

# TO TWEET OR RE-TWEET: CONSUMER MOTIVATIONS TO FOLLOW OPINION LEADERS

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Marketing executives from the wine industry are curious of the consumer motivation to follow wine bloggers on the micro blog site Twitter. The purpose of this study is to establish a wine blogger profile to include their credentialing and content focus on their micro blog. An investigation on why wine bloggers followers are motivated to engage with wine bloggers is explored. Can being a follower of a wine blogger on Twitter correlate with them recommending a wine, visiting a wine region or becoming credentialed because of the influence of these apparent opinion leaders

## Introduction

Wine bloggers appear to be an accepted community in the wine industry. “The elite wine writers and critics are inundated with story pitches and invite to attend wine tours. Bloggers are becoming the new opinion leaders in wine” (Oregon Wine Board, 2014). Wine bloggers are committed to micro blogs because they are passionate about wine, wine bloggers are not out to make money and do not measure their success based on the number of site visitors or social media followers they have (Lifestyle Blogging Report, 2013). Twitter is their social media communication medium of choice.

Wine bloggers who blog often have established themselves in becoming an increasingly influential voice through Twitter. Sharda and Ponnada (2007) reported that bloggers provide authentic information gained through personal experience and trust for one another which indicate an online community of practice. Therefore, a contributing participant or wine blogger on Twitter is more likely defined by a series of perceived legitimacy activities such as commenting and retweeting personally relevant opinions.

Twitter is a leading micro blogging platform for wine bloggers, in terms of engagement. Eighty four percent of wine bloggers use Twitter to promote their blogs (Lifestyle Blogging Report, 2013). Twitter enables users to post status updates, or tweets, no longer than 140 characters to a network of followers using various communication services. While some users consider the 140-character constraint as a severe limitation, many argue that it is the feature that sets Twitter apart—short information is easier to consume and faster to spread. Therefore, Twitter streams contain a large and diverse amount of information ranging from daily-life stories to the latest local and worldwide news and events (Hurlock and Wilson, 2011). “Twitter became popular in 2009 and the number of account holders who use the micro blogging site at least once a month grew 40 percent in the second half of 2012 to 288 million” according to the internet research company Global Web Index (2013).

The purpose of the study aims to establish the profiles of bloggers and followers, particularly focusing on wine content tweeted, sources of wine credentials, and wine recommendations on Twitters. This study has implications in the wine industry and develops an instrument to demonstrate opinion leadership on Twitter a micro blog site.

## Review of Literature

### Word of Mouth Marketing Social Media and Micro-Blogs

“The recent developments in Web 2.0 have provided more opportunities to investigate web-based social networks. As the new social media, micro-blogs are becoming a popular communication platform. They allow users to post short messages to describe, update and share their current status and opinion” (Brown, R., 2009). Compared to regular blogging, microblogging fulfills a need for an even faster mode of communication. By encouraging shorter posts, it lowers users’ requirement of time and thought investment for content generation. This is also one of its main differentiating factors from blogging in general. The second important difference is frequency of update. On average, a prolific blogger may update his/her blog once every few days; on the other hand a microblog may post several updates in a single day (Java et al., 2007). More and more users are sharing real-time news and information sources in micro-blog communities. People post their thoughts and opinions on news and information in micro-blogs every day. What other people think has always been an important piece of information for most of us during the decision-making process (Pang and Lee, 2008).

### Opinion Leaders and Their Recommendations and Credentials on Twitter

Categories of opinion leaders are formed based on personality characteristics or values held. Expertise includes the degree of knowledge one has about a particular product. Product involvement remains the predominant for opinion leaders’ conversations about products (Weimann, 1994). Kozinets (2002) suggested that people who interact in spaces like blogs over a long period of time trust the opinions of the other users and take them into consideration when making a purchase decision. There are certain product categories on the web which require more information for people to make a purchase; therefore, recommendations on the web are very helpful. Wine fits into this category suggesting that wine blogs may be useful for some consumers to make wine selections. Moreover, credentials determine expertise which includes the degree of knowledge one has about a particular product (Feick and Price, 1987). Credentials or certifications awarded by the Sommelier Society of America, Wine and Spirits Education Trust (WSET), Society of Wine Educators, International Sommelier Guild, International Wine Guild are particularly highlighted in wine industry.

## Research Design

Self-identified wine bloggers (no industry affiliation) on Twitter are a population of just over one thousand. A qualitative study using a mix of survey and content analysis instruments will be conducted. With the assistance of the 2013 Wine Bloggers Conference, 50 wine bloggers and their Twitter accounts will be identified. A micro blog will be tweeted to each to solicit their participations in a survey of their credentials and their Twitter content. The followers of each participating wine bloggers will also be micro blogged to solicit their participation in the survey. Using Tweets, a population of 500 followers for each of the 50 participating wine bloggers will be contacted. It is anticipated at least 30 followers for each wine blogger will participate in the survey.

The survey targeting wine bloggers is composed of several open-ended questions with the purpose of investigating the content tweeted, sources of wine credentials, and wine recommendations on Twitters. The survey targeting followers includes several open-ended questions aiming to evaluate the tweeted content followers pay attention on, the wine credentials followers are interested in, and the changes of followers' purchase behavior due to the blog recommendations.

This qualitative study will follow the stepwise methodology called the spiral of analysis (Boeije, 2009) to analyze the contextual content. The frequency test and content analysis provided by SPSS will be used to evaluate the data collected from the two surveys.

Dear Fellow Wine Blogger,

@professormerlot here to ask for 5 to 10 minutes of your time. I have been interested since the 2013 Wine Bloggers Conference in the content and credentialing of our community and why our followers choose and engage on Twitter. Could you help me find out through my survey?

Straight forward, my research has been effective in helping express the wine blogger, encouraged by your work I will continue to investigate and taste with you well into the future!

I appreciate your time in advance and should you have any questions of me I am best reached by email at marloweb@sou.edu or message me @professormerlot, I will respond to you within 24 hours. I look forward to sharing my results with you when the study is completed.

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