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SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING FOR WINERIES:

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ADOPTION OF INSTAGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis addresses the theme of social media marketing on Instagram as communication strategy for the Italian wine industry.

Wine communication has been affected by the advent of digitalisation, which influenced the conversation between wineries and their audiences. The digital environment has led to the emergence of social media, which are spreading through society as the most popular communication means of the time. In the meanwhile, wine consumers are using social media to evaluate wine products and they are expecting wine producers to be present on such platforms. Wine firms, for their part, have to answer the digital trend and to fulfil the expectations of their ever more demanding customers. In this scenario, social media marketing is emerging as communication and business instrument for wine firms, which are including it as a prominent part of their digital strategies.

Among the various social media, Instagram stands out as the one with the highest growth rate, offering multiple communicative advantages. The wine industry seems to have noticed the popularity of Instagram, as evidenced by the numerous accounts of wineries present on the platform. The rise of Instagram in the wine sector has been mentioned by the academic literature, which calls for an in-depth investigation of the topic.

Italy contributes significantly to the development of the competition in the wine industry, being the first wine producer in the world, the second consumer pro-capita and the second worldwide exporter. Wine has a deep bond with the Italian peninsula, which holds heritage in winemaking and excellences in innovation.

Based on these considerations, this thesis aims at investigating the adoption of Instagram by Italian wine firms, in order to understand how they are using such platform. The research question implies the examination of the reasons why wineries approached this social network, and the identification of the purposes and methods through which they are articulating their Instagram strategy.

To answer the research question, this thesis will perform qualitative empirical research over a sample of 10 Italian wine firms. The methodology of analysis selected is the Gioia method, which compares the different case studies by coding the data gathered through interviews and questionnaires.

This thesis is articulated in four sections. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the wine industry scenario, illustrating the main drivers of its global evolution and ending with a focus on the Italian context. Chapter 2 delivers theoretical background to both the practice of social media marketing and to the Instagram platform, treated as relevant strategies for business organisations. Chapter 3 offers a review of the available academic literature concerning social media marketing and Instagram in the wine industry. Chapter 4 enters the empirical research domain, following the specification of the research question, the selection of the method of analysis, the description of the case studies, and the presentation of the findings.

Chapter 1. THE WINE INDUSTRY SCENARIO

The wine industry is a globalised design that operates worldwide under a precise structure, in which the Old and the New world set the dynamics of the market. Data offer the possibility to individuate the main actors involved in the competition and to analyse their evolution, given the continuous fluctuations of the sector. From this landscape, Italy stands out earning several acknowledgments. This background will be contextualised and further explored in the following paragraphs.

1.1 The Old World and the New World of wine

Scholars are almost unanimous (Remaud and Couderc, 2006; Campbell and Guibert, 2006; Fandl, 2018) in dividing the wine industry in two well defined categories: the 'Old World' and the 'New World' of wine, that mould the global competition in the wine market. This classification has geographical origins and influences the methods of production, distribution, and promotion strategies of the countries involved (Banks & Overton, 2010). The Old World corresponds to the centenary European region, which holds time-honoured wine culture, history (Aleixandre et al., 2016), and consumption habits (Defrancesco et al., 2012); it includes France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Germany (Fleming et al., 2014). The New World term refers to the countries that have been conquered by Europe during its colonial expansion (Banks & Overton, 2010) such as Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Chile, South Africa, and California (Aylward and Turpin, 2003); which are now the new players in the market. Given the existence of this dichotomy, it is worth analysing the major differences characterizing each side, in order to understand the relative implications in the wine industry, with specific connection to the leading topics of this thesis.

To begin, it is possible to state that the Old World is where the winemaking arose (Fandl, 2018). The *Vitis vinifera*, the wild Eurasian grapevine from which origins most of the modern wine, has been present in the Caucasian area¹ since the 5500 BCE² (Campbell and

¹ The Caucasus refers to an area that extends today between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, including the states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Southern Russia.

² 5500 Before the Common Era (BCE). It is an alternative and equivalent notation for Before Christ (BC) and is commonly used in some academic literature.

Guibert, 2007); however, it is only during the Egyptian period that a practice similar to the modern viniculture began to be developed, and the consumption of the derived beverage became popular among the society of the time (Varriano, 2010). From the Mediterranean region, the wine culture has spread all over the Old World's geographical area, starting from Ancient Greece and landing to Italy, France, Spain, and Germany; meanwhile becoming more structured. Through the ages, Europeans became expert wine producers and France, in particular, built itself the fame of a prestigious wine grower. The wine industry has been dominated by the Old World until the last years of the twentieth century, when the New World countries started to emerge on the global competition (Campbell and Guibert, 2007). In fact, from the sixteenth century on, European settlers began to export the grapevine to Mexico, California, South America, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. The New World countries quickly recovered their lack of knowledge in the winemaking field, and even developed novel modern techniques of production and marketing strategies; that allowed them to enter the booming wine market as successful new entrants by the end of 1900. Since then, the Old and the New World of wine have started competing each other (Campbell and Guibert, 2007).

Notwithstanding the consolidated presence of the New World in the wine industry, European artisanal wine producers are still considered to be the best ones in the world, since their viniculture heritage has been handed down for generations. Indeed, the Old World's knowledge of wine making is made of proven techniques of production and a strong link to the territory. For this reason, winemakers of the concerned areas have made of *terroir* the focus of their promotional strategies (Banks & Overton, 2010). *Terroir* is a French word that denotes the unicity of a wine, made of exclusive geographical, technical, and organoleptic characteristics, which associate it with quality (Ballantyne et al., 2019) and make it be perceived as an authentic product (Spielmann and Charters, 2013).

In accordance with the official definition of the OIV: International Organisation of Vine and Wine (2010):

“..”terroir” is a concept which refers to an area in which collective knowledge of the interactions between the identifiable physical and biological environment and applied vitivincultural practices develops, providing distinctive characteristics for the products

originating from this area. “Terroir” includes specific soil, topography, climate, landscape characteristics and biodiversity features” (OIV, 2010).

The unicity of *terroir* has contributed to the development of a legislative framework (Banks & Overton, 2010) born in France as the *Appellation d'origine contrôlée* (AOC), and then expanded into other similar European regulations, such as the Italian *Denominazione di Origine Controllata* (DOC) system (Campbell and Guibert, 2007). The aim of these policies is to protect some features of the Old World’s wine making, from the procedures to the soil, with particular emphasis on grape varieties that can grow only in specific geographical regions (Banks & Overton, 2010). Furthermore, these regulatory schemes work as a guarantee to the compliance with production standards. The appellation system has in fact become a sign of quality for consumers, validating the intellectual property of the Old World (Banks and Overton, 2010) and its authentic³ characteristics of relationship to a place, methods of production, and heritage & pedigree (Beverland, 2005). Nevertheless, according to Fandl (2018) the conservative attitude of the Old World has limited its ability to innovate, depriving it of the possibilities to develop new practices and to meet new consumers’ preferences.

On the other hand, innovation and experimentation have flourished in the New World (García-Rodea et al., 2022), where the absence of regulations has enabled development by trials and errors (Banks & Overton, 2010). The results are a trade-oriented approach (Remaud and Couderc, 2006), both vertical and horizontal integrated, and the building of an industrial system of wine making able to answer to the mass market, which may not afford the old elitarian wines (Campbell and Guibert, 2006). Coherently, modern methods of production and wholesale distribution channels are combined with original marketing strategies based on the promotion of grape varieties (Banks & Overton, 2010; Defrancesco et al., 2012), given the wide range of grapevines present in the New World areas (de Magistris et al., 2011). The recent yet high advancement in innovation represents the

³ Authenticity is trend in the Agri-food industry. The terms indicates something unique and true, for which there are several subjective definitions. Beverland (2005) identified six attributes that may compose authenticity: heritage & pedigree, relationship to a place, method of production, stylistic consistency, quality commitments, and downgrading commercial motives.

competitive advantage of the New World countries and enables them to establish the new trends in the wine market (Aylward and Turpin, 2003).

However, even if the New World wine market is well developed, the Old World still detains the preference in the minds of consumers, and the competition to gain more market share remains open. Giacomarra et al. (2019) claimed that the Old World should invest more in communication, to expand the awareness of labelled products also in New World's countries; on the other hand, the New World should refine its marketing strategies with the help of public institutions or including wine tourism activities. De Magistris et al. (2011) noticed that the dichotomy Old and New World influences the younger consumer preferences in the respective countries. In particular, the authors have discovered that, when choosing a wine, Millennials of the Old World give more value to the country of origin, while Millennials of the New World base their choice on the taste experience, on the previous knowledge, and on social networks (de Magistris et al., 2011). The latter concept of social networks will be thoroughly examined later in this document.

Notwithstanding the ascertained delineation of the Old and the New worlds of wine, the studies of Banks and Overton (2010) and Li et al. (2018) observed the existence of another cluster in the global scenario, due to its conspicuous contribution to the worldwide wine production. Whether called 'Third World' (Banks and Overton 2010) or 'New New World' (Li et al., 2018) of wine, this additional group of players is composed by China, India, North Africa, Eastern Europe, and Brazil. Emphasis is given to the Chinese country, where the local wine market has rapidly grown in the last decades as consequence of the increase in wealth of the upper and middle classes, and where the investments of the Western countries are raising. China seems to be learning from the expertise of the Old World and from the fresh attitude of the New one, even if the quality of Chinese wines is still disputable. However, both the mentioned studies agree that China has a millennial viniculture history, which has influenced the Chinese culture since its origins, and suggest that it may not be proper to consider the country as latest arrival in the market⁴ (Banks and Overton, 2010; Li et al., 2018).

⁴ The authors propose instead to consider China as an ancient wine market.

The extension of the wine industry in several geographical regions causes the need for wineries to be present and competitive in such markets, and this might be achieved by the adoption of digital communications tools (Finotto and Mauracher, 2020). Finally, the different world of wines are consequence of the globalised economy and part of a moving design; as knowledge, resources, and technology will continue to be traded, new wine regions will arise and contaminate each other (Banks and Overton, 2010). Being aware of the main wine worlds and features here exposed will help analyse and comprehend the future scenarios.

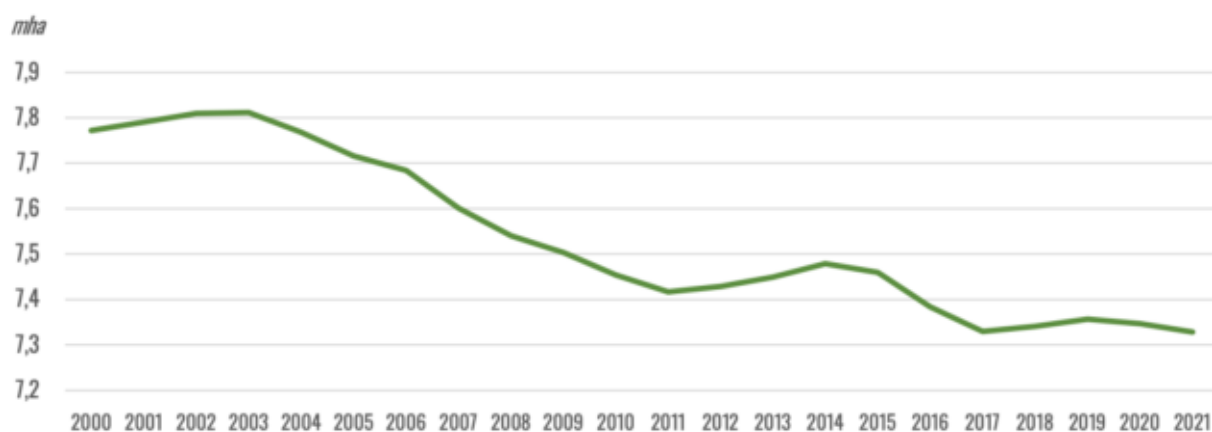
1.2 World wine sector Data

After having presented the worlds of wine, it is right to contextualise the wine industry through an objective analysis of the global scenario, possible thanks to use of institutional data. The main data here exposed come from the OIV databases (OIV, 2022a; OIV, 2022b), which represent the largest data collection accessible for research purposes and provide updated information on vineyard surface area, production volume both in the Northern and Southern hemispheres, consumption habits, and trade.

Data on the worldwide vineyard surface area⁵ may act as evidence of the globalisation of the wine industry. By the way, with reference to the surface vineyard area it is alluded to the cultivation of grapes designed to multiple purposes besides the winemaking, such as table grapes, juices, and dried grapes. The worldwide vineyard surface area covered a region of 7.3 million hectares (mha) in 2021 (OIV, 2022a), turning wine into an international product established in the major global markets. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, the geographical extension of vineyards suffered a decline, which lasted until 2017, year in which the trajectory stabilised (Figure 1).

⁵ The global area destined to the cultivation of grapes.

Figure 1: VINEYARD SURFACE AREA DURING THE 21ST CENTURY



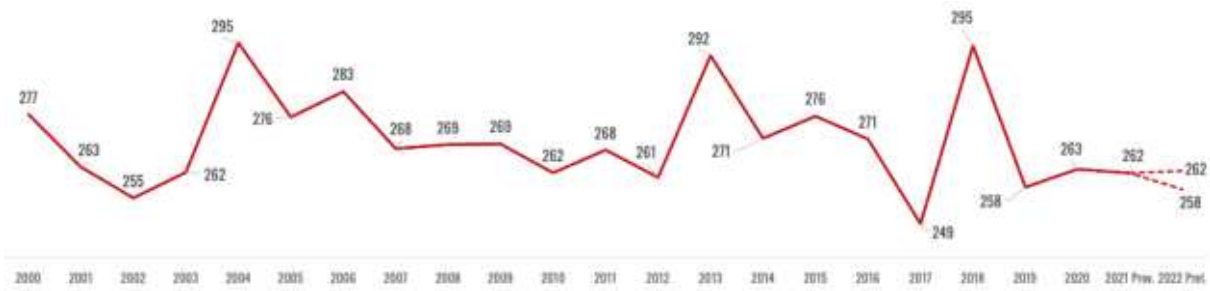
Source: OIV, "State of the World Vine and Wine Sector 2021", April 2022, p. 3

The reason behind the stabilisation can be found in opposing forces shaping the market and neutralizing each other, namely the increasing in wine cultivated area of Old World countries alongside China, and the negative trend characterising USA and some Eastern and Southern countries. Information about the specific geographical collocation of the vineyards seems to validate what argued previously regarding the viticulture expertise of the Old World, by electing Spain and France as first and second largest wine surface regions in the world, respectively with 964 kilohectares⁶ (kha) and 798 kha in 2021 (OIV, 2022a). On the third place there is China, with 783 kha, followed by Italy that counts for 718 kha. Whether the decline of vineyards in some Southern regions is due to meteorological issues that cause heatwaves and drought, in the USA it is the result of commercial practices deliberated to undermine an overproduction of grapes.

For what concerns the global production of wine, the path is not as linear since different peaks alternated in the last two decades (Figure 2). Being the wine industry part of the agricultural sector, the wine production is extremely prone to changes in the climate (WSET, 2015). From 2019 on, the production level declined, however, now it remains stable at approximately 260 million hectares (OIV, 2022b).

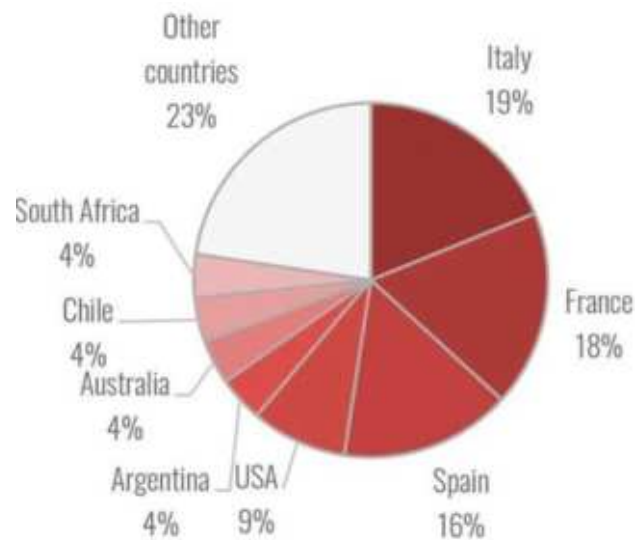
⁶ A kilohectare is equivalent to 1000 hectares.

Figure 2: DEVELOPMENT OF WINE PRODUCTION



Source: OIV, “World Wine Production Outlook”, October 2022, p. 3

Figure 3: WORLDWIDE WINE PRODUCERS

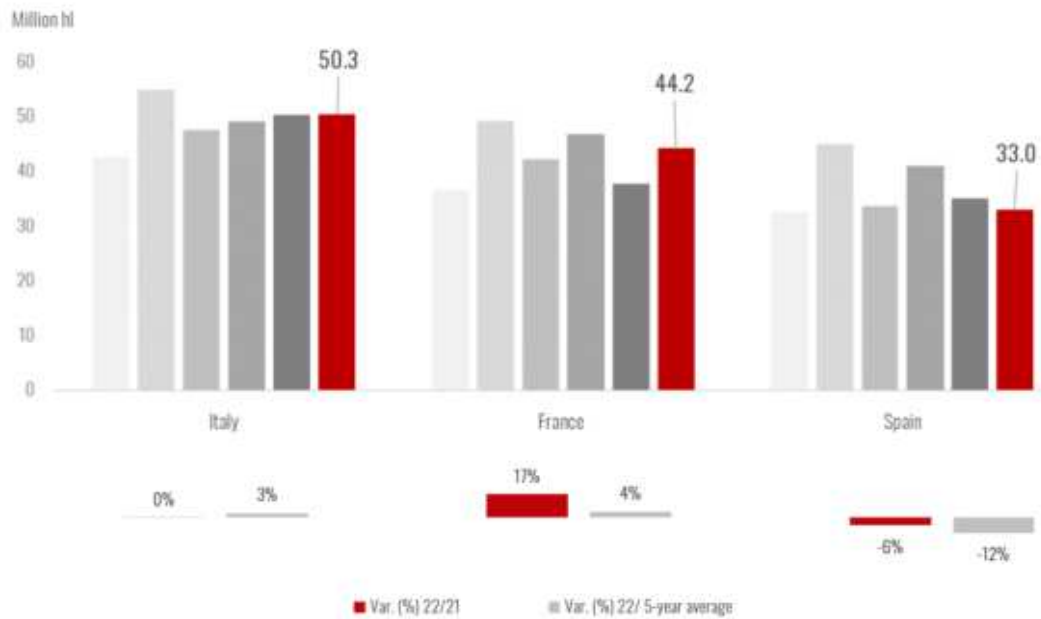


Source: Forbes, “Wine Production In The World In 2020, A Detailed Look”, 2021

Investigating the production volume per geographical area, it is possible to delineate the main wine producing countries in the world⁷. Once again, the most renowned Old World countries, Italy, France, and Spain, appear at the top of the classification, as may be seen in Figure 3. This provides scientific evidence that the ancient knowledge of wine making has led the Old World to gain supremacy in the wine market. Nevertheless, some New World countries such as Argentina, Australia, and Chile are enhancing their market share, meaning that the New World players are increasing their contribute to the global competition.

⁷ With exclusion of China and Russia, for which updated data are not available.

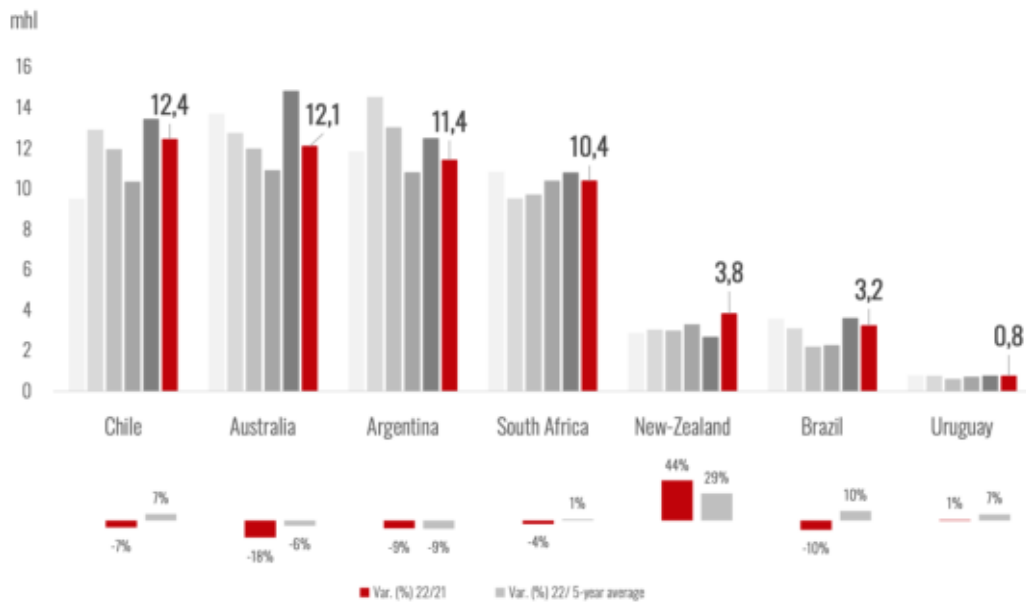
Figure 4: WINE PRODUCERS IN THE NORTHERN EMISPHERE



Source: OIV, “Wine Production First Estimates”, October 2022, p. 8

In the Northern hemisphere, the contribution of the European Union (EU) to the 2022 worldwide outlook is remarkable, for a total of 157 millions of hectolitres (mhl), with an increase of 2% of compared to the previous year (Roca, 2022). As depicted by Figure 4, Italy dominates the rank as first wine producer in the world with a volume of 50.3 mhl (OIV, 2022b). For this reason, the next paragraph of this thesis will be entirely dedicated to a detailed analysis of the Italian wine industry. Italy is followed by France, that despite its second position, with 44.2 mhl demonstrates the highest growth rate as compared to the 2021 results. Third on the podium there is Spain, country in which the water scarcity has affected the harvests, that amount at 33.0 mhl. Actually, the changes in the climatic conditions, such as hot weather and drought, had previously bothered all the European countries previsions for 2022’s production; in spite of that, the dry climate prevented from diseases and resulted in yields volumes higher than expected.

Figure 5: WINE PRODUCERS IN THE SOUTHRN EMISPHERE



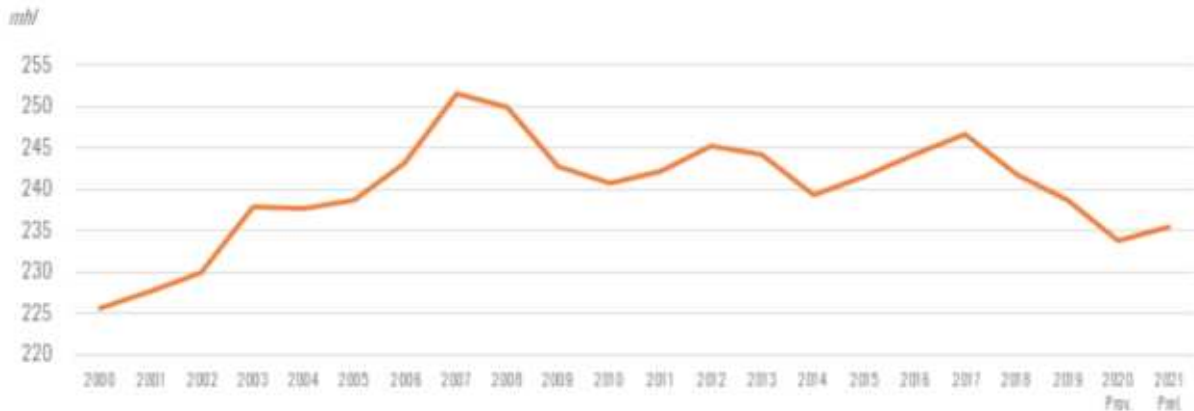
Source: OIV, "Wine Production First Estimates", October 2022, p. 5

Figure 5 illustrates the situation in the Southern hemisphere, where the year 2022 delineates a general reduction in wine production, compared to the previous year. The most negative variance is highlighted in Australia, with a decrease of 18 %, due, again, to climatic conditions. However, in contrast to the European heat, the Australian country has been hit by frequent rainfalls and a cold spring. An inverted tendency in the Southern regions is outlined in New Zealand, that marked a considerable growth rate of 44% in 2022.

