Communication through visual contents: Instagram use in the wineries' strategies

Elena Bellio
Management Department - Ca' Foscari University, Venice
Francesca Checchinato
Management Department - Ca' Foscari University, Venice
Christine Mauracher
Management Department - Ca' Foscari University, Venice

Paper from the 49th Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 26-29, 2020.

Communication through visual contents: Instagram use in the wineries' strategies

Abstract

Considering the visual social media diffusion, this research aims at analysing the content of the photos posted by high-end wineries on Instagram. The objective is to evaluate the opportunities in terms of communication strategies by defining content categories and their ability to create engagement. Visual content analysis of 662 pictures is applied. Results show that the majority of the photos still focus on the product and few consider the wine in a holistic way, linking it with elements such as history, art or food even if some of these categories seem promising as far as the engagement is concerned.

Keywords: visual communication, Social Media, wineries,

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media

1. Introduction

Social media are becoming more and more a relevant marketing and communication tool for many industries to enhance brands value and to effectively communicate. As highlighted by the Social Media Marketing Industry Report 2018, 80% of marketing managers declared to use mainly images in their social media marketing practices, thus they should understand which kind of contents are more effective in the digital landscape.

The interest shown by the wine sector towards online platforms is constantly increasing. Wineries are aware of the actual ongoing communication trends and thus try to explore the rising opportunities of sharing content. Despite some evidence about the effectiveness of the social media usage in increasing the online wine buying (Pucci, Casprini, Nosi, & Zanni, 2019), less is known about the use of Instagram for wine brands communication. Since this area is recent, there is still a scarcity of papers that shed light on the use of social media among wineries (Lockshin & Corsi, 2012) and that address companies in promoting an effective content strategy in this platform. Due to this situation, the main objective of this paper is to carry out an analysis of the visual communication contents shared on Instagram by a sample of Italian high-end wineries, in order to investigate the content categories and identify which contents generate engagement.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital marketing in the wine industry

Today, wine marketing has to become more marketing oriented than product oriented. As Rouzet, Seguin and Marenghi (2005) wrote, it is no longer a matter of finding someone who will buy a wine, but of defining a product that will conform to the desires and needs of a specific client. Wine has become an experience: consumers show the desire of being involved in a lifestyle experience linked to specific brand values available on all the possible touchpoints of their journey as wine bars, wine cellars, e-commerce platforms, blogs, company websites, apps, social networks and so on (Van Zanten, 2005). Therefore, communication is starting to play a high role for the wine products success and the digital presence represents a "must have".

Only recently scholars have been focused on the wine industry and some research has been published on the use of digital media in wineries' communication. Neilson (2014) carried out a content analysis of winery websites in five countries, finding that in most of the cases, web sites are used to provide information to consumers. Capitello et al. (2016) demonstrated a heterogeneous development of online communication, not depending on the territory. Lalicic and Gindl (2019)

found out that wineries are rather passive than active on Facebook. As far as the contents are concerned, Dolan and Goodman (2017) found that many wine brands have adopted social media to portray not only their products, but also family history, territory information and events because selling wine means selling a pleasure, a dream, a territory, a story. This is also the reason why the wine marketing strategies are highly specific and often associated with territorial or tourist marketing ones (Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009). Other researches explore the adoption and use of social media platforms, demonstrating its infancy as far as strategic marketing is concerned. In Italy wineries are mainly present with websites, in Facebook and in Instagram (Finotto & Mauracher, In press 2019). Due to this scarcity, many scholars highlight the need for more research in this sector to improve the knowledge and to support companies in an effective adoption of them.

2.2 Visual communication

A key component of modern marketing is visual marketing which focuses on the study and analysis of the ways in which images can be used as the center of a communication message (Wedel & Pieters, 2007). In fact, images are able to create an intense and emotional bond with the observer allowing the message to appear immediately and in an effective way. It is on these bases that the current preference of brands is moving towards communication strategies characterized by a greater use of visual content (Jamieson & Jamieson, 2007).

Visual social media platforms are nowadays the ones able to mostly influence the purchasing decisions of people (Meyerson, 2015) having changed the way consumers discover products and brands, transforming the traditional transactions into a long-lasting and engaging relationships between consumers and companies through a continuous flow of shared visual contents.

