

Sources of Information Used by Wine Tourists Prior to Visiting an Australian Wine Region

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Abstract:

Purpose: This paper examines the different sources first-time and repeat visitors use when deciding to visit a winery's cellar door, and whether or not there are evident differences in the sources chosen between the two groups. We also examine if there are demographical differences (i.e. gender and education) in the information sources chosen. For example, do men commit more to word of mouth when deciding to chose a cellar door than women? Past literature involving information sources and wine tourism was analysed and suitable research questions were formed.

Design/methodology/approach: A highly structured questionnaire was used to determine what information sources were used when visiting a cellar door. The questionnaire consisted of 32 questions, where mostly were close ended questions over a six to eight week period. A total of six 3-cellar doors were chosen to reflect a broad range of winery sizes, tastes and visitors, whereby the cellar door staff administered the surveys. The final sample consisted of 240 respondents.

Findings: The study found that word of mouth communication was the most common source of information used by winery visitors when deciding to visit a winery. The study also found that heavy consumers of wine used word of mouth communication the most out of all of consumption levels of wine and first time winery visitors were slightly more likely to use word of mouth recommendation. No significant differences were found demographically in terms of information sources used.

Keywords: First-time visitors, repeat visitors, word-of-mouth, information sources, wine tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Everyday individuals are faced with making decisions. Some are low involvement, for example what to have for dinner, and others are of high involvement, i.e. what life insurance company do we choose? (Sharp 2010). Yet, no matter what type of decision, the decision maker always seeks information through a variety of different sources, whether it is personal opinions (word-of-mouth) or mass media (TV, magazines, websites and newspapers) in order to reach a decision.

When planning to visit a cellar door at a winery, a visitor may use single source or multiple sources of information to determine which winery to visit. Yet depending on what type of visitor they are (first time or repeat), they may use different information sources (Bruwer & Lesschaeve 2012). A first time visitor is a visitor who visits a specific winery for the first time, whereas a repeat visitor is someone who has had a previous experience with that particular winery and is visiting again. Therefore, when visiting a winery for the first time, a first time visitor may rely on multiple sources of information (word of mouth, brochures, travel blogs or magazines), primarily because it is their first time and they need time to plan (especially if they are an overseas visitor) (Bruwer & Thach 2013). Yet, a repeat visitor may just rely on word of mouth from family and friends and past experiences of their own (Fodness & Murray 1997).

Studies conducted by Bruwer & Lesschaeve (2012) and Bruwer and Thach (2013) state that there is a difference in the information sources chosen by first time and repeat visitors. Bruwer and Thach (2013) discovered that first time visitors tend to use more formal sources, such as brochures and pamphlets and the regions information bureau more than repeat visitors when choosing to visit a cellar door. This is primarily because first time visitors need to plan their trip (especially if they are a tourist), as they aim to choose a winery that will offer them a positive experience. However, multiple studies conducted by Dodd (1998, 1999) and Barber et.al (2009) state that there is no major difference in the information sources chosen by first time and repeat visitors, however there are demographical differences. This study aims to fill this gap of understanding the types of information sources first time and repeat visitors use when visiting a cellar door, and whether or not there are any demographical differences between the information sources chosen.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Nowadays, there are many different ways to access and communicate information – formally or informally. Formal communication tends to occur through official communication channels, whereas informal communication tends to occur through unofficial channels that are not formally documented (Miller 2011). This distinction is important for wine tourism, as many wineries tend to focus on formal communication methods when promoting their winery to visitors, such as magazines, brochures and official websites. However, informal communication methods, such as word of mouth are increasingly powerful and are vital in wine tourism (Hall 2007).

Personal opinion (word of mouth - both positive and negative), TV, radio, magazines, information help services, newspaper and the internet are some examples of information

sources that are used by individuals. However, since its introduction, the Internet has been one of the fastest growing information sources used by individuals for a variety of different activities (i.e. information searching, shopping or communication). This is because individuals today live and are constantly surrounded by technology and the Internet, whether it is for work or for leisure purposes.

When planning to visit a winery's cellar door there are a vast number of sources that can be used to help aid a consumer's decision. Past studies state that the sources of information used by visitors to determine their visit to a particular winery is, newspapers and magazines, previous winery visits, previous exposure to the label, brochures, billboards and conventions, winery's own website and visitor information centres (Barber 2009; Batra 2008; Bruwer 2002b; Bruwer & Lesschaeve 2012; Dodd 1999). Thus, all of these sources help aid a consumer's selection when planning to visit a winery's cellar door, whether it be their first time or a repeat visit. Because there is a vast array of information sources that can be possibly used by visitors, this leads us to determine the incidence of information sources used by visitors, both first time and repeat.

From past literature, word of mouth has been found to be the main source of information used by first time and repeat visitors (Bruwer & Lesschaeve 2012; Bruwer & Reilly 2006; Bruwer & Thach 2013; Dodd 1998, 1999; Jacobsen & Munar 2012; Tassiopoulos, Nuntsu & Haydam 2004), rather than formal sources (i.e. websites, magazines and information centres). This is primarily because visitors inform others – friends, family, work colleagues and acquaintances, about their experience, which in turn spreads word of mouth about a particular winery, consequently influencing the individual to visit that particular winery and have a similar experience. This is evident in a study conducted by Dodd (1999) whereby approximately 70% of visitors stated that their friends and family were somewhat influential in their decision to visit their chosen winery. Therefore, based on previous findings from past studies, the aim of this research is to determine whether or not word of mouth is the main information source used by first time and repeat visitors.

Considering different types of visitors may use different information sources, multiple studies also claim that there are differences in demographics when deciding what information sources to use when visiting a cellar door (Barber 2009; Barber, Dodd & Kolyesnikova 2009; Chon 1990; Dodd 1998, 1999; Stoddard & Clopton 2015). Multiple studies conducted by Dodd (1998, 1999) discovered that women tend to place a higher importance on informal sources (i.e. word of mouth) than males. A study conducted by Barber et.al (2009) state that there are gender differences in information searching, as female search behaviour often encompasses interpersonal affiliations, such as asking the opinions of family, friends and other personal information sources. However, males tend to use impersonal or published material, as they prefer to rely on professional and academic advice (Barber et al. 2009).

A study by Barber et.al (2008) found that age and generation impacts what information sources are chosen when choosing to visit a cellar door despite being a first time or repeat visitor. Barber et.al (2008) discovered that Generation X tends to rely more on informal sources of information from friends and family, whereas Generation Y tends to rely on

formal sources from published work or media, such as blogs, magazine articles and reviews. This is primarily because Generation Y tends to be more tech savvy than Generation X.

In terms of education, Dodd (1998) and Jacobsen and Munar (2012), also found that visitors with lower levels of education used media sources as their primary information source when planning to visit a winery, rather than informal sources. This may occur because individuals with lower levels of education tend to trust the media more than those who are highly educated who place a greater emphasis on personal opinion due to surrounding themselves with like-minded individuals.

Yet, despite multiple studies stating that there is a difference in demographics when it comes to choosing and using information sources to visit a winery, studies conducted by Bruwer & Lesschaeve (2012) and Bruwer and Thach (2013) discovered that there is no difference in demographics (i.e. age, gender, education and income) when choosing information sources. Thus, these conflicting views and findings lead us to research whether or not there are differences in demographics when choosing information sources.

3. METHOD

The primary data collection instrument was a purpose-designed highly structured questionnaire. The questionnaire had 32 questions in total, most close-ended. On average, respondents managed to answer questionnaires within an 8-12 minute time period. The sampling frame was six 3-cellar doors within the McLaren Vale Wine Region (NPWR) in South Australia. The cellar doors were chosen to reflect a broad range of sizes of winery/tasting room businesses to obtain a wide as possible range of visitors and have an acceptable degree of fit with the universum of wineries.

The research questionnaires were administered at the cellar doors where data collection took place during a 6-8 week period in early 2014. Cellar door staff were given clear instructions on ensuring randomness when recruiting visitors to participate in the survey. For example, only one respondent from a household could participate in the survey and a time-based systematic random sampling technique used, first intercepting visitors randomly as they arrived during different times of the day and days of the week, but waiting until the identified persons were ready to depart. This ensured that visitors had first enjoyed the wine tourism experience before participating in the research. The amount of time needed to complete the questionnaire was explained and respondents given an assurance of complete confidentiality regarding their personal information.