Given the worldwide vineyard and production distribution, one may proceed with the analysis of the consumption patterns. The global wine consumption highlights two contrasting trends: a decrease of the domestic demand among the European countries, and an increase in the consumption level of some extra-Europe and Southern hemisphere ones (Del Rey and Piccoli, 2020). This means that the New World countries are increasing their shares also in the demand side. These opposite dynamics manage to keep stable the wine consumption outlooks at a worldwide level (Figure 6); however, they influence the commercialisation of wine in a globalised market. The wine consumption has been seriously affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which in 2020 caused a slowdown in the wine distribution chain, trade, and economy in general; impacting the consumption habits due to restrictive measures on socialization. Nevertheless, the statistics have

demonstrated a global increase of 0.7% in wine consumption since 2021, as consequence of the progressive return to the pre-pandemic way of living.

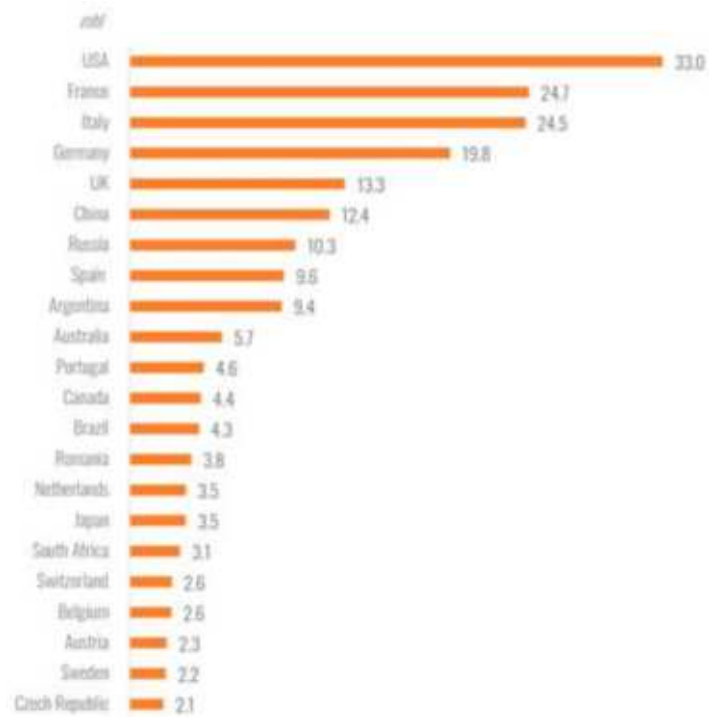
Figure 6: THE TREND OF WINE CONSUMPTION



Source: OIV, "World Wine Production Outlook", April 2022, p. 9

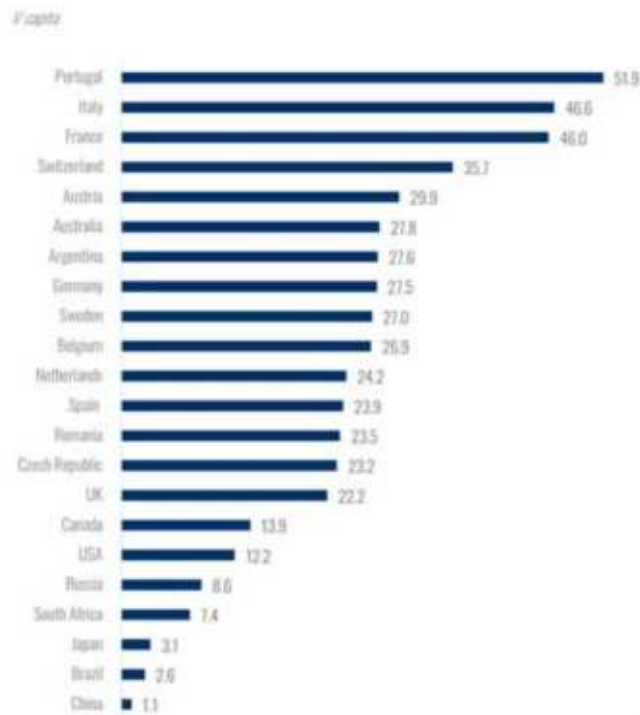
Consumption data may be considered both regarding the overall wine demand of a country and concerning the consumption pro-capita, as in Figure 7 and Figure 8. In the first case, the USA represent the first wine consuming country of the world, with 33.0 mhl, followed by France and Italy, with 24.7 mhl and 24.5 mhl; in the second case, the major consumption is registered among the European inhabitants of Portugal, Italy, and France respectively with 51.9, 46.6, and 46.0 mhl. The European Union (EU) is responsible for the largest portion of wine demand, with a share of 48% of the world wine consumption; even though its consumption level has experienced a considerable decrease (OIV, 2022a).

Figure 7: MAIN CONSUMERS BY VOLUME



Source: BK Wine Magazine, “The countries with the highest wine consumption per person in 2020”

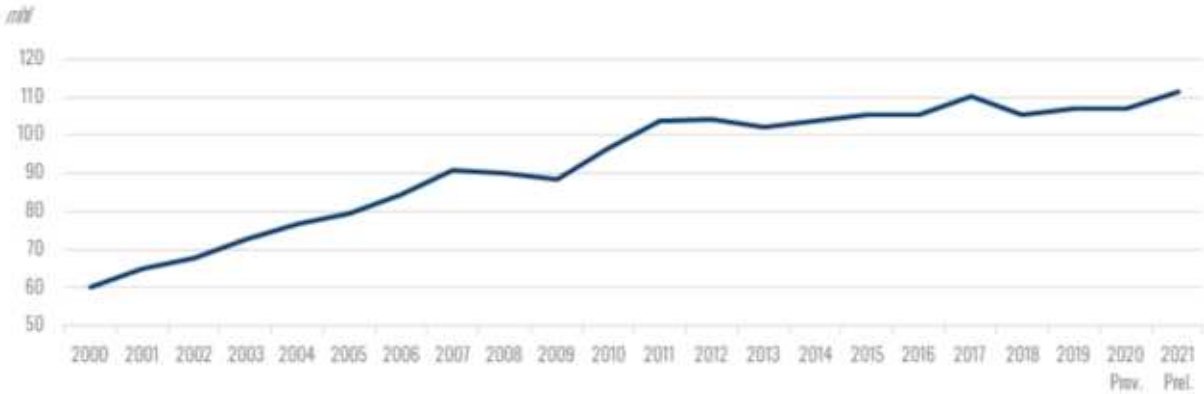
Figure 8: MAIN CONSUMER PRO CAPITA



Source: BK Wine Magazine, “The countries with the highest wine consumption per person in 2020”

Finally, it is worth analysing the international commercialisation of wine. Global data depict a positive outlook for the global trade of wine, which experienced a positive trend throughout the twenty-first century (Figure 9). For 2021 the result are even more favourable, since in such year the worldwide volume of exported wine registered the higher level ever reached, with a volume of 111.6 mhl; thus, an increase of 4% from the previous year. Coherently, also the economic value of the global trade has increased, reaching 34.3 billion euros (bn EUR) and a growth of 16%, compared to 2020.

Figure 9: GLOBAL TRADE OF WINE BY VOLUME



Source: OIV, “World Wine Production Outlook”, April 2022, p. 12

The countries that contribute most to the export of wine are once more France, Italy, and Spain. In terms of volume Spain is the first, with 23.0 mhl of wine exported in 2021, followed by Italy with 22.2 mhl and France, with 14.6 mhl. Concerning the value of the exports, France stays at the top with 11.1 bn EUR⁸ in 2021, succeeded by Italy with 7.1 bn EUR and Spain with 2.9 bn EUR. The triad of France, Italy, and Spain together provides 61 % of the global exports of wine (OIV, 2022a). One more time, the Old World stands at the top in the rankings. The categories of wine exported are bottled wine; sparkling wine; bag-in-box, which are small containers until ten litres; and bulk wine. The end of the pandemic has been particularly beneficial for the sparkling wines in France and Italy, thanks to the revival of social celebrations. In the New World countries the year 2021 was profitable for the exports of Chile and for New Zealand and the USA in terms of value only. Australia faced a decrease of its wine exports due to some duties imposed by the Chinese

⁸ Billions of Euro

government. As regards the imports, at global level the major wine importers are Germany, USA and UK; which represent together the 38% of the worldwide imports, corresponding to a volume of 42 mhl and a value of 13.1 bn EUR. Germany is ranked first by volume imports, for a total of 14.5 mhl; while France stays at the top for the imports by value, with 6.2 bn EUR. Noticeable is the growth of the imports for Italy, which in 2021 scored an increase of 83% of its imports by volume and of 37% of those by value, amounting respectively to 3 mhl and 381 m EUR⁹ (OIV, 2022a).

Scientific data on the world wine scenario offer an objective explanation of the reasons behind the fame of the Old World countries. The European renowned winemaking is a combination of both *terroir* associations and a practical and consolidated presence in the market, that places it at the top of the rankings. Meanwhile, the New World areas are expanding their power and changing the international dynamics. The competition in a globalised market disrupts the certainties and requires a continuously updating of the statics, which are highly impacted by fluctuations of economies, climate, policies, and regulations. The illustrated data may help in being proactive and forecasting the next scenarios.

1.3 A focus on the Italian wine industry

Given the presence of Italy at the top of the rankings in the wine sector, it is worth dedicating this paragraph to the analysis of the Italian wine industry. As previously stated, at global level Italy is the first wine producer, with 50.3 mhl; is the second wine consuming country pro-capita, with 46.6 mhl; and is the second wine exporting country, with 22.2 mhl (OIV, 2022a; OIV, 2022b). The reason behind these achievements may lie in the deep bond between wine and the Italian culture, history, and tradition. Italy preserves the ancient expertise in winemaking while contributing to the innovative journey.

⁹ Millions of Euro

1.3.1 Framework

The viticulture practice shapes the Italian geography, in which the 5,1% of the utilised agricultural area (UAA)¹⁰ is covered by vineyards (Area Studi Mediobanca, 2022), which are present in all the twenty Italian regions. Table 1 depicts the classification of the Italian regions by percentage of viticultural area on the total UAA. Veneto owns the highest percentage, with 10,90%; followed by Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Toscana, respectively with 9,80% and 8,70%. Even if with a very small portion, viticulture is present likewise in Basilicata and Valle D'Aosta, that close the rank both with 0,90%. In addition, the geographical area of viticulture differs in terms of value. One hectare of vineyard values 255 thousand euro in Trentino-Aldo Adige, 139 thousand euro in Veneto, 73 thousand euro in Piemonte and 60 thousand euro in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The Trentino Region is the most valuable because its areas are associated with quality.

For what concerns the national wine production output, it may be once again analysed in terms of volume and of value. With respect to the volume, the Veneto region contributes to the 20% of the domestic production, Puglia to the 18,6% and Emilia-Romagna to the 12,7%. As regards the value, Veneto and Puglia keep the first two positions with 21,6% and 12,5%, followed by Toscana, with 11,3%. The Italian regions contribute differently also to the exportations of the domestic wine, of which the 35% are determined by Veneto and the 17,2% by Piemonte (Area Studi Mediobanca, 2022).

The Italian territory holds a rich biodiversity, without equal in the world, presenting more than 500 native grape varieties (Pomarici et. al, 2021). Figure 10 shows some of the most known wines of Italy, each of them has become typical of the region and of the territory in which it is produced, testifying the varietal richness of the peninsula.

¹⁰ The utilised agricultural area (UAA) refers to “the total area taken up by arable land, permanent grassland, permanent crops and kitchen gardens” used by an agricultural firm (Eurostat, 2019).

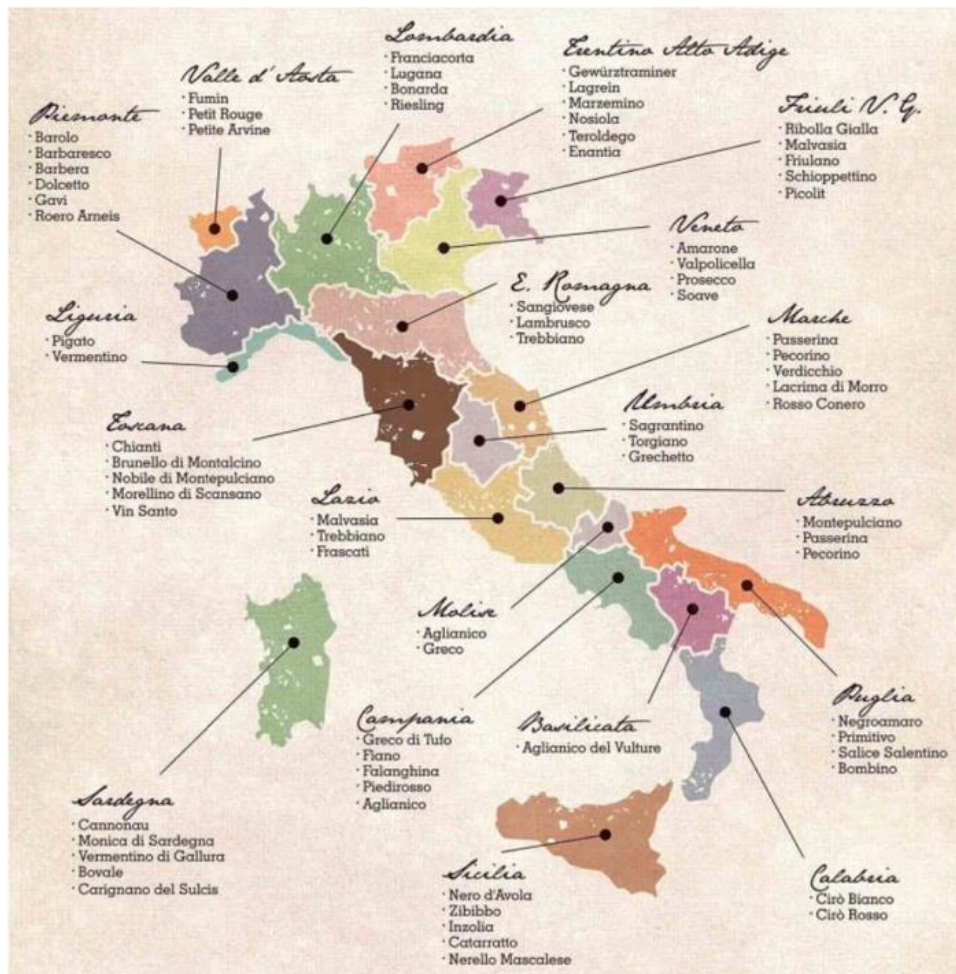
Table 1: PERCENTAGE OF UAA DESTINATED TO VITICULTURE

Region	%
Veneto	10,90%
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	9,80%
Toscana	8,70%
Puglia	7,60%
Sicilia	7,40%
Abruzzo	7,30%
Emilia-Romagna	5,10%
Piemonte	4,70%
Campania	4,20%
Umbria	3,50%
Lombardia	3%
Liguria	3%
Trentino-Alto Adige	3%
Lazio	3%
Marche	2,90%
Molise	2,60%
Sardegna	1,50%
Calabria	1,50%
Basilicata	0,90%
Valle d'Aosta	0,90%

Source: Rome Business School Research Center, "Il Business vitivinicolo in Italia", September 2022, p. 24.

Personal elaboration.

Figure 10: WINES IN THE ITALIAN TERRITORY



Source: This MARKETERsLife, "Going for quality: 30 anni di vino italiano", 2016.

Since a considerable amount of wines produced in Italy are labelled with quality marks, it is proper to get acquainted with the law regulating the quality of a wine. Italian wines are legislated under the *Decreto Legislativo 8 Aprile 2010, n. 61*¹¹, which appoints the latest specific provisions for the appellations of wine, in accordance with the EC regulation No. 607 of July 2009¹². The European legislation, enacted to protect the consumer and to provide him a guarantee of quality, distinguishes among two macro categories: wines with indication of origin, and wines without indication of origin. The first class is

¹¹ *Decreto Legislativo 8 Aprile 2010, n. 61* provides application rules in the Italian country for the EC regulation No. 607 of July 2009.

¹² EC regulation No. 607 of July 2009 provides application rules in the European area for the CE regulation No. 479 of 2008, referring to the protected designations of origin and the protected geographical indications.

composed by PDO “Protected designation of origin” and PGI “Protected geographical indication”. The Italian legislation (Decreto Legislativo 8 Aprile 2010, n. 61) has applied the communitarian norm with some specifications. As such, the Italian norm divides the PDO wines into DOCG “*Denominazione di origine controllata e garantita*” and DOC “*Denominazione di origine controllata*”; while the PGI are classified as IGT “*Indicazione geografica tipica*”. To these, two broad ones are added, varietal wine and generic wine. The result is an Italian appellation scheme articulated on a 4-level pyramid, that is composed from the top by DOCG, DOC, IGT, varietal wines, and generic wines. Specifically:

DOCG “[...] is assigned to wines having a particular value, that have been recognised as DOC wines since five years at least [...]” (*Legge 10 febbraio 1992, n.164*¹³).

DOC “[...] is used to describe a renowned quality product, whose characteristics are due to the geographical environment and the human factor” (*Legge 10 febbraio 1992, n.164*).

IGT denotes “[...] wines having a geographical indication, whose specific nature and quality level are due to the geographical grapes production area” (*Legge 10 febbraio 1992, n.164*¹⁴).

Varietal wines refer to wines without indication of origin, that may include specification of the name of grape varieties and of the vintage years (EC regulation No. 607 of July 2009).

Generic wines are a blend of several varieties of grapes, with no one grape predominating.

The UE recognizes and enables the more detailed classification adopted by the Italian state. Currently, in Italy there are 77 wines classified as DOCG, 330 as DOC and 118 as IGT wines (Federdoc, 2023). The highest concentration of DOCG wines is registered in Veneto, with 14 indications; while the majority of DOC extends in Tuscany and Piemonte, both with 41 samples. Famous DOCG wines are the Amarone della Valpolicella, Barbera D’Asti,

¹³ Legge 10 febbraio 1992, n.164 establishes the appellations of DOCG, DOC, and IGT in Italy, based on the previous *Decreto Presidenziale 12 luglio 1963, n. 930*, which firstly introduced the concept of designation of origin, with the DOC denomination.

¹⁴ Legge 10 febbraio 1992, n.164 establishes the appellations of DOCG, DOC, and IGT in Italy, based on the previous *Decreto Presidenziale 12 luglio 1963, n. 930*, which firstly introduced the concept of designation of origin, with the DOC denomination.

Barolo, Chianti and Franciacorta; some of the most known DOC ones are Lugana, Bardolino and Montepulciano d’Abruzzo (Federdoc, 2023).

As regards the stocks¹⁵ of wine, the Italian inventories in 2022 are registered at 50,7 million hectolitres for wine, 5,3 million hectolitres of musts, and 87.879 hectolitres for new wine still in fermentation (ICQRF¹⁶, 2022). The wine inventory is produced for the 55% of its overall volume in the North of Italy, for the 21% in the South, for the 15% in the centre, and for the 9% in the islands.

Table 2: WINE STOCK BY REGION

Region	Total Wines in HL	Total wines in %
VENETO	11.666.301	23,00%
PUGLIA	6.184.936	12,20%
EMILIA ROMAGNA	5.733.203	11,30%
TOSCANA	5.258.084	10,40%
PIEMONTE	4.216.329	8,30%
SICILIA	3.712.866	7,30%
ABRUZZO	2.752.117	5,40%
LOMBARDIA	2.340.213	4,60%
TRENTINO ALTO ADIGE	2.072.851	4,10%
FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA	1.756.905	3,50%
Altre regioni	4.979.626	9,80%
Totale Italia	50.673.431	100,00%

Source: ICQRF, “Cantina Italia: dati al 31 maggio 2022.”, May 2022, p. 4-5. Personal elaboration.

Considering the regional areas of Italy, Veneto stands out again, counting alone of the 23% of the national wine stock (Table 2). In particular, the venetian provinces of Treviso and

¹⁵ Every year, due to September 30th, all the natural or legal persons or their associations, operating in the wine industry must submit a declaration of their stocks of wine, musts and wines still in fermentation present till July 31th.

¹⁶ *Ispettorato Centrale della tutela della Qualità e Repressione Frodi dei prodotti agro-alimentari, ministero delle politiche agricole alimentari e forestali.*

Verona lead the national ranking of wine stocks by region, respectively with 9,1% and 8,6%; with large distance from the third, Cuneo, that accounts for the 4,6%. The 50,5% of the wine stocks of Italy detain the European DOP classification, the 28 % the IGP, the 1,3% are varietal wines and the 20,1% are generic wines. The red wine is the type more popular in both DOP and IGP; particularly, it represents the 52,5% of the DOP and the 59,1% of the IGP. Table 3 shows the DOP and IGP wines for which the largest quantity of stocks is currently registered in Italy. In 2022 all the wine stocks scored an increase of 3,1% compared to the previous year, as sign of the recovery from Covid-19 (ICQRF, 2022).

The Italian wine supply chain appears to be fragmented in terms of actors and relationships involved. It is composed by various trading partners, such as producers, farms, cooperatives, consortia, industries, processors, and distributors. Peculiar in the Italian territory is the presence of a large numbers of small farms, spread over the whole country, and opposed to a small number of big companies. Most of the small farms practice both the viticulture and the winemaking; however, their contribution to the national production is limited, being it generated for the 80% by the few large companies (Pomarici et al, 2021). Area Studi Mediobanca (2022) individuated the following distribution channels for the Italian wine industry: direct sales, large distribution, Ho.Re.Ca.¹⁷, wine shops and bars, wholesale, and on-line platforms. The biggest role is played by direct sales, including their e-commerce version. The digital asset deserves attention, since it is becoming relevant both as sales and communication tool, in which the investment of wine firm has been increasing of 71% since 2021(Area Studi Mediobanca, 2022). The digitalisation trend sustains the research question of this thesis and will be explicitly analysed in in this document.

¹⁷ Ho.Re.Ca is the acronym of *hotellerie-restaurant-café* and refers to the commercial sector that includes hotels, restaurants, catering and bars.

Table 3: MAIN DOP AND IGP STOCKS IN ITALY

WINE	TYPE	%
PROSECCO	DOP	8,60%
SICILIA	DOP	3,90%
MONTEPULCIANO D'ABRUZZO	DOP	3,50%
DELLE VENEZIE O BENESKIH OKOLISEV	DOP	2,90%
CHIANTI	DOP	2,80%
CHIANTI CLASSICO	DOP	2,00%
CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE PROSECCO	DOP	1,50%
VALPOLICELLA RIPASSO	DOP	1,40%
FRANCIACORTA	DOP	1,40%
BAROLO	DOP	1,30%
SOAVE	DOP	1,20%
PUGLIA	IGP	6,30%
TERRE SICILIANE	IGP	3,70%
TOSCANO O TOSCANA	IGP	3,60%
SALENTO	IGP	3,50%
VENETO	IGP	3,00%
RUBICONE	IGP	2,20%
EMILIA O DELL'EMILIA	IGP	1,60%
PROVINCIA DI VERONA O VERONESE	IGP	1,40%
TRE VENEZIE O TRI BENECIJE	IGP	1,20%
Altri DOP/IGP		42,80%
TOTALE DOP/IGP		100,00%

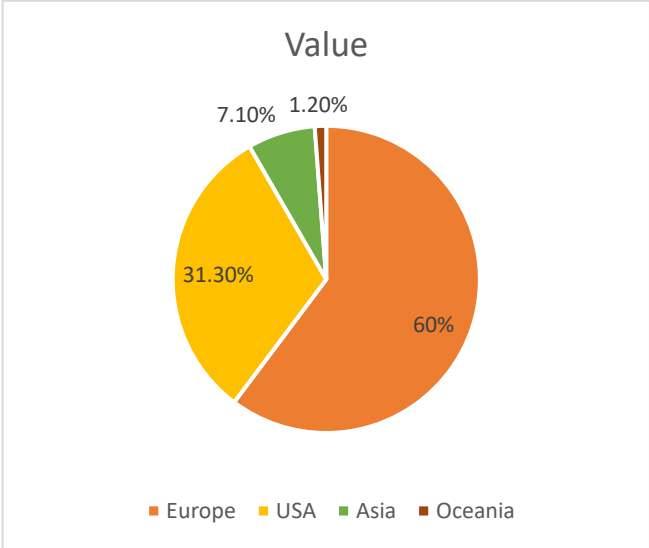
Source: ICQRF, "CANTINA ITALIA: dati al 31 maggio 2022.", May 2022, p. 7. Personal elaboration.