3. The Research

3.1 Objective and research questions

The general objective of our research is to shed light on how wineries are using Instagram to communicate and its impact on the responses of their online following. An analysis of the content published on Instagram by high-ended Italian wineries is carried out. The study investigates the contents published by the wineries and the ability of these categories to create engagement. Consistently with previous studies about visual content in a specific sector (Anagnostopoulos, Parganas, Chadwick, & Fenton, 2018; Bernkopf & Nixon, 2019; Ferwerda, Schedl, & Tkalcic, 2016; Hsu & Song, 2014; Lai, Khoo-Lattimore, & Wang, 2019; Song, Han, Lee, & Kim, 2018; Sonne & Erickson, 2018), we aim at defining "what" companies communicate in this new platform and the effectiveness of these contents.

Thus, we want to answer to the following two research questions:

RQ1- What visual content are Italian high-end wineries communicating through Instagram?

This question arises from the need to investigate whether there is a common choice in communicating through visual content by wineries with the same nationality (Italian), with the same product strategy (only one specific denomination) and which operate in the same market segment (high-ended).

We want then to verify if there are categories of content that are particularly able to involve the audience. The final scope is to establish if a common content strategy can be outlined for wineries acting in the same market segment. Thus the second research question is defined*: RQ2 - Do the photos which register a higher level of engagement belong to the same kind of categories?*

3.2 Research design and methodology

The research is carried out in four main phases:

Phase 1 – Context selection: Italian high-ended wineries. Italian wine market revenue in 2018 was of 13 billion €, with over 310.000 wine companies spread around the territory with a production of 55 million of hl in 2018 (+29% if compared to 2017). The designation of origin certification accounts for 49% on production while the PDO and PGI recognitions are 526 (Ismea, 2019).

Phase 2 - Data collection: information is downloaded from the Instagram official profiles of a sample of high-ended Italian wineries using 4kStogram and Instagram API.

Phase 3 - Content Analysis: that is a systematic and objective method used to reduce the complexity of the material under analysis and to capture central themes and content categories (Krippendorff, 2018). It is also a common approach to examine pictures (Hunter, 2008). We combine a deductive content analysis using elements presented in previous researches (e.g.Rouzet, et al., 2005) and an inductive one based on the selected wineries' image analysis coherently with what is suggested in literature (Santarossa, Coyne, Lisinski, & Woodruff, 2019; Smith & Sanderson, 2015). A final list of categories and variables is defined by two coders as suggested in literature (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007).

Phase 4 – Image evaluation: adoption of the identifies content categories to the posted images, with the objective of providing an answer to the previously listed research questions.

3.3 Sampling

As for the selection of the wineries sample, the leading Italian wine e-commerce Tannico website was used in order to obtain a winery list. In this first exploratory phase we decided to

investigate separately the following product categories proposed by Tannico website: reds, whites and sparkling wines. To refine the sampling, the following filters have been applied to each category: (1) country: Italy; (2) format: 0.75l; (3) price: we relied on the price criterion of classification of wines proposed by (Yeung & Thach, 2019), choosing he high-ended wineries (price greater than or equal to 50$). Among this first sample, only the wineries which had an official Instagram presence were considered.

We then decided to analyse exclusively the companies with a focused product strategy: companies with a single designation of origin.

For each of the selected wineries' Instagram profile, the following information was collected: number of followers, number of posts, average monthly publication frequency in six months (July-December 2018). Then we calculated the average capacity of the published contents to attract new followers in the profile as followers/posts.

The 5 best performing companies for number of followers, attractive rate and average publication frequency have been selected and shown in table 1.

NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS	ATTRACTIVE RATE (FOLLOWERS/POSTS)	AVERAGE PUBLICATION FREQUENCY
Cà del Bosco	Ornellaia	Querciabella
Ferrari	Cà del Bosco	Cupano
Ornellaia	San Leonardo	Berlucchi
Bellavista	Bellavista	Ferrari
Berlucchi	Terenzi	Cà del Bosco

Table 1. Best performing companies on Instagram use.

In selecting our final sample, we have chosen the wineries which appear at least in two columns of table 1: Cà del Bosco; Ferrari; Ornellaia; Bellavista and Berlucchi. Furthermore, in order to provide more useful insights through our analyses we decided to add to our sample one "worst performer" - Querciabella which publishes a lot without registering positive results on the followers' variable - and the "best performer" - San Lorenzo which seems to be able to post few pictures but in an effective way.

