

Winery Owners' Perceptions of Social Media in Promoting Wine Tourism: Case Study of Langhe, Italy

Authors : Magali Canovi, Francesca Pucciarelli

Abstract : Over the past decade Langhe has developed as a wine tourism destination and has become increasingly popular on an international basis. Wine tourism has been recognized as an important business driver for wineries in Langhe and wine owners have taken advantage of this opportunity through developing a variety of tourism-related activities at their wineries, notably winery visits, wine tastings, cellar-door sales, B&Bs and/or restaurants. In order to promote these tourism-related activities and attract an increasing number of wine tourists, wineries have started to engage in social media. While tourism scholars are now well aware of the benefits social media provides to both travellers and service providers, the existing literature on social media from supplier's perspective remains limited. Accordingly, this paper aims to fill this gap through providing new insights into how service providers, that is winery owners, exploit social media to promote tourism online. The paper explores the importance and the role of social media as part of wineries' marketing strategies to promote wine tourism online. The focus lies on understanding, which motives drive winery owners to activate and implement social media activities in promoting wine tourism. A case study approach is adopted, using the North Italian wine region of Langhe in Piedmont. Empirical evidence is provided by a sample of 28 winery owners. An interpretivist approach to research is adopted in order to extend current understandings of social media within the context of wine tourism. In line with the interpretivist perspective, this paper uses discourse analysis (DA) as a methodological approach for analyzing and interpreting winery owners' accounts. Three key findings emerge from this research. First, there is a general understanding among winery owners what social media represents an opportunity in promoting wine tourism - if not even a must have. Second, the majority of interviewed winery owners are currently applying to some extent social media to promote wine tourism online as well as to interact and engage with tourists directly. Lastly, a varying degree of usage of social media amongst wineries is identified, with some wineries not recognizing social media as a crucial tool in marketing communication strategies. On the other extent, some commonalities in strategies and platforms chosen can be detected by these wineries that actively participate in social media. In conclusion, the main contribution of this paper is that it extends current understandings of social media in the wine tourism context by offering valuable insights into how service providers perceive and engage in social media.

Keywords : langhe, promotion, social media, wine tourism

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