Using cellar door staff to administer the surveys also had the advantages of first establishing a relationship of trust with the visitor before completion of the questionnaires in a relaxed atmosphere, and of course a considerable saving on the cost of data collection. Incentives were offered in the form of entry in a lucky draw for a case of the region's best wine. The final sample size is 240 respondents. A further 20 questionnaires were incomplete or incorrectly filled in and were not used in the study. The data was entered and manipulated in the SPSS 21.0 statistical software programme and information compared and extracted in accordance with the nature of the data collected.

4. FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. Previous research conducted by Bruwer (Bruwer 2002b, 2002a, 2004) has shown that the majority of winery visitors in Australia are in the Generation X age group or older (34 years of age and above). This finding is also evident in the results of this study, with the majority of winery visitors (71.2%) being at least 35 years old. The age group with the highest representation amongst both males and females was 55-65 years old. There was greater representation of the older Generation X within the males surveyed (75.5% of males) than within female (66% of females). The majority of winery visitors surveyed were from South Australia, with slightly less coming from overseas and less again from interstate locations, which was due to the fact that the research was conducted in a well-known wine region in South Australia. The most commonly represented income categories were between \$50,000 and \$100,000 household income per year (42.9% of respondents).

<i>Characteristic</i>	Female (%) N=109	Male (%) N=131	Total (%) N=240
Gender	45.4	54.6	100.0
Age Group			
18 – 24	8.3	3.1	5.4
25 – 28	9.2	9.2	9.2
29 – 34	16.5	12.2	14.2
35 – 40	9.2	6.1	7.5
41 – 45	11.9	9.9	10.8
46 – 54	17.1	18.3	17.9
55 – 65	19.3	27.5	23.8
65+ years	8.3	13.7	11.3
Income Category			
< \$25,000	6.4	3.1	5.0
\$25,000 to \$50,000	13.8	14.5	15.5
\$50,001 to \$75,000	17.4	20.6	21.0
\$75,001 to \$100,000	23.9	16.8	21.9
\$100,001 to \$150,000	12.8	19.1	17.8
\$150,001 to \$200,000	9.2	9.9	10.5
> \$200,000	6.4	8.4	8.2
Place of Residence			
South Australia	43.1	38.9	40.8
Interstate	35.7	39.0	21.7
Overseas	21.1	22.1	37.5

Table 2 below shows the sources of information that were accessed before the winery visit and consequently led the respondents to choose the winery. As can be seen, word of mouth communication is by far the most prevalent source of information used for visitation decision-making, with a total of 128 affirmative responses to this information source (28.4% of the sample). Followed by word of mouth, previous exposure to the winery label and previous visits to the winery or region were the next two common information sources used by first time and repeat visitors. This finding is vital for wineries and their marketing, as the most preferred sources of information are not regarded as formal industry marketing communication platforms such as TV, magazines and information centres.

Table 2: Source of information used by winery visitors (Overall)		
Information Sources	Responses	Sample %
Word-of-mouth	128	28.4
Previous exposure to label	65	14.4
Previous visits to the winery or region	47	10.4
Retail outlet	29	6.4
McLaren Vale visitor centre	26	5.8
Another winery in McLaren Vale	20	4.4
Wine festival or event	17	3.8
Newspaper or magazine article	17	3.8
Winery's own brochure	16	3.6
Newspaper or magazine advertising	15	3.3
Wine tasting attendance elsewhere	14	3.1
SAT centre Adelaide	12	2.7
Billboards or road signage	10	2.2
TV program	8	1.8
Winery's website	7	1.6
Tour guide or travel agent	7	1.6
Attending wine show or trade fair	6	1.3
Local accommodation provider	4	0.9
RAA	1	0.2
Local convention or conference	1	0.2
National Wine Centre Adelaide	0	0
Total responses	450	N=240
Mean number per visitor (450/240)	1.875	-

Table 3 shows the difference between first time and repeat winery visitors in terms of the information sources accessed, leading to a decision to visit a particular winery. The sample consisted of 165 first time and 75 repeat visitors. The difference between information sources used is highlighted between the two groups and shows a similar result to that of the overall sample. For both first time and repeat visitors, word of mouth is the predominant medium through which respondents heard about the winery and made their decision to visit. This finding corresponds with previous studies, whereby word of mouth was found to be the most popular information source used by both visitor groups (Bruwer & Lesschaeve 2012; Bruwer & Reilly 2006; Bruwer & Thach 2013; Dodd 1998, 1999; Jacobsen & Munar 2012; Tassiopoulos et al. 2004). Within their respective groups, first time visitors were slightly more likely to have heard of the winery through word of mouth recommendations (32%) than repeat visitors (30%).