Through an Instagram API, we then collected for each winery all the posts between 07/01/2018 and 12/31/2018 saving the following information: post Url, post type (single picture, quotes, collage or video), comments number, like number, publication date.

3.4 Image content categories identification

In order to define the content categories for our analysis, we started from the literature review,

by selecting the most frequently used elements to describe and communicate wine. Then, further categories have been added adopting the following procedure:

1). Considering the full sample of Italian wineries, ten companies having an official Instagram profile were randomly extracted: five with a focused product strategy and five having a wide assortment. The inductive coding activity was carried out by two coders. We choose to define categories in this wider group of pictures to obtain more generalizable results. 2). For each company the most recent 10 posted photos were analysed. Each coder has evaluated a total of 50 images identifying the categories and their frequency of appearance (a photo could be in more than one category). 3). Each coder selected only the categories with a presence greater than 50% in the sample. 4) The creation of the categories was then discussed: in all the categories a common agreement of interpretation between the two coders was found.

At the end of this process the final categories were 8: product presence, production process, landscape, history and wine, art and wine, food and wine, events and recognition, human presence. Two of the categories were also analyzed in more subcategories. For product elements: brand focus, bottle, cork, label, wine glass, wine bucket, decanter, bottle opener, bottle pack, other. For the process category: vineyards, grapes, instruments for grape harvest, barrel.

4. Preliminary findings

4.1 Sample description

Overall the number of downloaded photos for our analysis was 690. Images belonging to "quotes", "collage" categories or video were excluded. The final analysis therefore involved a total of 662 images (Table 2).

Winery	Number of photos	Total engagement	Average Engagement
Ca' del Bosco	75	101,340	1351.20
Ferrari	142	235,063	1655.37
Ornellaia	25	27,157	1086.28
Bellavista	67	45,132	673.61
Berlucchi	113	68,800	608.85
Querciabella	199	18,852	94.73
San Leonardo	41	26,850	654.88

Table 2. Overview of posts and engagement

4.2 Findings

In table 3 the content categories for each winery expressed as relative frequency are presented.

	Ca' del Bosco	Ferrari	Ornellaia	Bellavista	Berlucchi	San Leonardo	Querciabella
Product	89.33%	69.72%	32.00%	59.70%	60.18%	24.39%	71.86%

Production process	5.33%	2.11%	64.00%	7.46%	12.39%	48.78%	7.04%
Natural landscape	32.00%	11.97%	48.00%	5.97%	38.94%	68.29%	18.59%
History and wine	0.00%	0.00%	4.00%	13.43%	12.39%	2.44%	0.50%
Art and wine	8.00%	4.93%	8.00%	31.34%	10.62%	0.00%	2.51%
Food	17.33%	26.76%	4.00%	14.93%	30.97%	2.44%	13.07%
Events	13.33%	24.65%	4.00%	20.90%	10.62%	2.44%	11.06%
Human presence (primary)	13.33%	35.21%	20.00%	17.91%	15.93%	26.83%	30.65%

Table 3. Image content categories and variables for the assessed wineries (RQ1)

Concerning our first objective we can noticed that the content strategies of the selected wineries are not homogeneous, even if there are some patterns. One of the most used content category is the product, with an average of 62.19% of presence in the regular sample and 52.97% considering the worst and best performing wineries followed by picture with natural landscape (27.38% and 35.54%) and picture with a human presence as main subject (20.48% and 23.18%). Except for Ornellaia and San Leonardo (the best performing case), product is the main image category. The link with history and art is not so adopted by the companies, except for Bellavista that portrays art elements in the 31.34% of its pictures.

Looking at our second research question (table 4), most of the photos with a high engagement belong to the product category. Analysing findings by single winery, positive results in terms of engagement appear also in the following categories: art and wine (in Ferrari and Querciabella) history and wine (in San Lorenzo) and food (in Ca' del Bosco), while natural landscapes which are highly used as a content, reach middle levels of engagement. Analysing the average engagement - without considering the winery – product and human presence are the best performing.