1.3.2 International trade

Data regarding the exchange of wine are here illustrated to understand the role of the Italian country in the international competition. Area Studi Mediobanca (2022) offered

an insight of the Italian wine trade, highlighting the composition of its exports. Italy exports 40% of its wine production and it registered a trade surplus of 6,7 billion euro in 2021¹⁸. In the same year, Italy destined 60% of its exports by value to Europe, 31,3% to the USA, 7,1% to Asia and 1,2% to Oceania; as s may be seen in Figure 11.

Figure 11: EXPORTS VALUE COMPOSITION OF ITALY IN 2021



Source: Area Studi Mediobanca, “Il settore vinicolo in Italia”, May 2022, p. 9. Personal elaboration.

The most important export countries for the Italian wine may be ranked according to the volume and to the value of the product, as depicted in the following tables (Table 4 and Table 5). Taking into account the volume, Germany is the first market of destination, receiving 5,5 mhl; followed by the USA, with 4 mhl. However, the first two places are interchanged when considering the value. This means that the exports to the USA are slightly lower, although more profitable, amounting to 1720 millions of euros, compared to the 1.134 millions of euros of Germany. UK stands at the third place in both charts. Other significant countries for the Italian exports are Switzerland, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Russia, and Denmark (Table 4 and Table 5). The data of the exports in all the countries considered recorded an increase compared to the year 2020 (Area Studi Mediobanca, 2022).

¹⁸ Data expected in 2021. Source: Area Studi Mediobanca, “Il settore vinicolo in Italia”, May 2022, p 10.

Table 4: TOP 10 EXPORT DESTINATIONS FOR THE ITALIAN WINE BY VOLUME

Rank	Country	2021 Expected	
		Mhl	% on the Total
1	Germany	5,5	24,7
2	USA	4	18,1
3	UK	2,7	12,3
4	France	0,8	3,7
5	Canada	0,8	3,6
6	Switzerland	0,8	3,5
7	Netherlands	0,6	2,9
8	Belgium	0,6	2,8
9	Sweden	0,6	2,7
10	Russia	0,6	2,6

Source: Area Studi Mediobanca, “Il settore vinicolo in Italia”, May 2022, p. 9. Personal elaboration.

Table 5: TOP 10 EXPORT DESTINATIONS FOR THE ITALIAN WINE BY VALUE

Rank	Country	2021 Expected	
		MEUR	% on the Total
1	USA	1.720	24,2
2	Germany	1.134	15,9
3	UK	743	10,4
4	Switzerland	415	5,8
5	Canada	384	5,4
6	Netherlands	225	3,2
7	France	222	3,1
8	Sweden	201	2,8
9	Belgium	197	2,8
10	Denmark	156	2,2

Source: Area Studi Mediobanca, “Il settore vinicolo in Italia”, May 2022, p. 9. Personal elaboration.

Finally, Italy is renowned at global level for its contribution to the research and development (R&D) in the wine industry. As evidence, 70% of the worldwide techniques and engineering related to wine are Italian, and this achievement is possible through a structured collaboration between administrations, research centres, and universities (Pomarici et. Al, 2021).

The one between oenology and Italy is a close relationship, that enriches both sides; winemaking shapes the Italian territory and the consumption habits of its inhabitants, while Italy sustains the technological advancement of the wine industry. The accomplishments achieved so far are a lot, and they may become even more in the future ahead.

Chapter 2. SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Before deepening the theme of social media marketing, it is worth explaining how this practice has reached the world of wine; thus, an introduction to wine communication and its evolution is here provided.

2.1 Wine Communication and the impact of digitalisation

The increasing concentration of the wine industry calls for the need for wineries to master their communication strategies in order to emerge from the cluster. In the meantime, the advent of digitalisation obliges wine communication to be tailored to the new digital marketing instruments.

Communication is a business function concerning the contents and the methods through which a company conveys its messages to its stakeholders, both internal and external ones. Communication acts inside the marketing department as the promotional part of the marketing mix: product, price, place, and promotion; introduced by McCarthy in 1964 (Goi, 2009). Therefore, communication is one of the so called '4Ps of marketing' (Londhe, 2014). The marketing function has gained more and more relevance over the years, becoming crucial for companies in order to come closer to consumers; to boost sales; to build the company's image (Zagorulko, 2019); and, most of all, to create value for all the parts involved (Londhe, 2014).

Nowadays, communication is handled inside firms using a larger and structured vision known as 'Integrated Marketing Communications' (IMC) (Reid et al., 2001). IMC is designed around the customer's point of view (Kotler, 1999, in Ignat et al., 2021) and operates consistently¹⁹ and synergically²⁰ to develop a profitable relationship with its audience. IMC is made concrete in a program that uses all forms of promotion of a company, involving different stakeholders, to gain the maximum communication impact while conveying the same message (De Pelsmacker et al., 2021). An IMC approach may be

¹⁹ IMC acts under the principle of consistency, according to which all the communication instruments shall work in the same direction, avoiding conflict.

²⁰ IMC acts under the principle of synergy, according to which all the communication instruments shall mutually reinforce each other's action.

beneficial for lots of businesses and for the wine industry in particular, given the alterations the sector is experiencing. The research of Reid et al. (2001) highlights the ongoing changes in the wine industry and calls for the need to leverage IMC as a business asset, which may be determinant for the continued existence of wine firms. In particular, a current issue in the wine sector is the enhanced competition, which is determined by the increasing number of brands and players in the industry, especially new young actors coming from the regions of the New World. As consequence, all these subjects are causing an over-production tendency. Peculiar in the wine industry is likewise the role of the retail field, which is acquiring more bargaining power than ever. Moreover, customers have become more demanding, as result of their improved knowledge of the sector, and they are taking on an active part by searching for detailed information about wine products and producers on the web. More specifically, the issues threatening the wine sector have been identified by Rabobank International (1999, in Reid et al., 2001) as the following: maturity of the sector in which the consumer is searching for quality; higher competition due to over-production and globalisation; increasing bargaining power of the retail, which determines its possibility to ask the producers for sales promotions along with a greater chance of getting the preferences of the consumers; and the need for companies to differentiate in order to stand out from the crowd. In this scenario, IMC becomes crucial for wine firms to maintain competitive advantage by aligning the communicative efforts of the company to the costumers' needs (Reid et al., 2001).

The promotions tools trough which communication operates and that wineries may use are both offline, such as public relations, advertising, and trade fairs; and online ones, for example websites, social media, and newsletters.

2.1.1 Offline wine communication

The wine discourse revolves around the narration of wine. Narrating wine aims at communicating the wine experience and bringing it closer to a community of wine enthusiasts. Wine consumers, sommeliers, or experts use to communicate the wines they approach to find a collective response; suggesting the presence of a social nature at the base of the wine product (Caballero et al., 2019).

The narration of wine implies a certain level of acculturation on the subject, which enables the usage of a particular vocabulary (Caballero et al., 2019). The wine language assumes

various forms, from wine speaking to wine writing, all united by the adoption of a specific wine lexicon. The wine vocabulary, however, is made up of a multitude of shades, which facilitate the exposition by adopting figures of speech, for instance. Besides words describing its acidity, such as steely or soapy; is indeed not uncommon to find terms out of the context, that may refer to the weight, as viscous or full; to the texture, as creamy or syrup; to the heat, as hot and warm; to the dynamicity, as chewy and grippy; and to the complexity, as soft or rich (Gawel et al., 2000). The research of Caballero (2007) revealed even that in the French context it is ordinary to refer to wine as if it were a person. The personification practice describes the structure and the personality of the wine using words such as thin, shy, or aggressive. The same study suggest that wine description may be supported by verbs of motion helping to figure out the tasting moment, since the motion requires the movement of the actors involved in the action. Examples are the verbs jump, kick, run, dance, and swim (Caballero, 2007).

Certainly, wine professionals adopt scientific languages and methods of evaluation of wine. In the European context, it is very popular the Wine and Spirit Education Trust (WSET) method. Originating in England in 1999, the procedure developed a “systematic approach to wine tasting”, that investigates the elements present in a wine and provides a cloud of terminology among which the taster has to choose for the describing the wine. The terminology provides terms for each descriptive category: appearance, nose, palate, and conclusion. For example, a wine may be described as bright, amber, floral, heavy and being remarked as of outstanding quality (Herdenstam et al., 2009). Those passionate about wine are willing to learn and practice the wine language, affirming in this way their belonging to a wine community (Caballero et al., 2019).

The wine telling is a multilayer narrative that has to highlight the several aspects involved in the wine discourse, from the product and its organoleptic features, to the production techniques and the territory of origin, including the history and the values of the winery and its people (Ingrassia et al., 2020). Therefore, the language of wine offers a multiplicity of micro themes that may be exploited in wine communication, each one owning its specific vocabulary. Caballero et al. (2019) individuated three main communication strategies that are used by wine tellers. These strategies are: the winemaking process, the wine product, and the tasting. Adopting a communicative strategy based on the winemaking process means articulating the narration on the elements of the winemaker,

the *terroir*, and the variety. Consequently, the author will describe the production of wine by emphasizing its occurrence in a specific geographical area, or its belonging to a collection of prestigious varieties. The strategy which focuses on the wine product is marked by the type and characteristics of the wine itself. Therefore, in this case the wine is mentioned by emphasizing its product composition, in terms of presence or absence of elements and of their relative quantities. Finally, communicating the wine tasting refers to the impression that the consumers has of the wine, in terms of colour, smell, taste, and emotions. The research of Fagioli et al. (2022) evidenced the tendency of Italian wine firms to adopt different communication strategies depending on their geographical location. Wineries located in the North of Italy prefer to tell about their history and production methods; wineries of the Central area of Italy highlight the wine firm and the quality of their wines; wineries in the Southern regions focus on communicating the values and the territory in which they are placed. For each communicative approach, the authors illustrate a word cloud containing the terms most used, which appear in order of importance. In the North case, the mentioned words are: wine, production, quality, company, vineyards, grapes, group, Italian, new, and products. In the Central approach, the terms are: wine, quality, production, Chianti, family, grapes, years, areas, and hectares. In the Southern attitude, they refer to: wine, production, grapes, quality, Italy, territory, winery, vineyards, Aglianico, and sea.

Caballero et al (2019) went deeper into the wine discourse, suggesting that the wine tale may be the utterance of a private feeling; namely, the re-elaboration of an intimate experience into a wine speak that is shareable with the community. The authors illustrate in detail this re-elaboration process, that finds its focus in the changing of context. Indeed, the inner experience is recontextualized according to the context in which the narration takes place, and the recontextualization determines the adjustments of feelings and thoughts into a proper vocabulary, to make them comprehensible by the audience. The process is structured into three levels: private record, recontextualization, and public record. In the first phase, the experience of the wine tasting arouses sensorial feelings in the individual, who has to be able to recognize his feelings and memorize them. Then, the experience is recontextualized into a meaningful language, so translated into understandable words. Finally, the wine language is adjusted with a proper wine vocabulary, using expressions that make it suitable to the social wine discourse. Thus, the

recontextualization process helps the wine consumer narrating about his wine experience and helps the audience comprehend the wine tell.

A challenge for wine companies may be to communicate in an understandable way for consumers, since often the language adopted by wine communicators results to be complex and incomprehensible by people external to the professional area; ending in the risk of losing the flow of the communication message (Charters and Pettigrew, 2006). If the shadows offered by wine storytellers are various and may bring complexity to the narration, it is nonetheless true that and they may enrich the storytelling enabling the wine teller to evoke emotions in the audience. Thus, the power of storytelling, and the multiple narrative features offered by the wine sector shall be leveraged to build an effective communication strategy.

The instruments through which wineries may put in practice the offline communication are various, among these, the one that stands out is Public Relations (PR). PR are a function, inside the communication department, in charge of the management of the reputation of the company. They spread acceptance, understanding, and goodwill towards the firm and its products by communicating them to both the firms' internal and external stakeholders. PR adopt communication instruments such as press releases, press conferences, and events. They may deal with crisis management and with the maintenance of an online reputation by collaborating with influencers; and in this latter case they are called digital PR. As the PR function works in every business, it works also in the wine industry. There, the PR personnel is called Wine PR. Likewise, a Wine PR is in charge of spreading positive information about the winery and its products across the media (Wagner et al., 2007, in Kokhraidze, 2016). As noted by Kokhraidze (2016) the PR efforts may be particularly beneficial of the wine sector. Indeed, they create long lasting benevolence around the winery, they may help in creating solid relationships with its audience, and, most of all, they may build a positive image of the winery. The author explores the theme of Wine PR by highlighting some features characterizing a successful Wine PR campaign. More precisely, he suggests how public relations may be juxtaposed to modern tools of promotion, such as social media, and to modern programmes, involving the collaboration with influencers. Essentially, the researcher is advocating for the adoption of digital PR in the wine sector.

2.1.2 Online wine communication

The online means represent key elements given the digital tendency that is permeating economies and the wine industry in particular. Digitalisation is shaping the way in which wineries and consumers interact, as evidences the increasing number of wine firms adopting digital marketing tools. Clients are using digital channels and are expecting to be reached there; thus, wineries have begun to adapt to the digital trend, and are planning to increase their digital marketing investments for the future (Zagorulko, 2019; Fagioli et al., 2022). The spread of the digital trend has been facilitated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which stopped temporarily the offline ways of communication, forcing wine producers to experience the online instruments. As consequence, wineries and their costumers got used of the digital means and have elected them as their preferred ones. With the recovery of the offline communication by the end of the pandemic, both offline and online instruments have started to be integrated into a bigger communication strategy (Alonso, 2021). Becoming digital is no more an option for wineries. Regardless their size and geographical location, wine firms have to be present in the online platforms, otherwise they would not communicate their existence to the world. As noticed by Costopoulou et al. (2018), the digitalisation of the wine experience may determine for wineries a massive exposure to consumers' voices; with the consequent obligation to listen and to take them in consideration. Nevertheless, the large amount of information may be used by wineries to learn about their consumers' characteristics and habits, thus enabling a profiling of their audience (Costopoulou et al., 2018).

Szolnoki et al. (2016) coined the terms of Wine 1.0²¹ and Wine 2.0²² to explain the digital transition that wine firms have passed through. The researchers describe how Wine 1.0 alludes to the adoption of Internet by wineries in a basic form, with the creation of a website containing useful and commercial information. Wine 1.0 is characterized by a one-way communication flow, from the wine firm to the passive users. Wine 2.0, instead, incorporates the basic features of Wine 1.0 while allowing a bidirectional communication, and denotes the aim of wine firms to reach their customers where they want to be reached.

²¹ Web 1.0 is defined by the authors as the arrangement of personal web pages and the act of creating content on the Internet (Szolnoki et al., 2016).

²² Web 2.0 is defined by the authors as the evolution of Web 1.0 into collaborative projects like blogs (Szolnoki et al., 2016).

Consequentially, Wine 2.0 enables the dialogue with the audience in specific platforms, such as social networks and blogs, where the visitors are involved in the co-creation of content and may express their opinion and preferences.

With reference to the website, Scarso (2014) theorized some important principles that the web page of a winery has to respect for the effectiveness of its communication. These principles concern: contents, clarity, consistency with the image, and usability. The contents are the first ingredient to build a communication flow from the wine firm to the audience, and they may be about the winery, the wine product, the production, and the location. The types of content proposed and the accuracy of their writing may determine the interest of the audience towards the web page of the winery. The clarity principle means that the contents have to be narrated in a clear and comprehensible manner, avoiding a complicate syntax to prefer immediate and intuitive statements. Then, the principle of consistency with the image explains that all the exposed contents have to respect and confirm the image of the company. On the one hand, this principle is aligned with the previous exposed principle of consistency of IMC; in the other hand, communicating the same message with the same features in all the communicative channels helps the image of the winery being remembered. Finally, usability refers to the easiness of navigation, which is due to structural and aesthetic elements of the web page. In fact, if contents are easy to be found and if the layout is appealing, the user experience will be satisfying. The importance of the architecture of the user experience has been confirmed by Iaia et al. (2017), who conducted research on the websites of selected Italian wine firms. The result of their study reveals how wineries aims at facilitating the navigation of the user in their website, by adding a homepage button in almost every sheet of the site. Moreover, wineries seem to understand the globalised context in which they operate, given their efforts to publish content both in Italian and in English. Importance is given likewise to the concept of family, around which are built and narrated the history and the tradition of the winery. Other sections of the website that the researchers have found to be important are the contacts section, which includes both online and legal addresses; and the section dedicated to extra activities which the company may take on, regarding, for example, the respect of the environment. The core page is dedicated to the illustration of the wines produced, which are described in terms of variety of the grape, territory of origin, alcoholic percentage, organoleptic features, and food pairings. The web

experience is completed with insights about news and events organized in the vineyard and calls to visit the location.

In this digital scenario, the leading role is played by social media, being the most popular online communication tools adopted by wineries and by businesses in general. Social media are:

“any kind of online media that stimulates participation, openness’ conversation, Connecters and sense of community” and they may acquire various forms, such as: social networks, blogs, microblogs, media-sharing sites, social bookmarking, and forums (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012).

These instruments have spread in the society as the preferred communication channel of the time, due to their easiness of utilisation; and businesses are including them in their marketing plan to create and cultivate a closer relationship with their audiences. Being wine an experiential product, it lends itself to be visually communicated trough social media, through which firms have the possibility to communicate their brand identities and experiences. Moreover, wine costumers and lovers are accustomed to approach wineries firstly on the Internet, visiting their social networks in search for information and word of mouth advices (Szolnoki et al, 2018). Ingrassia et al. (2020) explain how wine firms are adding value to social media as instruments to communicate in particular to the Millennials generation. Millennials are people born from 1980 to 1996; they are digital natives, thus accustomed to the use of the online platforms, and they have reached an age in which they are in control of their economical and lifestyle decisions. Indeed, the generation has attracted the interest of the wine sector due to their purchasing capacity and their talent in setting the trends and accepting innovations. Millennials have introduced a new concept of wine consumption, in which the wine product is a mean to affirm their belonging to a certain social status. Society influences likewise their choice of a wine, since these individuals seem to value the advice coming from their peers. Millennials are not interested in the geographical labels that link the product to a specific territory, instead, they give importance to the type of the wine (Ingrassia et al., 2020).

Considering the rise of social media in the wine industry, this document will be dedicated to an in-depth study of their approach by wine firms, and the following paragraph will describe in the detail the practice of social media marketing as business instrument.

2.2 Social media strategy for businesses

The advent of Internet and social media has changed the means through which people and businesses communicate (Porter, 2001, in Alves et al., 2016). Social media, in particular, have empowered customers, who now dispose of more and easily obtainable commercial information (Albors et al., 2008). Companies have become aware of the necessity to implement their own social media strategy (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012), which is an imperative to remain competitive in the digital environment (Evans et al., 2021). Consequentially, the marketing function of firms has been called to answer the new means of communication, developing specific approaches to the issue (Thomas, 2007). In this context, the practice of social media marketing has emerged (Alves et al., 2016).

The definition of social media marketing was once focused on the promotional concept:

“the use of social media channels to promote a company and its products” (Nadaraja and Yazdanifard, 2013).

However, it became more structured in recent times:

“Social media marketing is the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organization’s stakeholders²³” (Tuten and Solomon, 2017)

Scholars present it as a current issue for organisations (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012; Tuten and Solomon, 2017), which have to incorporate and align their social media marketing strategy with their marketing one (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012).

As Tuten and Solomon (2017) explained, social media marketing is characterized by the communicative power it provides customer with. In this new logic, customers raise their voices to collaborate with companies for the production of content. Namely, the content

²³ Such definition is elaborated on the basis of the definition of marketing: “marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customer, clients, partners, and society at large” to the social media context” (Tuten and Solomon, 2017).

marketing is the result of the exchange between the customer and the company, which cooperate for the fulfilment of reciprocal needs. This approach is possible thanks to the democratic principle around which social media are conceived, that gives the possibility to users of taking active part in the conversation. Coherently, the authors suggests that the involvement of customers in the social media marketing discourse is such that it may be appropriate to include in the marketing mix another P: participation (Tuten and Solomon, 2017). With participation, marketing shifts from a merely outbound logic²⁴, to an innovative inbound²⁵ one; that ends to be a strategy through which the customer spontaneously comes closer to the company, because he finds in it interesting content (Dakouan and Chouaib; 2019).

Social media marketing is proven to offer multiple advantages to those companies implementing it. Nadaraja and Yazdanifard (2013) summarised such advantages in the following: costs, social interaction, interactivity, targeted market, and customer service. The major advantages social media marketing provides are cost-related, given the little investment it requires; merely in terms of organisation of the function, since most of social media do not impose any fees to access and use them. Moreover, in the social environment the posted information may become viral thanks to the sharing of the users, thus without needing any additional economic effort by the company. Social interaction is another benefit deriving from social media marketing, given the new sites and periods of conversation the strategy has created; as such, social platforms are currently the first place in which people spend the majority of their time, meanwhile having the possibility to interact with new individuals, contributing thereby to the social interaction journey. Interactivity is the main feature of social media marketing, which enables users to participate in the communication and creation of content. Targeted market refers to the possibility marketers have to target their audience based on the data about users they collect; in fact, on social media users share inadvertently lots of data about their preferences, and such data may be used by marketers to tailor the offer to the users. Finally, social media marketing allows the marketer to include a customer service system, which offers assistance or Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) in case the user needs

²⁴ Outbound marketing concerns content pushed by the company to the customer.

²⁵ Inbound marketing concerns the seeking of interesting content by the user in the company devices.

them. In the long run, a well implemented customer service may positively impact the loyalty of users (Nadaraja and Yazdanifard, 2013).

2.2.1. Planning

The decision to adopt a social media marketing strategy comes as the last step of a planned digital marketing strategy, which has to be aligned to the overall business plan. According to Di Fraia (2015) a well-articulated digital marketing strategy relies on the 5W: “where”, “why”, “who”, “what”, “when”; to which is added “how”.

“Where” concerns both the analysis of the external scenario and the consequent decision of which geographical market to address. The analysis of the external scenario is implemented through a SWOT analysis, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the sector; and through an analysis of the competitors. All the obtained information serves the company to identify the best position for its strategy. In case the digital efforts are intended for the abroad markets, the communication has to be declined according to the language and cultural symbols of the country of destination, in order to avoid possible biases and make sure the message is well received and understood. This implies previous research efforts by marketers involved in the implementation of the digital strategy, who have to study the language and cultural of the destination market.

“Why” refers to the objectives, namely the business aims that move all the marketing endeavours. Objectives has to be SMART: Specific; Measurable; Actionable; Relevant; and Time-related. Specific means that objectives have to be tailored to the problem of interest. Measurable relates to the adaptability of objectives to qualitative or quantitative measures. Actionable means that the objective in question is able to trigger actions that enhance the performance. Relevant concerns the relevancy for a specific issue. Time-related refers to the specification of a time period (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). Anyway, the objectives a company may be willing to achieve are various, the most popular are found to be: brand awareness and brand building, enhancement of the customer base, launch of new products and services, retention of current customers, brand promotion, employee engagement, marketing research, individuation of new segments of customers, individuation of new products and services, and improvement of actual product and services (Tuten and Solomon, 2017).

“Who” relates to the specification of the target to which the digital strategy is addressed. This specification occurs through the ideation of Buyer Personas: archetypal figures of a person who might buy, or influence the buying of, the products a company sells; and to which is destined the communication content (Revella, 2011). This person is crafted as an avatar, thus identified with a name and a picture, and described in terms of personality, goals, education, profession, and so on. Buyer Personas are used to help marketers create a tailored communication message; addressing the archetypal figure as it was real. Furthermore, Buyer Personas assist the marketer in investigating the psychology and decision-making process of the audience, to fulfil its communicative needs (Revella, 2011).

“What” refers to the object of the communicative message, namely the content which the digital marketing strategy offers. Content marketing is the practice of delivering content which has value for the target customer, provided in the places where he is seeking it (Content Marketing Institute, in Baltes, 2015). The quality of the content marketing is directly proportional to the performance of the digital strategy and may help the company increase brand awareness²⁶ and customer’s loyalty (Baltes, 2015). Content marketing may aim at entertain, inspire, educate, or convince (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2022); and there are multiple forms through which it may be performed, the most popular are: blog posts, eBooks, templates, infographics, videos, podcasts, guides, kits, tip sheets, checklists, webinars, whitepapers, case studies, surveys and research reports, and user-generated content (Vinerean, 2017).

