

Chapter 19

Promoting Wine on the Internet: An Exploratory Study of the Portuguese Wine Blog Community

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the content of Portuguese wine blogs and addresses two main questions: (i) which content and design elements of Portuguese wine blogs have more impact on the promotion of wine, and (ii) how can the content and design quality of wine blogs be assessed and improved. To answer these questions, a number of features of wine blogs are examined, and an initial attempt is made to describe the profile, uses and practices of Portuguese wine bloggers. Strong correlations were found between performance measures (posts, comments and traffic). In addition, it was found that one of the main marketing features that bloggers can offer was in rating wines. On the other hand, presentation features were found to account for very little regarding the performance of the blog. Finally, accessibility features, such as cross-references and RSS/Feeds that tend to increase blog traffic, are only used by a minority of Portuguese bloggers.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most recent developments in the Internet age is the so-called social web. The social web is where people with common interests can gather to share thoughts, comments and opinions. It includes: 1) social networks such as MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn; 2) branded web destinations like Amazon and eBay; 3) enterprise sites

such as IBM, Cisco, and Oracle (Weber, 2009). The social web is an unpaid medium created by individuals or enterprises, with a strong capacity to shape public opinion. Some strategies include: 1) search engines such as Google and Yahoo; 2) blogs hosted on Blogger and other sites and the micro-blog site Twitter; 3) topic-specific e-communities.; and iv) content-sharing networks such as YouTube (more than 10 billion videos a

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month), and Flickr (more than 40 million visitors monthly to see photos and videos) (Weber, 2009).

Blogs are websites that allow people to instantly publish content about a certain subject. Bloggers provide commentary or news on a particular topic, such as wine. A typical blog combines text, images and links to other blogs, webpages, and other media related to its theme. Blogs are dynamic, easily updated and personal, as readers have the ability to leave comments or questions in an interactive way (Wright, 2006).

Today, there are millions of blogs on the Internet; hundreds if not thousands are created every day. A study by Technorati (2008) reported that 900,000 blogs are posted every day and 133 million blog records have been indexed in the database since 2002. A majority of the bloggers in Europe and Asia are males (73%) while in the United States (US) the percentage is lower (57%). The average monthly rate of unique visitors is higher in Asia (26,000), than in Europe (24,000) and the US (18,000). According to Universal McCann (2008), 346 million people read blogs (60.3% in the US) and 184 million started writing blogs (24.6% in US). Of these, 26.6% write on the topic "opinions on products and brands." The rate of interest is similar when reading a blog (26%).

Blogs and their business impacts have been receiving strong attention recently from international researchers (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010; Trusov *et al.*, 2009; Woerndl *et al.*, 2008; Thompson & Sinha, 2008). Blogs possess functional characteristics that can promote and support a variety of business uses. Blogs can be used as a public relations tool, as one of their goals is to build relationships (Menzie & Keyton, 2007) and influence public opinion—specifically with regard to buying decisions (Berger, 1987). Some of these techniques include: online product recommendations (Senecal & Nantel, 2004); product placement (visual, audio or audio-visual) used as a tool to report positive experiences and thoughts about a product or a brand (Karrh *et al.*, 2003); electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), now viewed as co-produced

in consumer groups, communities, or networks (Xia & Bechwati, 2008; Xiaofen & Yiling, 2009; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010); and consumer communities built around shared themes (products or brands) to expand market exposure and enhance customer relationships (Ives & Watlington, 2005; Jang *et al.*, 2008; Vecchio *et al.*, 2009).

Wine bloggers can be seen as a specific virtual community that explicitly focuses upon wine-related interests. They can be defined as affiliative groups whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of wine (Kozinets, 1999; Thach, 2010). These blogs can be used independently by people to say provocative things about wine (ratings, restaurants, food, etc.) or can create online communities of people interested in sharing thoughts, activities and reactions about wine. Some of the most popular blogs are commercialized; they utilize their reach to promote products and business. Alder Yarrow at *vinography.com* compiled 656 blogs in English, with an additional 163 wine blogs in other languages, including Italian (41), French (37), German (35), Spanish (22), and Portuguese (11).

To the best of our knowledge, little empirical effort has been made to understand wine blogging practices and to assess and improve content and design elements of blogs. This study focuses on the content of Portuguese wine blogs and addresses two main questions: (1) which content and design elements of the Portuguese wine blog community are used most often in the promotion of wine; (2) how we can assess and improve the content and design quality of wine blogs. To answer these questions, we examine the content and design elements of Portuguese wine blogs and investigate the uses of their features for the promotion of wine.

This research can be useful to managers of wine firms for several reasons: (1) wine blogs can be a rich source of information to better understand consumers and opinion leaders; (2) wine blogs provide a unique marketing tool to promote wine through the Internet; (3) WOM is an increasingly

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