	Average Value	Ca' del Bosco	Ferrari	Ornellaia	Bellavista	Berlucchi	San Leonardo	Querciabella
Product	Likes	1394.15	1909.15	1275.13	677.00	684.50	701.8	88.00
	Comments	11.27	8.64	21.88	4.63	16.54	10.3	1.77
	Engagement	1405.42	1917.79	1297	681.63	701.04	712.1	89.77
Production process	Likes	1053.75	708	1109.63	546.8	435.29	627.55	78.10
	Comments	7.25	3.00	13.94	4.20	16.00	5.80	2.10
	Engagement	1061.00	711.00	1123.56	551.00	451.29	633.35	80.19
Natural landscape	Likes	1264.71	1471.59	916.17	578.93	564.07	589.25	84.51
	Comments	8.96	5.06	7.00	4.00	18.09	5.86	1.84
	Engagement	1273.67	1476.65	923.17	582.93	582.16	595.11	86.35
History and wine	Likes	-	-	855.00	194.89	514.29	899.00	74.00
	Comments	-	-	4.00	0.22	11.64	17.00	-
	Engagement	-	-	859.00	195.11	525.93	916.00	74.00
Art and wine	Likes	1098.33	2354.71	703.00	472.76	479.42	-	94.20
	Comments	8.33	23.29	9.50	2.33	9.25	-	2.80
	Engagement	1106.67	2378.00	712.5	475.10	488.67	-	97.00

Food	Likes	1622.92	886.47	754.00	597.80	626.35	482.00	84.62
	Comments	15.69	8.16	8.00	2.30	15.56	2.00	1.65
	Engagement	1638.62	894.63	762.00	600.10	641.91	484.00	86.27
Events	Likes	816.00	654.83	564	619.86	383.83	279.00	75.32
	Comments	4.00	4.63	8.00	4.00	8.08	7.00	1.27
	Engagement	820.00	659.46	572.00	623.86	391.92	286.00	76.59
Human presence (primary)	Likes	816.00	1892.02	1033.60	647.17	555.00	685.18	79.72
	Comments	4.00	6.86	10.20	4.33	11.89	6.82	1.68
	Engagement	820.00	1898.88	1043.80	651.50	566.89	692.00	81.40

Table 4. Image engagement in terms of likes and comments (RQ2)

5. Conclusions and Managerial Implications

The objective of this work was to evaluate the communication through images posted on Instagram by high-end Italian wineries to understand the contents from a marketing perspective. This paper contributes to the literature providing 1) a content categorization in a sector where research on the social media usage is in its infancy compared to other such as the tourism one and 2) some findings about the categories that more engage users.

As far as the contents concern, the analysis highlighted a prevalence in the presence of the product and some main elements connected to them such as the brand itself, the bottle and the label. This confirms that wineries are still product oriented. Product pictures generate high level of engagement, but there are categories that could perform better. For example, in the Ca' del Bosco case, high level of engagements are generated by food picture, but they represent the 13.33% of the posts. The importance of highlighting the natural landscape of the territory (Tempesta et al., 2010) is understood by wineries, but online it seems to generate average results in terms of engagement.

In general, however, the images considered, although belonging to different wineries, appear to be very similar and they seem to not been designed with the aim of telling a specific story of a certain brand or winery.

Based on the main findings and the similarity of pictures, it can be stated that deeper analysis of the Instagram context is needed, adding other information such as time of publishing, target, winery strategy, etc..

Since visual communication, and especially the communication carried out on Instagram, can represent an important and effective strategy of customer engagement, brand reinforcement and value creation, a careful selection of the shared visual content is required. The messages transferred through visual contents must necessarily be distinctive and emotional in order to make the communication effective. Wineries should be able to transfer through Instagram their specific attributes by creating memorable experiences, telling a story that emphasizes the uniqueness of their products, involving tradition and culture, always putting consumers at the center of their messages.

References

Anagnostopoulos, C., Parganas, P., Chadwick, S., & Fenton, A. (2018). Branding in pictures: using Instagram as a brand management tool in professional team sport organisations. *European Sport Management Quarterly, 18*(4), 413-438.

Bernkopf, D., & Nixon, L. (2019). The Impact of Visual Social Media on the Projected Image of a Destination: The Case of Mexico City on Instagram *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2019* (pp. 145-157): Springer.

