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Netnography on Wine

Researching consumer attitudes towards wine consumption on social media

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ABSTRACT

Title: Netnography on Wine

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Abstract:

The purpose of this dissertation is to uncover digital consumer insights within the wine community in regards of what motivates them to drink wine and to join an online wine community. The study uses a qualitative approach called Netnography to study online behaviours and has selected the online wine community “Wine Folly” to examine its digital content. The current research on online behaviour in regards of wine consumption is quite limited. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine feelings expressed towards wine consumption, motivations to join Wine Folly and perceptions members reveal towards the online wine community and wine. Results of the research indicate that there a level of confusion that distorts people’s choices when purchasing wine. Those who are less knowledgeable on the subject have expressed their interest in joining online wine communities for intellectual satisfaction. While some are interested in sharing information, others are more interested in developing relationships or seek social support from the community. These members wish to share their frustrations and challenges faced but also their experiences with the others, creating bonds along the way. Moreover, results show that members of the group had different perceptions in regards to wine consumption as they have developed different meanings and attitudes. For example, a perception of wine being a healthier lifestyle choice. Furthermore, the study highlights the implications and draws conclusions from the findings, offering strategic managerial recommendations. In addition, the research acknowledges its own limitations.

O objetivo desta dissertação é descobrir as percepções digitais dos consumidores na comunidade vinícola em relação ao que os motiva a beber vinho e a ingressar em uma comunidade vinícola on-line. O estudo usa uma abordagem qualitativa chamada Netnography para estudar comportamentos online e selecionou a comunidade vinícola online "Wine Folly" para examinar seu conteúdo digital. A pesquisa atual sobre o comportamento on-line em relação ao consumo de vinho é bastante limitada. Portanto, o objetivo deste estudo é examinar os sentimentos expressos em relação ao consumo de vinho, as motivações para ingressar no Wine Folly e as percepções que os membros revelam em relação à comunidade e ao vinho online. Os resultados da pesquisa indicam que existe um nível de confusão que distorce as escolhas das pessoas ao comprar vinho. Aqueles com menos conhecimento sobre o assunto manifestaram interesse em ingressar em comunidades de vinho on-line para satisfação intelectual. Enquanto alguns estão interessados em compartilhar informações, outros estão mais interessados em desenvolver relacionamentos ou buscar apoio social. Esses membros desejam compartilhar suas frustrações e desafios enfrentados, mas também suas experiências com os outros, criando laços ao longo do caminho. Além disso, os resultados mostram que os membros do grupo tiveram percepções diferentes em relação ao consumo de vinho, pois desenvolveram significados e atitudes diferentes. Por exemplo, a percepção de que o vinho é uma opção de estilo de vida mais saudável. Além disso, o estudo destaca as implicações e tira conclusões dos temas identificados, oferecendo recomendações gerenciais estratégicas.

Keywords: Netnography, Wine, Motivations, Perceptions, Digital insights.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction 1**
 - 1.1 Problem definition and relevance: 1**
 - 1.2 Scope and Research questions:..... 2**
 - 1.3 Overview of the thesis 2**
- 2. Literature Review 3**
 - 2.1 Research on experiential & wine consumption: 3**
 - 2.2 Research on online communities 5**
 - 2.3 Social media and wine marketing 6**
 - 2.3.1 Wine consumers..... 6**
 - 2.3.2 Wine businesses 7**
 - 2.4 Research Gaps 8**
- 3. Methodology and research design..... 9**
 - 3.1 Netnography..... 9**
 - 3.1.1 Method justification 9**
 - 3.1.2 Defining Netnography 9**
 - 3.2 Research planning 10**
 - 3.3 Entrée 10**
 - 3.4 Characteristics of the online wine community: Wine Folly..... 11**
 - 3.5 Data collection & analysis..... 11**
 - 3.6 Ensuring ethical standards 12**
- 4. Empirical findings: Thematic content 14**
 - 4.1 Feelings 14**
 - 4.2 Motivations..... 18**
 - 4.3 Perceptions 22**
- 5. Implications..... 28**
 - 5.1 Theoretical implications..... 28**
 - 5.2 Managerial implications 29**
- 6. Conclusion 31**
- 7. Limitations and further directions..... 32**
- 8. References 33**
- 9. Appendices 36**

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem definition and relevance:

In the past decades, wine has become a topic of regular discussion in both mass media and social media. With the evidence of wine critics' influence on wine sales perceived to be declining (Lockshin et al., 2009) and the recurrent traditional method of medal acquisition of lesser value in the growing markets, wine businesses are having to consider new ways to court their potential customer (Atkin, 2012). The wine industry has distinct characteristics that are complex and depend heavily on customer taste and perception of a brand which is particularly subject to online global conversations. We can find a plethora of brands either big or small around the globe, and consumers have a large variety of choices to choose amongst. Therefore, wine marketing continues to be highly competitive and challenging which could potentially leave small wine businesses at a distinct disadvantage. Furthermore, the growing adoption of social media has altered the way people interact with each other and with businesses, since they have less time and look more for convenience and experience.

The generational differences in wine consumption are a significant issue for wine producers but could constitute an opportunity of market expansion. In this new digital era, consumers are exposed to social media, identify themselves with certain wine brands and are more likely to talk about their brand experience with their community. Social media now provides a platform for all wine businesses to reach and influence new audiences. Today's wine consumers are disrupting the wine industry, rethinking the traditional stereotype of a wine drinker. Not only because wine drinkers are much younger, but also because they bring a unique set of tastes and lifestyle choices (Barber et al., 2006: Barber, N., Almanza, B. and Donovan, J. 2006.; Jones, J.,2006). Barber (2008) considers customers, particularly millennials, more prone to rely on labels, brand imagery, awards, shelf information displays and seek the opinion of the online community rather than relying on store personnel or wine stewards.

On that note, the emergence and growth of the number of wine influencers has increased exponentially, having greater impact on consumers' decision making (Wilson, D., & Quinton, S., 2012). In light of this, obtaining substantial knowledge on your customer's taste and preferences, and having various other information about them can be very helpful for wine companies to prioritize and understand how to allocate their marketing efforts that appeal to their customers.

1.2 Scope and Research questions:

The paper intends to contribute to the marketing literature by exploring the characteristics of the online wine community, subsequently studying their most important communities, including a reputable wine educator and influencer “Wine Folly”, and also to provide to wine marketers on how they can use social media to build brand community. The aims of this paper are twofold: first to provide insight on the wine sector and use of social media through a review of the literature and its respective online community and to explore the relationships between posts on social networks using a netnographic approach. The study will therefore observe interactions and behaviours of the online members of the wine community Wine Folly, then analyse the data. The purpose of the present study is to understand the characteristics and motivations of the online wine community and their interactions and offer strategic recommendations to companies to help build their brand community. The following research questions come to light:

RQ1: What motivates wine consumers to join Wine Folly¹ and what role does the community play in the decision-making process?

RQ2: What can we learn about the Wine Folly community?

1.3 Overview of the thesis

The thesis starts exploring the problem relevance as well as defining the scope and research questions, followed by five distinct chapters: previous literature concerning wine marketing which includes studying the literature on wine consumption, experiential consumption, social media and wine marketing. The study will then illustrate the methodology used in the research, present the empirical findings which encompasses the thematic network and analysis, then move to implications. Finally, the researcher will offer the conclusions and limitations, as well as further research.

¹ Wine Folly, first launched in 2011 in Seattle, Washington, was created by Justin Hammack, Madeline Puckette, and Chad Wasser. Wine Folly is a content site devoted to wine knowledge and appreciation and have also launched two edition books about wine education.

2. Literature Review

This chapter illustrates an academic review of the existing literature around the main topics of experiential and wine consumption, online communities and social media. The literature then covers social media marketing in the wine sector from the consumer perspective as well as wine businesses. Furthermore, research gaps were identified and have provided guidance in the direction of the study.

2.1 Research on experiential & wine consumption:

Over past decades, researchers have elaborated studies acknowledging a broader range of consumption, that goes beyond purchase behaviour and brand choice, looking at what users are experiencing, while consuming market offerings (Belk 1988; Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) suggested an alternative approach to process information and the decision-making approach, which included an experiential perspective of consumer behaviour. Subsequently, they developed a framework that included value (Holbrook and Corfman 1985), cognition (Hirschman 1985a), holistic-intuitive consciousness (Hirschman 1985b) and emotion (Holbrook 1986) in experiential consumption. Findings of this study concluded factors that were considered important, such as the environmental context, consumer state of mind, which include feelings, thoughts, evaluation based on either intrinsic or extrinsic components. Also, the stimulation through sensory modalities, which means that one must consider emotional processing and sensory stimulation in hedonistic consumption. Wine is a good example for an experiential product, since it is difficult for a consumer to know exactly what they are getting just by looking at the product, but also changes in regards of the consumption setting (Hall and Lockshin, 2000; Unwin, 1999).

