

# INTERNET AND WINE CONSUMERS'/TOURISTS' BEHAVIOR: THE SOURCES OF ONLINE CONSUMER POWER AND THEIR IMPACT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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## Introduction and research aims

Wine (tourism) research has started investigating the adoption of social media by wine consumers/tourists, but it has neglected to better explain and understand why and how the social media transform consumer behavior. In short, from simply consuming offerings, internet advances have transformed and empowered wine (tourism) consumers to become co-marketers, co-designers and co-producers of their tourism experiences (Sigala & Gretzel, 2018; Sigala & Robinson, 2018). However, little is known about how the internet has changed the way wine consumers and tourists search, find, evaluate, select, consume and experience wine (tourism) offerings and destinations. To address this gap, this study adopted and contextualized the Labrecque et al.'s (2013) model of online consumer sources of power for identifying and explaining how the use of the internet can empower the wine consumers/tourists and influence their behavior.

## Theoretical background

The model identifies four major sources (categorized into two types) in which the internet supports and empowers the consumers: 1) individual-based power sources (including demand- and information-based power) representing ways in which the Internet enables and empowers individual consumers to take more informed decisions (e.g. UGC, comments, rankings, demand aggregation); 2) network-based power sources relate to the use of (social) networks to distribute, share and enrich (e.g. by commenting) user-generated content. In this way, social media advances support and foster two major ways for generating network-based namely, networks and crowdsourcing. Sigala & Haller (2018) also further enriched and updated this framework by showing how innovative business models of online wine intermediaries are transforming the online wine tourists/consumers from simply being better 'educated' consumers to becoming co-designers, co-creators, co-distributors but also co-founders of their own wine (tourism) offerings.

Overall, the individual-based sources of consumer empower include:

- the basic/lowest level of user information empowerment created by the easy access, search, comparison and transparency of company – generated information;

- the user empowerment to not only consume but also to create content, which in turn can be searched, read by and influence other users
- the user empowerment by information provided by online infomediaries adopting innovative business models that exploit big data analytics to aggregate and analyse a huge amount of online user-generated and company – created wine related information
- the user empowerment to co-create his/her personalised wine (tourism) offering

Overall, the network-based sources of consumer empower include:

- the lowest level of user empowerment which refers to the users' ability to form and participate in social networks for accessing and distributing information;
- the user empowerment to collaboratively enrich and/or create wine related content (e.g. a wine wiki)
- the user empowerment enabled by the ability to form and access social networks for aggregating resources (e.g. skills, negotiating power, demand, information) and conducting wine related transactions (e.g. wine auctions, exchanges, group purchases)
- the user empowerment to collaboratively co-create wine (tourism) related offering either in the real world (e.g. crowdfunding) or in a simulated edutainment world (e.g. online social wine related games)

### **Research methodology**

An online convenience sample was used for collecting primary data from wine consumers/tourists in order to examine their internet usage patterns and the influence of the former on consumers' online wine (tourism) purchasing decision-making processes and consumption behaviors. The study also investigated whether the consumers' level of wine involvement influenced their internet use and subsequently, the latter's impact on their behavior

### **Findings and implications**

The findings revealed that the internet usage is not homogenous amongst all wine consumers/tourists. Different patterns of internet usage were identified and these patterns were also found to have a significant different impact on consumer behavior. Specifically, the data revealed that the respondents use the internet in a way that they take benefit of both the individual- and the network-based sources of empowerment. However, the findings showed that the respondents' level of internet use varies depending on the type of internet use: i.e. the respondents' internet use is relatively of low sophistication, as it mainly reflects a frequent use of conventional internet tools (e.g. meta-search engines and flash sales), a less frequent use of sophisticated internet tools (e.g. big data) and a limited use of co-creation tools. A cluster analysis identified the following distinct segments of wine consumers (the conscious buyers; the social consumers; the social cocreator) and wine tourists (conscious buyers, the social active consumers). These segments reflect similar patterns of internet use for both wine consumers and wine tourists, which in turn were also associated with different types of impact son consumer behavior on the various stages of decision making, i.e. information collection and evaluation,

purchase, and after purchase behavior. Wine involvement was also found to be significantly related with different types of internet use and impacts on behavior.

The findings suggest that the need to develop appropriate marketing strategies (in relation to information creation/sharing; personalization; data analysis; pricing strategies) to target and better satisfy the different wine consumers/tourists based on their internet usage patterns.