Capitello, R., Agnoli, L., & Begalli, D. (2016). Online Communication Approaches and Social Networks in Traditional Wine Regions: A Case Study from Italy *Successful Social Media and Ecommerce Strategies in the Wine Industry* (pp. 30-54): Springer.

Cohen, E., & Ben-Nun, L. (2009). The important dimensions of wine tourism experience from potential visitors' perception. *Tourism and Hospitality Research, 9*(1), 20-31.

Dolan, R., & Goodman, S. (2017). Succeeding on social media: Exploring communication strategies for wine marketing. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, 33*, 23-30.

Ferwerda, B., Schedl, M., & Tkalcic, M. (2016). *Using instagram picture features to predict users' personality.* Paper presented at the International Conference on Multimedia Modeling.

Finotto, V., & Mauracher, C. (In press 2019). Digital Marketing Strategies in the Italian Wine Sector. *International Journal of Globalisation and Small Business*.

Hayes, A. F., & Krippendorff, K. (2007). Answering the call for a standard reliability measure for coding data. *Communication methods and measures, 1*(1), 77-89.

Hsu, C. H., & Song, H. (2014). A visual analysis of destinations in travel magazines. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 31*(2), 162-177.

Hunter, W. C. (2008). A typology of photographic representations for tourism: Depictions of groomed spaces. *Tourism management, 29*(2), 354-365.

Ismea. (2019). Scheda di settore Vino. Istituto di Servizi per il Mercato Agricolo Alimentare. In ISMEA (Ed.).

Jamieson, G. H., & Jamieson, H. (2007). *Visual communication: More than meets the eye*: Intellect Books.

Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*: Sage publications.

Lai, M. Y., Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Wang, Y. (2019). Food and cuisine image in destination branding: Toward a conceptual model. *Tourism and Hospitality Research, 19*(2), 238-251.

Lalicic, L., & Gindl, S. (2019). Viennese Wineries on Facebook: Status Quo and Lessons Learned *Management and Marketing of Wine Tourism Business* (pp. 155-176): Springer.

Lockshin, L., & Corsi, A. M. (2012). Consumer behaviour for wine 2.0: A review since 2003 and future directions. *Wine Economics and Policy, 1*(1), 2-23.

Meyerson, M. (2015). *Success Secrets of the Online Marketing Superstars*: Entrepreneur Press.

Neilson, L., & Madill, J. (2014). Using winery web sites to attract wine tourists: an international comparison. *International Journal of Wine Business Research, 26*(1), 2-26.

Pucci, T., Casprini, E., Nosi, C., & Zanni, L. (2019). Does social media usage affect online purchasing intention for wine? The moderating role of subjective and objective knowledge. *British Food Journal, 121*(2), 275-288.

Rouzet, E., Seguin, G., & Marenghi, M. (2005). *Il marketing del vino: il mercato, le strategie commerciali, la distribuzione*: Edagricole.

Santarossa, S., Coyne, P., Lisinski, C., & Woodruff, S. J. (2019). # fitspo on Instagram: A mixed-methods approach using Netlytic and photo analysis, uncovering the online discussion and author/image characteristics. *Journal of health psychology, 24*(3), 376-385.

Smith, L. R., & Sanderson, J. (2015). I'm going to Instagram it! An analysis of athlete self-presentation on Instagram. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 59*(2), 342-358.

Song, J., Han, K., Lee, D., & Kim, S.-W. (2018). "Is a picture really worth a thousand words?": A case study on classifying user attributes on Instagram. *PloS one, 13*(10), e0204938.

Sonne, J., & Erickson, I. (2018). *The Expression of Emotions on Instagram.* Paper presented at the 9th International Conference on Social Media and Society.

Tempesta, T., Giancristofaro, R. A., Corain, L., Salmaso, L., Tomasi, D., & Boatto, V. (2010). The importance of landscape in wine quality perception: An integrated approach using choice-based conjoint analysis and combination-based permutation tests. *Food Quality and Preference, 21*(7), 827-836.

Van Zanten, R. (2005). Drink choice: factors influencing the intention to drink wine. *International Journal of Wine Marketing, 17*(2), 49-61.

Wedel, M., & Pieters, R. (2007). *Visual marketing: From attention to action*: Psychology Press.

Yeung, P., & Thach, L. (2019). *Luxury wine marketing: The art and science of luxury wine branding*: Infinite Ideas.