“When” is a peculiar issue in the digital environment, given the “always on” characteristics of digital contents, which have to be continuously updated by marketers, notwithstanding hour and date. Moreover, an additional effort is required to digital operators, concerning the individuation of the best times to post, in order to reach the audience with particular content, always maintaining an ongoing sharing of basic one.

“How” closes the ideation of the digital strategy, by identifying the media mix through which implementing the design. As such, the strategy may be performed by various instruments,

²⁶ Brand awareness is the notoriety of a brand, called also brand familiarity, is the extent to which the brand is recognizable in the minds of consumers. The objective of the brand awareness is reaching the “top of mind awareness”: being the first brand consumers think of when answering to a category need. It is one of the assets of the brand.

among which social media may be included. According to this logic, social media marketing comes as a consequence of the overall digital strategy, elaborated starting from its objectives and ending in the methods to achieve them. On the contrary, a decision to adopt social media marketing without inserting it in a planned digital strategy would cause ineffective results (Di Fraia, 2015).

As previously exposed, the term social media may refer to multiple instruments, such as: social networks, blogs, microblogs, media-sharing sites, social bookmarking, and forums (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). For the sake of its research, this thesis focuses on social networks, and particularly on Instagram.

2.3 Instagram

Social networks (SNSs) are defined as:

“sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd and Ellison, 2008).

Social networks are various, the most popular are: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. This research is centred on Instagram, being it one of the leading social media of the time (Rejeb et al., 2022), and the one with the highest increase rate among all the social media platforms (Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis, 2016; Harris, 2016, in Chalupova, 2021).

Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social network founded in 2010 by Mike Krieger and Kevin Systrom (Mattern, 2016), which is available as website and as free application in mobile devices (Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis, 2016). In 2013 Instagram was bought by Facebook, of Mark Zuckerberg, and soon it reached 100 million of users (Ramos, 2015). Today it is controlled by Meta Platforms, Inc. and counts more than 1 billion users per month and 500 million users per day (Rejeb et al., 2022). An average of 80 million photos are shared on Instagram every day (Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis, 2016).

The vintage yet innovative soul of Instagram is intrinsic to its name, which is the composition of two terms: instant and telegram (Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis, 2016).

The main kind of content Instagram delivers is inspirational: millions of people use Instagram to find in it inspiration about their lifestyle, aesthetic, hobbies, and many other (Singh, 2020).

The Instagram platform allows its users to take, edit, and share photos or videos, and to chat thanks to its “direct” messaging system. Users of Instagram possess a profile, in which they post their content, and through which they may like, comment, or share the content of the other users (Haenlein, et al., 2020). In fact, Instagram functions through a series of vanity KPIs²⁷ (Key Performance Indicators), namely likes and followers. Each user may express his approval to the content posted by another user by putting a “like” on it. Analogously, he may express his interest in regularly receiving the content shared by a user through starting to follow him. Consequently, each user will have a certain number of followers and following people, and will receive a certain number of likes. Moreover, each content may also receive a number of shares, based on the number of times it is shared by other users. The number of these indicators corresponds to the fame of a user, and it is used as a relevant metric in personal branding (De Vries, 2019). Since 2018, the period of videos has been extended to a maximum of 60 seconds, thanks to the introduction of their IGTV format (Haenlein, et al., 2020).

The content posted on Instagram is generally paired with hashtags (Haenlein, et al., 2020). Hashtags are words with the character ‘#’ as prefix. Introduced in Instagram in 2011 (Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis, 2016), hashtags are used to indicate the theme of a post and to make it more visible (Park et al., 2016). On Instagram they are placed in the description part of posts, along with the copy. Since they may refer to a variety of content, they have to be chosen according to the one of interest. Every hashtag corresponds to a photo gallery containing all the photos that have been tagged with such hashtag (Chalupova, 2021). Thus, once a post is shared using one or more hashtags, it will appear to any user that will click on that specific hashtag in any page; for this reason, hashtags enhance the visibility of a post (Park et al., 2016). Notwithstanding their original describing function, some scholars (Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis, 2016) argue that hashtags are currently used to emphasize, criticize, or bring humour or emotions to the

²⁷ Vanity KPIs are metrics that express a quantity variable.

content. Scholars suggest using hashtags expressed in English, or to combine them with other languages (Chalupova, 2021).

Peculiar is the fact that on Instagram the visual content assumes a square shape, which takes inspiration from the iconic Polaroid pictures. The two main formats through which the visual content is shared on Instagram are posts and stories. If posts have been present since the origins of the platform, stories were introduced in 2016 (Haenlein, et al., 2020). As Kreling et al. (2022) explained, these two kinds of content format differ mainly for their persistence in time. Posts have a high level of persistence, since once a user decides to publish them on his profile, they remain visible; unless the user himself decides to delete or store them. On the contrary, stories may be considered ephemeral, since they remain visible for 24 hours and then disappear; unless the user decides to keep them visible as “Featured Stories” (Kreling et al., 2022). Anyway, stories would always appear as additional elements complementing the content published through posts. Moreover, posts and stories may differ also in terms of visibility. As such, once contents are posted they are potentially visible to all the followers of the user, if his profile is private, or to all Instagram’s users if his profile is public. Stories, instead, enable the user to configure the visibility of the content according to his preferences. For instance, a user may choose to display the content only to the range of his “close-friends”, or to hide it from specific users. Moreover, given the nature of the two formats, posts are more likely to be planned both in content object and in time of publishing, while stories may lead to a more spontaneous sharing (Kreling et al., 2022).

Once posts are published, they appear on the “feed” section of a user profile (Leaver et al., 2020). By the way, regarding this a clarification has to be made. Originally, the content used to be displayed on the feed chronologically, so the user was accustomed to seeing the posts from the more recent to the less recent. Nevertheless, in June 2016, the way of working of the platform changed, due to the introduction of an algorithm. With the algorithm content is no more displayed chronologically, instead it follows the guidelines of the algorithm itself. The mechanisms moving the algorithm was initially unknown by the public, causing panic among the pool of users. In 2018 Instagram provided marketers with broad parameters regarding the functioning of the algorithm. Consequently, it is possible to know that, following the algorithm, the feed part of each users’ profile is composed on the base of three elements: interest, recency, and relationship. Interest, as

may be deduced, depends on the interests of the users, in terms of the types of contents he prefers to see. Recency is the only element that remains connected to the time classification, since it refers to the age of the post. Relationship relates to the connection between the user who is posting and the user who is receiving the post. This connection is determined on the basis of their chatting, liking, commenting, and tagging each other (Leaver et al., 2020).

Instagram is seen as beneficial for marketing purposes and scholars suggest its adoption as a marketing channel (Singh, 2020). The platform may positively impact brand promotion, given the low involvement needed from its users, who dispose of the visual content with no effort (Molinillo, et al., 2018). As such, the main reason why Instagram may be effective is its visual method of communication. Images present a series of favourable characteristics: they are easily received and understood by the audience than a text language, they are easier to remember, and they may express in a shorter time a consistent quantity of content. Moreover, pictures are keener to arouse emotions and extreme feelings in the audience. Thus, Instagram provides companies with a more engaging and effective way of storytelling, that is worth to be leveraged and introduced in the digital strategy; given the expressed preference of the consumers of the twenty-first century for visual communication (Singh, 2020).

Singh (2020) individuated the steps that compose an effective Instagram strategy: “choose a simple promise and deliver a sophisticated message”, “create a unique visual narrative Brands on Instagram”, “build your story on the four pillars of visual storytelling”, “pick your storytelling themes”, and “occasions”. The first step refers to a company’s intention to deliver more than a merely visual content, instead, a one that narrates the brand experience to the audience. The second step deals with originality, which may be relevant for the loyalty of the users. The four pillars of visual storytelling are individuated in: authenticity, sensations, archetypes, and relevancy. Picking the themes relates to the choice a company has to make regarding the kind of content it wants to deliver. Finally, the storytelling should be embellished with occasion moments, concerning compelling images of socialisation times (Singh, 2020).

After having introduced the field of social media marketing and Instagram, the next chapter will investigate their adoption by the wine industry.

Chapter 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The advent of social media in the wine industry has gained the interest of the academic literature. The necessity to contribute to the research path is given by the emergence of some important considerations: the reported several benefits for wineries coming from the usage of social networks (Zeler et al., 2019; Obermayer et al., 2022) and the poor integration of the social media tactics in the business strategy of wine firms (Dean et al., 2020; Mastroberardino et al., 2022; Costopoulou et al., 2018). Notwithstanding the increasing popularity of the Instagram platform in the wine sector (Veszelski, 2019; Bellio et al., 2021; Chalupova and Pilar, 2021), previous research has been focusing on Facebook (Fait et al., 2013; Scarso, 2014; Wagner and Weigman, 2014; Galati et al., 2017; Sigala and Robinson, 2019), and less academic attention has been paid to Instagram, highlighting a gap in this field of literature. The need for further research on the topic has been manifested by various scholars calling for an in-depth investigation of the social media approach in the wine industry (Capitello et al., 2014; Tach et al., 2016; Galati et al., 2017) and for a qualitative examination of their effectively adoption by wine firms (Dolan and Goodman, 2017; Antonio et al., 2019).

Before entering the empirical research domain, a review of the relevant literature on the topic is here provided. The sources are presented by distinguishing them in two classes, each one dedicated to one of the two main themes of interest in the wine sector: social media marketing and Instagram.

3.1 Social media marketing in the wine industry

Numerous studies address the adoption of social media as business instruments by the wine industry and witness the increasing interest of the sector towards such tools (Capitello et al., 2014; Szolnoki et al., 2014; Dolan and Goodman, 2017; Szolnoki et al., 2018; Pucci et al., 2019; Zeler et al., 2019; Ingrassia et al., 2020; Levitskaia et al., 2020; Strickland and Williams, 2022). The recent investigation of Mastroberardino et al. (2022) on the effect of digitalisation on wine firms reveals two main findings. First, the business function on which digitalisation has had the greatest impact is marketing, which has become digital; second, according to wine producers, the activity on which they are

currently focusing most of their efforts is social media marketing. Nowadays, social media are an essential part of the marketing mix of wineries (Szolnoki et al., 2018) of all sizes (Zeler et al., 2019), which do not even consider their possible disuse (Bellio et al., 2021). Whether the familiarity with innovative digital communication tools is expected in the New World countries, in which, as previously stated, there is a propensity towards marketing activities, it is not taken for granted in the Old World ones. Nevertheless, Capitello et al. (2014) underline how social media have become important assets even in the traditional Italian winemaking landscape; while Dolan and Goodman (2017) offer a focus on their usage by the New World country par excellence, Australia. Even if Szolnoki et al. (2014) and Galati et al. (2017) assert that the social media strategy is more common for wineries of the New World, it is possible to state that the social revolution is affecting the whole wine industry in its global extension. Wineries embrace social instruments to communicate both at corporate and at product level, spreading commercial information together with company's values, history, and initiatives (Dolan and Goodman, 2017).

Some scholars argue that the enormous success of social media in the wine industry is due to the characteristics of the wine product (Cuomo et al., 2016; Dolan and Goodman, 2017; Pucci et al., 2019; Dean et al., 2020; Ingrassia et al., 2020; Bellio et al., 2021; Gómez-Rico et al., 2021). The works of Dolan and Goodman (2017) and of Gómez-Rico et al. (2021) highlight the hedonic nature of wine, which has to be described in all its features, each of which is a possible trigger for the interest of the consumer. The symbolic essence of hedonism offers a leverage for visual communications efforts, that may aim at arousing emotions in the audience, creating a deep bond with it (Cuomo et al., 2016). In addition, wine is considered as an experiential product (Szolnoki et al., 2016), conceived to be tasted among social groups, thus fostering socialization (Ingrassia et al., 2020); and this conception has various implications. Firstly, Szolnoki et al. (2018) theorize the need for consumers to communicate their wine experience; secondly, Dean et al. (2020) extend the reasoning by suggesting how the experiential category nurtures social interaction and discussion among social media users; thirdly, Bellio et al. (2021) confirm the experiential notion by identifying in the wine purchase an expression of the adhesion to a specific lifestyle, that as such requires a certain degree of exhibition. Furthermore, researchers are almost unanimous in identifying an information asymmetry in the wine field. For this reason, the works of Szolnoki et al. (2016), Pucci et al. (2019), and Costopoulou et al.

(2018) suggest how consumers may count on advice coming from other people's recommendations or from professional opinions before considering a wine product.

According to Galati et al. (2017), the search for information characterizes the wine experience and may enhance the reputation of a product. This flow of information results in a so-called word of mouth (WOM) effect, namely the need to talk with peers about the wine product (Szolnoki et al., 2016); which, according to Szolnoki et al. (2018), positively affects the wine purchasing. The importance of WOM for the wine product is reinforced by Dean et al. (2020). In the view of Zamarreño Aramendia et al. (2021), it is more appropriate to refer to a digital word of mouth (E-WOM), given the move of the conversation in the social networks. According to the authors, a favourable E-WOM for a wine company may be the result of a satisfying wine experience, created through hedonic details conveyed in the narration, that reinforces the relationship with the consumer and lasts over the moment in which the parts have come in contact (Zamarreño Aramendia et al., 2021). In the recent study of Strickland and Williams (2022) E-WOM has a positive relationship with the attraction of tourists to the winery. All the aforesaid peculiarities of the wine product are addressed by the social media platforms, that enable an easy and speedy sharing of information (Ingrassia et al., 2021) enriched by the pairing with emotionally touching images. Consequentially, wine has become one of the top eight types of products of which it is regularly spoken about online (Costopoulou et al., 2018).

The academic literature has expressed consensus in detecting a huge impact of social networks in the wine industry, and on the extent to which social media may be beneficial for wineries in different ways. Antonio et al. (2019) explains how social media enable companies and consumers to come into a closer relationship. A finding similar to those of Cuomo et al. (2016) and Obermayer et al. (2022), according to which social media allow a deeper knowledge of the consumer personality, offering the possibility to collect data about consumers' preferences and expectations; thus, allowing the tailoring of the marketing strategy to the audience. As suggest Cuomo et al. (2016), data shall be monitored and updated regularly, for the most effective communication result; and in the view of Galati et al. (2017), information may be used to guide the behaviour of consumers. In the opinion of Tach et al. (2016) and Obermayer et al. (2022), social media enhance wine sales and the customer engagement, which, for (Antonio et al., 2019), is an important indicator of the success of the digital strategy. Zeler et al. (2019), who propose a focus on

wine social media marketing in Spain, highlight how social media may convey insights about the preferences of other stakeholders besides consumers, and how they may influence the reputation of the wine company and its products. Coherently, the authors support the importance of aligning the social media strategy to the that of PR and, at the same time, they indicate how maintaining an active presence in the social profiles may be crucial to ensure a positive and professional image of the company. As reflected in Zeler et al. (2019) and Obermayer et al. (2022), social media present the further advantages of requiring a minor investment for their adoption and the possibility to involve the audience in a process of co-creation of the content proposed (Obermayer et al., 2022).

Notwithstanding the multiple benefits offered by the innovative platforms, the reasons why wineries adopt them may be different. Szolnoki et al. (2018) theorize the major purposes that wine firms try to reach through the digital platforms, indicated in the following list: promotion of the organized events, public relations, dialogue with the costumers, enhancement of the consumer base, promotion of the company itself, customer service, information about the products offered, and communication with other wine entities. Dolan and Goodman (2017) concentrate the analysis on the Australian context and discover that the main aims are: to acquire new consumers and to communicate with them, to promote the winery, to develop public relations, and to promote events. The investigation of Obermayer et al. (2022) confirms the previous research, while adding the goal of obtaining brand awareness. As Tach et al. (2016) emphasize, is extremely important to identify the objectives of the social media strategy; they also add that, on the contrary, acting without a clear direction path would cause an unsatisfactory result, especially for sales. The importance of an accurately planned social media strategy is remarked more recently in the study of Veszelszki (2019), who argues that the plan has to be oriented to the long period and shall offer precious content which addresses the needs of all the targets involved.

Proved the utilization of social media by wine firms, Capitello et al. (2014) individuate two main strategies of social media approach by wineries: “focus on tradition” and “search for innovation”. In the “focus on tradition strategy” , the communication accentuates the production expertise, the history and pedigree, and the link with a specific territory. In the “search for innovation” approach, the concept of oenological renaissance is introduced, and particular attention is drawn to the drinking of wine as part of the Italian

lifestyle. The social media strategy's discourse was continued in the more recent work of Dolan and Goodman (2017), in which some primary communications directions emerge: "experiential orientation", "selling orientation", and "customer orientation". Each orientation defines the primary message of the communication and the related visual themes posted on the platforms. The "experiential orientation" aims at communicating the different experiences one may live when coming in contact with the winery, with particular attention to the events by this organized, such as guided degustation, music shows, celebrations, and company meals. Events are the main object also of the images shared in the posts, that illustrate the beautiful location, the actors involved, and the tickets to participate. The one who adopts this experiential approach targets the decision-making process of the consumer and the possibility to build with him a closer relationship. The "selling orientation" has for objective the increase in sales and, for this reason, shows pictures regarding pricing specifications, special promotions, release date, and wine evaluations. Wineries involved in this strategy focalize their efforts on brand recall and on product representation; nevertheless, this communication method presents the risk of over-communication, and shall be embraced with caution. Finally, the "customer orientation" pursues the creation of an affective bond with the customer, made of confidence, gratification, and empathy; that end up in the arising of a brand community. This communicative attitude is the one that, more than the other, dialogues with the customers, trying to build support around the company's personality. These three orientations are examples of how wine firms have developed communication strategies on social media, aimed at creating positive associations with their product and corporate image (Dolan and Goodman, 2017).

Previous research underlined some challenges in the realization of a social media strategy by wineries. As Pucci et al. (2019) and Bellio et al. (2021) consider, the first issue regards the need to integrate the social media strategy in the marketing and business's ones; in order to achieve a seamless experience, where the message communicated is the same in every touchpoint in which the consumer may be found. Secondly, the recent contribute of Obermayer et al. (2022) points out the necessity of continuously renewing the social media management program, due to the dynamicity of the platforms, which requires to be up to date with the latest trends. To achieve a satisfying result, social media operators need to adopt an open minded attitude, to be devoted to the cause, and to cultivate a

constant and clear relationship with the audience; even if it would necessitate massive time resources (Obermayer et al., 2022).

Coherently, another branch of literature has notified some lacks in the effective implementation of the social media strategy by wineries (Capitello et al., 2014; Pucci et al., 2019; Szolnoki et al., 2018; Costopoulou et al., 2018; Zeler et al., 2019; Dean et al., 2020; Mastroberardino et al., 2022). The first suggestion was proposed in 2014 by Capitello et al., who argue that wine sector does not include social media into the holistic design, since it adopts the media without aligning them to other business's objectives. The reasoning has been continued by Pucci et al. (2019), who opine that often social media are not used to support the marketing plan (Dean et al., 2020) and that, in general, are not handled in a strategic way (Zeler et al., 2019). This may be caused by a scarcity of technological resources and inadequate organisational culture on the digital trend. Szolnoki et al. (2018) suggest even that lots of wineries neither use social media, nor intend to approach them in the future. In their previous book, Szolnoki et al. (2016) individuate some terms to refer to wine firms according to their current or future adoption of social media. Namely, wineries may be divided into four groups: "enthusiastic innovators", "modest innovators", "sceptics", and "latecomers". "Enthusiastic innovators" are wineries that are active on the social platforms and are willing to increase their online activity for the future. "Modest innovators", despite being present on the platforms, do not want to extend their usage for the times to come. "Latecomers" have just recognized the power of social media and will start using them in the future. "Sceptics" are the wineries that do not want to use social media at all. Given the presence of wine firms on social platforms, some studies (Viana, 2016; Pucci et al., 2019) concur that wineries have been slow in embracing such tools. The vision is confirmed in the very recent contribute of Mastroberardino et al. (2022), who add that, despite the late arrival, the influence of social media is quite evident in the wine industry (Obermayer et al., 2022) and still shapes its communication dynamics.

3.2 Instagram as wine communication instrument

Instagram is a platform worthy of attention, being awarded as the social network with the highest growth rate and the highest engagement rate (Di Fraia, 2015), registering around one billion monthly users (Dean, 2021, in Rejeb et al., 2022). It represents the relevant

social platform around which the social media marketing's strategy of wine firms shall be designed (Chalupova and Pilar, 2021).

3.2.1 Strategy and implementation

The popularity of the instrument may come from its visual method of communication, which has been addressed by the studies of different scholars (Veszelski, 2019; Bellio et al., 2021; Alonso, 2021). Communicating visually has become the preferred way of expression of the society of the twenty-first century; moreover, it is particularly effective in the wine field, since it enables to trigger emotions (Alonso, 2021), to establish a deep relationship with the audience, and to influence its decisions in the purchasing phase (Veszelski, 2019; Bellio et al., 2021). The possibility of sharing emotionally touching wine pictures makes of Instagram the perfect social platform in which the wine industry may invest (Veszelski, 2019; Pozzetti, 2021 in Alonso, 2021).

Scholars sustain the importance for wineries to implement a structured Instagram strategy (Alonso, 2021; Bellio et al., 2021). Given the need to offer interesting and original content to an over-exposed audience, the creation of an Instagram strategy shall be preceded by the analysis of the activity of the competitors, to understand which are the already discussed topics and which ones deserve to be deepened (Alonso, 2021). As suggested by Scarso (2014) the management of the strategy requires an organizational attitude ready to fully engage in it, and in this regard, some key principles may be of service. In particular, it shall be known that the developing of online relationships involves trust; thus, it may be relevant to nurture it through a transparent and genuine conduct, reflecting the real state of the winery. Subsequently, given the fluctuating character of the social platforms environment, the social media personnel shall be ready to make even little and unexpected adjustments. Since credibility and novelty necessitate time, the willingness to dedicate them time-resources shall be assessed in advance. Finally, the social media journey may be an experience both for the audience and for the winery itself, which may try to act with amusement while implementing the strategy (Scarso, 2014). Taken for granted the exposed suggestions, the development of the Instagram strategy may begin with the identification of the objectives and followed by the expression of the winery personal style. The style distinguishes social wine firms from one another, and it is built through visual elements, such as colour palettes and

communication themes, together with a specific tone of voice (Alonso, 2021). For this reason, a winery shall consider the importance of establishing the mentioned elements, and then of continuing to post with reference to them; meaning that it may always use the same colour shades in its images, for instance. Being Instagram a visual network, it is crucial to dispose of high-quality photographic material, which may depend preferably on the hiring of a skilled photographer, or on the usage of image filters (Alonso, 2021). As noted by Bellio et al. (2021), the overall Instagram strategy shall be composed by experiential and storytelling elements. The relevance of the storytelling notion is reflected in the research of Veszelski (2019). According to the author, telling a personal story could serve wineries to offer three types of content: educational, helpful, and of entertainment. Educational content regards the telling of the phases and professions involved in the production of the wine product, from the viticulture to the viniculture, also including the gastronomic matching and instructions for usage. The helpful content provides users information about a healthy nutrition. Finally, the entertainment text adds extra content concerning family and tradition anecdotes. The story may even sound truer if it reveals anecdotes and facts of the everyday life (Alonso, 2021). A proper storytelling, combined with an emotional touch, would catch the attention and loyalty of the audience, turning the winery and its personnel into digital speakers worthy of being followed (Veszelski, 2019). Successively, the author individuates the steps to follow in order to set up a good story of the wine firm. These steps are four: identification, differentiation, storytelling²⁸, own voice, and continuous updates. In the identification phase the winery reflects about its genesis and characteristics and defines its brand identity. Then, during the differentiation step the found characteristics are highlighted in their unicity from competitors. The contents are combined with the storytelling act, that individuates awards and struggles of the narrative. Later, the winery has to define its own tone of voice, which shall be individual and tailored to its character. Finally, the message shall be communicated unceasingly and regularly updated (Veszelski, 2019).

The core parts of the strategy are the choice and the planning of the content, whether it is in the form of posts or stories. With reference to the themes object of the wine posts, the academic findings are heterogeneous, since the topic of the narration may concern the wine products, the winery, the vineyard, the values of the company, and the employees

²⁸ Storytelling is here indicated as a name of one of the steps that compose the overall storytelling practice.

involved. Nevertheless, researchers have found some general trends. According to Alonso (2021) the majority of posts involve the matching of wine and lifestyle. As found by Bellio et al. (2021), instead, wineries seem to concentrate the object of their posts around the product itself, without including extra elements such as landscape or food. The content may appear more catching and truer if it depicts the winemaker or the people employed in the wine firm (Pozzetti, 2021, in Alonso, 2021). To enhance the number of reach²⁹ and impressions³⁰, the content may be organized in short videos, since they are more likely to catch the attention of the audience; and the posts may be localized using the geo-localization feature of Instagram, which, in addition, shall help in attracting visits to the winery (Scarso, 2014). The Instagram post is then framed by a proper selection of the hashtags. As evidenced in the study of Chalupova and Pilar (2021), hashtags are declined by wine marketers according to the various shades of the world of wine and organized in categories that orientate the research of the consumer on one side, and the targeting of the audience by the winery on the other side. Some popular hashtags used in the wine sector are: #instawine, #winelover, #naturalwine, #organicwine (Chalupova and Pilar, 2021), #winepic, #wineoclock, #winetime, #somm, #whitewine, #redwine, #sparklingwine, #winestagram, #winedownfriday, #winewednesday, and #italianwine (Alonso, 2021). As noted by Bellio et al. (2021), the number of hashtags adopted in a post influences the number of likes received by the same publication; thus, impacting the vanity KPIs. The maximum number of hashtags publishable on Instagram is thirty; however, it is proper remain in a range of three to five hashtags per post (Alonso, 2021).

The choice about features and attributes of a post is used for the purpose of sharing the content. As for all the business sectors, also in the wine industry the social media strategy is structured into an editorial calendar. Alonso (2021) illustrates the prototype of a possible editorial calendar for a wine firm, in which messages are shared through the alternation of posts and stories. In each message the theme may be one of the following: the product, the winery, the sector, the territory, the events, the lifestyle, the tourism, user-generated-content, and others. Posting about the product would mean adding information about its organoleptic and commercial characteristics, while including

²⁹ Reach is indicator used to express the number of individuals exposed to the content; namely, the number of individuals who saw the content.

³⁰ Impressions are an indicator used to refer to the number of times a content has been displayed; namely, the number of times a content is shared or viewed by the audience.

possible elements of novelty. Focalising on the winery would offer the possibility to illustrate its history and organization, as well as its structure, facilities, and functionalities. Involving the wine sector would treat with news, lectures, and meetings. The theme of the territory offers a narrative linked to the culture, tradition, history, and nature of the place. Events may end in a lively content inviting to tastings, lives, and contests. Lifestyle pairs with food and landscapes. Tourism refers to the art of welcoming the guests to the winery. User-generated-content is customized according to the audience of interest, and other themes may incorporate anniversaries and humourism. Furthermore, stories may also include quizzes and tips. As a result, the editorial calendar would be composed by a combination of entertaining, educational, inspiring, and convincing content (Alonso, 2021).

Finally, what matters is to create content that conveys value to the audience (Veszelski, 2019). Followers and potential consumers will come and return to the an Instagram page only if they find in it valuable content, that is able to satisfy their desires of entertainment, knowledge and inspiration (Pozzetti, 2021 in Alonso, 2021).

3.2.2 Wine community

The sharing of valuable content on Instagram may happen between two categories of actors that have been addressed by the recent wine literature: wine influencers (Ingrassia et al. 2020; Alonso, 2021; Ingrassia et al., 2022) and wine lovers (Cuomo et al., 2016). Influencers are individual capable of influencing the acting and decision-making process of other people due to their trustable and competent attitude (Gretzel, 2018). More specifically:

“An influencer is an individual who can effect change in behaviour of others often through trusted opinion, knowledge, and content creation” (Glenister, 2021).

They are people active on social media, especially Instagram (Haenlein et al., 2020), where they build their community of followers. The influencer marketing has become both a marketing strategy adopted by various sectors, and a profitable industry in itself (Haenlein et al., 2020). Influencers are considered *connoisseurs* of the specific theme in which they choose to specialize, and whether this theme is wine, they are called Wine

Influencers (Ingrassia et al. 2020; Alonso, 2021; Ingrassia et al., 2022). A Wine Influencer is:

“the social media influencer [...] that operates in the wine industry system” (Ingrassia et al., 2020) as a professional of the sector, who pursues this role as first or secondary profession, and who may be a sommelier, a journalist, an oenologist or a winemaker (Alonso, 2021).

Wine Influencers are attracting the attention of the wine industry, that is capable to register an impact on its revenues due the collaboration with such actors (Ingrassia et al., 2020). Alonso (2021) individuates the seven phases a winery should follow to develop an effective influencer marketing campaign and to approach influencers for the first time. These steps are: definition of the winery strategy’s objective, whether it may be increasing the traffic, the awareness, or the conversion rate; situational analysis of the social environment in terms of tone of voice and themes adopted; choice of the right influencers, who match the values and characteristics of the winery; show of interest towards such influencers and their content; submission of a request for collaboration to the influencers; starting of the collaboration; measurement the performance achieved. If these steps are followed, they may positively impact the performance of the campaign.

Witnessed the presence of Wine Influencers in the wine industry, the research of Cuomo et al. (2016) highlights the emergence of a new category of actors involved in the wine discourse on Instagram: Wine Lovers, namely individuals who share enthusiasm for the wine product and who socialize with their peers on the social platform adopting a specific style of expression. According to the authors (Cuomo et al., 2016) the communication between Wine Lovers organizes them in “web tribes”. These tribes are conversational flows regarding the same topic, inherent to the wine sector, that unite Wine Lovers and offer them means for comparison and learning. The study of the Wine Lovers phenomenon has revealed a classification map of their identities, whereby they may be divided into four personalities: “enjoyer”, “wannabe”, “wine victim”, and “prophet”. The “enjoyer” type finds excitement and amusement in the consumption of the wine product, and uses hashtags of the types #relax, #happy, #friends, and #party. A “wannabe” drinks wine to pursue his desire of social climbing, expressed in the hashtags of #rich, #beauty, and #vip. For a “wine victim” the wine is a form of expression of his current social status,

that finds evidence in the usage of the hashtags #classy and #vintage. Finally, is a “prophet” who combines the acts of drinking wine and of respecting the environment, choosing the hashtags #green, #bio, and #sustainability. The observed categories of “Wine Lovers” may be used primarily to segment and to target the wine communication on Instagram; and secondarily to make them act as wine influencers for a wine company (Cuomo et al., 2016).

The study of Ingrassia et al. (2020) on the communication scheme of Wine Influencers on Instagram combines the aforesaid figures, identifying some recurring dynamics in the relationship between Wine Influencers and Wine Lovers. Specifically, the authors reveal that are five recurring dynamics in the conversation among the parts: the presence of a regularly cultivated socialization between both subjects, feelings of trust, reciprocal activity of counselling, Wine Influencers principally giving recommendation to Wine Lovers, and the impact of Wine Influencers on the thoughts and acts of the Wine Lovers. A regular conversation is cultivated through the comments of customary and loyal followers, and is the starting point for group conversations. Trust is developed by the mastery and authority of the influencer in the field. The reciprocal activity of counselling extends to third parties that become aware of the conversation topic through the viral marketing³¹ generated by the followers’ discussion. Recommendations are expressed by the Wine Influencer in his posts or stories. Finally, the power of the influencer creates its community of Wine Lovers, who recognize their selves in the leading figure and who express their willingness of belonging to the beloved group (Ingrassia et al., 2020).

3.2.3 Social commerce

More recently Mastroberardino et al. (2022) draw attention to the topic of social commerce. According to the authors, social commerce refers to a form of e-commerce which is consumer-centred and that has spread on the social platforms, especially on Instagram, becoming a wine digital marketing strategy that may serve as a support to the sales.

³¹ Viral marketing is a form of E-WOM. It originates from the discussion of an interesting or original content that has been shared on a platform and subsequently spreads all over the web.

By definition, social commerce is:

“a form of commerce that is mediated by social media [...] it represents potential merchandizing opportunities that combine shopping and social networking activities through social media [...] is regarded as a new category of e-commerce” (Wang and Zhang, 2012).

On Instagram, advertisements of the product or link to the e-commerce site may be introduced, to promote the wine items and to lead the users to the web site³².

According to Mastroberardino et al. (2022) the popularity of social commerce is a consequence of the digitalisation trend; specifically, the authors suggest how the advent of social media has caused a digital transformation that has impacted the marketing function, and consequently the commercial one; now, both functions operate together on the Web aligning to the traditional strategy. Namely, if consumers have always seen favourably the dialogue with wineries on social media, wine firms, on the other hand, have started to value these instruments only during the Covid-19 period. During the pandemic the social distance caused the need to develop an online relationship with the costumers, to maintain the contact with them and to nurture their interests towards the winery and its products. Social media have been elected as the perfect media to serve these needs. Firstly, as mean of communication they enabled an easy, truthful and equal dialogue with the audience, which enjoyed to be involved and entertained in the socials. Following, the platforms suited the consumers' need for commercial knowledge, by starting to include details and descriptions of the products. As such, social commerce may be seen as an encouragement for the e-sales, since it may guide the potential buyers to the e-commerce site of the winery, where it is possible to conclude the purchase. Consequently, winemakers have realized the power of social commerce, which has been steadily introduced and which continues to support e-commerce purposes. In the Instagram environment the social commerce practice encounters the needs and desires of the

³² Meta, the company that owns Instagram together with Facebook and other social networks, does not allow the sales of wine products in its platforms, while allows their promotions and advertisement (Meta Business Help Centre <https://www.facebook.com/business/help/4718253321552152>).

audience and evolves by addressing them. Consumers feel involved in the conversation and share their social commerce experience, fostering in their turn the participation of other audience, thus contributing to the sales of the winery. The contribute of the consumers to the winery's strategy is stressed through *ad hoc* initiatives; for instance, the request for posting and commenting about the winery and its product in a definite time period, to increase the visibility and to call for viral marketing actions. Instagram is particularly relevant as medium for social commerce, since this platform enables the highest conversion rate from visitors to effective consumers (Mastroberardino et al., 2022). Similar findings have been previously suggested by the investigation of Festa et al. (2019), who confirm the vivid presence of wineries on social media and who argue about a transformation of the concept of wine purchasing. In particular, the scholars highlight the emergence of a new approach to the wine sales, caused by the need of consumers to encounter affectivity and emotions in the purchasing action, which is fulfilled in the social platforms.

Despite the increasing trend in online wine sales and the progressively expansion of social commerce as part of the social media strategy of wineries, some limitations to its implementation shall be considered. The sale of wine deals with regulations and policies regarding taxation, logistics, and restrictions that differ from state to state. Consequently, it may be difficult to sell wine in the international markets through the online platforms. Nevertheless, customers are more and more interested in coming in contact with wineries on the social networks, since the platforms enable a closer and transparent relationship with the winemaker and its company.

Chapter 4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter will illustrate the empirical part of the research path. Considering the nature of the topic of interest, and the need for its qualitative examination expressed by the academic literature (Dolan and Goodman, 2017; Antonio et al., 2019), the author has evaluated the choice to adopt a qualitative method of analysis. This chapter will describe each of the phases involved in the empirical research journey: specification of the research question, choice of the qualitative method of analysis, individuation and analysis of the case studies, reporting about findings, and discussion.

4.1 Research question

The literature review enabled the author to specify the research question. From the inspection of the academic sources, it has emerged that there is a gap concerning the adoption of Instagram by wine firms. Scholars ascertain the popularity of Instagram in the wine sector (Veszelski, 2019; Bellio et al., 2021; Chalupova and Pilar, 2021). Nevertheless, scholars have been focusing their research on Facebook (Fait et al., 2013; Scarso, 2014; Wagner and Weigman, 2014; Galati et al., 2017; Sigala and Robinson, 2019), without providing targeted analysis to the highlighted topic.

For this reason, this thesis aims at bridging the literature gap regarding the adoption of Instagram by wine firms, answering the following research question:

How are Italian wine firms adopting Instagram?

Thanks to the literature review and to the considerations of the author, it is possible to specify the research question in 3 objectives:

1. Identification of possible triggers to the adoption of Instagram by Italian wine firms.
2. Identification of the purposes that animate the usage of Instagram by Italian wine firms.
3. Identification of the types of contents that Italian wine firms are publishing on Instagram.

Given the relevance of the Italian economy in the wine industry, the author has decided to focus the research question on the Italian context, in order to understand how this emergent social network has spread across the peninsula.

Consequently, the research question implies an investigation of the national Instagram approach, with the purpose of understanding how wineries use such platform, which may be the motives behind their choice to be present on Instagram, which may be the related communicative purposes they aim to achieve by its usage, and what kind of content do they publish on it.

To provide an exhaustive and tangible answer to the query, the research will be based on empirical analysis, and some wine firms will be selected as case studies; as will be explained later in this chapter.

4.2 The Gioia method

The explanation of the research question and its purposes is worthy to be followed by the illustration the methodology of analysis adopted in this thesis: the Gioia method.

The Gioia Method has been designed to bring “rigor” to the qualitative research, in order to provide it with a structured method of analysis and with an authoritative manner of exposition of its results (Gioia et al., 2012). As the authors explain, qualitative research has always faced the challenge of defending itself from the academic scepticism surrounding it, based on the supremacy of quantitative data. The necessity to provide scientific evidence to the outcome of the qualitative research has aroused the contribute of Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991, in Gioia et al., 2012), who have been the first to bring accuracy to the qualitative research. A result, the conception of the Gioia method has followed: a systematic and multi-layered structure of analysis that combines the inputs of both the analyser side and of the analysed part, ending in a complete outlook sustained by evidence. The Gioia method highlights every phase of the process, clarifying how each step triggers the subsequent, and giving relevance to the possible emergence of new concepts (Gioia et al., 2012).

The Gioia method is based on 4 assumptions:

1. The world of organizations is socially constructed.
2. Social actors are “knowledgeable agents”.
3. Researchers are “glorified reporters”.
4. Researchers are “knowledgeable people too”.

The first assumption implies that the world of business and its organisation is composed and moved by people. Consequently, organisational studies focus on the social patterns that determine the relationships among individuals and their decision to unite in organisational means. The second assumption presumes individuals involved in the organisational processes as “knowledgeable agents”, aware of their desire to join together and of the dynamics adopted to do so. The third assumption brings the organisational field to the research one, where individuals become informants for the research aims, and researchers are termed as “glorified reporters”. According to this view, researchers are the ones in charge of reporting the voices of the informants, in order to express the informants’ portrayal and experience of the facts. In this phase, researchers pay attention to exclusively report the voices of the informants, which are free to flow without constraints imposed by theoretical concepts or judgements of the researcher. Researchers are “glorified” because they are the ones who have primary access to the raw contributes of the informants, i.e., the qualitative data at the root of the research. Finally, researchers are considered to be “knowledgeable people too”, capable of analysing the gathered data, of understanding the connections between them, of uncovering new concepts, and of expressing them into meaningful academic language (Gioia et al., 2012).

The Gioia method involves a specific series of steps for its implementation. Firstly, the research question is identified by the researcher. Subsequently, the field of interest is investigated through various qualitative data sources, of which the more relevant are semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews represent the preferred approach given their flexible construction, which allows the hindsight considerations of the informant to arise. As such, the researcher prepares a list of questions centred on the research topic, which compose the script of the interview; however, questions and their order may change during the interview following the voice of the informant, enabling whatever consideration to transpire. As Miles and Gilbert (2005) point out, semi-

structured interviews are ideal means to understand reasons and ways behind any decision; thus, they find perfect implementation in this context of analysis. Finally, every interview is recorded with the consensus of the interviewed, and then meticulously transcribed by the researcher, who thus has the qualitative data at the disposal of her research (Gioia et al., 2012). Even if transcription may require a lot of time resources, it is a crucial step to prevent the author to omit important text paragraphs when she still is not aware of the relationships among them (Flick, von Kardoff, and Steinke, 2004).

After data are gathered, they are coded, thus analysed, and the core part of the research method begins. Through a cross case analysis, data coded in three levels of analysis, which will be at the base of the whole research structure. The 1st level of analysis is centred on the terms uttered by the informants, which are displayed through a series of quotes. Here, the researcher is overwhelmed by a large number of quotes, and while trying to organize them in conceptual classes, she may lose herself in the huge quantitative of apparently disconnected information. After a while, the researcher reduces the number of quotes by electing only the most useful ones for the research purposes. The elected quotes represent the set of the 1st order concepts, thanks to which the author rediscovers clarity in her research path. In the 2nd level of analysis, data assume the form of concepts and themes which are utterance of the researcher. Here, qualitative data are organised according to their similarities or discordances, and grouped together into a set of 2nd order themes, which are characterized by both novelty or new contextualisation. In the 3rd level of analysis, the author focuses her “knowledgeable” efforts in individuating additional dynamics behind the 2nd order themes, which connect them in *aggregate dimensions*: the biggest and meaningful concepts for the research purposes. Finally, concepts and themes of each level are visually organized into data structure maps, to let the author and the audience discuss together about the outcome (Gioia et al., 2012).

As the authors (Gioia et a., 2012) reveal, the Gioia method is conceived to be applicated to research questions expressed in “How” terms, thus, it finds perfect application in this thesis.

It should be noted that in the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2012) the explanation of the research question precedes the literature review, while in this thesis the research

questions arises after having investigated the literature. This approach is however coherent with the conception of the Gioia method, which has been designed to be suitable to multiple contexts of analysis and *ad hoc* interpretations, thus allowing any potential change of its structure, in the name of its principle of transferability.

4.3 Case studies

Made explicit the research aims and the methodology selected, the author may proceed with the introduction of the case studies.

The research was conducted on a sample of 10 Italian wine firms. As indicated by Gioia et al. (2012), effective empirical research requires the analysis of a consistent number of cases, to have the possibility of extrapolating and formulating concepts with theoretical relevance; on the contrary, focalizing in one or small samples would result ineffective for the research purposes. For this reason, 10 wineries were individuated. Moreover, the authors (Gioia et al., 2012) sustain the necessity to choose case studies which are suitable for the research context. Accordingly, all the wineries that were chosen are currently adopting digital means and social networks, and all possess and manage an Instagram account. Furthermore, to investigate the topic of interest in its broader manifestation, the sample includes wineries of different dimensions, both in terms of size and revenues, that for ease of reference, are considered as: small, medium, and big wine firms. This approach enables the researcher to understand if the phenomenon shows the same patterns of adoption across the whole wine sector, or if dimensional factors have influence on its approach. Finally, being the research question focused on the Italian context, the wineries chosen as case studies are all Italian³³. In accordance with the method of analysis selected, case studies were studied by the use of different various qualitative data sources: semi-structured interviews and questionnaires; even if the more substantial data have been gathered through interviews. Each interview lasted about forty minutes and has been recorded with the consensus of the interviewed. For each case study, one or two individuals have been interviewed. Notwithstanding their different professional role, all

³³ They may operate also abroad, however, they all have been founded in Italy and have their headquarters and major business activities located in Italy.

the informants are involved in the social media processes of the organisation to which they belong, or are knowledgeable about them. Thus, the contributes of all the informants are useful for the research purposes. After data gathering, cases were investigated through a cross case analysis, following the Gioia method.

Table 6: *SELECTED WINE FIRMS*

NAME	BUSINESS TYPE	N° OF EMPLOYEES	REVENUES/ N° OF BOTTLES	NAME OF THE INTERVIEWED	ROLE OF THE INTERVIEWED
CAVIRO	Cooperative winery	501-1.000	417MEUR	—	Digital & e-commerce Manager
ZONIN1821	Wine Group	501-1.000	199.50MEUR	Giancarlo Parolini	Head of Communication & Sustainability
FRESCOBALDI	Winery	201-500	67.940.177 EUR	Federica Quarato; Gina Sorce	PR & Communication specialist; member of the communication agency
FERRARI TRENTO	Winery	51-200	95.743.818 EUR	Francesca Endlicher	Digital Manager
CASTELLO DI MELETO 1256	Winery	51-200	3.882.550 EUR	—	Hospitality & Wine club Manager
CA' RUGATE	Winery	11-50	5.1MEUR	Michele Tessari	Owner
ELVIO COGNO	Winery	2-10	70 K	Sara Bertola	Marketing Manager
LA LECCIA	Winery	2-10	356.639 EUR	Lorenzo Bagnoli	Co-Owner
CA' VESCOVADO	Winery	2-10	400 K	Rebecca Battiston	Product Manager
FONTANAROSA VINI	Winery	2-10	30 K	—	Co-Owner

Source: AIDA database and LinkedIn, elaborated by the author

Table 6 lists the 10 selected wine firms in order of size. The dimension of each firm is expressed by two indicators: the number of employees and the revenues³⁴ or number of bottles produced³⁵. At the same time, other features are highlighted: name of the firm, business type, name³⁶ and role of the interviewed.

³⁴ Revenues for the year endings 2021 and 2022, from the AIDA database.

³⁵ The number of bottles produced is used as dimensional indicator when the revenues are not available.

³⁶ The name of the informant is specified only if the person has expressed his consensus.

4.3.1 Presentation of the companies

CAVIRO

Here, where it all comes back

Overview of the company

Caviro Sca is the largest wine cooperative in Italy, and the largest Italian winery for market share. Counting for the 10% of the Italian grapes presented, it is also the largest Italian winery for the amount of wine produced.

The Group was founded in 1966 in Faenza, Emilia-Romagna, with the purpose of giving value to the contribute of each member. Today, the Group exports in eighty countries worldwide and owns sixteen wine brands, such as Tavernello and Vigneti Romio.

With Caviro Extra Spa, the Group produces second-hand raw materials derived from the leftovers of the winemaking process, which are transformed into biomethane and noble products for the food, pharmaceutical, and agriculture sector. The Group is leader in the production of alcohol in Italy and a world co-leader in the production of natural tartaric acid. Thanks to the Enomondo partnership, any other leftover is transformed into renewable energy sources.

Sustainability stands at the heart of Caviro and has shaped the development of its new business model, that is sustainable in each of its pillars: economical, social, and environmental. Every activity of Caviro is aimed at respecting the natural resources, recycling materials, and reduce their usage³⁷.

³⁷ Sources for the page: Caviro corporate website (<https://www.caviro.com/en/>)

Table 7: KEY DATA OF CAVIRO

CAVIRO in Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 50 years of activity• 1st in Italy by market share• 12.000 winemakers• 16 wine brands• 37.300 hectares• 7 Italian regions• 80 export markets• 417 MEUR revenue• 1.700 followers

Source: elaborated by the author

Digital strategy of Caviro

The social media strategy of Caviro started four years ago, when the digital team was created and the company opened its social networks accounts. Since then, the digital strategy has evolved, becoming increasingly structured and including the collaboration between the digital marketing managers of Caviro, who are part of the digital team, and various marketing and communication agencies. Caviro strongly believes in the digital path and tries to sensitize its employees on the theme, offering them training courses on digital skills and digital notions. Coherently, the Group plans to continue investing in the digital assets³⁸ in the near future.

³⁸ Sources for the page: Caviro corporate website (<https://www.caviro.com/en/>) ; Caviro LinkedIn account (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/cavirosca/?originalSubdomain=it>); Caviro interview.

Today, the Group has a consolidated presence on the major social networks. On Instagram it owns the corporate account: @gruppocaviro , with around 1.700 followers and other brand accounts. Given the multiple sustainable activities in which the Group is involved, Caviro is keen to communicate its green commitment beyond winemaking, showing to its social visitors the different stages composing the circular economy's journey. The social campaigns are planned through both an editorial calendar and an editorial plan, and aim at increasing brand awareness and notoriety. Social networks stand at the core of the digital strategy³⁹ of Caviro, which, however, includes other digital activities such as web sites, e-magazines, SEO⁴⁰ and SEA⁴¹.

³⁹ Sources for the page: Caviro Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/gruppocaviro/>); Caviro interview.

⁴⁰ Search Engine Optimization.

⁴¹ Search Engine Advertising.

ZONIN1821

We are wine lovers with an italian DNA

Overview of the company

ZONIN1821 represents the excellence of the Made In Italy in the world. Founded in 1821 in Gambellara, in the venetian region, the Group is the largest family-owned prosecco company in Italy and one of the top five Italian wine producers, become famous globally for having exported the Italian wine culture beyond the national borders.

Family is the main asset that nurtures the entrepreneurial attitude of ZONIN1821, which boasts a heritage long seven generations and with more than two hundred years of history. The Group proceeds towards the future respecting its deep bond with the territorial culture and in the name of its DNA, composed by specific elements: care for the territory, enhancement of the local wine traditions, respect for biodiversity, technical experiments, innovation of production processes, and sustainable development. The Group is concerned about sustainability, which promotes in each of its environmental, social, and economic aspects.

The year to which dates back the first land records is 1821, certifying Giovanni Battista and Girolamo Antonio Zonin as the first owners of a vineyard in Gambellara. In the first post-war period the innovative vision of Domenico Zonin began the building of the brand and found Cantine Zonin. Under the control of Gianni Zonin the company approached the new DOC legislation introduced in 1965, and started to export abroad. In the 70s, the brand establishes itself as one of the most beloved ones by Italian consumers. In the 90s, the Group started its internationalisation process, which led it to be present in more than a hundred countries in the world. In the early 2000s the new generation joined the Group: the Zonin brothers, Domenico, Francesco and Michele are respectively Chairman and Vice-Presidents⁴².

⁴² Sources for the page: ZONIN1821 Corporate Text; ZONIN1821 Corporate website (https://www.zonin1821.com/app/uploads/2021/11/2021_Zonin1821_MasterENGFINAL.pdf).

Today the Group operates in 140 nations employing more than 500 collaborators, distributed among the Italian headquarter and the four subsidiaries of USA, UK, China and Sweden. The production area covers 4000 hectares, of which 1600 are vineyards, where extend the nine estates of the group. Seven of these arise in the Italian territory: Ca' Bolani, Castello di Poggio, Oltrenero, Castello di Albola, Rocca di Montemassi, Masseria Altemura, Principi di Butera; one in the USA: Barboursville Vineyards; and one in Chile: Dos Almas. The Group produces still, sparkling, and premium wines. The estates compose the brand portfolio together with Ca' Vescovo, Sette Archi, Feudo del Principe, Sant'Ilario, San Zeno, and Conti Buneis⁴³.

Table 8: KEY DATA OF ZONIN1821

ZONIN1821 in Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 200 years of history• 7 generations• 4000 hectares, of which 1600 of vines• 9 estates• 140 nations• More than 500 collaborators• 85% export• 199,50 MEUR revenue• 11.000 followers

Source: elaborated by the author

Apart from the wine production, the Group is engaged in the hospitality activity, with the aim of respecting the cultural and gastronomic peculiarities of each territorial area. The

⁴³ Sources for the page: ZONIN1821 Corporate text; ZONIN1821 Corporate website (https://www.zonin1821.com/app/uploads/2021/11/2021_Zonin1821_MasterENGFINAL.pdf), (<https://www.zonin1821.com/>) and ZONIN1821 interview.

Group has developed successful partnerships, noticeable is the one with the singer Kylie Minogue for the launch of the homonymous Prosecco Rosé, which in one year has become the first Prosecco Rosé in the UK and has consequently reached the USA.

Digital strategy of ZONIN1821

Since 2022, ZONIN1821 has undertaken a digital integration process, concerning the brand ZONIN1821 and all the brands composing the portfolio. The digital integration path is a complex architecture design that aligns web sites, social media, e-commerce, and their related activities in a general vision, always respecting and promoting the peculiarities of each brand, in the name of ZONIN1821. Coherently, in one year have been created six new brand web sites, each of which has been complemented with the e-commerce and with the social media and integrated in the web site of the Group ZONIN1821. Moreover, the activities of the social media have been aligned with all the digital ones. The content proposed in the digital means is planned through editorial calendars and implemented through activities of digital PR, with the aim of narrating the heritage of the estates and their products.

Today, the Group boasts a consolidated presence on the web and on the major social networks. ZONIN1821 is present on Instagram with the account of the Group: @zoninofficial, owning more than 11.000 followers, and with the accounts of the brands composing the portfolio. The Group aims at communicating the brand experience through the value of its estates, involving the audience in the narration⁴⁴.

For the purposes of this thesis the author has interviewed Giancarlo Parolini - HEAD OF COMMUNICATION & SUSTAINABILITY at ZONIN1821; courtesy of ZONIN1821.

⁴⁴ Sources for the page: ZONIN1821 interview and ZONIN1821 Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/zoninofLicial/>).

FRESCOBALDI

Cultivating Toscana diversity

Overview of the company

Frescobaldi is a centenary old reality symbolizing the spirit of the Tuscany region, its viticulture attitude, and the rich geography of its land. The variety of terroirs is reflected in the numerous estates and wines that compose the uniqueness of the ancient winemaking heritage of Frescobaldi, possible thanks to the expertise of its passionate agronomists and oenologists.

The history of the noble family Frescobaldi begins in 1000, year in which the family moved from its original area of Val di Pesa, to Florence, where they contributed to the architectural progress of the city. To Lamberto Frescobaldi we owe the construction of the first bridge built over the Arno, which today has become Ponte Santa Trinità, originally conceived to connect the property of the nobleman with the centre of the city. The Frescobaldi family has been producing wine in Tuscany since the early 1300s. The genealogy of the family comprehends scholars, explorers, musicians, and statesmen. Commercial contracts testify that the wine house has been the supplier of various European Courts in the 13th, 15th, and 16th centuries, and that it has collaborated with various artists such as Donatello, Michelozzo Michelozzi, and Filippo Brunelleschi. The family deserves credit for having introduced, in the 19th century, the varieties of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Nero, and Chardonnay, previously unknown in Tuscany. In the following century, the members of the family elevated Tuscany to a place of excellence for winemaking. Today, the company is led by Lamberto Frescobaldi, its President, who reinforces the value and uniqueness of each of the Frescobaldi's estates.

"Cultivating Toscana Diversity" is the concept which nurtures the mission and vision ⁴⁵ through which the company pursues innovation, while honouring the Tuscany tradition and respecting the unique terroirs of the area. Frescobaldi wines are conceived to be

⁴⁵ Sources for the page: Frescobaldi corporate website (<https://www.frescobaldi.com/en/history#cultivatingtoascanadiversity>).

expression of the Tuscan lifestyle, made up of pleasant details, in harmony with the territory and with the products it offers; a hymn to life lived appreciating the beauty and the quality. Frescobaldi operates with the purpose of passing to the future generations their passion and commitment to the everlasting land of Tuscany. The interpretation of the Tuscan diversity is a moral duty for Frescobaldi. Diversity is mirrored in the authentic estates, vineyards, and wines of the company; each of which promotes the peculiarity of the terroirs. Diversity is fostered likewise in the “Renaissance of the arts and of men” project, which includes the sponsorship project of “Artist for Frescobaldi”; and a social responsibility program concerning the rehabilitation of the detainees of Gorgona island.

The company owns nine properties in the Tuscany: Castello Nipozzano; Tenuta Perano; Tenuta CastelGiocondo; Tenuta Castiglioni; Castello Pomino; Tenuta Ammiraglia; Gorgona; Rèmole; Tenuta Calimaia; each one offering peculiar products. With the headquarter based in Florence, Frescobaldi operates in 65 countries worldwide⁴⁶.

Table 9: KEY DATA OF FRESCOBALDI

FRESCOBALDI in Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 700 years of history• 30 generations• 5000 hectares, of which 1000 of vines• 9 estates• 65 nations• 67.940.177 EUR revenue• 50.000 followers

Source: elaborated by the author

⁴⁶ Sources for the page: Frescobaldi corporate website (<https://www.frescobaldi.com/en/history#cultivatingtoascanadiversity>) ; Frescobaldi LinkedIn page (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/frescobaldivini/about/>).

Frescobaldi combines the oenological tradition with the culinarian one, embedded in the Ristorante Frescobaldi, where the tradition Tuscan cuisine is paired with the wines of the estates. The company is committed to the sustainability cause, respecting the principles of integrated production and sustainable agriculture in all its estates, certificated by the AgriQualità certification of the Region of Tuscany.

Digital strategy of Frescobaldi

The peculiar heritage of Frescobaldi is rooted in the past yet oriented to the future, continuously evolving to fit the needs of the contemporary age. In this view, the theme of social media has emerged. Specifically, in order to implement a communication strategy in step with the times, the company has decided to approach social media and to align them to all its other communicative instruments⁴⁷. As such, Frescobaldi adopts an omnichannel and cross-media communication design, build up of both offline and online tools; and social networks represent a crucial element of the digital effort. Notwithstanding the actual popularity of social media, Frescobaldi has been one of the first wine companies to introduce them in the wine sector, believing in the power of innovation as support to the heritage. Today, Frescobaldi has a consolidated presence on the major social networks, which manages in collaboration with Kaiwa⁴⁸ communication agency. Inside the social network strategy, particular relevance is provided to Instagram, given the fame the platform is acquiring in the wine sector.

On Instagram the company manages the corporate account: @frescobaldivini , with more than 50.000 followers. Instagram represents a fundamental channel for Frescobaldi to increase its brand awareness and to communicate with a specific target: Wine Lovers. In order to attract Wine Lovers to its account, the company tries to articulate a storytelling that is more emotional as possible, presenting itself as a life companion for its audience. Accordingly, Frescobaldi follows a structured Instagram strategy, revised monthly by an editorial plan, which defines times and themes of the content to post. The editorial plan is based on three editorial macro areas: the vineyard and the winery, hospitality, and the

⁴⁷ Sources for the page: Frescobaldi corporate website (<https://www.frescobaldi.com/en/history#cultivatingtoascanadiversity>); Frescobaldi Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/frescobaldivini/>); Frescobaldi interview.

⁴⁸ KAIWA THE CONVERSATION AGENCY (<https://kaiwa.it/>); courtesy of KAIWA.

wine product. The first area narrates how vineyards and the estates express the peculiarity of the Tuscan territory, including pictures of the surrounding landscape. The second area, hospitality, refers to the several wine tourism initiatives the company offers, such as wine tastings, visits of the estates, and dining. The third area is dedicated to wine, narrated as an icon, or paired with food and social gatherings. The photographic material for the editorial plan is obtained through collaborations with various photographers, with whom are organised specific shootings according to the macro area of interest. Moreover, to engage its audience in the narration, Frescobaldi cares about activities of community management, based on providing timely and proper answers to the comments or direct messages of the followers.

Frescobaldi values the increasing importance of the digital instruments and will continue to invest in social networks, seen as portals to the future and to the hearts of people.

For the purposes of this thesis the author has interviewed Federica Quarato - PR & Communication Specialist at Frescobaldi; and Gina Sorce of Kaiwa; courtesy of Frescobaldi⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ Sources for the page: Frescobaldi interview.

FERRARI TRENTO

The Italian toast par excellence

Overview of the company

Founded in 1902 in Trento by Giulio Ferrari and run by the Lunelli⁵⁰ family since 1952, Ferrari Trento is Italy's leading Classic Method sparkling winery. As the Italian toast par excellence, Ferrari Trento celebrates the most important moments in culture, sport and entertainment, including all Grand Prix podiums, being the official sparkling partner of Formula 1®.

The company cultivates Chardonnay and Pinot Noir with devotion to its territory: the Italian Alps in the region of Trentino, which give birth to the Ferrari Trentodoc, an excellence among the sparkling wines.

Ferrari was created thanks to the pioneering vision of Giulio Ferrari, the man who cultivated his dream of producing in Trentino a wine able to compete with the best French Champagnes. He was the first to believe in the viniculture vocation of the Trentino region and the first who planted substantial vineyards of Chardonnay in Italy. Giulio Ferrari started producing in small selected scale, with the imperative of quality. Since he had no descendants, in 1952 he individuated as his successor Bruno Lunelli, owner of a wine shop in Trento. Bruno Lunelli succeeded in increasing the production without ever compromising on quality, and subsequently leaving the activity to his sons. In this period Ferrari Trento became "the nation's celebratory wine par excellence". Today, the company is led by the third generation of the Lunelli family. ⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ferrari Trento is part of the Lunelli Group

⁵¹ Sources for the page: Ferrari Trento corporate website (<https://www.ferraritrento.com/en/the-house/>) ; Ferrari Trento LinkedIn page (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/ferrari-trento/about/>).

The Italian Art of Living

The Ferrari brand is a style icone and synonym of elegance, it is “among the most glittering manifestations” of the Italian Art of Living, lived in the purpose of beauty and savoir vivre. With the headquarter located in Trento, Italy, the company exports the Italian lifestyle worldwide.

The production of Ferrari Trento is declined in six collections: the Classic Line, the Maximum Line, the Perlé Line, the Riserva Line, the Gran Cuvée Line, the Limited Edition Line.

A core value for Ferrari Trento is the respect for eth environment. The company operates in harmony with nature and is committed to sustainability.

Table 10: KEY DATA OF FERRARI TRENTO

FERRARI TRENTO in Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 century of history• 3 generations• 6 collections• 95.743.818 EUR revenue• 120.000 followers

Source: elaborated by the author

Ferrari has been the official partner of Formula 1® since 2021. Every podium is celebrated with a Jeroboam of Ferrari Trentodoc. The excellence in sports meets the sparkling wine par excellence. From this project origin two Limited Editions: the Ferrari F1® edition and the Ferrari F1® Podium Jeroboam⁵².

Another Limited Edition results from the collaboration of two luxury pillars of the luxury “Made in Italy”: Ferrari Trento and Missoni. The brands collaborate in the name of the

⁵² Sources for the page: Ferrari Trento corporate website (<https://www.ferraritrento.com/en/the-house/>); Ferrari Trento LinkedIn page (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/ferrari-trento/about/>).

Italian style, combining the Ferrari Trento Chardonnay from the 2018 vintage with the famous Missoni pattern.

Digital strategy of Ferrari Trento

Ferrari Trento has been using social media for about ten years, firstly approaching Facebook and then Instagram and other relevant social networks. The decision to adopt the Instagram platform came forward as a need to answer to the communicative standards of the sector. Consequently, today Ferrari Trento has a consolidated presence on the major social platforms. On Instagram it owns the account: @ferraritrento, with more than 120 thousand followers⁵³. Instagram represents a crucial channel to create brand awareness and to expose the Ferrari Trento to a worldwide connected audience. The social media marketing strategy of the company is handled by the digital managers of Ferrari Trento and some external communication agencies. The photographic material for social posts is the result of *ad hoc* shootings organised with the external agencies.

For the purposes of this thesis the author has interviewed Francesca Endlicher- Digital Manager at Gruppo Lunelli, courtesy of Gruppo Lunelli.

⁵³ Sources for the page: Ferrari Trento Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/FerrariTrento/>); Ferrari Trento interview.

CASTELLO DI MELETO 1256

Overview of the company

Castello di Meleto 1256 has been reigning over its land of about 2,470 acres, in the heart of Chianti Classico, since more than a thousand years. Woods and 300 acres of vineyards compose the estate, in which the terroir makes possible the production of great wines.

The company holds a millennial structure dating back to 1256 combined with a proactive attitude. The varietal most used for the production of the Chianti Classico DOCG is the Sangiovese; others include Merlot, Cabernet, and the recently introduced Vermentino.

The charming landscape that surrounds the castle offers rest and calm to its visitors. Meleto is today an oasis in the Tuscan territory, where wine, food, and hospitality match to offer an unforgettable experience⁵⁴.

Table 11: KEY DATA OF CASTELLO DI MELETO 1256

CASTELLO DI MELETO 1256 in Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 thousand old structure• 2,470 acres, of which 300 of vines• 3.882.550 EUR revenue• 13.400 followers

Source: elaborated by the author

⁵⁴ Sources for the page: Castello di Meleto 1256 website (<https://www.castellomeletohospitality.it/en/castle-wine-resort-tuscany>) ; Castello di Meleto 1256 LinkedIn profile (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/viticola-toscana-s-p-a---castello-di-meleto/about/>) ; Castello di Meleto 1256 Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/castellodimeleto/>) .

Digital strategy of Castello di Meleto 1256

Castello di Meleto 1256 started its social media marketing strategy in 2019. Today, the firm is present on the major social networks and on Instagram, where it owns the account: @castellodimeleto, with 13.400 followers⁵⁵. Instagram, in particular, stands out from the other social platforms given the advantages it offers in terms of immediateness of the communication. The pillar of the social media strategy of the company is the coordination among all its different functions and personnel, that are involved in the creation of the editorial plan. Indeed, Castello di Meleto 1256 organises its content post trough an editorial plan, which schedules the communicative themes on the bases of the advices coming from each organisational area. Consequently, the publication goes along with the events that are relevant for each season; the grape-harvest in September, for instance. The digital operators of the company work together with some external collaborators to organize the shootings for the photographic material. In the visual communication, lot of emphasis is given to emotional content. As such, Castello di Meleto 1256 tries to share pictures that are more emotional as possible, to catch the interest and the understanding of the audience. The member of the company have noticed a positive influence on the notoriety of Castello di Meleto 1256 deriving from its presence on Instagram, for this reason, they plan to continue developing their Instagram strategy in the near future.

⁵⁵ Sources for the page: Castello di Meleto 1256 Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/castellodimeleto/>) ; Castello di Meleto 1256 interview.

CA' RUGATE

Memories form past ages and new trajectories

Overview of the company

Ca' Rugate is an agricultural business owned by the Tessari family, which has been producing wines for a hundred years in the territories of Soave Classico, Valpolicella, and Lessini Durello. The family continues the production of historic vine varieties, while innovating and reinterpreting the traditions of the area.

The company takes its name from the geographical place in which it is located, the volcanic hill of Rugate, near the centre of Brognoligo, Verona; a location with a strong vocation for the viticulture.

The history of Ca' rugate goes along the one of the Tessari family, which at the beginning of the twentieth century started its activity thanks to the foresight of Amedeo Tessari, who recognized the viticulture attitude of the land. In the following years, the business has growth acquiring hectares of vineyards and passing from one generation to another. Today, the company is run by Michele Tessari, the fourth generation of the family. Michele started a process of strategic and managerial reorganisation of the company, expanding to the Valpolicella Area and to the one of Lessini Durello. As result, Ca' Rugate covers an area of 90 hectares and its wines are distributed in 98 Italian provinces and 50 international markets.

Ca' Rugate is the only winemaking firm of the province of Verona that produces the denominations of the area: Soave Classico, Amarone della Valpolicella, Valpolicella, Lessini Durello Riserva, Recioto della Valpolicella, Recioto di Soave⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ Sources for the page: Ca' Rugate web site (<https://www.carugate.it/en/ca-rugate>) ; Ca' Rugate LinkedIn profile (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/carugate/about/>).

The company operates by continuously confirming its deep bond with the territory, while adopting an international attitude; to look to the future while respecting the past, providing a refined quality offer.

Ca' Rugate is committed to sustainability. Since the harvest of 2020, the wines of Ca' Rugate have been labelled with the biological certification of the European Community, progressively according to their different aging times.

Table 12: KEY DATA OF CA' RUGATE

CA' RUGATE in Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 century of history• 4 generations• 90 hectares• 98 Italian provinces• 50 international markets• 5.1 MEUR revenue• 4.662 followers

Source: elaborated by the author

Unconventional projects

Ca' Rugate has a dynamic business model articulated in projects that go beyond the winemaking. As such, the company has been certified as Didactic Farm by the Veneto region; it has been recognised as a Museum of Regional interest: the "Enomuseo"; and it offers the possibility to private individuals of organizing *Sur Measure* events in the winery. Moreover, the company has undertaken a collaboration with the Italian artist Annalisa Bollini, who masters the art of the embroidery, of which is expression the logo of all the labels of Ca' Rugate: the embroidered house of the Rugate⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ Sources for the page: Ca' Rugate web site (<https://www.carugate.it/en/ca-rugate>); Ca' Rugate LinkedIn profile (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/carugate/about/>).

Digital strategy of Ca' Rugate

The social media marketing strategy of Ca' Rugate started about ten years ago, following periods of collaborations with communication agencies and other of independent management of the social networks by the company itself. Today, two people inside Ca' Rugate and GHEUSIS⁵⁸ communication agency are in charge of handling the social media marketing strategy. Moreover, a photographer has the task of producing the photographic material for the content post. Ca' Rugate is present in the major social networks, included Instagram, where it owns the account: @carugatevini, with 4.662 followers⁵⁹.

The company has decided to adopt Instagram given the visual communication method and the various functionalities the platform offers, which are considered as suitable for the communicative intent of the firm. As such, on Instagram Ca' Rugate the company aims at communicating all the different activities composing its rich business model. In addition, an important communicative role is played by the family, which is the core pillar of Ca' Rugate, the vineyards, and the winemaking. Moreover, to come closer to its audience, Ca'Rugate includes in its post images of people, to leverage the emotional aspect arousing from the human figure. Ca' Rugate believes in the communicative power of Instagram, as long as it is structured in an editorial plan, build through reciprocal collaboration between the subjects involved.

For the purposes of this thesis, the author has interviewed Enol. Michele Tessari – Owner of Ca' Rugate.

⁵⁸ <http://www.gheusis.com/> ; courtesy of GHEUSIS.

⁵⁹ Sources for the page: Ca' Rugate Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/carugatevini/>) ; Ca' Rugate interview.

ELVIO COGNO

Overview of the company

Elvio Cogno produces wines honouring his founder, Elvio, and respecting the history of the family, the traditions and the attitude of the area in which it is located, the Langhe.

The winery extends in around fifteen hectares of vineyard property in Novello, one of the eleven townships in province of Cuneo which detain the Barolo DOCG certification. The Langhe hills in which the winery is located are recognized as World Heritage by UNESCO. The peculiar landscape that surrounds the winery together with the passion of its owners creates a unique *terroir*, that gives birth to elegant and balanced wines.

With 70.000 bottles of production's size, Elvio Cogno produces four Barolo labels and has been awarded as the best Italian producer of the *Menzione Geografica Aggiuntiva* (MeGA) "Ravera". Ravera is the most prestigious area of vineyards (*cru*) of Novello, a *terroir* that represents excellence.

Today, the company is directed by Nadia Cogno, the daughter of Elvio, and Valter Fissore, her husband. The winery continues its activity producing territory-focused wines, while being committed to sustainability in each phase of the production. ⁶⁰

Table 13: KEY DATA OF ELVIO COGNO

ELVIO COGNO in Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 generations• 15 hectares• 4 Barolo labels• 70.000 bottles• 12.500 followers

Source: elaborated by the author

⁶⁰ Sources for the page: Elvio Cogno website (<https://www.elviocogno.com/en/>).

Digital strategy of Elvio Cogno

Elvio Cogno entered the social media field about seven years ago, opening its account on the major social networks and on Instagram, where it owns the account: @elvio_cogno, with 12.500 followers⁶¹. Today, the social media marketing strategy is managed by the digital marketing personnel of the company and by an external collaborator.

Instagram works as a support to the corporate website and helps the company increasing its notoriety in the online community. Storytelling stands at the base of the Instagram communication of Elvio Cogno, which aims at narrating the values, history, and tradition and of the company. The communication target is composed of people between 35 and 40 years old, who are passionate about wine, sommeliers, or wine selectionists. Notwithstanding the presence of a scheduled editorial plan, the production of the photographic material may include the contributes of the members of the family, along with the one of the official photographer. Elvio Cogno is satisfied with its Instagram and is will continue to evolve its online strategy.

For the purposes of this thesis the author has interviewed Sara Bertola – Marketing Manager at Elvio Cogno, courtesy of ELVIO COGNO.

⁶¹ Sources for the page: Elvio Cogno Instagram account (https://www.instagram.com/elvio_cogno/); Elvio Cogno interview.

LA LECCIA

“ Flumina iam lactis, iam flumina nectaris iban flavaque de viridi stillabant ilice mella” OVIDIO, Metamorphoses

Overview of the company

La Leccia arises in the centre of Chianti, on the hills near Montespertoli, from which it dominates the Val di Pesa and Val d’Elsa, an area where with an ancient viticultural vocation. The winery stands about 200 meters above sea level, surrounded by holm oaks exposed to the sun light: a perfect location to produce wonderful wines.

La Leccia has been property of the Bagnoli family since the 1970s. In 2013 the new generations have decided to devote their selves to the farm, acting with enthusiasms, gratitude and respect towards the nature in which it is located.. In the estate the biodiversity is guaranteed by 25 hectares of vineyards, made of both native vines such as Sangiovese and Trebbiano, and of international ones such as Syrah and Merlot; and by 3,500 olive trees. The oak forests is a protection for the certified organic crops and as air purifier.

The respect towards nature is more than a philosophy for La Leccia. All its wines have been certified organic since 2019 and sustainable activities are continuously implemented, such as beekeeping and preservation of the forest⁶².