Wine serves sociological and religious functions, but also offers dietary utilities and plays a role in disease prevention (Soleas, G. J., Diamandis, E. P., & Goldberg, D. M, 1997). Additionally, researchers have noted that wine drinkers sometimes cite health benefits of drinking wine (Mitchell and Greatorex, 1989; Uysal and Hagan, 1993). Dating back to 6000 B-C, wine is produced on every continent, shifting from the “old world” wines to “new world” wines, influencing wine choice behaviour based on its area of origin (Anderson, K., 2004), but also on its characteristics; either intrinsic or extrinsic, and is associated with experiential and emotional significance to those who consume it (Hussain, M., Cholette, S. & Castaldi, R., 2007.; Constantinides and Foutain, 2008).

The marketing literature suggests these external factors, such as price or labels or brand names also help understand wine purchasing behaviour. However, overall the consumer behaviour literature acknowledges that is too multifaceted to be entirely captured by these mentioned attributes (Barber et al.,2009). Jaeger et al. (2009), found that prior consumption of a wine, grape variety, availability by the glass, and match with food were the primary influences of wine selection when dining out. Thomas and Pickering (2003) also found that wine taste and meal pairing were important wine purchasing considerations. Charters and Pettigrew (2008) suggest intrinsic motivators, such as symbolic dimensions that could be one's presenting of themselves in a desired social setting or experiential that could potentially influence wine consumption. In their research, also found in other studies (Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Santos et al.,2006; Yuan et al. 2005), they note enjoyment as the most important motivator to drink wine along with fun, sensory stimulation and knowledge that were also considered. However, these intrinsic cues are more likely to be subject to perceptual bias. That said, authors have discussed the risk perception that consumers have when it comes to purchasing wine (Lockshin et al., 2006, Mueller et al., 2008). A few examples to illustrate this concept, such as social risk e.g., receiving negative judgment from peers, or financial as not getting value for money or failing to meet standards, or even health like having a headache the following morning.

Moreover, other studies have proposed segmentations of the different types of customers along with segmenting different types of customer wine experiences, for instance based on their level of involvement and knowledge (Santos, C. R., Blanco, M. C., & Fernández, A. G., 2006), demographics or lifestyle (Bruwer, J., & Li, E., 2007) or even price perception (Costanigro, M., McCluskey, J. J., & Mittelhammer, R. C., 2007). On that note, a study suggests that back in the 1990s, wine enthusiasts were considered to be middle aged who lived close to the wine region and had above average income (Bruwer, J., & Li, E., 2007). The concept of quality of a wine product suggested by several studies (Johnson, R.,& Bruwer.J, 2007; McGarry Wolf, Orth, U. R., , M., & Dodd, T. H.,2005; Parr, W et Al., 2003; Rocchi, B., & Stefani, G., 2006) varies in the different approaches proposed in the literature but most agree that the plethora of brands creates a complex and confusing environment for a consumer to make a choice decision. However, nowadays, with the emergence of the internet, people have access to all kinds of information which allowed the younger generation to develop a wine passion and get easily acquainted with information related to wine, either by joining online groups, forums or becoming club members.

2.2 Research on online communities

The advent of the internet has sparked a growing interest of people joining the virtual space and connecting with the online community, that allowed them to interact with each other, regardless of their physical location and transforming communities, integrating it in the daily life (Wellman, B., Boase, J., & Chen, W., 2002). Online communities link people who share the same interests, goals, or activities through the internet. Academics have provided several definitions to online community that are more or like similar. Preece (2000) characterizes online communities having the following characteristics: people (who socially interact to fulfil their own needs and have a special role like moderation or influencing other), shared purpose (which involves the interest or information sought and exchanged, or even a service that provides a purpose for the community), policies (in the form of protocols, rules, and laws that guide people's interactions), and computer systems (to mediate social interaction and facilitate the "togetherness" impression). Although online communities share these same features, there is no specific or unilateral recipe that constitutes a path to their success, since they evolve rapidly and are particularly complex. Despite meagre specificities, online communities are commensurate with traditional communities whose sole purpose is to connect people and bring them closer (Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M. 2002). Quinton & Harridge-March (2010) find that individuals within fora tend to develop relationships with each other, the network itself as well as the potential brands involved. These relationships are predicated on trust that is established between members, as well as their shared interests and experiences which could lead into strengthening bonds and even develop into offline aspects. Moreover, studies suggest that people are looking for a sense of belonging and being affiliated to a larger social group when joining a virtual community (Lin, H. F., 2008; Zhao et al., 2012).

Armstrong and Hagel (1996) classified online communities into four different types; communities of relationship, communities of transaction, communities of interest, and communities of practice. Initially, one would consider to classify wine fora into communities of interest which eventually turns into communities of relationships, and perhaps transaction. Pitta and Fowler (2005) illustrate another limitation to this previous research and explain that discussion fora can be both communities of interest as well of practice. In this sense, a community of interest, which link members to a product, here, wine, and practice highlights what members do together, for instance, giving advice about buying wine. They can also share knowledge through mutual engagement around activities around the practice, like improving level of knowledge about wineries or vineyards and improve their understanding of viticulture

terms. It is worth mentioning that this would be useful for marketers to understand relationships between members of the social network.

Another study suggests that communities who have strong ties, help others within a brand community. In addition to another study (Pitta and Fowler, 2005) that explains how relationships can be built outside of one particular group or platform and can develop into other networks of specific interests. These relationships could potentially grow into virtual communities and social networks that provide the ideal connections, which allow consumers to build stronger relationships, hence, influencing consumer behaviour (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

2.3 Social media and wine marketing

2.3.1 Wine consumers

Wine serves as an ideal product for social media marketing due to its exhaustive number of wine labels on the market which creates a high level of confusion. It is to believe that wine has the larger number of cues than most of the other food products (Goodman et al., 2005). Wilson and Quinton (2012) found that the socialization aspect of social media was a good fit with wine, because it allowed consumers to communicate knowledge and encourage others to try different types of wine. Also, socialization upholds Lockshin and Corsi's (2012) study on wine, which supports the idea that personal recommendations influence considerably the purchasing decisions in wine.

Additionally, consumers have difficulties to trust their own taste and thus the role of the wine critic or the wine award acts as a risk reducer and influencer when purchasing wine (Wilson & Quinton, 2012). Therefore, recommendations from wine critics or journalists, wine awards or mass-media advertising are strongly encouraged. Academics have argued that wine is an incredibly information-rich subject and consumers typically do not feel confident in selecting wine due to lack of knowledge and the huge amount of choices ((Lockshin et al., 2009; Lockshin and Hall, 2003). It is worth mentioning in this same study, Lockshin (2003) found that consumers with high and low involvement choose wine differently; low involvement relied more on well-known brands and lower prices, whereas the high involvement used region and middle to up range prices to make their purchasing decision.

2.3.2 Wine businesses

Findings of a study conducted on wineries and their social media usage and website demonstrate that they do not fully exploit the potential benefits of a website, even less in regards of social media. More importantly, the authors warn that these wineries are facing increasing competition from other wine regions and tourist destinations and may be foregoing opportunities to strengthen their region's image destination and reputation (Duarte Alonso et al., 2013).

Lockshin and Corsi (2012) point out the lack of peer-reviewed studies that investigate the use of social media and its outcome in the wine industry by stating: "we are at a very early stage in understanding the best way to use social media in wine marketing". There are several studies that describe how social media can be useful to wine consumers and wineries if properly used (Fuentes Fernández.R., Vriesekoop.F, Urbano.B, 2017 ; Reyneke.M, Pitt,L Berthon.P, 2011; Szolnoki et Al.,2014 ; Thach, L., Lease, T. & Barton, M. J 2016). For instance, Wilson and Quinton (2012) conducted an interesting research on Twitter's contribution to winery businesses, where they provide evidence that claims that social media, specifically Twitter, can create value for companies. They conclude that wine brands, marketers and retailers are not optimizing value creation via Twitter and are not engaging with the existing wine members on that platform. Researchers have also mentioned that wineries can use social media platforms to directly educate consumers which translates to understanding consumer behavior related to wine, which can be fundamental in achieving marketing benefits (Yuan et al., 2006; Dodds & Butler, 2010). On this matter, another paper observes wine brands activities on social media, focusing on Bordeaux premier grand crus where they concluded that most of the brands did not present a social media strategy and their presence was a mere consequence of individual consumer interest (Reyneke et al., 2011).