Table 3: Source of information used by winery visitors (First time versus repeat visitors)				
Information sources	<i>First time</i>		<i>Repeat</i>	
	Responses	Sample (%)	Responses	Sample (%)
Word-of-mouth	86	32.2	42	29.8
Previous exposure to label	41	15.4	24	17.0
Retail outlet	21	7.9	8	5.7
McLaren Vale visitor centre	17	6.4	9	6.4
Another winery in McLaren Vale	15	5.6	5	3.5
Local accommodation provider	14	5.2	4	2.8
Wine tasting attendance elsewhere	12	4.5	2	1.4
Newspaper or magazine advertising	9	3.4	6	4.3
SAT centre Adelaide	9	3.4	3	2.1
Newspaper or magazine article	7	3.4	10	7.1
Billboards or road signage	7	2.6	3	2.1
Previous visits to the winery or region	6	2.2	6	4.3
Winery's own brochure	6	2.2	10	7.1
Tour guide or travel agent	6	2.2	1	0.7
Winery's website	4	1.5	3	2.1
TV Program	3	1.1	5	3.5
Attending wine show or trade fair	3	1.1	3	2.1
RAA	1	0.4	0	0.0
Wine festival or event	6	32.2	11	7.8
Local convention or conference	0	15.4	1	0.7
National Wine Centre Adelaide	0	7.9	0	0.0
Total Responses	267	-	141	-
Total Respondents (n)	165	-	75	-

Table 4 shows the difference in information sources used between male and female respondents. As can be seen, word of mouth communication was the most common source of information used and was almost equal in prevalence for both genders. This finding is similar to Dodd (1998, 1999), however the 1% difference overall indicates that it is not particularly significant.

Table 4: Source of information used by winery visitors (Gender)				
Information Sources	Male	Sample (%)	Female	Sample (%)
Word-of-mouth	71	28	57	29
Previous exposure to label	36	14	29	15
Retail outlet	16	6	13	7
McLaren Vale visitor centre	15	6	11	6
Another winery in McLaren Vale	10	4	10	5
Local accommodation provider	1	2	3	2
Wine tasting attendance elsewhere	8	3	6	3
Newspaper or magazine advertising	9	4	6	3
SAT centre Adelaide	9	4	3	2
Newspaper or magazine article	11	4	6	3
Billboards or road signage	7	3	3	2
Previous visits to the winery or region	28	11	19	10
Winery's own brochure	6	2	10	5
Tour guide or travel agent	4	2	3	2
Winery's website	6	2	1	1
TV program	4	2	4	2
Attending wine show or trade fair	4	2	2	1
RAA	1	2	0	0
Wine festival or event	10	4	7	4
Local convention or conference	1	2	0	0
National Wine Centre Adelaide	0	0	0	0
Total responses	257	-	193	-
Total respondents (n)	131	-	109	-