Digital strategy of La Leccia

La Leccia has been present on Facebook and Instagram since 2018, after having felt the need to comply with the methods of communication adopted by the wine customers. On Instagram it owns the account: @fattoria_la_leccia, with 1.614 followers⁶³. Instagram is the main social network around which the social media strategy is articulated, given the

⁶² Sources for the page: La Leccia website (<https://www.laleccia.it/en/philosophy.html> ; La Leccia Instagram account (https://www.instagram.com/fattoria_la_leccia/) ; La Leccia interview.

visual communication method it offers. Images enables the firm to clearly narrate its wine products and its brand. More specifically, Instagram seem to be a proper place for La Leccia to tell stories about wine. To catch the emotions of the audience, the winery tries to include images of people in its content post. Most of all, La Leccia aims at being authentic. For this reason, the Instagram post are shared spontaneously by the member of the family, according to the picture they take during their work at the winery⁶⁴.

Table 14: KEY DATA OF LA LECCIA

LA LECCIA in Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 200 meters of altitude• 25 hectares of vineyards• 3,500 olive trees• 356.639 EUR revenue• 1.614 followers

Source: elaborated by the author

For the purposes of this thesis, the author has interviewed Lorenzo Bagnoli – Co-owner of La Leccia.

⁶⁴ Sources for the page: La Leccia LinkedIn profile (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/la-leccia/about/>); La Leccia interview.

CA' VESCOVADO

I VIGNETI DELLA TRADIZIONE

Overview of the company

Ca' Vescovado has been producing quality wines since the mid of the 20th century. Located in the province of Portogruaro, in the Veneto region, the winery contributes to the continuity of the renowned winemaking vocation of the area.

The production process of Ca' Vescovado combines ancient winemaking techniques with innovation and 4.0 technology. Expert winemakers take care of every detail of the process, which follows the natural rhythms of the land.

The winery is committed to eco-sustainability, an attitude dictated from the deep respect it has for nature and its products. Accordingly, Ca' Vescovado has entered a process of organic conversion.

The label comprehends three wine lines: Vescovado; Cason Brusà; and Vigna di Riva; from which were produced 400.000 bottles in 2022⁶⁵.

Table 15: KEY DATA OF CA' VESCOVADO

CA' VESCOVADO in Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 400.000 bottles• 474 followers

Source: elaborated by the author

⁶⁵ Sources for the page: Ca' Vescovado website (<https://www.cavescovado.com/it>) ; Ca' Vescovado interview.

Digital strategy of Ca' Vescovado

Ca' Vescovado has been present on Facebook and Instagram since two years ago. On Instagram it owns the account: @cavescovado, with 474 followers⁶⁶. Instagram is the main social network around which it is articulated the social media marketing strategy of the firm, which aims at increasing the brand knowledge and at enhancing the audience pool. The communication themes concern daily scenes of the life and work at the winery, with detailed images of the location and the wine products. The company is considering greater investments in the Instagram strategy for the near future.

For the purposes of this thesis, the author has interviewed Rebecca Battiston – Product Manager at Ca' Vescovado, courtesy of Ca' Vescovado.

⁶⁶ Sources for the page: Ca' Vescovado Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/cavescovado/>) ; Ca' Vescovado interview.

FONTANAROSA VINI

Fontanarosa vini is a small family owned wine firm, located in the province of Matera, Basilicata, Italy, in the heart of Magna Grecia. Louise Loscalzo runs the business together with her husband. The first harvest took place in 2001.

The activity of the winery is animated by the love for the territory, its tradition and its culture, which are strictly linked to the wine product.

Fontanarosa vini owns a vineyard of 4 hectares, which is dedicated for one part to the cultivation of Primitivo DOC Matera, and for the other part, to that of Greco DOC Matera. The winery has a capacity of about 1500 hectolitres per year, since it includes also grapes coming from small local winemakers, and it produces about 30.000 bottles per year⁶⁷.

Table 16: KEY DATA OF FONTANAROSA VINI

FONTANAROSA VINI in Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1500 hectolitres• 30.000 bottles• 257 followers

Source: elaborated by the author

⁶⁷ Sources for the page: Sources for the page: Fontanarosa vini Facebook profile (https://www.facebook.com/fontanarosavini/?locale=it_IT); Fontanarosa vini Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/fontanarosavini/>); and Fontanarosa vini interview.

Digital strategy of Fontanarosa vini

Fontanarosa vini opened its Instagram account two years ago as an experiment, having previously focused its digital efforts on Facebook. Nevertheless, today the company is quite satisfied with its presence on Instagram, where it owns the account: @fontanarosavini, with 257 followers⁶⁸. On Instagram the winery finds an unparalleled visual communication opportunity. As such, images enable Fontanarosa vini to narrate the conceiving of the wine product and the deep bond with the territory. Moreover, the company leverages the visibility potential that Instagram offers, given the popularity the social has acquired in the wine sector. The sharing of posts happens spontaneously, apart from some recurring seasonal events; and the photographic material is taken by any member of the family, coherently with the attitude of the firm.

⁶⁸ Sources for the page: Fontanarosa vini Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/fontanarosavini/>) ; and Fontanarosa vini interview.

4.4 Findings

Following the Gioia method, interviews were accurately transcribed thanks to the support of recordings, offering a real-time photography of the research field. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled the researcher to modify the questions according to the necessity of each case, directing the discourse towards the direction of interest and letting the authentic perceptions of the informants emerge. The contribute of the respondents and the humble knowledge of the researcher served together the coding activity. The voices of the informants were of inspiration for the researcher, who put in practice her mastery of the methodology in order to be open to the rise of possible combinations of the qualitative data.

The collected data were coded in three levels of analysis. In the 1st order of analysis, the quotes of the informants were underlined and reported, with the aim of identifying conceptual categories. Given the quantity and the relevance of the gathered information, the author lost temporarily her trajectory, ending up in collecting an huge amount of apparently not useful quotes. Subsequently, the reduction of the number of elected quotes helped the researcher to regain control of the situation, and to understand the dynamics behind the relationships among the qualitative data. In this way, she individuated a set of 2nd order themes, composed by both new concepts and already existing ones, which encounter a new contextualization. Finally, in the 3rd level of analysis, the author realized how the 2nd order themes are part of aggregate dimensions, bigger notions that are shaped by the themes composing them.

Coding has resulted in the emergence of a set of new terms and concepts, that are interconnected by a structured relationship scheme, which determines the origin of the primary notions and the cause of the subsequent ones. The research path unveiled 3 aggregate dimensions: *Triggers of Instagram adoption*; *Instagram communication strategies*; and *Collaborations as response to the communicative needs*. The individuation of such areas allowed the creation of 3 data structure maps, each one dedicated to one of the aggregate dimensions discovered (Figure 12; Figure 13; Figure 14). The data structure maps represent the core of the entire research work, they animate the whole analysis and are of essential importance for the presentation of the results. First of all, data structure

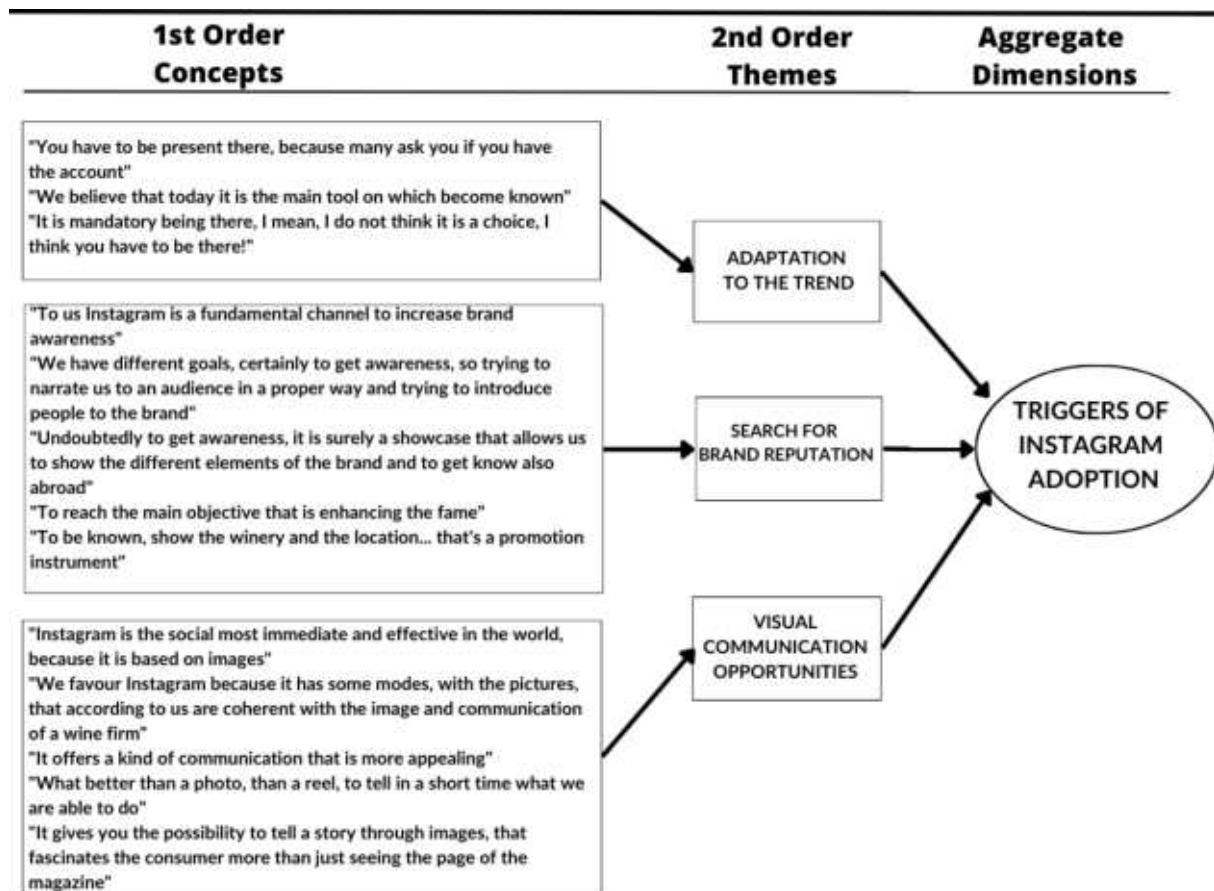
maps let results be graphically visible by the reader, who thus may understand which new expressions the researcher brought to light. Secondly, data structure maps allow the relationships among data to be comprehended by the external. Thirdly, with the maps the author may explain her research path, illustrating how she started from collecting raw data, to continuing by individuating terms, and ending in reconducting all the above to the aggregate areas. Data structures are thereby used as a practical proofs of the research efforts, that may seem as abstract in the eyes of the spectators (Gioia et al., 2012).

Each of the 3 aggregate dimensions will be presented and discussed in the following subparagraphs.

4.4.1 Triggers of Instagram adoption

The first aggregate dimension that arises from the cross-case analysis is the *Triggers of Instagram adoption*. This dimension implies that there might be some factors or reasons that have led wine firms to adopt the Instagram tool. As shown in Figure 12, the researcher found this aggregate dimension to be composed by three 2nd order themes and these are: *Adaption to the trend*, *Search for brand reputation*, and *Visual communication opportunities*.

Figure 12: DATA STRUCTURE 1



Source: elaborated by the author

The theme of *Adaption to the trend* suggests that wine firms have felt the need to comply with some communicative standards imposed by the advent of digitalisation in the business. The issue affects a wide dimensional range of wineries, from smaller to larger ones, as can be shown in the following quotes.

"You have to be present there, because many ask you if you have the account!"
(Lorenzo Bagnoli - La Leccia)

These genuine lyrics bring the contribute of the small side and explain how the presence on the platform is of vital importance for wineries, in order to keep up with some conditions set by an ever more demanding audience. Refraining from answering the digital call would make the winery appear at fault, with the risk of losing clients, who nowadays are expecting to meet the producer on the Instagram platform.

The need for small wine firms to be present on Instagram is confirmed in the case of Cà Vescovado:

“We believe that today it is the main tool on which become known” (Rebecca Battiston – Ca’ Vescovado)

The sentence unveils two considerations. Firstly, Instagram has become the main platform in which wineries start to communicate their existence to the audience and on which begins their creation of a pool of audience. Secondly, the importance of becoming known on Instagram, discloses the relevance that the platform has acquired as the main social medium of the time, centre of all the digital socialization and which may have enormous impacts on the fame of a wine firm.

“It is mandatory being there, I do not think it is a choice, I think you have to be there!” (Francesca Endlicher - Ferrari Trento)

This quote demonstrates that the relevancy of Instagram is acknowledged by the whole industry and reaches even bigger entities. This statement suggests that the presence in Instagram has become a moral duty for wine firms and that it is of essential value even for firms with a consolidated brand presence on the market, regardless of their already proven position and number of adherents.

All these sentences sustain the contribute of the academic literature (Veszelski, 2019; Alonso, 2021; Bellio et al., 2021; Chalupova and Pilar, 2021), regarding the relevance of Instagram as communication instrument for wineries, while highlighting a peculiar new issue to the topic. As such, the reported quotes suggest that the Instagram choice is not a spontaneous one from the wineries’ side. This might be explained by the delay of the wine industry in entering the social media field. Being digital latecomers, winemakers have not had the possibility to autonomously evaluate, consider, and prefer the Instagram tool. Instead, they have been morally forced to adhere to a communicative method that was already become a trend in the concerned industry. Moreover, the trend seems to have spread because customers master it and expect wineries to be in line with it. Consequently, digital innovation in this case is the result of an unconscious cooperation between business technology’s advancements and its utilisation by users; while wineries are limiting their selves to adapt to the changing times.

The second theme that shapes the aggregate dimension is the *Search for brand reputation*. Thanks to the statements of the informants, it has been possible to understand that, given the comply with the Instagram trend, wineries have then begun to consider the platform to reach a certain scope. Moreover, this scope is found to be the reputation of the brand, meant as the reputation of the winery and its products. Reputation is a complex notion that involves the identity, the fame, and the awareness of a company. Awareness is the main objective of three major wine realities: Ferrari Trento; Frescobaldi; and ZONIN1821.

“To us Instagram is a fundamental channel to increase brand awareness” (Federica Quarato – Frescobaldi)

The awareness aim is made explicit in the words of Federica Quarato from Frescobaldi. This sentence confirms what previously suggested regarding the effects that the popularity of the Instagram tool might have on the reputation of a company.

“Undoubtedly to get awareness, it is surely a showcase that allows us to show the different elements of the brand and to get known also abroad” (Francesca Endlicher - Ferrari Trento)

This contribute reinforces the concept of Instagram relevance for awareness and extends the potentiality of Instagram beyond the national borders, while connecting awareness to the other assets of the brand.

“We have different goals, certainly to get awareness, so trying to narrate us to an audience in a proper way and trying to introduce the people to the brand” (Giancarlo Parolini - ZONIN1821)

The awareness concept becomes more structured in the case of ZONIN1821. The voice of the informant suggests initially that the effective reach of awareness might depend on the accuracy of the communication effort. This, as Parolini explains, depends on the selection of the right communication message and of the right communication channel according the audience of interest. Undoubtedly, this assumes the previous profiling of the target audience. The architecture of the communication contribute is a complex design for a big group like ZONIN1821. If, on one hand, communication has to be declined according to the character of each of its brands; on the other, it has to respect a bigger and general communication message, namely a general creativity line, that guarantees the consumer

to live the same user experience in each of the pages or accounts in which he is navigating. This enables the customer to encounter a seamless experience⁶⁹, a concept that stands at the core of the modern conception of the digital strategy. The second part of the sentence of the informant is quite significant, since discloses the intention of ZONIN1821 to solicit the initiative of the customer. More specifically, the group effort of arising interest in the customer aims encouraging him to intentionally come closer to the brand. This is in line with the attitude of ZONIN1821, which is one of the first wine groups that is trying to exit from a merely outbound marketing logic and to embrace, instead, an inbound one, involving thereby the consumer in the creation of value.

Smaller and medium entities seem to concentrate their efforts in the searching for fame, as is apparent in the case of Elvio Cogno and in the one of Ca' Vescovado:

“To reach the main objective that is enhancing the fame” (Sara Bertola – Elvio Cogno)

“To be known, show the winery and the location... that’s a promotion instrument”
(Rebecca Battiston - Ca' Vescovado).

This approach may result from the fact that smaller and medium firms might still be in the first phases of their reputation building process, or might have defined their identity until recently. Consequently, searching for awareness would be premature for them. On the contrary, promoting the company and its location may help the winery introducing itself to the audience and to increase the number of visitors. By the way, it has to be noticed that identity and fame are part the same big design, attributable to brand reputation. Moreover, both concepts may lead, in their subsequent evolution, to the search for brand awareness itself. Finally, it is possible to state the emergent wineries' desire concerns the building of brand reputation and that this necessity finds application on the Instagram platform, given the popularity that the instrument owns on the web at global level.

The third theme that composes the aggregate dimension of *Triggers of Instagram adoption* is the one of *Visual communication opportunities*. The rise of the theme unveils how wineries tend to prefer Instagram, compared to other social networks, because they find

⁶⁹ A seamless experience is an expression used to refer to a web navigation design that is conceived to be smooth for the user, who has to be able to live the same experience in each of the communication channel adopted by a brand.

in it some communicative advantages, deriving from the structural functionalities of the platform itself. Notably, the benefits are found to be all related to the visual communication method which Instagram adopts. The relevance of images is mentioned by different kind of wineries, from smaller to bigger ones.

“Instagram is the social most immediate and effective in the world, because it is based on images” (Fontanarosa vini)

The communicative power of Instagram is directly linked to the image in the case of Fontanarosa vini. The statement of the informant brings about the concept of immediateness of the communication and suggests that, when communicating through images, the content is better received from the audience. In fact, images appear on the screen in a few seconds and are immediately available to the user, who does not have to make any effort to watch or reach them. Moreover, the images are immediate because they depict the message in a clear and understandable way, often using modern colours and layouts techniques that are seen as familiar by the viewer. As the informant later explains, the audience of the 21st century is not interested in reading long written texts and prefers to be engaged by a an immediate eye-catching photo; thus, Instagram is the perfect platform to comply with the customers desires; and the informant awards it with a communicative power that is unparalleled in the whole world.

“It offers a kind of communication that is more appealing” (Rebecca Battiston – Ca’ Vescovado)

The view of Ca’ Vescovado confirms the attractive nature of Instagram’s images.

“We favour Instagram, because it has some modes, with the pictures, that according to us are coherent with the image and communication of a wine firm” (Lorenzo Bagnoli - La Leccia)

Lorenzo Bagnoli from La Leccia continues the visual communication discourse, while adding that this method is effective especially for wine firms, since it enables them to spread a coherent and genuine communication. Accordingly, wineries have the possibility to start talking from their core essence, depicting the birth of each grape in the vineyard and following their journey to the harvesting, to the wine-cellar and so on.

“What better than a photo, than a reel, to tell in a short time what we are able to do”

(Michele Tessari - Ca' Rugate)

This sentence extends the reasoning to the different content formats that Instagram allows to publish, thanks to its structure and functionalities. Each content format, whether a photo or a reel, is effective because leverages the potentiality of the visual communication in terms of variety of the themes narrated. More specifically, an image may be useful to share a deeper meaning, since images allow to spread in a speedy and immediate way the content of thousands of words.

“It gives you the possibility to tell a story trough images, that fascinates the consumer more than just seeing the page of the magazine” (Giancarlo Parolini – ZONIN1821)

The potentiality of images is leveraged likewise by ZONIN1821. As Giancarlo Parolini argues, the visualization of photographic content on digital means is more effective than their print on traditional press instruments. Following this reasoning, Instagram embodies the advantage of combining the potentiality of visual communication and the one of digitalisation, becoming an active instrument of communication. Digital images are seen as more appealing for the customer, who is encouraged in continuing to follow the narration path, because he feels involved in the storytelling, on which he may take part by leaving a comment to a post or reacting to a story.

To summarize, all the mentioned contributes are evidence of the importance that visual communication has come to have for wineries, and which is possible to implement on the Instagram platform, thanks to its structural architecture. The innovative visual communication proposed by Instagram has been welcomed by the wine sector, which now adopts it regularly to obtain the related advantages in terms of immediateness, coherence, attractiveness, and variety of the contents proposed.

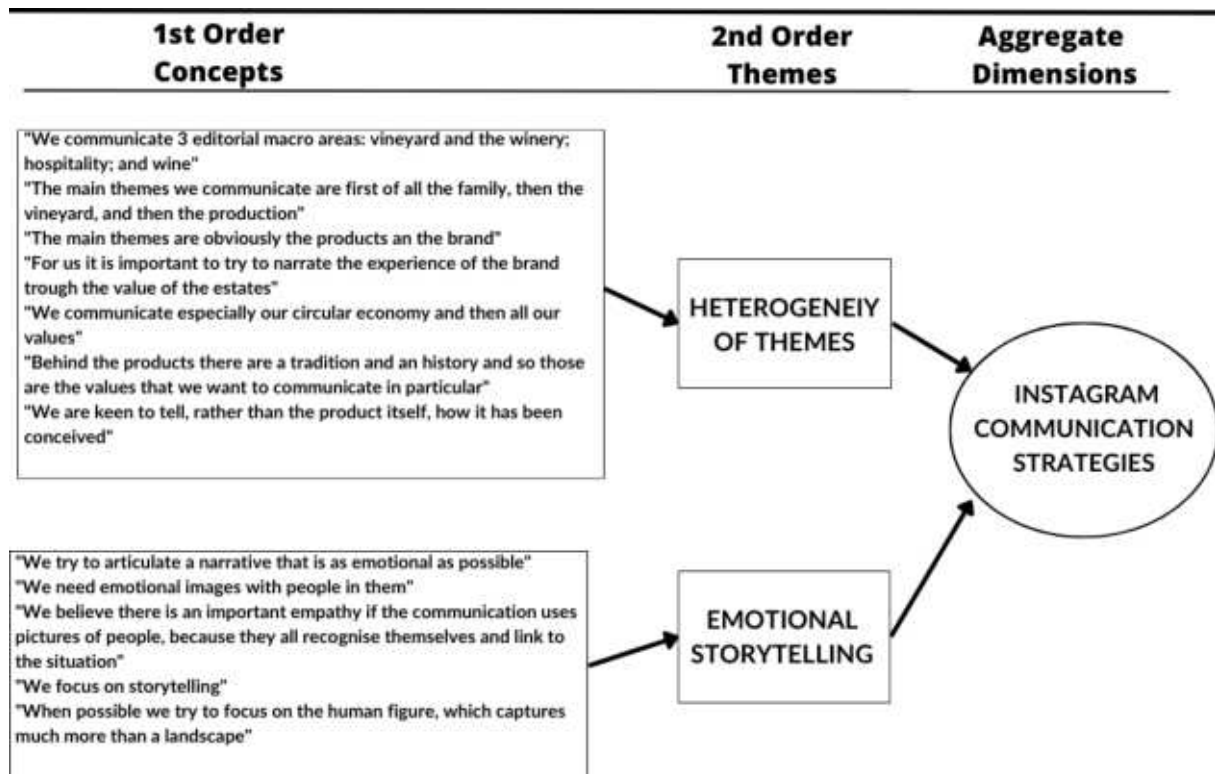
The three mentioned emergent themes are interrelated and comprehended inside the aggregate dimension of *Triggers of Instagram adoption*. The necessity to answer the Instagram trend has resulted in the possibility to leverage the Instagram platform for the reach of relevant objectives; consequentially, Instagram was found to be more profitable than other social networks given the visual communication opportunities it offers. Each of the nascent themes of *Adaption to the trend*, *Search for brand reputation*, and *Visual*

communication opportunities may be seen as a trigger for the adoption of Instagram as communication tool by wine firms, which have incorporated it in their business, marketing, and communication plans.

4.4.2 Instagram communication strategies

The second aggregate dimension resulting from the cross-case analysis is the one regarding *Instagram communication strategies* (Figure 13).

Figure 13: DATA STRUCTURE 2



Source: elaborated by the author

Coding the qualitative data, the researcher understood that wineries use to communicate specific themes on Instagram; moreover, the choice of the object themes delineates some communication strategies by them adopted. Consequently, the type of content that a wineries may choose to publish is directly linkable to the Instagram communication strategies by them selected. The communication strategies are found to be several across

the different types and attitudes of the analysed wine firms, and may include some specific storytelling elements. Consistently, this aggregate dimension was found to be composed by two 2nd order themes: *Heterogeneity of themes*, and *Emotional storytelling*.

