

Ethics before aesthetics? Performative Responsibility in Champagne Houses' Digital Communications

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Abstract

Champagne is a symbol of luxury, yet it is an agricultural product subject to norms on responsibility. Unlike many categories where responsibility has become institutionalised expectations, luxury goods are still weakly bound by such norms. Drawing on performativity, the study distinguishes between responsible practices (e.g. vineyard management) and performative acts of responsibility (communicative performances through which practices are framed). Analysing multimodal responsibility communication on Instagram and websites of six champagne houses, the study explores how responsibility is enacted as performances that contribute to shaping what responsibility means in a luxury agricultural category. The paper finds that performativity is used as a bridge between everyday practices and meaningfulness in a luxury context and that brand positions and stakeholder orientations guide actions of performative responsibility.

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics