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MOTIVATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS  
OF INTERNATIONAL WINE BLOGGERS

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## Motivations and Characteristics of International Wine Bloggers

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**Abstract:** The worldwide emergence of blogs (or weblogs) has presented marketers with a new communication channel. In the wine industry little is understood about wine blogging practices and motivations. This exploratory study examines the profile, motivations and several technical and marketing features of international wine bloggers. In general, the findings suggest that international wine bloggers are a niche community, relatively young and dynamic in the world of blogs. They tended to blog for self-promotion rather than diversion, using Wordpress platform, Google analytics counter and Creative Commons licence. Furthermore, this study indicates the minor role of advertisement and the practice of rating wines as a strategy to increase the profitability of the blog.

**Keywords:** Wine blogs; Wine bloggers; Wine marketing; Wine business.

## **Introduction**

The number of Internet users has doubled over the past five years and there are now more than two billion Internet users worldwide. By the end of 2010, around 30% of the world's population was online (against 12% in 2003, and 6% in 2000). The proportion of households with access to the Internet is growing steadily, both in the developing countries (16% at the end of 2010), and developed countries (66%). Penetration rates in Europe are well above the 50% (and often more than 80%). By the end of 2010 more than two in three people were online and over 80% of all Internet subscribers had a broadband connection. Broadband is important as many of the most effective applications and services are only available through a high-speed Internet connection (ITU, 2011).

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: i) social networks such as MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn; ii) branded web destinations like Amazon, and eBay; iii) 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: i) search engines such as Google and Yahoo; ii) blogs hosted on Blogger and other blog sites and micro-blog site Twitter; iii) topic-specific e-communities involving healthcare, sports, etc.; and iv) content-sharing networks, such as You Tube (more than 10 billion videos a month), and Flickr (more than 40 million visitors monthly to see photos and videos) [Weber, 2009].

Blogs are websites that allow persons 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 more 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: hundred 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 unique visitor 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 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 and 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 and Keyton, 2007) and influence public opinion - specifically with regard to buying decisions (Berger, 1987). Some of these techniques include: online product recommendations (Senecal and 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 and Bechwati, 2008; Xiaofen and Yiling, 2009; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010); and consumer communities built around shared themes (products or brands) to expand market exposure and enhance customer relationship (Ives and 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). These blogs can be used independently by people to say some provocative things about wine (ratings, restaurants, food, etc.) or can create online communities of people interested in share 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](http://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 identify wine blogging practices and to understand their rationales and motivations. This study focuses on international wine bloggers and addresses three main questions: who are they?, what are they

doing?, why are they blogging?. To answer these questions we examine the practices of international wine bloggers and investigate their profile, uses and motivations.

This research can be useful to managers of wine firms for several reasons: (i) wine blogs can be a rich source of information to better understand consumers and opinion leaders; (ii) wine blogs provide a unique marketing tool to promote wine through Internet; (iii) eWOM is an increasingly important technique to influence the conduct of consumer-to-consumer communications; (iv) strategic implications of the existence of different types of both virtual communities and community participation must be consider. The interest of the research could be extended to the wine blog community as some of the implications could help them improve their blogs. Future research could expand upon the study to examine other special interest communities.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 briefly examines empirical evidence on the uses of blogs for marketing purposes. Section 2, discusses theoretical contributions in order to understand the motivations of wine bloggers. Next section refers to the research methodology. Section 4 is dedicated to the analysis of the profile, uses and motivations of international bloggers. Finally, conclusions are given by discussing our findings and suggesting some marketing implications for bloggers and managers of wine firms.

## **1. Blogs as a marketing tool**

The use of blogs for promoting products and brands has been studied since the emergence of the social web. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) used book reviews posted by customers at two Internet retail sites (Amazon and Barnes and Nobles) to research how customer WOM affects consumer purchasing behaviour. The results suggest that an improvement in a book's reviews leads to an increase in relative sales at that site and the impact of 1-star reviews is greater than the impact of 5-star reviews. Xia and Bechwati (2008), based on two experiments, show that the level of cognitive personalization developed while reading an online review influences consumers' purchase intentions. In addition, the level of cognitive personalization is a function of the reader's affect intensity, the nature of the product reviewed (experience vs. search) and the content of the review (experiential vs. factual). Xiaofen and Yiling (2009) explore the consumer

attitude and intention towards Internet apparel purchasing, concluding that online WOM and opinion leader comments influence positively consumer's willingness to buy clothes.

Using data from online social networking site, Trusov *et al.* (2009) found that WOM referrals have a very strong impact on new customer acquisition and have a larger and longer-lasting effect than traditional marketing activity. Kozinets *et al.* (2010) studied a marketing campaign in which mobile phones were seeded with prominent bloggers. The findings indicate that bloggers responded with four types of WOM communication strategies. Evaluation strategies focus on the good and service promoted rather than the market campaign. Embracing strategies offer a bold, self-interested justification for participation in the WOM campaign alongside their open adoption of their dual role as a consumer and marketer. Endorsement strategies disclose the marketing campaign and discuss its potential drawbacks but appeal for communal assistance, support, and understanding. Explanation strategies openly disclose and analyze the marketing campaign, acknowledging its potential conflict while asserting the importance and interests of the community.

Senecal and Nantel (2004) investigate consumers' usage of online recommendation sources and their influence on online product choices. They conclude that subjects who consulted product recommendations selected recommended products twice as often as subjects who did not consult recommendations. Further, the source labelled "recommender system", typical of the personalization possibilities offered by online retailing, was more influential than more traditional recommendation sources such as "human experts" and "other consumers". The type of product also had a significant influence on the propensity to follow product recommendations (Senecal and Nantel, 2004).

Blogs (corporate or consumer) had also been used in the context of brand communities: as an effective tool to manage the relationships with customers, to enhance brand loyalty or adopt a new product. Vecchio, *et al.* (2009) examined the social dynamics and dimensions observed inside the Dell bloggers community to conclude that is a hybrid community, larger than it could seem, in which the initiative of the firm through the corporate blog is mixed in a not well-defined space with several other communities founded spontaneously by the users. The authors add that this customer virtual community can provide a large amount of knowledge and relational insights that firms can acquire and use by interacting with the market. Jang *et al.* (2008) looked into the extent to which brand communities contribute to the creation of brand commitment, and whether

these breed more loyal customers. The results show that in the case of consumer-initiated communities the information available, quality of the systems, interaction between the members and the rewarding of the members all play a role in achieving commitment. In the case of company-initiated communities only the last two factors are important. Thompson and Sinha (2008) explore the relationship between brand community membership and new product adoption to conclude that higher levels of participation and longer-term membership in a brand community increase the likelihood that a customer will adopt a new product from that brand. Furthermore, higher participation and longer membership duration reduce the likelihood of adopting a new product from a competing brand.

## **2. Bloggers' motivations**

A commonly used framework to understand motivations in computer-mediated communications is the uses and gratifications theory (Blumler and Katz, 1974; Ruggiero, 2000). The theory suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use. The authors add that a media user seeks out a media source that best fulfils the need of the user (Blumler and Katz, 1974). After an extensive literature review of uses and gratifications theory (past and present), Ruggiero (2000) asserts that the emergence of computer-mediated communications has revised the significance of uses and gratifications. He proposes that contemporary and future models must include concepts such as interactivity, demassification, hypertextuality, and asynchronicity. Luo (2002) applied the uses and gratification theory to explore the influences of informativeness, entertainment, and irritation on various online consumer behaviors such as attitude toward the Web, Web usage, and Web satisfaction. The results of a structural equation model reveal that Internet users who perceive the Web as entertaining and informative generally like the Web and show a positive attitude toward the Web.

In the context of blogs, there have been some attempts to understand blogging motivations. Nardi *et al.* (2004) based on ethnographic interviews with bloggers and textual analysis of blog posts, identified five motivations for blogging: documenting the blogger's life, expressing commentary and opinions towards interested issues, releasing emotions, organizing minds through writing, and building community. Using a questionnaire Li (2007) found, after a

factor analysis, seven motivations: self-documentation, improving writing, self-expression, medium appeal, information, passing time and socialization. Improving writing was the most important reason, followed by information, medium appeal, self-expression, self-documentation, and socialization. Blogging as a way of passing time was slightly disapproved by respondents. Also, Jones and Alony (2008) identified seven motivations to blog. Similar to Li (2007) they found need for self-expression and need for documentation. Slightly different from socialization was need for social contact (within existing and new relationships) and academic needs for knowledge and interests (self-documentation). New motivations to blog were need for recognition, need for introspection, and need for artistic activity.

From a social psychology point of view Trevino (2005) investigates why college students start to blog, why they stay and why they left. She distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, concluding that some individuals begun a home page to meet new contacts (intrinsic) and others (in large number) do so in order to maintain relationships with family and friends (extrinsic). Power over their blog and the self they choose to reveal or conceal to their audience and gain a “pull” medium when they can post content without directly targeting or imposing upon their audiences to read it are the personal or emotional reasons for keeping a blog. The author not found any clear reason to explain abandonment of the blog. A similar approach was taken by Brady (2006) to investigate the motivations for reading and posting to blogs. Through interviews and an online questionnaire the author concludes that blogging supports a variety of motivations occurring at different levels and changing throughout blogger’s lifecycle. He adds that still exist a link between reading and writing blogs and the main motivation to continue to blog is sharing of information (experiences, content and knowledge).

A content analysis of a random blog sample made by Papacharissi (2004) revealed that, an average blog is a self-reflective account that serves the purpose of personal expression and provides the perceived gratification of self-fulfillment. Trammel et al. (2006) investigate the motivation of 358 Polish bloggers to test six *a priori* motivations: self-expression, entertainment, social interaction, passing time, information and professional advancement. The results show that social utility (combination of self-expression and social interaction) was the primary motivation, although self-expression as an internal-level motivation was found to outweigh the external-level social interaction motivation. The diversion motivation formed by uniting entertainment and

passing time was presented in two thirds of the sample. Information and professional advancement was found residual motivations (10.5% together).

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1 Elements of a blog***

A wine blog can be defined as using the Internet to engage with wine consumers in a time and manner of their choosing (Olsen and Hermsmeyer, 2008). Anyone with access to the Internet can set up a free blog by using software such as [blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com) or [blogs.sapo.pt](http://blogs.sapo.pt). The templates available made it possible to customize the blog page. This page is divided in six main parts: i) the body, which is the whole of the page within the browser frame; ii) the outer wrapper that contains all the sections within the blog; iii) the header wrapper, which is the top section and contains the header, inside of which is the title and the description of the blog; iv) the main column with the posts section; v) the sidebars at the side of the posts column; and vi) the footer that lies at the foot of the page.

Content is considered to be most important element of the blog (Kargar *et al.*, 2008) and is seen to be directly related to blog success (Safran and Kappe, 2008). Content includes: i) blog posts encompassing a subject title and a body message (it can be short or long in length), a variety of media objects (text, pictures, graphics, multimedia and file formats) and a timestamp to denote time and date; ii) comments that readers write to respond to a blog post; iii) archives of past blog posts that are accessible and searchable way; and iv) templates allowing pages to be built according to author personalization interest (variety of graphical layout, typography and colour schemes). To encourage repeat visits and comments, visitors need to be provided with fresh content (updated blog posts), links, searchable archive, RSS feeds, and other features.

#### ***3.2 Sample and data collection***

The analysis of international wine bloggers is based on a web-based screening questionnaire managed by [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). The survey was taken by Ryan Opaz (from Catavino blog), during 2008, and the data were accessed in November 6<sup>th</sup>, through [winebrandsblog.com](http://winebrandsblog.com) (2008). Questions regarding demographics (country of residence, gender, age, average income in US dollars, education level), blogging activity and traffic (date of start, time of posting), blog features (web statistics, blogging platform(s), licence, language), marketing

features (acceptance of samples, advertisement, rating scales) and reasons for blog, were included in the questionnaire. A total of 92 responses were available for further investigation, although some respondents skipped a few questions. The sample is mainly from the United States (two thirds), while Italy and Spain (5 and 4 answers, respectively) are the most represented European countries. The rest of the sample includes more 12 countries, some of them producers of wine (France, Australia and Chile). International wine bloggers were mostly males (70.7%) and between 31 and 50 years old (69.6%). The majority of wine bloggers belong to high income groups: 34.1% have an annual income between 100.001 and 250.000 US dollars and 56.8% between 50.000 and 250.000. However, less affluent bloggers exist (13% have less than 20.000 US dollars). The bloggers who responded to this questionnaire are well educated having 40.3% a master degree or a PhD and 34.8% a bachelor. Most of the respondents belong to the wine industry: more than 50% are agents in the market (producer, retailer, distributor), while others write about wine (31.4%).

Some transformations have been made in the questions regarding: age of blogs (from quantitative to nominal); rating wine (reducing the items of the scale); language (including less mentioned languages in “others” category); and web statistics and blogging platform (aggregating options).

#### **4. International wine bloggers: results**

There are three typical characteristics that identify community: i) a feeling of connection among members; ii) the presence of shared rituals and traditions; and iii) the idea of a moral responsibility toward the community as a whole and toward other members (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). At least two of the former characteristics are present in the international wine blog community. A sense of connection is growing between bloggers with the organization of an annual event in Europe and United States (European/North American Wine Bloggers Conference). This event provides an open forum to discuss issues regarding the blogging activity (writing, standards, etc.) and wine-related themes (tasting and rating wines, etc.). Cross-referencing fellow bloggers’ sites on one’s blog is another example of connection. And of course, there are the rituals associated with wine-tasting and drinking.

The international virtual wine community has been consolidating his position in the blogosphere: 46.3% of bloggers have blogged for more than three years and only 24.3% started during the last two/three years (Table 1).

**Table 1 – Profile of International bloggers**

<b>Profile</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><i>Age of blogs</i></b>		
More than 3 years	23	46.3
Between 2 and 3 years	19	24.3
Less than 2 years	36	29.4
Total	78	100
<b><i>Posting</i></b>		
1 – 4 times per month	26	28.3
5 – 7 times per month	61	66.3
More 7 times per month	5	5.4
Total	92	100

Content creation and management is the most important part of the blog activity. Wine posts usually incorporate text (a review of a wine, in most cases), links (to original sources of information), image (photos of the label or bottle) and video (short movies about an event or a visit to a winery). The posts are grouped in a searchable archive. The frequency of posting gives an idea of blog's dynamism: a low frequency rate denotes loss of interest; the opposite is regarded as dynamic.

The dynamism of a blog is critical if it is to attract attention of actual and potential new visitors, be relevant, and maintain up-to-date information about new wines, events and news. In the international blog world, the majority of bloggers are an active community as 71.7% of them posts more than 5 times per month. Consequently, a segmentation analysis based on blog traffic has to be made to focus marketing effort of managers of wine firms. Top bloggers (key influencers), need to be closely followed in order to create and maintain a good relationship. Some sort of public relations actions that could be taken includes: subscribe the blog; made pertinent comments on a daily or weekly basis; send press releases; ship wines to bloggers for review, invitation to participate in small wine events organized by the firm. Emergent bloggers (below the top), could be followed with less attention (monthly basis), but with slightly different marketing effort (for example, invitation to participate in large events, instead of small). New bloggers (new comers), deserve a careful examination (reading the posts and comments) to assess

reputation and blog traffic, before further engagement with the blogger. Marginally marketing effort is needed in the case of occasional bloggers as they have poor traffic, the activity of posting is episodic, and the influence is almost none.

One structural dimension of blogging practices is the blogging software and its underlying architecture (Table 2). Two general types of software exist: blog services and blog script packages: services such as blogger.com offer blog hosting on their servers; blog script packages such as wordpress can be installed, used, and fully controlled on the user's own web server (Schmidt, 2007).

**Table 2 – Technical features of International bloggers**

<b>Technical features</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><i>Blogging platform</i></b>		
Blogspot	31	33.7
Wordpress.org/com	47	51.1
Other	14	15.2
Total	92	100
<b><i>Web statistics (*)</i></b>		
Sitemeter	8	7.0
Google analytics	43	38.1
Other	32	28.3
None	30	26.6
Total	113	100
<b><i>Language (**)</i></b>		
Portuguese	6	5.9
English	83	82.2
Other	12	11.9
Total	101	100
<b><i>License of Content</i></b>		
Creative Commons	24	26.1
All Rights Reserved	14	15.2
No license	54	58.7
Total	92	100

(\*) Some weblogs include more than one web statistics. (\*\*) include translation.

International wine bloggers prefer the wordpress platform (51.1%) which requires a certain degree of technical expertise for installation and maintenance, but gives greater control over appearance and data. Others concentrate their preferences on the Blogspot platform (33.7%)

which is easy to use and usually allow people to set up a basic blog, but in most cases the user's control over the amount of storage and the design of the blog is limited.

The use of web statistics is a common means of tracking visitors profile and measure the success of the blog. The analysis of visitors (referrers, recent hits, countries coverage) and traffic statistics such as number of page views, unique visitors, first time visitors and returning visitors are metrics available in software tools. International wine bloggers use Google analytics (38.1%) and a large percentage of bloggers have no counter which seems to be a bad option as the profile of the visitors are not known and measures of blog traffic does not exist. This could be a severe constraint to the future development of the blog.

Blog sites, like other web pages, can fall victim of imitation. This means that if a web site is highly usable and provides very useful information presented in a logical arrangement, this may induce copy (Blair and Level, 2008). Licensing the online content of the blog assures that when visitors copy and distribute information they have to give credit to the publisher. Authorship is the focal point of this feature as citations can raise the number of new visitors, improve blog traffic and increase personal awareness in the virtual community. There is a large number of wine bloggers without copyright protection (58.7%). Creative Commons license is cited more frequently as a tool to letting others know exactly what they can and can't do with the content of the blog. Most of the international wine bloggers publish their posts in English (82.2%), which seems to be the universal language of the blogosphere (other blogs offer translation to English).

Some important technical features of the blogs are useful for marketing purposes. In this study, the selected features are wine reviews, samples' acceptance and advertising adoption. In the wine business tasting and rating wines requires a professional qualification, yet they comprise one of the most important marketing features that bloggers can offer to consumers and wine firms. In virtual communities as the wine blogs, a positive review or recommendation can be disseminated rapidly through eWOM with impact on the sales. Therefore, wine reviews with rating are a very powerful tool to marketing a wine via Internet in an effective and free way. Thach (2010) conducting a content analysis of 222 English language wine blogs found that there are 9 major categories of wine blogs, with the most common being reviews and ratings of wines by consumer bloggers. However, Table 3 shows that, contrary to the expected, only a small

number of international wine bloggers (33.7%) used a quantitative scale to taste and rate wines. The scales used vary between 1-5 and 1-100 points.

The acceptance of samples of wine reduces a blogger's independence. As a large percentage of international wine bloggers accept samples (68.5%), the reference in the evaluation note that the sample has been sent by the producer can attenuate the problem of credibility perceived by the consumer. The acceptance of samples could be beneficial for producers of wines as a positive rating on various blogs could generate friendly eWOM. This is very important for less known wines/brands, for online shops that could increase the sales of the rated wine/brand and for bloggers who could use this marketing tool to increase blog traffic.

**Table 3 – Marketing features of International bloggers**

<b>Marketing features</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><i>System of rating wines</i></b>		
100 points/star/asterix	8	8.7
5/10/20, thumbs up/down	23	25.0
Don't rate wines	61	66.3
Total	92	100
<b><i>Acceptance of wine samples</i></b>		
Yes	63	68.5
No	29	31.5
Total	92	100
<b><i>Acceptance of advertising</i></b>		
Yes	39	42.4
No	53	57.6
Total	92	100

The mechanical characteristics of the blog allow for the inclusion of advertising - ads with text, colour, image, sound and video. The exposure of blog visitors to ad formats, such as banners and text ads, is voluntary if browsing activity is not interrupted. Intrusive ad formats such as pop-ups interrupt browsing activity and demand immediate response from the visitor. The advertising placed at the right or left side of the blog page is a way to increase revenue. However, for the majority of international wine bloggers (57.6%) accepting advertising is not an option due to the lack of interest of wine firms and producers or the market orientation of the blogger.

Research shows that exposure of blog visitors to banner advertising can lead to brand recall, ad recognition and brand attitude (Chartterjee, 2008). Xu *et al.* (2009) reported positive

effects on attitude, intention to use and purchase intention. However, the role of advertising is somewhat a double-edged sword: on the one hand, only the more influential bloggers can attract advertising as the buyers search for traffic, demographics and reach; on the other hand, the abuse of advertising on the blog can deter returning visitors, and can be irritating for people who visit the page more frequently.

In order to examine the rationale behind wine blogging (Table 4) we consider four main motivations. The first three denotes motivations already pointed out by empirical research mentioned above: i) diversion motivation (grouping entertainment and passing time) as the answer to “I blog as a hobby”; ii) professional advancement as the answer to “I blog to help promote myself in other related work”; iii) information as the answer to “I blog to keep track of wine I like”. The fourth motivation was put forward as answers to “I blog for a living” and “I am working towards using this as my primary source of income” indicate financial motivation.

**Table 4 – Motivations for wine blogging**

<b>Motivations</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
I blog for a living	2	2.2
I blog as a hobby	4	4.4
I am working towards using this as my primary source of income	12	13.0
I blog to help promote myself in other wine related work	57	61.9
I blog to keep track of wine I like	13	14.1
Skipped questions	4	4.4
Total	92	100

Professional advancement is the main motivation for international bloggers (61.9%), as they want to increased personal awareness, reputation and authority in the blogosphere to acquire an opinion leader status, and then extend this personal asset to others wine related activities. Interestingly, some of the international bloggers (15.2%) are guided for financial reasons as they are living or are trying to live exclusively of wine blogging. This motivation was not mentioned by previous empirical research. Further research is needed to identify the activities that generate revenue and explore the implications for bloggers. In the opposite side of the motivational

spectrum is diversion (4.4%) suggesting that only a small number of international bloggers are looking for leisure when they blog.

## **5. Discussion and implications**

International wine bloggers appears to be a niche wine consumption community, relatively young and dynamic. As a new form of communication blogs inherit the main characteristics of computer-mediated communication while exhibiting some new features by presenting the combination of online self representation, community building, and interpersonal communication (Li, 2007). In line with this assumption, motivation for blogging indicates that self promotion (representation) is searched by international bloggers who want to acquire status. The organisation of international conferences (European and American) suggests a sense of connection among members around wine and related issues. The rituals associated to wine tasting and drinking denotes they shared the same interests. Collective actions against accuses coming from outside indicates moral responsibility. International wine bloggers can be considered a specific consumption community as they fulfil, at least, two main characteristics: connection among members and shared rituals and traditions. The participation of marketers in virtual communities of consumption as members can improve the knowledge on how decisions on product evaluation are made, examine different product's usages, identify dominant attitudes towards products or brands and understand consumer preferences and choices.

Posting a favourable evaluation in a dynamic and influential wine blog can generate positive eWOM which can affect consumer purchasing behaviour. Research suggests that positive reviews lead to an increase in relative sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). Blogs allow new opportunities to find opinion leaders online. General search engines such as technorati or alawine are all venues to approach influencers. The identification by wine agents (producers, importers, etc.) of the most influential bloggers can be useful to target specific actions of direct marketing. One obvious action is send wine as a sample to an influential blogger expecting a favourable review in their blog. Another could be an invitation to visit the winery and report wine tasting. Finally, a close attention is needed to the posts published on the blog: reading and comment the posts if the subject affects the firm, explain some misunderstandings regarding the wine business or contradict wrong information is only examples of follow-up actions.

Reading and replying the comments helps the blogger to interact and have some feedback from the visitors. This interactive element is important because allows the reader to submit their opinion and express disagreement about different sort of wine related subjects. This interactivity tries to increase reader involvement and approximates the blog of a two-way communication medium.

Another important feature of the blog is the possibility of including web statistics which contains relevant data that permit to know the audience (demographics, geographic coverage, exposure, etc.). This enables media buyers to target specific audiences as wine bloggers offers selectivity. Additionally, the qualitative data that can be collected on wine blogs (posts and comments about a specific wine) are an important primary source for marketing research.

Contrary to traditional media (for example TV or Radio) blogs demand active participation from bloggers in order to produce content. Thus, blogging suggests a consciousness of the expected gratifications and subjective intentionality to create content. The frequency of posting denotes a rationality of publish or perish as most of them post more than 5 times per month. A balance between relevance of posting (utility of the information for the users), necessity of being online (maintaining and attract attention) and disposable time of the blogger (how many hours) has to be made. The increasing number of international bloggers that wants to be professionals is a good indicator of the time spent in this activity.

Wine firms should recognize the growing importance of blogs and their use as a marketing tool. Different actions can be taken by the wine firm: i) adopt a corporate blog that provide strong control over message; ii) sponsor a blog that assures strong coverage of all the activities of the wine firm; iii) insert a banner in a blog which permits to control the form and content of the message and attract attention to the online shop or wine firm's site.

A strong limitation of the study has to deal with the international sample: i) a bias towards the US bloggers could restrain the results extrapolation to the whole international blog community; ii) the same applies to the sample size regarding some countries representation.

Future studies should investigate the effectiveness of blogs for marketing purposes using experiments: i) to evaluate the impact of specific direct marketing or public relations actions on bloggers posting activities and attitudes; ii) to evaluate the influence of top bloggers activity on consumers' buying behaviour towards wine acquisition choices (brand, region-of-origin, variety, etc.). Also, qualitative studies were needed in order to have a deep insight of: i) bloggers'

personality traits and typologies; ii) propensity factors (internal or external) to blog; iii) main reasons and motivations behind bloggers activity.

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