Further research proposed in these papers come to a conclusion that wine businesses need to get more involved and properly utilize the platforms and better manage the interaction with their customers online in order to gain competitive advantage. It is important to mention this as we previously discussed the high-risk perception being associated with wine products, that intensifies the high level of confusion among consumers. Therefore, wine businesses need to work the proper channels of communication to reduce this risk perception. It is clear that wine marketing, considering its online aspect, is underdeveloped which leaves room for potential exploration on the matter. On that note, many have argued that wineries, globally, have not incorporating social media as a marketing strategy (e.g., Bruwer and Wood, 2005; Christou and Nella, 2012; Stricker et al., 2007).

2.4 Research Gaps

Previous research focused mainly on wine tourism experience, demographics or segmentation of wine consumers, the tourism industry, and wine tourists' behaviours for instance (Williams & Kelly, 2001) rather than on online discussions evolving around wine as a product. A substantial amount of research deals with winery visiting and the individual relationships with wine brands, but has not investigated discussions of wine drinker in forums. It is interesting to mention that these researches mainly focused on segmenting the different types of wine customers offline (Bruwer, J., Li, C., Reid, M., 2001 ; O'Mahony et al., 2006 ; Santos, C., Blanco, M. & Fernández, A, 2006) depending on age and origin, which can help us understand consumer behaviour based on these features. This would allow us to set the directions of the study, which tries to provide insights on studying behaviours of the online wine community and compare findings.

Moreover, the previous literature focusing on wine marketing includes very few studies about the online aspect and how businesses can utilize social media platforms to create value as a communicative tool and be effective in creating relationships with their current and potential customers. Indeed, having a deeper understanding of perceptions and attitudes of online consumers in the wine sector can help businesses build new and strengthen relationships with customers or develop and reposition their current online communication strategy (Thurlock et al., 2004). We can conclude that there is a limited number of studies concerning the online aspect of wine and deepening further knowledge on wine marketing. Therefore, this study will focus mainly on observational behaviour of a specific online wine community and try to offer scrutiny to what these wine consumers have in common as to what are the most important topic of their conversations. We will also explore how businesses can use that data to allocate the appropriate online marketing strategies to build their brand community. We will examine the characteristics of the online wine community and extract cultural insights and meanings from wine discussion forums and explore their relevance for wine practices.

3. Methodology and research design

This chapter focuses on elaborating the methodological approach used to conduct this study in order to answer the research questions proposed in the first chapter.

3.1 Netnography

3.1.1 Method justification

Traditional quantitative methods have been complimented with the adoption of more qualitative approaches, such as ethnographic studies from social sciences that are designed to study consumer experiences and understand group dynamics (Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P., 2007). Consequently, with the advance of technology, specifically, the internet, this method has also moved to the online virtual space. The creation of social media has allowed consumers to become more open online, behind the screen, than they are in real life, which could offer great insight into the consumers' wants and needs, choices, meanings and even more (Wright, L. T., Cova, B., & Pace, S., 2006). Considering this aspect, netnography is better suited to uncover underlying needs, motives and attitudes of consumers' computer-mediated spaces and is found to be an appropriate methodology due to its unobtrusive, interactive and flexible nature. Moreover, this study is carried out inductively, which seeks to come to a grounded knowledge, allowing data gathered to derive theories and implications (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.1.2 Defining Netnography

Netnography was initially proposed and developed by Kozinets, uses social sciences methods to propose a new approach to conducting ethical and comprehensive ethnographic research that combines archival and online communications, participation, and observation with new forms of digital and network data collection, analysis and research representation (Kozinets, 2010). The approach comprehends cultural understandings of human experiences from online social interaction as well as content, then representing them in a form of research, which allows a more natural course that explores the dynamics of the online community. According to Kozinets (1990, p. 366), "*these social groups have a 'real' existence for their participants, and thus have consequential effects on many aspects of behaviour, including consumer behaviour*". Collecting data in an online communication is shown to be less costly than traditional in-person ethnography and other qualitative methodologies, such as focus groups or interviews (Kozinets 2002). It is worth mentioning the limitations of netnography in terms of generalizing findings onto a broader type of group and even across other types of groups, but also depend on the interpretive skills of the researcher.

Netnography follows the six steps of ethnography: research planning, entrée, data collection, interpretation, ensuring ethical standards, and research representation (Kozinets, 2010). An explanation of every stage is as follows, that will highlight every step taken by the researcher to conduct the study.

3.2 Research planning

When conducting a netnographic study, the researcher must first formulate the desired research questions and set the objectives. The researcher has to think how his study will contribute to findings already established and what he or she will bring as new discoveries. An initial enquiry in Google search was performed, using keywords like < wine knowledge>, <wine education>, <all about wine>. We only considered the top search results, which led the researcher to select the Wine Folly community. The researcher has identified an online wine community that has a high traffic (over 20+ regular daily postings, dynamic communication between members and existent on different channels). The Wine Folly community is present across different social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, along with their official website (www.WineFolly.com). On Instagram alone, Wine Folly has over 200k followers, with over 17k posts with the hashtag #Winefolly, approximately +145k on Facebook and +21k YouTube subscribers with a little over +900k views.

3.3 Entrée

It is essential for the researcher to identify the appropriate online forums in order to answer the specific research questions and to be aligned with the researcher's objectives. Also, one must be familiar with the characteristics of the online community such as language, interest and group membership, where the researcher has to develop a deep understanding of the culture that surrounds the data that he uses (Kozinets, 2002). The immersion of oneself in the community where the data is sourced is considered a key step.

The community forum on their website is public domain where all posts and discussions are accessible to everyone without having to sign up on the site. However, in order to be able to post comments and engage with other members, one must consider logging in with their Facebook account. In light of this, the researcher has already signed up as a member of the community for a period of 5 months. On a note, the online wine community on Facebook is not considered dynamic as members do not engage with each other but only with the group admins, but it is worth pointing out the top active Facebook members engage on the other platforms.

3.4 Characteristics of the online wine community: Wine Folly

Wine Folly shares the same posts on different platforms including their official website, allowing users to comment, using their Facebook accounts and disseminating the same type of information using simplified graphs, charts and tables (see Appendix 2). The members' interactions vary on the different platforms. While some seem to be engaging on their website forum, they are not very communicative on their Facebook page. It is difficult to segment the different group members based on attributes previously suggested by academics such as demographics. The main reason for their participation is their passion for wine and sharing their common interest. The group is very diverse in terms of age, gender, occupation and level of engagement. We can find members who are actively present in the wine industry such as wine businesses, wine educators or simply wine enthusiasts. There are no geographic boundaries along with a divergent level of linkage to the wine industry. In fact, among the group members we can also find all levels of wine drinkers, including wine novices or beginners, to wine connoisseurs, wine experts, pros and even certified sommeliers².

The founders of Wine Folly are heavily engaged in the community and post regularly trying to engage other members. As they have a strong background in wine, they provide most of the insights to the community, prompting systematic feedback and sparking others' interest. In particular, the founder Madeline, who also has a background in graphic design has made the posts more enjoyable and visually stimulating. This has allowed for the group's popularity to grow as members are constantly sharing her work.

On a particular note, unlike other studies focusing on the behavioural aspect of group members' interactions online, we can observe the absence of conflict between them. Overall, the diversity of the group members has showed a certain dynamic that has allowed the researcher to collect rich data coming from different perspectives and backgrounds.

3.5 Data collection & analysis

The researcher observed the selected online community in a non-participatory, non-biased manner. The researcher has also retrieved data from members' communication and from personal observation. Data collection was performed on a period of 5 months, between March 2019 and July 2019 on the different platforms dedicated to Wine Folly. Posts and threads however, dated back to 2016 up to recent ones in July 2019. A total of 143 posts were collected

² "A French word used for wine steward. A "master sommelier" is a US trademark term owned by Court of Masters Sommeliers that's reserved for those who pass the 4th level of their certification exam." (Wine Folly source)

and then analysed where data was predominantly text based. Due to the extensive rich data, only 35 posts were considered relevant to the formulated research questions. The researcher has made field notes incorporating a description and analysis of what has been observed throughout the research process.