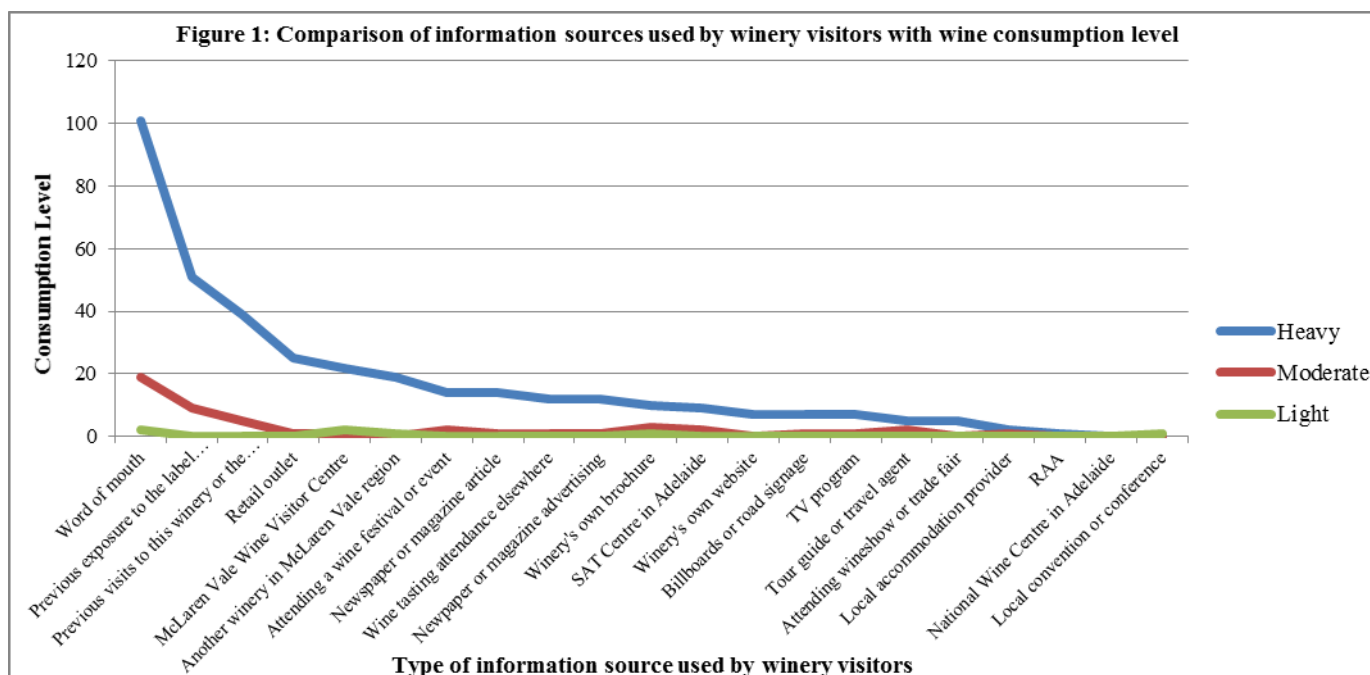
Table 5 below shows the sources of information used compared with the different levels of education within respondents. Word of mouth is the most popular source of information used, particularly amongst those with a Bachelor's level degree. However, this segment also had the highest amount of responses overall. Word of mouth communication has a similar prevalence across school leaving certificate, HSC, TAFE and Graduate diploma education levels. Previous exposure to the winery's label was the second most common source of information consulted before visiting the winery across all levels of education.

Table 5: Source of information used by winery visitors (Education)							
Information sources	School Leaving Certificate	HSC	TAFE	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate/ Postgraduate Diploma	Master's Degree	Doctorate Degree
Word-of-mouth	18	16	19	44	19	5	4
Previous exposure to label	11	12	11	17	10	3	1
Retail outlet	3	7	4	9	1	4	1
McLaren Vale Visitor Centre	3	2	6	9	2	3	1
Another winery in McLaren Vale	1	3	2	6	2	5	1
Local accommodation provider	0	0	3	0	0	0	1
Wine tasting attendance elsewhere	0	3	2	5	1	2	1
Newspaper or magazine advertising	4	3	3	5	0	0	0
SAT Centre Adelaide	0	3	1	5	2	0	0
Newspaper or magazine article	2	5	5	3	2	0	0
Billboards or road signage	0	3	1	6	0	0	0
Previous visits to the winery or region	7	7	8	16	4	2	2
Winery's own brochure	2	1	4	5	2	2	0
Tour guide or travel agent	0	1	1	2	1	1	0
Winery's website	2	1	1	2	0	0	1
TV Program	2	0	3	3	0	0	0
Attending wine show or trade fair	0	2	2	1	1	0	0
RAA	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Wine Festival or event	2	2	5	5	1	1	0
Local convention or conference	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
National Wine Centre Adelaide	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total responses	57	72	81	143	49	28	13
Total respondents (n)	32	35	38	77	31	14	8

Table 6 shows no significant patterns of difference in age between different information sources used, especially between generations. Thus, the results of this study are consistent with previous findings from Bruwer & Lesschaeve (2012) and Bruwer and Thach (2013), whereby there are no demographical differences between the information sources chosen.

