Orientation	sales	customer	event	Sales + customer	Sales + event	Customer + event	Sales + customer + event
No.	367	487	768	178	133	237	25
Percentage	16.7	22.2	35.0	8.1	6.1	10.8	1.1

Event orientation, shown in the largest ellipse (C) was the most dominate orientation as expected. There was some overlap particularly with customer orientation as shown in the BC section, and overlap with sales orientation to a lesser extent as shown in the AC section. This is possibly as the event itself focusses heavily on consumers being brought 'inside the business' and sales purely as it is a brand operating within social media.

Consumer: Marketer Discourse

> **The Lane Vineyard**
> March 12 ☀
>
> Hot tip from Banjo. Coolest place in the heat, the bathroom floor!
>
> Like · Comment · Share
>
> 👍 John Alexander Hird, Deb Zigenbine, Robin Brown and 43 others like this.

The contribution of this paper, both academically and managerially, is seen in the one example given where we compare the results from 233 Winery Brand Managers. The original communication orientations were developed from a consumer view, though generated by marketers. We undertook this second phase to see to what extent Marketers viewed Facebook posts in the same manner as consumers.

Figure 7: Customer Orientation

This post was expected to be perceived as customer oriented as the post does not focus on the product or a sale. The post includes a picture of the family/winery pet and attempts to use humour to engage their customers. The post makes no mention of wine, or the brand.

The practitioners were shown the same definitions as provided in Fig. 2. We expected to gain similar responses to perceptions, but as shown in Figure 9, Marketers perceptions are much narrower. Whilst just under 50% of consumers perceive this post to fit under the customer orientation, nearly 80% of Marketers felt it was customer (relationship) oriented. Nearly twice as many consumers felt it was sales related as Brand Managers did.

What we see is that, although marketing definitions might seem to fit, as marketers (academic and practitioners) they seem to be relevant, the media they are communicated in might impose a consumer perception askew with marketing thought. In social media at leasat, brand coimmunication appears to be tainted with 'they're trying to sell to me'

Figure 8: Consumer vs Practitioner Perceptions
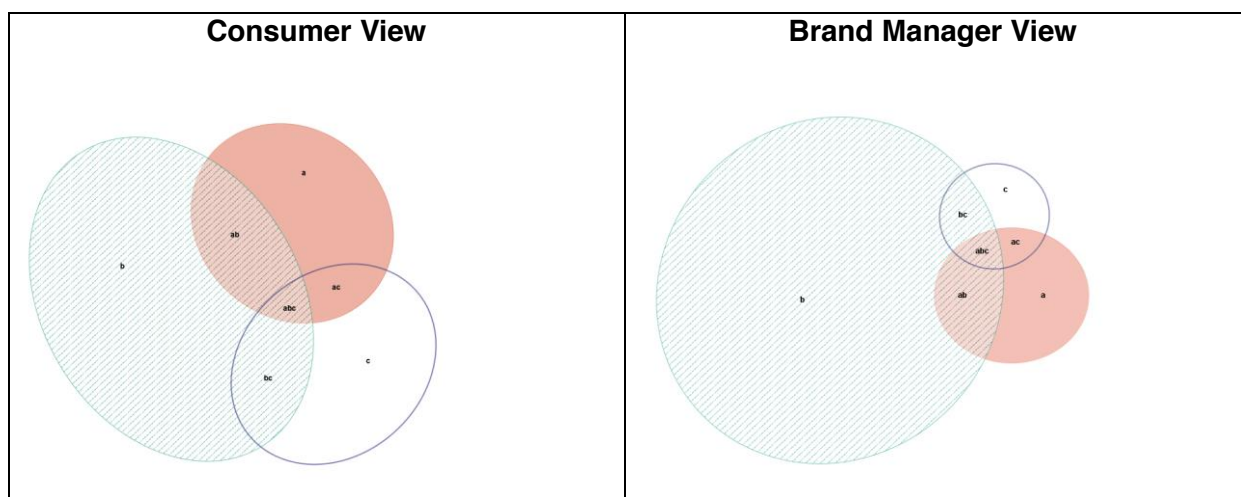
Table 5

Consumer vs.   Practitioner

	Orientation	A	B	C	AB	AC	BC	ABC
		SO	CO	EO	SOCO	SOEO	COEO	SOCOEO
Consumer	Count	277	829	310	160	53	129	25
	Percentage	15.5	46.5	17.4	9	3	7.2	1.4
Brand Manager	Count	20	198	9	12	3	6	3
	Percentage	8.0	78.9	3.6	4.8	1.2	2.4	1.2

4. CONCLUSIONS

Consumers do perceive different types of marketing communication in social media, Facebook in this example, differently. Across all of the eighteen posts we used, in combinations of text only and text + photo, there were clear distinctions that aligned with the definitions proposed in earlier research (Dolan & Goodman 2011; Dolan, Goodman & Habel 2012, 2013). The definitions developed for the communications orientations are not mutually exclusive, some consumers see things outside of the definitions developed. However in each case there was some reason that could be seen as influencing the perception. We suggest that the prominence of a sales perception by some consumers in posts that have very low sales slant might be attributed to the fact that the overall perception that consumers have of a wine brand attempting to communicate in what they view as personal, social space. This was explored in follow up focus groups and is a sentiment expressed by several participants. Future research should further investigate why consumers perceive posts in the way that they do, which would help confirm the definition rules for the orientations in the typology.

The contribution of this paper is to demonstrate that whilst marketing might apply definitions and think of communication as achieving a desired aim, we must be careful not to over estimate the power of that message. If a message is designed to specifically achieve a desired orientation, the data we gathered shows that consumer perception of it is like to be much less than the way we as marketers perceive it. This potentially leaves much less room for copywriting 'fluff', and is worthy of further investigation.

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