Kozinets (2002) categorizes members of the community based on their involvement and consumption activity. He defines four types of members: first, the “Tourists”, that have a lack of social ties and interest, second the “Minglers”, characterized by a having strong social ties but minimal interest; thirdly the “Devotees”, with strong consumption interests but appear to have no attachment to the community; and finally the “Insiders”, that have strong ties to the group and consumption activity. Devotees and Insiders are considered to have the most valuable insights and provide important data for the researcher.

The purpose of netnographic data analysis is to organize the collected information from participation and observation into a meaningful, and useful form of research output.

The data can include several downloaded textual, graphical, photographic, audio, and visual files, screen captures and reflective field notes (Kozinets, 2010). In this study, data collected was downloaded and stored onto an Excel file where the researcher began to code the material. The main goal of open coding is to reach a theoretically relevant understanding of the phenomena of interest. Software solutions such as the QSR NVivo and Atlas.ti, are qualitative analysis packages that allow to conduct “social media research, help facilitate coding, content analysis, data linking, data display, and theory-building functions“ (Paccagnella 1997). Given the quantity and nature of the data and taking into account the time constraint, a manual approach has been chosen as the most suitable approach when conducting the research. Within the boundaries of grounded theory, stages of coding and conceptualizing were performed, followed by a stage of creating categories, which eventually led to developing theories and hermeneutic interpretation.

3.6 Ensuring ethical standards

Kozinets (2002) proposes four recommended ethical research procedures, when conducting a netnographic research. The research must make full disclosure of his or her presence and credentials, state his or her intentions, ensure members of the importance of confidentiality and their anonymity, assimilating their feedback and contacting members to gain permission for the use of any related postings.

As suggested, in order to comply with the procedures stated above, the researchers must first introduce himself or herself to the online communities, stating the purpose of the study by elaborating on the methodology used. Another way to ensure ethical standards is to include feedback from members of the online communities by going through the process of member checks. The researcher can then share his or her findings to various group members in order to get their take on the matter (Kozinets, 2002). For the time being, members of the Facebook group and Instagram followers were contacted directly via private messaging in order to obtain their consent to use their postings and referencing directly their quotes as well as to collect their feedback on the result findings. As a result, four member checks were conducted by relating findings and checking if the validity of the research can be established. This has allowed the researcher to analyse their insights regarding Wine Folly and to get a better understanding of the dynamics of the group. Nevertheless, names of the users will not be mentioned in order to ensure compliance with the user privacy protection. Additionally, the dataset gathered is currently stored on a password-encrypted laptop.

4. Empirical findings: Thematic content

The subsequent chapter explores the data collected from the online platforms and offers qualitative interpretations in the form of a netnography, embedded in thematic analysis which establishes the development of grounded theory. This section establishes the main central themes observed in members' behaviours. The process involved grouping descriptive codes and interpreting their meanings in relation to the research questions and objectives. The result was mapped in a thematic network shown in Appendix 1.

4.1 Feelings

The first theme that has emerged from the data revolves around feelings. The researcher defines feelings as the mental associations and reactions to emotions expressed by group members in the forum following their personal experience with consuming wine, but also since joining the online group. Members have a tendency to express positive feelings when their needs have been met and negatively when their needs haven't been satisfied. In analysing the data, there is a fine line in feelings expressed towards the community as a whole and also their appreciation towards wine. Feelings connected to the interactions they have, their appreciation and how they feel towards the people in the community.

We can note feelings of enthusiasm when joining the online community giving them an opportunity to become more educated on the complex subject of wine. An abundant mention of being curious and intrigued when joining Wine Folly. Wine is seen as an intricate subject, however, sparking people's curiosity and triggers their intent to go and learn more about the subject and becoming more involved as members state:

Members (1)

“What a pleasure it is for me whenever I read your excellent blog, Wine Folly is my go to for all things wine. Thanks for supporting my curiosity and deepening my enjoyment of wine 🍷”

or

Member (2)

“Thank you for taking the complex subject of "Wine" and in an orderly, easily understood format explaining so much about what once seemed an incomprehensible subject.”

The language used when talking about wine is quite different and technical compared to any other alcoholic beverages which involves the use of scientific terms and complex understanding of the subject. People use labels like fruits and unconventional descriptions to describe certain taste buds such as “peach or kiwi” or “wet stone”, that some average consumers don’t relate to. The way it is expressed makes it difficult and confusing for those who are considered beginners, especially when trying to guess if one would like a wine based on these more elaborate tasting notes. It is challenging for one to describe detailed notes of what he or she is tasting and, is even harder for the other person to comprehend exactly what is communicated. We notice a certain level of confusion that is predicament and for which users adhere to the community:

Member (3):

“I’ve been trying to get into wine for some time now... I find it hard to understand what goes into the wine and how people are describing it but good thing I am starting my baby steps with Wine Folly”

As previously mentioned by Lockshin (2003), consumers with low involvement and less knowledge do not feel confident in selecting their own wine, which impacts their purchasing decision. Gaining further insights, hence, knowledge, pushes them to become more comfortable in the decision they make and explore further other kinds of wine or brands with a feel of excitement. This highlights the importance of having educated consumers in order to further develop their palates overtime.

Member (4):

“It makes me excited about trying new things, and confident that I can have the knowledge, not just to know what I’m drinking, but also how to ask about it when I don’t”

Beginners who recently joined Wine Folly, that are only consumers, seem to enjoy the creative aspect of educating themselves on wine. Novices strongly favour fun features as opposed to having over complicated technical paragraphs. The key is to simplify the complexities presented in wine and finding a more entertaining approach like visual aids, videos., but more importantly to have a charismatic and fun presenter. Therefore, a strong feel of fun is encouraged to convey the desired message or to help them learn:

Member (5):

“I am just starting my journey into the wine world and so glad my mentor pointed me in your direction. Thanks for the wealth of knowledge and making it fun to learn!”

Or Member (6):

“You teach me so much and make it fun along the way!! Madeline, your approach is spot-on...”

Moreover, a feeling of frustration sheds light when talking about online wine ordering in the US. Due to federal laws, several challenges arise that evolve around customers ordering in between states and overseas, but also the condition in which the bottles arrive in. In fact, wine requires special delicacies in which it should be conserved, stored and shipped, which includes special thermal insulated packaging (in some cases, shipped in refrigerators). Finding the desired bottle is very problematic for consumers around the world in general, as not all wineries ship worldwide, on top of having governmental restrictions for certain countries. Additionally, consumers have expressed their frustration with paying higher prices for shipped bottles, doubling or tripling the initial price of the bottle. As one member from Canada expresses:

Member (7):

“We unfortunately cannot ever get US wines here any longer due to the exchange rate. 2013 Wind Gap Wines Grenache Old Vine Sceales Vineyard is one of my favorite US. wines. Its crazy because almost all of our top premium wines bar a few come in at under 20 dollars.”

Most of the postings include sharing recommendations on wine bottles and tips like joining particular wine clubs to obtain privileges and exclusive bottles. There is a feel of gratitude and appreciation expressed towards other members, but also when one enjoys a bottle following others' recommendations, that is however often found to be limited. For instance, even though members encourage others to order online to benefit from discounts and exclusive bottles, they also warn on the difficulties of certain locations that allows them to take advantage of these offerings. As a wine drinker who is seeking to expand his or her palate, it is challenging for them to do so if they live in certain areas and find themselves restricted to a certain range of wine bottles.

Members (8):

“Purchasing wine online is a good idea, but only if you live in a state that allows you to do this. Some states, like Arkansas for instance, will not allow shipments of alcoholic beverages to be sent into the state... if you go to an online wine retailer and enter Arkansas as the state it will not allow you to place the order..”

Furthermore, frustration is also derived from consumer’s expectations about how the wine should taste beforehand. Relying on the description on the label has found to be ineffective to them, often leading to disappointment and sometimes embarrassment in front of others. As suggested, people with low involvement do not fully comprehend the list of ingredients mentioned on a bottle, even less the types of grapes that could be adequate to their palate. Frustration is somehow linked to the perceived risk associated when purchasing wine but also after consumption. Consumers express their concerns related to these risks as a sort of burden which sometimes discourages them from buying a wine bottle or simply do not want to deal with the pressure of these risks. Academics have previously addressed these risks (Lockshin et al., 2006, Mueller et al., 2008), whether financial, “if the wine has a good Quality Price Ratio”, social “if it impresses others or is a major flop”, but also health as members (9) says:

“And Sugar! I get horrendously painful headaches with med-dry”

and the other member (10) replies *“stay away unless you want that killer headache in the morning... just bit high quality wine and you’ll be fine... it’s the cheap stuff the boards buy that are filled with added sugar.”*

Information concerning the presence of the community in other parts of the world seems to be inexistent or difficult to access which represents frustration for the concerned users. Indeed, the Wine Folly community is not present on social media platforms such as WeChat³. Due to political censorship, Chinese consumers are not able to access social media platforms such as Instagram, therefore, can only access the official website where there is not a high traffic of corresponding messages.

³ WeChat, released in 2011, is a Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app developed by Tencent. WeChat is considered the biggest social media platform in China with over 1 billion monthly active users.

Member (11):

"I am working at China in the wine industry. follow wine folly for a long time. it could be very nice if you can blog on Chinese social medias. as Wechat ! I am sure you will have huge fans in China. Unfortunately, we don't have insta 😊"

4.2 Motivations

The second theme that emerged from the data is motivations. Motivations encompass different cues that provide insights into why members join the Wine Folly community but also into why they prefer choosing wine. Motivations in terms of understanding why members consistently engage within this community, but also to understand the drivers or attributes that make wine their primary choice of consumption.

The preeminent motivation toward joining Wine Folly is gaining knowledge or engaging for the pleasure of self-improvement and seeking satisfaction for learning or understanding something. In this case, the search for and exchange of information as a main driver for members' participation in the online discussions. Seeking knowledge about the composition of the wine, deeper information about wineries and regions (or terroir) and also exploring new trends. These new trends include organic, orange wine⁴, vegan wine and even cannabis infused wine.

Many people take considerable pride in their national or regional wines, particularly in areas with strong wine-growing traditions and want to share it with others. For people having a religious background, the emphasis on finding and leaning more about Kosher wines, or Christians looking for wine for religious festivities like a communion. Moreover, people with dietary restrictions or lifestyles such as vegans are more prone to choosing wine as it provides them with more options. Initially, vegetarians and vegans did not think they had much choice with food pairing and wine, as they believed they were restricted in the offerings. Not only that, but people who were trying to recommend wine to their vegan acquaintances find themselves also limited before, as member states:

Member (12):

⁴ Orange wine is a "type of white wine made by leaving the grape skins and seeds in contact with the juice, creating a deep orange-hued finished product" (WineFolly source).

“I have been at somewhat of a loss as to how to advise my vegan friends on food and red wine pairings. Your information was very helpful!”

On an individual aspect, members express an interest in learning how to enhance their tasting buds or to learn how to describe a wine using the existent language for several reasons: either motivated by external cues such as being socially accepted, or internally like having the benefit of one’s understanding on the subject to make better choices. Therefore, the share of knowledge is the first criteria for which members join the community, or what we can interpret as intellectual satisfaction as member state:

Member (13).

“We need to be responsible consumers & understand what we eat & drink, how it is made & where it comes from. It is a human right!”

Wine Folly uses an educational approach that is visually appealing and made uncomplicated for wine non connoisseurs to get easily acquainted, which constitutes their main basis for their popularity. As mentioned, founder Madeline Puckette benefits from her background in graphic design to propose a more artistic approach to presenting her knowledge on wine in a more appealing way, using colourful and well-designed visual aids. Wine Folly aims to simplify the content about wine to make it more readable, easy to understand and fun. It is important for them to share the information as consumers have no or little knowledge about wine, and feel that they are being enlightened. In fact, they are looking for a sort of dependency and reliability of information and source in which the members count on which could enhance their wine experience. Particularly for beginners and intermediates, Wine Folly has become their point of reference when searching for information.

Member (14):

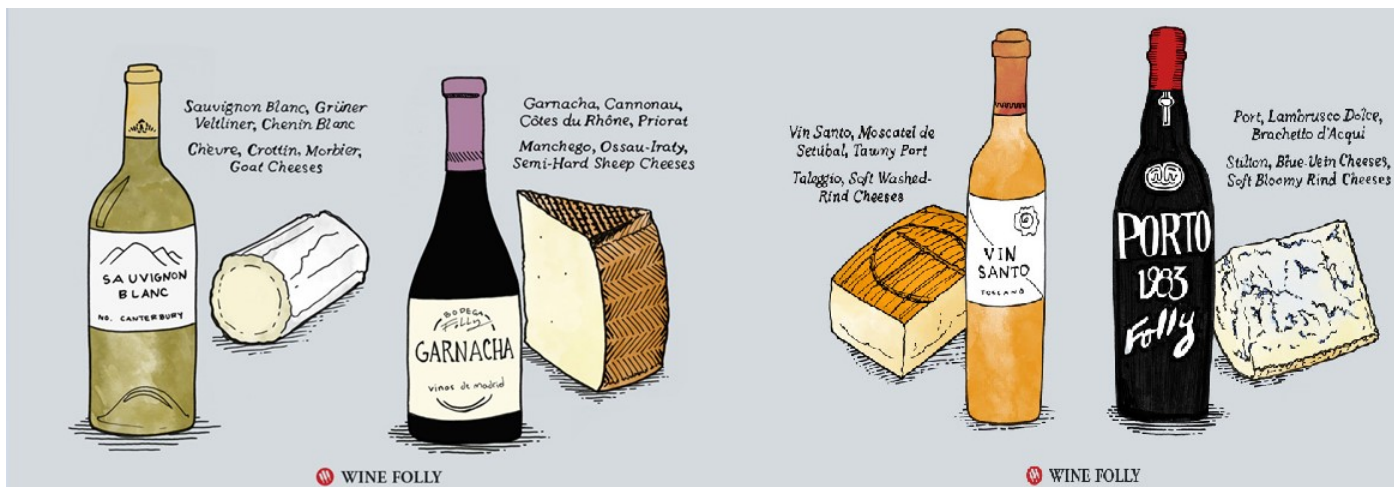
“When I have ANY wine questions, my first go to is Wine Folly! Easy to understand and apply to my particular needs.. it's one of the best wine blogs to help simplify the complexities of wine with it's publication of articles, videos, and infographics (and they are really creatively designed & illustrated infographic !!!)... a joy to read straight through, skip around and use as a reference when wine questions arise!”

Or Member (15)

”Parlaying your graphic artist talent in combination with your wine knowledge is a winner.. I’m a big fan and share your talents with my friends, as they’re worthy of your inspiration(s)”.

Comparing to wine enthusiasts, who consider themselves more advanced, do not feel that they require simplified graphs to help them further their understanding on the matter.

The following images taken from the Wine Folly site, elaborates further on the complementing visuals offered. It demonstrates the different types of cheese pairing with the different types of wine. For instance, a proposed pairing of Sauvignon Blanc with goat cheeses or a Garnacha with semi-hard sheep cheeses.



Members are constantly praising the founders’ skills and giving credits for every shared post on their individual pages. Members recognize that the quality of the designs is crucial and draws them to visit the page recurrently. A combination of reliable information, an admiration for the founders and appealing designs captivates the group members’ attention. The founders clearly play a role of influencer and shape others’ opinion. For some, being part of this community has sparked their interest in renewing their love for wine as one explains:

Member (16):

“I can’t count the number of times I’ve looked at a great Wine Folly | Learn about wine. article or infographic (Madeline really does put out some of the best visual content in the industry!!).. Wine Folly has definitely renewed my passion and interest in learning even more about wine.”

Moreover, one the reasons members seek to join Wine Folly is for social support. Members participate in the community to share their, feelings, advice, and recommendations. The

sharing of recommendations has revealed that members come back later on to post their opinions following suggested bottles. Discussing their passion for wine, members indicated that they feel part of a community where they found similarities and common interests between themselves. Other than relying on the admins, members are drawn to the sense of community and believe they can rely on other group members to deliver reliable information:

Member (17):

“I also really do learn a huge amount from my peers and betters within both the wine industry and the wine blogging community...”

As suggested by Lin (2008) and Zhao et al., (2012), virtual communities are those where members feel part of larger social group creating a great number of relationships with other members with ongoing exchanges of common interest that potentially lead to long lasting relationships. They are motivated by social support and the sense of belonging is strongly present and encourages them to become more active:

Member (18)

“I guess if you call yourself a wine enthusiast or simply someone who wants to know about wine, you will definitely feel together with the other people here, I feel like I am part of the community”.

Though we have explored the motivations of group members to joining Wine Folly, it is interesting to understand what motivates these members to choose wine over other alcoholic beverages. Motivation and frequency affect the purchase decision process of the wine consumer: how often the consumer buys a bottle of wine, where the bottle in question is consumed and also by “motivations” that delineates the reasons why a consumer chooses the wine. In fact, the environment in which they are surrounded plays also an important role as well as context or occasion. Typically, a wine bottle consumed at a restaurant is twice or more of its original price. Therefore, the willingness to pay is much higher than what an average customer typically spends. Some might associate paying a higher price to better quality or a more esteemed perception by others.

Member (19)

“When I am at a client’s dinner, I typically try to choose an expensive wine so I am certain it will taste good, what better way to impress someone.”

Members who are part of wine clubs seem to enjoy it as they give them access to a greater variety of higher quality wines, as well as access to discounts and offers but the opportunity to increase their knowledge of wine. Members mentioned wanting an online wine community to offer the chance to try out new wines and getting acquainted with award-winning wines, product launches and new innovations. They also mention liking the idea of a wine community providing them with exclusive wine tastings.

Considering that wine is an experiential product, the overall wine experience results in the active construction of meanings associated with the thoughts, behaviours and feelings that take place during consumption, which consequently has an impact on consumer perceived brand image. The idea behind this is that consumers are motivated by internal cues such as the pure enjoyment of wine but also external cues that influence the way they consume wine. For instance, the use of this community to reaffirm their social identities as group member as a mean to gratify their social needs. Members have mentioned that their drinking habits were dependent on their state of mind. A less general motive for drinking is coping with anxiety resulting in escapism of daily life. Although members do not wish to further discuss the topic publicly, the insights gained individually suggests an aspect to consider. Therefore, motivations in drinking wine are variable according to different cues previously suggested.

Furthermore, members are interested in findings a source that is credible in which they can rely on. They want to be able to trust the information provided by someone who has the background to support that, instead of relying on people who are in the business that appear to have self-serving interests that are often misleading. Once trust is established, members become more influenced by the recommendations which highlights the power of e-WOM⁵.

4.3 Perceptions

The last theme noted involves perceptions that members reveal in terms of how they understand and interpret their beliefs towards drinking wine and related wine topics but also their attitudes concerning the wine influencer in question.

⁵ E-WOM stands for electronic word-of-mouth, focuses on person-to-person contacts that occur on the internet.

According to members, wine is perceived as being the healthy alternative. A strong mention of health benefits from disease prevention to dietary functions, and even related conditions to which makes them drink wine (e.g. containing anti-oxidants). Consumers perceive wine as a healthier option and reflecting a healthier lifestyle choice. For instance, people with celiac disease or an intolerance to gluten mention preferring to drink wine than beer. Members are strong believers that wine can contribute to favourable offerings with a strong emphasis on being consumed in moderate amounts. More on the subject, certain other members do not consider that wine is as healthy as advertised. They perceive it as being oversold and is deceiving a great number of people. They believe it is often resulting in consuming more wine, since people are being misled by these assumptions. The use of sarcasm is strongly present when discussing the health benefits of wine. A few members banter about replacing sport activities with drinking wine for example. Previous research on the matter seem to be quite controversial as to whether these assumptions are true. Many scientists have presented their work, often contradicting one another, unable to reach a universal conclusion. Many members believe that consuming wine is more related to social factors as one states:

Member (20)

“the benefits to drinking are social - any theorized health benefits would be far more easily achieved by say adding an extra 10 mins of cardio here and there or such like”.

A common downside mentioned to drinking wine is its effect later on, concerning headaches and potential addiction. They consider that wine follows the same patterns as any other alcoholic beverage. However, conclusions drawn with negative perceptions about wine consumption are more often related to the excess consumption of wine.

Another insight towards drinking certain types of wines are considered seasonal and vary depending on the climate. As previously mentioned, the environment plays a role on how people consume wine. In this case, climate influences their decision on what type of wine to drink. An assumption that red wine is more appropriate for winter conditions or on a post related to rosé wines one member commented:

Member (21):

“Perfect Summertime sipper!”

Members highlight the related factors concerning social construct in terms of buying wine. Other than consuming the wine, they believe it is an appropriate item to gift in a given context,

such as bringing a bottle of wine when invited to a dinner party. Many assume that wine is a fitting accompaniment and an appropriate gift in all manner of situation, as the following member illustrates:

Member (22)

“...Other than actually buying wine to drink/enjoy, there are other more social factors, I think. For example, I would buy a bottle of nice wine/Champagne as a gift (birthday, house warming, a BBQ gathering etc). Some may buy wine to serve at a meal, because they perceive that the guests would enjoy the wine, even if they don't really do so themselves”.

Another aspect to consider is the social status associated with consuming wine. People who drink wine are perceived to have a refined taste, but also belonging to some sort of upper class compared to other alcoholic beverages:

Member (23)

“drinking beer and spirits may be likelier to be cigarette smokers and/or be in a lower socioeconomic strata than wine drinkers”

On that note, according to this community, drinking wine is often associated with a sense of being snob and pretentious, especially for those who are considered novices. The language used to describe wine is often viewed as overboard and exaggerated in terms of how they present and promote a bottle. One can easily distinguish people's involvement with wine by the terms or jargon used in their posts. This is often perceived in a negative way by those considered less knowledgeable and sometimes misguiding others:

Member (24)

“You have the sommeliers, the chiropractors, the light healers, and other assorted fiff-raff who pass on pretence to the slightly less endowed. There's is nothing more than carnival-barking with a fancy French title.”

Or Member (25)

“Some people buy wine to show they are sophisticated. They often bungle the selection or otherwise display their ignorance about wine in the process, negating their intention to impress. This makes them insecure, immature, or possibly just a jerk”.

Certain users have expressed their concern regarding those who are not being acquainted with wine as sort of being at a disadvantage. A general opinion about professionals who use this “weakness” to sell overpriced bottles or to convince others to buy. There is a strong emphasis on building trust. They believe that the market is immature and there is therefore a need to educate oneself as suggested by member (26):

“I don't believe having wine knowledge is pretentious. As a consumer, I believe product knowledge is essential to help protect against being taken advantage of by professional sales people.”

On this topic, an example of misconception is that the pricier the wine, the better, simply because it is promoted that way. It is believed to be associated with the level of occupation. Occupation, which includes several factors such as income and level of education, facilitates the spread of this misconception. The idea behind it is that the higher the income and the more esteemed occupation, the finer the wine selection becomes evident. The higher price paid for the wine enables a sort of stimuli and represents a social status for certain members. Thus, using identifications and evaluation of wine quality characteristics based on price. Members take into consideration the price factor when purchasing alcohol. As member (27) explains:

“Wouldn't price be a factor in the consumption of beer versus wine? I believe that a serving of wine is more expensive than beer, even a really good beer. This is most assuredly true in a restaurant or bar...”

Where member (28) replies *“I agree. You get more for your money with beer. I also think wine drinkers tend to savor more than beer drinkers. Wine is my primary choice, but I also enjoy beer sometimes. I'll probably throw back three beers in the time it takes me to drink one glass of wine”*.

Members consider that there is a lack of information on the internet, sometimes misguided by promoting influencers or professionals that do not reflect its true nature. Other than that, members think that the information provided is not sufficient and consequently makes them less interested and perhaps confused. There is a great number of sites dedicated to wine and is exponentially growing over the past decades, which include blogs, vlogs, YouTube channels etc. However, members do not recognize the value of each site and what differentiates them from one another. This can be found problematic, as failing to stand out does not allow them to

become influential. Users acknowledge that there is need for more effort to be invested into these sites as one points out:

Member (29):

“Problem with the online wine industry is that there is a big void when it comes to proper content to go along with the wines. Name of the wine and price is just not enough, people want to know more, and that’s where a lot of the sites fail (not all)... you depend upon a bunch of lackeys (sommeliers) to promote the glories of your product.”

Members find that it is important that a brand represents some sort of authenticity which can be defined as: “a socially negotiable concept that is relative, contextually determined, and ideologically driven” (Leigh et al., 2006, p.483). Authenticity drives the narrative behind a brand’s perception to the public, how it chooses to portray itself and how it communicates with its customers. The idea of involving consumers behind the scenes, paired with a history and story of the wineries creates an intimate space for members to get to know the brand more as member (30) illustrates:

“I love the romantic story of the family winery, multiple generations, steeped in tradition, estate bottled wine from local varietals. To me what makes the wine industry wonderful is visiting wineries, different winegrowing regions, meeting families that live the industry; tradition. What gets my attention is the personal story that goes with the wine. There are so many good wines out there not possible to drink them all. Give me a good wine, a good story, good food”.

Authenticity in a sense where they appear to be approachable and relatable. Communicating their story to show the work and effort put in to provide something worthy of their customers. Involving them and making them part of the wine family, consumers feel that they are closer to the brand like member (31) suggests:

“I love the fact that Lodi wineries are so approachable (not snooty).. makes me wanna try all their wines..”

This also applies to wine influencers, who ought to be authentic and genuine. As previously mentioned, members seek to build trust with influencers, which entails that wine influencers

need to appear sincere in order to be able to succeed. Other than providing reliable information, they need to avoid appearing pretentious and become more inviting and down to earth in order to impress the general public. Having a sense of being affable and humble is key to portraying authenticity. This is important to note, as presenting oneself this way encourages members to engage and develops further the two-way communication. Initially, academics described wine marketing as being traditionally a one-way communication, but soon grew to involve its customers in the process (Quinton, S., & Harridge-March, S., 2003; Thach, L., 2009). Therefore, platforms are becoming more dynamic where people interact heavily, which is partly encouraged by the influencers, hence, why wine businesses should immerse themselves in these discussions.

However, when looking at posts related to luxury wines and how they are talked about, there is a sort of prestige and sophistication linked to it. Prestige on the other hand, is different to authenticity. It projects the illusion of something superior. We can define prestige as “*the social expression of the labour value given up by subjects to institutions and their agents in return for the perceived security of (occupational) privilege*” (Shapiro, S., 2009). On that note, Bourdieu’s work, *Distinction* (1979), claims that class structure is reproduced through the accumulation of cultural capital, hence giving access to higher social circles and superior status occupations. This can provide us with a more contextualized framework that could explain the tastes of the different classes here. We can observe these members, who aspire to the luxury countenance, being mostly interested in posts related to champagne and old French wines. These members are characterized generally by a higher knowledge of wine, use intricate jargon and look for the best on the market as a mean to distinguish themselves. They consider popular brands as cheap wine and unworthy of their time. They have strong interest towards prominent wines and exclusive experiences (also being part of exclusive wine clubs). They believe that winery visits, for instance, are essential in getting to know the wine brand better. Prestige is important to note as can be instrumental in the decision to buy and satisfies an emotional desire. For instance, the Chinese market is becoming more abundant with these types of customers, that certain luxury wine brands can potentially court.

5. Implications

5.1 Theoretical implications

This research has shown the desire for people to share their interest, knowledge and experience of wine related products but also to learn from each other. Motivation expressed towards intellectual satisfaction, the pleasure of accomplishing something or towards stimulation as main drivers, have been at the centre of social media studies and to understand why people engage in online communities. Not only that, but researchers have been prone to understand consumer' behaviours online as they are being more engaging and base their decisions in these online groups (Kozinets, 2002). Previous studies on the matter have concluded social support and a sense of belonging as important drivers for members' participation in online communities as supported in this research (Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M., 2002; Haythornthwaite, C., 2007; Hwang, K. O., et Al., 2010). Social support can be defined as "the degree to which a person's basic social needs are gratified through interaction with others" (Thoits, 1982, p. 147). Members seek the connect with more than one member that share the same interests, tastes, etc.

We can also relate certain motivations to the Uses and Gratifications theory that explores how individuals deliberately seek out media to fulfil certain needs or goals. This could explain how people use the media for their own need and get a sense of satisfaction or gratification when their needs are fulfilled such as entertainment, relaxation, or socializing (Ruggiero, T. E., 2000).

Another theory that emerges from the data, includes prestige, which can be justified by Bourdieu's theory of taste (1979), that supports the idea of group affiliates, who seek prestige place intrinsic value on aesthetic experience. He projects the idea of status competition and social emulation which can be identified in the research in terms of understanding tastes of the different groups which affects the consumer choices at the market.

Moreover, in Beverland's paper (2005) concerning how luxury wine brands should market themselves, the author stresses the need to maintain authenticity by having a good narrative, using history and culture as referents and trying to appear above commercial considerations.

On a final note of this section, this study was conducted using Netnography as a primary research method, which uncovered many insights regarding a particular community. The use of this methodology has articulated its flexibility and being an effective tool in bringing to light important meanings and insights.

5.2 Managerial implications

The insights can be found useful in articulating a range of branding strategies with wider appeal in terms of communication, but also in terms of positioning oneself to the relevant target groups. The challenge faced with wine drinkers is obtaining relevant and easy to understand information that will inhibit them to adhere into this consumption. The importance of information fora as a source for consumers can direct wine marketers in suggesting appropriate tactics to effectively communicate with them. In this sense, businesses can utilize their social media pages to educate consumers and help cultivate brand awareness. Compared to winery-sponsored social media pages, wine bloggers, the reviewers and other, are motivated by the need to share and learn rather than promote that we can consider it as pure e-WOM. So, it seems that the forum can play an important role in influencing others and is up to wine marketers to incorporate them into their social media strategies. Managers could identify the key players who influence other members' behaviour concerning purchasing decision and building brand loyalty.

New emerging brands who wish to position themselves as 'luxury' could attempt to reflect the lifestyle and aesthetics of the upper class and consistently incorporate across their brand communications. As packaging is a major communication tool, it is important to create substantial additional value and being able to communicate that effectively across channels. Marketers can select certain salient identifiers that signals that it belongs to a superior class.

Another strategy that would allow to increase prestige includes co-branding with someone who has prestige. An example of world established brand, Veuve Clicquot champagne who, in 2008, had partnered with Riva⁶ to present their limited 86'Domino yacht. (See Appendix 3). In this collaboration they invited Riva owners, selected journalists and even celebrities to attend the yacht's presentation in an extravaganza of parties, dinners, and sailing experiences.

There are prestige-building techniques can include, for instance, the use of the cultural code of the upper class as well as elaborate communication and packaging. It is an important consideration as consumers develop prestige meanings for brands based upon interactions with people and also hedonic values.

As mentioned in the findings, people like the idea of feeling connected to the brand by storytelling and knowing more about the brand's history and narrative which leads to establishing a certain authenticity to the brands. Wineries therefore can use their social media

⁶ Riva is an Italian motor boat manufacturer, considered high quality and a symbol of upscale luxury and "extravagant zest " for life.

page to help communicate that story to its customers by effectively communicating the important salient symbols of their wineries such as the vineyards, production stream, etc. Marketers can try and capture the fluency experience which would likely enhance product evaluation like emphasizing on tastings experiences and visits.

However, marketers need to keep in mind how they want to position themselves in order to pick the appropriate channels. For instance, if you want to appear as a premium or luxury brand, the use of Instagram wine influencers would be an alternative to consider. Instagram in fact, can be considered a social platform that instigates the desire for people to seek others' approval and present themselves in an ideal visual perspective. The desired narrative would be projected on living like someone belonging to the upper-class and on rare experiences that the average customer would strive for. Having an emphasis on the luxury aesthetics and something unique that is not accessible to all.

On the other hand, if you are a popular brand, engaging in a two-way communication form on social media, platforms like Facebook is ideal to involve your customer. A good example would be the Gallo Family wine brand (which is considered one of the most popular brands) on Facebook, who post weekly, engaging heavily with their customers. The brand proposes grand prizes, offering their customers the chance to win Gallo Family wines, winery visits and so on. Wineries could also highlight favourable internet forum reviews and link them to their postings or incorporating into a section of their website under sections like "what people say about us".

For the case of the Chinese market, there is a big potential to penetrate the market as it has been growing over the past year showing a great interest towards wine consumption. According to China Wine Market, there are approximately 48 million "wine lovers" in mid-2017. This is mainly due to the influence of western culture in China's major cities but also due to its developing economy and the rise of upper middle-class citizens. Wine businesses can consider shifting their efforts towards targeting this market and invest in online marketing strategies in order to raise brand awareness and building brand loyalty.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of the research is to understand why people join these communities, their motivations and attitudes, but also to learn more about them and explore the relationships between members and the entity that created these bonds. The data resulted in rich content, documenting real consumer exchanges, in real time rather than hypothetical scenarios. The use of netnography in consumer research should therefore be encouraged within the context of online buyer behaviour and online communities. Gaining insights from this community can help guide managers how to connect with their targeted audience. In social networks, members may have only one shared goal (an interest in wine), yet differ in all other respects, in terms of background and psycho demographic, but the source credibility is still strong and the formation of bonds and influence is achieved. There is an ongoing process with emotions that is manifested by means of enjoyment, excitement and fun. Feelings of frustration and confusion are also expressed in this community.