<i>Information sources</i>	<i>Generation Y</i>					<i>Generation X</i>		
	18 – 24	25 – 28	29 – 34	35 – 40	41 – 45	46 – 55	56 - 65	65+
Word-of-mouth	9	10	23	5	13	20	33	15
Previous exposure to label	2	6	7	4	8	16	16	6
Retail outlet	0	3	2	3	4	7	9	1
McLaren Vale Visitor Centre	2	3	4	4	3	2	5	3
Another winery in McLaren Vale	0	1	2	2	4	3	5	3
Local accommodation provider	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Wine tasting attendance elsewhere	0	1	0	3	0	4	5	1
Newspaper or magazine advertising	0	1	0	0	1	7	4	2
SAT Centre Adelaide	0	1	3	2	2	1	2	1
Newspaper or magazine article	0	1	2	1	2	4	6	1
Billboards or road signage	0	2	1	0	1	1	3	2
Previous visits to the winery or region	0	3	4	2	4	14	12	8
Winery's own brochure	0	3	1	1	0	4	4	3
Tour guide or travel agent	0	0	1	0	0	1	4	1
Winery's website	0	2	1	2	0	1	0	1
TV Program	0	3	1	0	1	1	2	0
Attending wine show or trade fair	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	0
RAA	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Wine Festival or event	2	2	2	2	1	2	5	1
Local convention or conference	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
National Wine Centre Adelaide	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total responses	15	42	54	31	46	92	120	50
Total respondents (n)	13	22	34	18	26	43	57	27

Wine consumption was also measured by the number of bottles consumed, and categorised into different levels by the number of times a bottle of wine was consumed. The categories were as follows: heavy (those who consumed wine between once a day and a few times a week), moderate (once a week to once a fortnight) and light (once a month and those who never drink wine). Figure 1 below shows that word of mouth has the highest usage incidence amongst heavy consumers of wine (101 responses). Moderate and light consumers were considerably less reliant on word of mouth recommendation in choosing a winery. The graph also shows that there was a more even spread of information sources used by moderate and light consumers compared to heavy, and that moderate and light consumers also used other sources of information more than heavy wine consumers.



5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study adds to previous research undertaken on winery visitors and the sources of information that are used when choosing to visit a winery. The key finding of this study is that informal sources of information are the most common catalysts to the selection of a winery destination. In particular, word of mouth communication was found to be the most popular source of information used when making a decision to visit a winery, and it was identified as a strong force when it comes to influencing the decisions of all winery visitors. However there was a higher incidence among first time visitors to the winery when compared with repeat visitors. Among first time visitors, informal information was generally a more common source used than among repeat visitors. Word of mouth and prior exposure to the label were the most prevalent, of which wineries and marketers alike traditionally have little to no control over.

The second key finding of this study was that winery visitors classified as heavy consumers of wine (those who consumed wine once a day to a few times a week) were seen to access almost all information sources more than lighter consumers. However again, overwhelmingly so, word of mouth was the dominant source of information accessed by the group of heavy wine consumers. It was also the most common source of information used by moderate and light wine consumers, however by far less. The word of mouth incidence among light consumers was particularly low. This could be due to the fact that they along with their family and friends are less knowledgeable in general about wine regions and wineries than heavier consumers of wine. This study also found no significant differences between gender, age and education demographics and the information sources used to select a winery.

It has been established that word of mouth communication is the most common source of information used among consumers when deciding upon a winery destination. The results

show that first time visitors to a winery rely more so on word of mouth recommendations than first time visitors. The results also indicate that word of mouth recommendations are most common amongst the heaviest consumers of wine; however it was also the most prevalent source of information used by all consumption groups. These findings highlight the importance that word of mouth has for consumers when selecting a winery to visit, which also has several implications for managerial decisions.

The implication of these findings is that it is important for winery and cellar door managers to be aware of the power that word of mouth has in influencing winery choice. Particular consideration must be given to the power that it has in acquiring new visitors, as they are most likely to use a word of mouth recommendation when choosing to visit a winery. Relationships between neighbouring tourism operators such as tourist centres or other wineries in the region is one possible way to increase the positive impact of word of mouth by encouraging referrals between businesses. It is also vital that wineries leave a positive impression on their visitors in order to increase the likelihood that a positive recommendation will be passed on to potential new customers in the future. Positive referrals have the potential to benefit many wineries within regional boundaries such as the McLaren Vale. In the future, it is recommended that this study be replicated in other wine regions to further investigate the information sources used by winery visitors, with the hope to increase generalisability over time.

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