Heterogeneity of themes is the first topic that shapes the related aggregate dimension. As the expression suggest, there was not possible to draw some common lines of action, given the highlighted variety of themes wineries use to communicate. In fact, the situational analysis reports that, even inside their dimensional categories, wine firms may choose different communication themes.

“The main themes are obviously the products and the brand” (Lorenzo Bagnoli – La Leccia)

La Leccia concentrates on the wine product and the brand. Being the winery a recent born, it may be appropriate to provide the consumer with information about the commercial offer and to increase its knowledge of the brand.

“We are keen to tell, rather than the product itself, how it has been conceived”
(Fontanarosa vini)

The focus on the wine product is recorded also in Fontanarosa vini, even if in this case the narration goes beyond. In fact, for the winery it is important to give voice to the mixture of human and territorial factors that have made possible the creation of the wine products; in coherence with the deep bond that links the winery to the culture of the geographical area in which is located.

“Behind the products there are a tradition and an history and so those are the values that we want to communicate in particular” (Sara Bertola – Elvio Cagno)

The practice of linking of the product to other elements finds similar results in the approach of Elvio Cagno, even if in this case the extra narration is centred in the story of the firm.

“The main themes we communicate are first of all the family, then the vineyard, and then the production” (Michele Tessari – Ca’ Rugate)

In this contribution it is noticeable how the communication strategy becomes slightly structured, highlighting three levels of object themes. The hierarchy of contents follows the essence and the values of the winery; coherently, family stands in the first position, being it the pillar of Ca' Rugate.

By moving to bigger entities, the layering of the content themes is included in a scheduled plan:

“We communicate 3 editorial macro areas: vineyard and the winery; hospitality and wine” (Gina Sorce – Kaiwa communication agency, on behalf of Frescobaldi)

The official scheduling of the 3 communication themes reflects the structure of the company, which is articulated in different business units surrounding the wine production, such as hospitality.

“We communicate especially our circular economy and then all our values” (Caviro)

The voice of another big player of the industry, Caviro, confirms the relevance of extra themes beyond the merely winemaking practice. As the informant claims, for the Caviro group it is of extremely importance to inform the audience about its commitment to the environmental cause, that stands at the base of the company values.

“For us it is important to try to narrate the experience of the brand through the value of the estates” (Giancarlo Parolini – ZONIN1821)

An additional communication strategy is the one adopted by ZONIN1821. Indeed, detaching from a product-centric method of communication is at the core the strategy of the Group, which focalises on the narration of each of the estates it owns, by leaving open spaces for the digital users to enter the conversation. Coherently, each visitor has the possibility to share its brand experience and of becoming part of the brand narration. The involvement of the customer in the telling finds perfect application in the Instagram platform, given the multiple content format that may be leveraged. As Parolini explains, some specific hashtags may be launched, and customers who post using such hashtags may be reposted by ZONIN1821 itself in its corporate account.

The second theme composing the *Instagram communication strategies* dimension is that of *Emotional storytelling*. The voices of the informants suggest that emotions are seen as important elements by wineries, which include them as parts of the communication strategy. Wineries are trying to leverage the sentiments of the audience in order to create an emotional bond with them. Thus, wineries seem to be aware of the communicative power that a symbolic product like wine may hold. Emotions are narrated through visual storytelling and often matched with the human figure.

“We try to articulate a narrative that is as emotional as possible” (Federica Quarato – Frescobaldi)

The emotional content is seen as an imperative in the case of Frescobaldi.

“We need emotional images with people in them” (Castello di Meleto 1256)

Emotions are mentioned likewise by Castello di Meleto 1256. In this case the emotional bond seems more a necessity than objective, revealing how emotions might be a requisite for arousing interest in the viewers. Furthermore, this quote brings about the element of people. Human figures convey empathy in the viewers, who are keen to follow the narration path of their peers.

“We believe there is an important empathy if the communication uses pictures of people, because they all recognise themselves and link to the situation” (Michele Tessari - Ca' Rugate)

The contribute of Ca' Rugate reinforces the element of human figures, considered as relevant factors for the arousing of emotions.

“When possible we try to focus on the human figure, which captures much more than a landscape” (Lorenzo Bagnoli - La Leccia)

As Lorenzo Bagnoli tells, pictures of people are the preferred because they have more communicative power than other types of contents. As he explains, as beautiful as it is a landscape, the audience prefer to see pictures of members of the family involved in whatever activity related to wine, such as tasting a glass.

By the way, the presence of images of people in a winery page makes sense only if such figures are properly included inside a storytelling; namely if a meaningful narrative is created and narrated around them.

“We focus on storytelling” (Sara Bertola - Elvio Cogno)

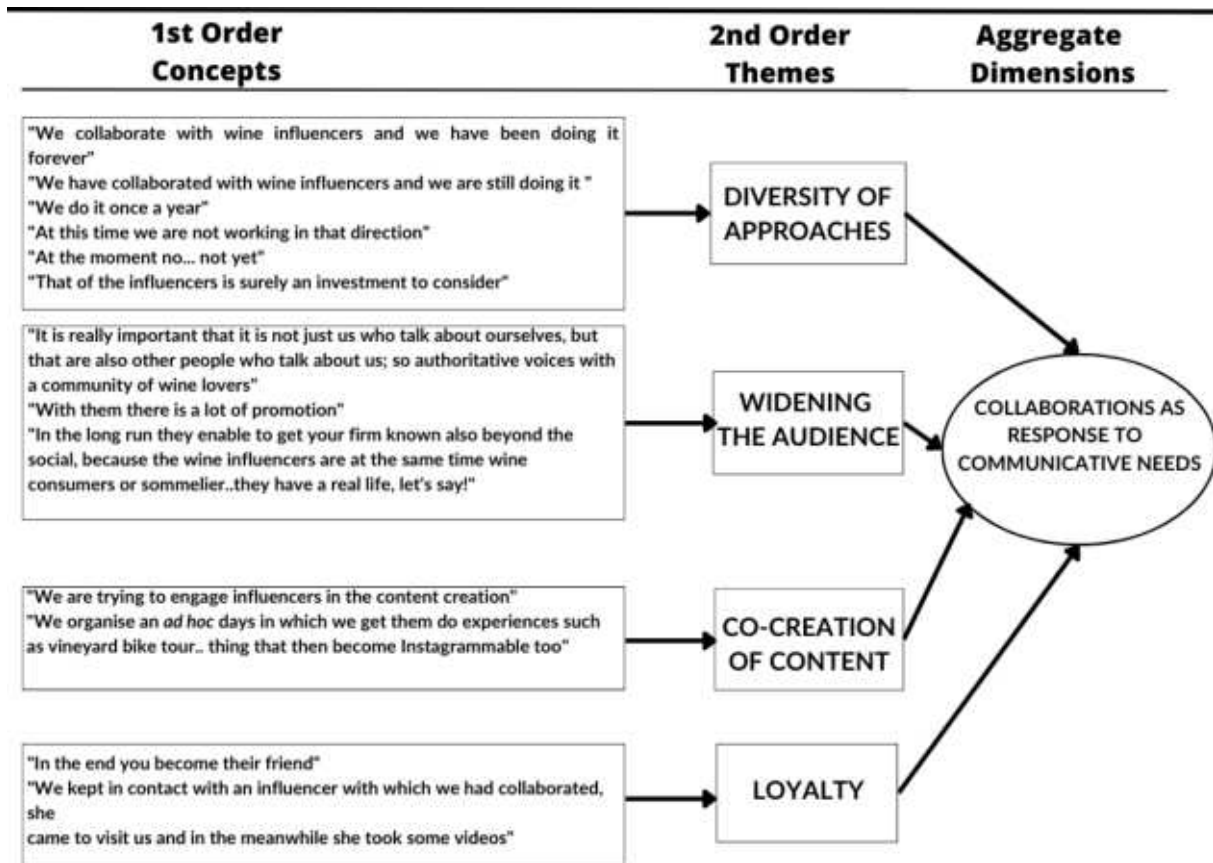
As the informant of Elvio Cogno explains, storytelling stands at the core of the digital narration and is an essential part of it.

Both the communication themes and the emotional storytelling are part of the aggregate dimension of *Instagram communication strategies*. The acceptance of Instagram as communication tool has been followed by the development of specific communication strategies through which wineries adopt the platform. Instagram communication strategies are found to be shaped by the type of content and the emotional storytelling they include.

4.4.3 Collaborations as response to communicative needs

The implementation of Instagram as business communication tool and its consequently mastery have developed in wineries specific communication objectives. Such goals are in part pursued by adopting different communication strategies, which rely on narrating the desired themes. On the other part, a further communication method is found to be popular for the reach of the purposes, namely the one of collaborations. Adopting the Instagram tool while partnering with other figures, such as Wine Influencers, may be beneficial for wineries and gives rise to the third aggregate dimension: *Collaborations as response to the communicative needs*. This dimension is found to be composed by four 2nd order themes: *Diversity of approaches, Widening the audience, Co-creation of content, and Loyalty* (Figure 14).

Figure 14: DATA STRUCTURE 3



Source: elaborated by the author

The theme of *Diversity of approaches* suggest that wineries do not show a common line of thought regarding the collaboration with Wine Influencers. Big wine firms seem to have already experienced the practice and to have shown willingness to continue this approach.

"We collaborate with Wine Influencers and we have been doing it forever" (Francesca Endlicher - Ferrari Trento)

Ferrari Trento holds a long collaboration history with Wine Influencers, which continues to pursue.

"We have collaborated with Wine Influencers and we are still doing it" (Federica Quarato – Frescobaldi)

The intention to continuing the collaboration journey is noticeable likewise in the case of Frescobaldi.

“We do it once a year” (Castello di Meleto 1256)

In medium entities the confidence towards the collaborative practice begins to decrease, even if still present in the case of Castello di Meleto 1256.

“At the moment we are not working in that direction” (Sara Bertola - Elvio Cogno)

On the contrary, Sara Bertola from Elvio Cogno explains how the winery has not undertaken such strategy.

“At the moment no... not yet” (Michele Tessari - Ca' Rugate)

The contribute of Ca' Rugate shows a finding similar to that of Elvio Cogno; nevertheless, both the contributes leave open the possibility to take on the collaborative practice in the near future.

“That of influencers is surely an investment to consider” (Rebecca Battiston – Ca' Vescovado)

Stranger to such strategy is Ca' Vescovado. The winery, however, stands out evaluating the effectiveness of the instrument: being the firm a small player in the sector, some budget constraints may be considered as opposed forces for the implementation of collaborations; which do not exclude their future introduction.

Notwithstanding the diversity of approaches to the topic of collaborations, the contribute of the informants present it as a current issue in the communication of wineries, which is continuing to evolve and to impact the wine sector.

The reason why wineries may be interested in starting a collaborative strategy gives name to the second theme of this aggregate dimension, the theme of the *Widening of the audience*.

“It is really important that it is not just us who talk about ourselves, but that are also other people who talk about us; so authoritative voices with a community wine lovers”
(Federica Quarato – Frescobaldi)

This contributes triggers various elements of discussion. First of all, the sentence reveals the need, even for big wine firms, to give entitlement to the communication message with

the contribute of figures external to the company's dimension. Secondly, this need is fulfilled with the collaboration with Wine Influencers, who are seen as experts in their field of action by the audience. Thirdly, the whole design is aimed at covering a larger pool of users, and the community of Wine Lovers who are loyal followers of their Wine Influencers satisfies this need. Summarizing, the contribute of the informant confirms the presence of a strict bond among Wine Influencers and Wine Lovers, as suggested by the literature (Ingrassia et al., 2020), meanwhile, offering it another contextualization. Coherently, the informant unveils that the relationship between Wine Influencers and Wine Lovers is not an end in itself, since it is being leveraged by wine firms. Wineries are aware of the ability of Wine Influencers to impact a huge amount of people, and are including such figures as important assets of their business plans.

“With them there is a lot of promotion” (Castello di Meleto 1256)

The desire to enhance the audience emerges likewise from the informant of Castello di Meleto 1256, who confirms that collaborations are aimed at increasing the promotion effort.

“In the long run they enable to get your firm known also beyond the social, because the wine influencers are at the same time wine consumers or sommelier... they have a real life, let's say!” (Lorenzo Bagnoli – La Leccia)

The concept of the widening of the audience finds its maximum expression in the words of Lorenzo Bagnoli, from La Leccia. The informant moves the context of action beyond the social borders, suggesting that Wine Influencers may be considered outside their professional area, as individuals living a personal life comparable to that of any possible Instagram user. According to this view, the promotion impact would be higher than ever, covering the communities of Wine Lovers and extending to the contacts who are part of the social life of the Wine Influencers.

The third theme, *Co-creation of content*, proves that the collaboration strategy is already implemented as part of structured strategy in some wine realities. Pioneer in this logic is ZONIN1821:

“We are trying to engage influencers in the content creation” (Giancarlo Parolini – ZONIN1821)

The interviewed explains how the group is keen to individuate Wine Influencers who match the personality and the values of the company, in order to collaborate together to the narration of the brand experience.

“We organise ad hoc days in which we get them do experiences such as vineyard bike tour.. things that then become Instagrammable too” (Castello di Meleto 1256)

In the case of Castello di Meleto 1256, the collaborative creation of content is consequence of the activities specifically conceived for the Wine Influencers, that end to be part of material shared on the platfor.

The maintenance of an ongoing relationship with Wine Influencers gives birth to the fourth theme of this aggregate dimension: *Loyalty*.

“In the end you become their friend” (Lorenzo Bagnoli – La Leccia)

Lorenzo Bagnoli from La Leccia explains how a long-lasting professional collaboration may result in a friendship one, which consequently facilitates the cooperation.

“We kept in contact with an influencer with which we had collaborated, she came to visit us and in the meanwhile she took some videos” (Caviro)

The concept of a sustained relationship with the Wine Influencer is confirmed up to the edge of the dimensional pyramid, as indicated in the case of Caviro. The informant later reports a finding similar to the one previous exposed, explaining how the initially merely professional collaborations has then reached a sort of friendship terms between the group and the Wine Influencer. In this way, the Influencers feels free to come to visit the wine company at his own pace, and every of such times becomes an occasion to produce content material for the socials.

In conclusion, when the attitude of the Influencer matches the one of the wine firm, the result is an effective collaboration path, which the parts are willingly to pursue, becoming loyal to each other.

4.5 Discussion

The cross-case analysis allowed the author to investigate the phenomenon of interest by comparing different wine realities. The coding of data resulted in a situational analysis that helped the researcher understand the overall approach of the wine sector towards the Instagram platform, and to individuate any peculiar methods of adoption specific of the singular entities. Consequently, the collected material is used by the author to answer to the research question and its objectives, as will be illustrated in this paragraph.

The implementation of the Gioia method led to the emergence of 3 main concepts currently issuing the adoption of Instagram by Italian wine firms, namely 3 aggregate areas: *Triggers of Instagram adoption*, *Instagram communication strategies*, and *Collaborations as response to communicative needs*.

The first aggregate dimension, *Triggers of Instagram adoption*, ascertains the adoption of Instagram as digital communication tool, by revealing the presence of some factors that may be considered as triggers for the approach of Instagram by Italian wine firms. Such factors are individuated in the 2nd order themes composing the aggregate dimension: *Adaptation to the trend*, *Search for brand reputation*, and *Visual communication opportunities*. The first theme, *Adaptation to the trend*, suggests that wineries of all size felt the need to comply with the Instagram trend spreading in the wine business, feeling morally obliged to satisfy the expectations of their customers. As such, the Instagram trend imposed itself in the market thanks to the advent of technologies and to the habits of even more demanding customers, expecting wineries to comply with their standards. Consequently, the theme of Instagram adoption continues the Instagram discourse opened by the academic literature (Scarso, 2014; Veszelski, 2019; Alonso, 2021; Bellio et al., 2021; Chalupova and Pilar, 2021), by highlighting that Instagram didn't come across as an option for wine firms, instead, as a must. Subsequently to the necessity of complying with the trend, wineries began to evaluate the possible benefits deriving from the adoption of Instagram. As the second theme, *Search for brand reputation*, reveals, the scope uniting the aims of the analysed wineries is found to be reputation. The adoption of Instagram as tool to increase the reputation of wineries confirms the relevance of the Instagram platform as the actual most popular social network, capable of influencing the

popularity of companies. In this case, if bigger wine firms concentrate their reputational efforts on brand awareness, while small and medium ones prefer to focus on the early stages of the building process of brand reputation, due to their structural characteristics. Another benefit considered by wineries when evaluating the Instagram tool is the one explicated by the third theme: *Visual communication opportunities*. All the wineries prefer Instagram, compared to other social networks, due to the visual communication method it adopts, which holds a great communicative power in terms of immediateness and attractiveness of the communication.

The second aggregate dimension, *Instagram communication strategies*, unveils that, after having approached Instagram, wineries started to adopt some specific communication strategies in it. As explained by first 2nd order theme, *Heterogeneity of themes*, strategies differ in terms of the themes chosen as object of the communication, which are various across the industry. Small firms would rather communicate their wine brands and products, and their conception. Medium sized wineries enrich the communication with values, such as tradition, history, and family. In bigger wine firms the communication strategy becomes more structured, through the adoption of editorial calendars for the planning, and through the individuation of specific editorial areas, which may include hospitality, circular economy, along with estates and its wine products. Notwithstanding the different preferences about themes, all the analysed wine firms seem to value the second 2nd order theme: *Emotional storytelling*. In fact, wine firms are enriching their narrations with emotionally touching contents, in order to create deep bonds with the audience. This concept confirms what suggested by the literature (Cuomo et al., 2016) regarding the inclination of the wine product to be paired with the emotional content, and the importance of creating a proper, emotionally based, storytelling. Thus, the finding sustains the literature review providing it empirical evidence.

The third aggregate dimension, *Collaborations as response to communicative needs*, highlights the emergence of another communication strategy popular among wine firms: collaborating with Wine Influencers. As revealed by the voices of the informants, this additional practice is found to be beneficial for the reach of the communicative purposes and to reinforce the narration of the desired themes. The first 2nd order theme composing this dimension, *Diversity of approaches*, shows an heterogeneity of approaches to the

strategy of collaborations: big entities mastery the practice and strongly believe in it, medium firms divide their selves in some in favour and some opposed to the practice, and small firms are still extraneous to such strategy. Nevertheless, the second theme, *Widening of the audience*, explains how collaborations may fulfil the needs of wineries to expand their audiences and to give entitlement to their communications through authoritative figures external to the company dimension, individuated in the ones of Wine Influencers. Once the collaboration is implemented, it may lead to the *Co-creation of content*, which goes name to the third theme. Wine firms are trying to hire Wine Influencers who match the personality and the values of the company, to produce together the content of their digital communication. Finally, the maintenance of a sustained relationship with Wine Influencers may end in a *Loyalty* dimension, the fourth theme; namely a more informal exchange, close to a friendship, deriving from a previous successful collaboration and from the reciprocal desire of the parts to continuing the collaboration path.

The illustrated findings fulfil the research question by illustrating how Italian wine firms are currently adopting Instagram. Moreover, the emergent concepts provide an answer to each of the 3 specified objectives characterizing the research purpose. First of all, the analysis confirms the hypothetical presence of triggers to the adoption of Instagram by Italian wine firms, and individuates them in the themes of: *Adaptation to the trend*, *Search for brand reputation*, and *Visual communication opportunities*. Subsequently, the main purpose animating the usage of Instagram by Italian wine firms is found to be *Search for brand reputation*, declined in its components of awareness and fame. Finally, the types of content that Italian wine firms are publishing on Instagram are found to be heterogenic; however, they prove the existence of specific wine communication strategies, shaped by the types of themes they intend to communicate. Moreover, the analysis enriches the research question by highlighting the emergence of another communication practice popular among wine firms in the Instagram environment: collaborations with Wine Influencers.

CONCLUSION

This thesis investigates the adoption of Instagram as platform for social media marketing by Italian wine firms. To tackle the field of analysis a research question is identified:

How are Italian wine firms adopting Instagram?

The identification of the research question was possible thanks to a review of the relevant literature, that enabled the author to divide the research query into three objectives:

1. Identification of possible triggers to the adoption of Instagram by Italian wine firms.
2. Identification of the purposes that animate the usage of Instagram by Italian wine firms.
3. Identification of the types of contents that Italian wine firms are publishing on Instagram.

The research question and the relative objectives were addressed through qualitative empirical analysis, performed with the Gioia method, over 10 Italian wine firms of different dimensions. All the small, medium, and big wineries that were analysed possess an Instagram account and manage a more or less structured Instagram strategy as part of their communication plan.

Following the methodology of research, qualitative data were gathered through interviews and questionnaires; subsequently, data were coded in three levels of analysis. The 1st level of analysis collected the most significant quotes of the informants and organised them in some 1st order concepts, reporting the words uttered by the informants. The 2nd level of analysis allowed the author to understand the relationships behind the gathered data and to individuate a set of 2nd order themes, in which new concepts emerged and already existing ones found a new contextualization. The identified concepts conducted to the 3rd level of analysis, which associated the data to the bigger aggregate dimensions to which they belong. The combination of all the levels of

investigation resulted in a situational analysis of the current state of Instagram adoption, revealed by the perceptions of the informants.

As an outcome, three aggregate dimensions are found to shape the current adoption of Instagram by Italian wine firms: *Triggers of Instagram adoption*, *Instagram communication strategies*, and *Collaborations as response to communicative needs*.

The first aggregate dimension, *Triggers of Instagram adoption*, addresses objective 1. highlighting the presence of some factors that have triggered the decision of Italian wine firms to adopt Instagram. These factors are found to be the 2nd order themes composing this aggregate dimension: *Adaptation to the trend*, *Search for brand reputation*, and *Visual communication opportunities*. In other words, the necessity for wineries to answer the Instagram trend already spreading in the wine industry, together with the advantages Instagram offers in terms of enhancement of brand reputation and of communicating through images, were considered by wine firms as valid reasons to approach Instagram. Specifically, the theme of *Search for brand reputation* represents the main purpose animating the usage of Instagram by Italian wine firms, fulfilling at the same time objective 2.

The second aggregate dimension, *Instagram communication strategies*, tackles objective 3. identifying two 2nd order themes: *Heterogeneity of themes*, and *Emotional storytelling*. These concepts reveals that, although heterogeneous, the content themes Italian wine firms use to publish on Instagram gives birth to some communication strategies, declined according to the communicative intent of each firm. Whether the communication of small firms relies on wine products and brands, in medium entities it includes values, such as tradition, history, and family. Otherwise, in bigger wine firms the communication strategy reflects the more articulated structure of the company, being planned through editorial calendars and including themes which go beyond wine, such as hospitality and circular economy. Anyway, all the considered wineries seem to value the power of emotional storytelling, that is included as part of the communicative strategy, regardless the types of themes communicated.

The third aggregate dimension, *Collaborations as response to communicative needs*, enriches the research journey bringing extra content to the initial query. In particular, this

dimension unveils the presence of another popular strategy through which Italian wineries are currently using the platform, namely the one of collaborating with Wine Influencers. This dimension is shaped by the themes of: *Diversity of approaches*, *Widening of the audience*, *Co-creation of content*, and *Loyalty*. In fact, despite the different lines of approach to the practice, which are influenced by the organisational and economic resources of each wine firm, collaborating with Wine Influencers is recognised as relevant strategy in the wine sector. Moreover, collaborations are considered by the informants as beneficial in several respects. Firstly, given the popularity Wine Influencers own among their Wine Communities, they may help the firm increasing its audience pool. Secondly, whether the personality of the Wine Influencer reflects the one of the winery, they may collaborate together for the creation of content. Thirdly, if the collaboration between wine firms and Wine Influencers is a sustained and a fruitful one, it may end in a relationship of loyalty connecting the parts.

The above findings evidence the relevance that Instagram has acquired as communication instrument in the wine sector. The contributions of the informants witness the methods through which Italian wine firms are currently adopting the platform and imply their intentions to keep including Instagram as a salient part of their digital marketing strategies.

Some limitations characterise this research. The selected wine firms are not intended as comprehensive of the entire dimensional categories to which they belong, not even of the whole Italian wine sector. Given the rich composition of the Italian winemaking business, future research may consider a larger sample of wine firms on which to test the qualitative findings of this study.

Finally, this thesis bridges the literature gap concerning social media marketing through Instagram in the wine industry, bringing qualitative empirical findings to the topic of interest. In accordance with the Gioia method, the identified concepts will continue to serve the research domain being intended as adaptable to various contexts, thus fostering the continuation of the research path.

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