As suggested, the world of wine is considered wide and complex comprising a vast array of brands that confuses wine drinkers in terms of purchasing wine but also to obtain information. Members therefore join communities to seek information and broaden their knowledge on wine in order to make better informed decisions. They rely on other's recommendations and engage in the exchange of experiences, enabling some sort of social support in which they depend on. It is important to note that high involved consumers are more likely to spend time searching for the information compared to low involved drinkers who avoid information seeking activities. They are also motivated by external factors such as being socially accepted or benefiting from having discounts and rewards. Members turn to external cues to make their purchasing decision, like relying on brand, price, awards, recommendation. There are certain perceptions noted when talking about wine, such it being a healthy option giving great benefits to the individual. Also, wine represents a symbol of social status to some, while appearing "snob" or "pretentious" to others. An element of sophistication but also authenticity is also associated. A note on factors like mood or environment (weather) also affect wine drinking habits.

Wine Folly can be considered as the gate keeper of information of this community, that would potentially help wine businesses raise brand awareness and strengthen their presence on social media. Online wine bloggers or critics have the power to shape and impact public opinions of brands, but also to challenge these brands. Opinions formed in these discussions influence others' choices in purchasing wine, hence, establishes the importance of e-WOM.

7. Limitations and further directions

The research has yielded interesting findings about the wine community using a netnographic approach, however, certain limitations are to be considered.

The methodology used to conduct this research presents its own limitations as it studies a particular online community but also depends on the interpretive skills of the researcher where findings can be seen as subjective. Kozinets (2002) suggests using different methods of approaching of the desired subject so that findings can be more generalizable.

The research was only conducted on one group, Wine Folly, and did not study wineries and wine companies on social media. Although Wine Folly is considered one of the biggest online wine communities, studying other communities can add on valuable insights not found in this particular group. Findings of this study may vary from studies that use other online communities, for instance blogs, vlogs, forums of other media outlets or different social networks (Twitter, Wechat). One must consider exploring other forums dedicated to wine in future research to uncover new information or to be able to generalize within the whole industry. Also, scaling the research in terms of data collection and using further techniques can help uncover further insights, as well to confirm current findings.

Due to the nature and framework of this study, time and data collection process are quite restricted. The small sample and time restraint limit the depth of the result and are not statistically generalizable. Therefore, a quantitative approach is encouraged in the future to verify the mentioned findings. The use of quantitative software for instance can quantify and validate the data and hopefully could generalize results.

Furthermore, as the author decided to conduct a qualitative analysis in the form of a netnography for the sake of exploring deeply integrated cultural information in the online community, the interpretation of such data is subjective to a certain degree. Consequently, the analysis' quality is dependent on the researcher's interpretive skills.

The aim for a longitudinal study which would allow a longer period for examining social media pages used by wineries would give researchers a clearer idea on the level of engagement of users and uncover new data not being presented before.

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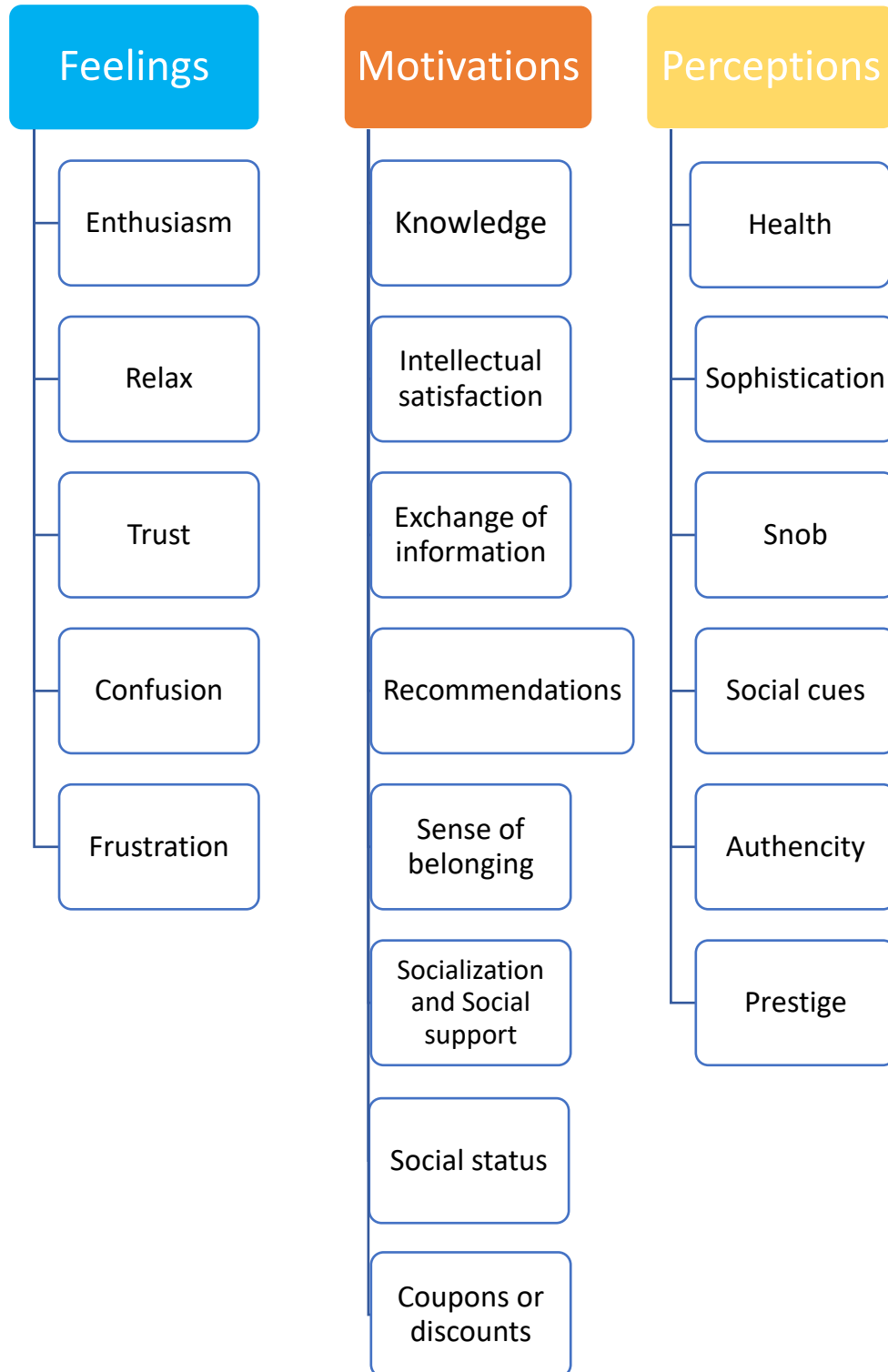
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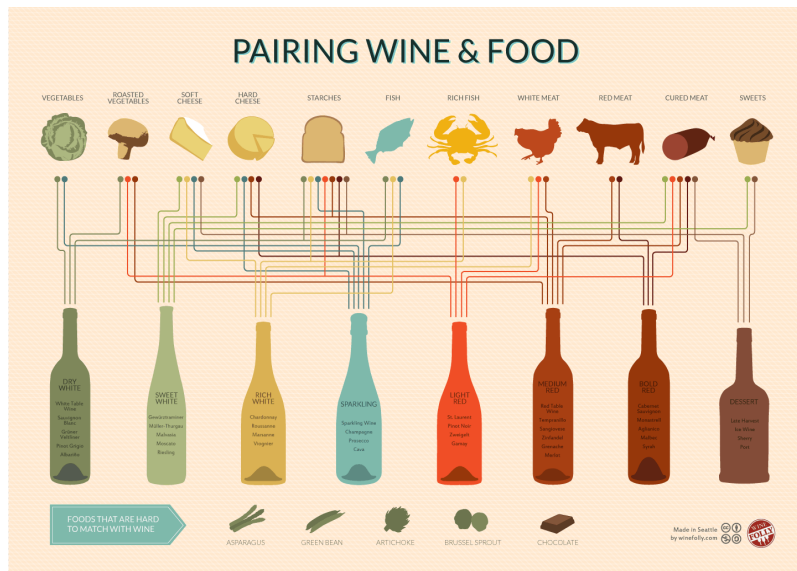
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9. Appendices

Appendix 1. Thematic Network:



Appendix 2. Examples of Tables, schemes and charts created by Wine Folly:



Source: www.winefolly.com

Appendix 3. Veuve Cliquot and Riva collaboration campaign, 2008:



Source: <https://www.yatzer.com> > riva-veuve-clicquot