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Adoption of Social Media in the Australian and New Zealand Wine Industries

Sharon L Forbes*

Faculty of Agribusiness & Commerce
Lincoln University, Christchurch, New Zealand
(* corresponding author)

Steve Goodman

Business School of Marketing & Management
University of Adelaide, Australia

Rebecca Dolan

Business School of Marketing & Management
University of Adelaide, Australia

Abstract

Purpose - *This paper examines the adoption of social media technologies across the Australasian wine industries, how wineries are using social media, and the issues that limit adoption.*

Design/methodology/approach - *Data for this exploratory study was obtained from a survey of wineries across Australia and New Zealand.*

Findings - *The level of social media adoption by wineries is the same across both nations (65%), with Facebook and Twitter being the most adopted platforms. Wineries are predominantly utilising social media to communicate and provide event information to existing customers, as well as to advertise and gain new customers.*

Originality/value – *This study adds to current knowledge regarding the use of social media in the wine industry, including a comparison of the use across Australasian wineries to wineries in other nations. It also identifies the main barriers affecting the use of social media by wineries; time constraints, effectiveness, and lack of knowledge.*

Keywords: *social media; adoption; wine; Australia; New Zealand*

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Introduction

Social media technologies have been rapidly adopted by both individuals and businesses (Nair, 2011; Protalinski, 2013). The social media innovation has changed the nature of relationships and allowed businesses to communicate with customers at a global level (Keller, 2009). Whilst there is a considerable body of literature relating to social media in general, there is less knowledge about the adoption of it in the wine industry. It has been reported that the wine industry, one strongly steeped in tradition, has been slower than other industry sectors to adopt social media (e.g. Bruwer & Wood, 2005; Gebauer & Ginsburg, 2003; Quinton & Harridge-March, 2003). This study seeks to examine the degree to which social media has been adopted across the Australian and New Zealand wine industries and identifies what social media is being used for. In addition, the issues that limit the adoption of social media in wineries are identified and discussed.

This paper begins with a review of the literature about social media in general and then more specifically, social media in the global wine industry. Following sections outline the method used in this study, discuss the results, and provide final conclusions.

Social Media

Social media is described by Nair (2011) as online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights and media can be shared. Social media can also be described as online resources that people use to share content, including videos, photos, images, text, ideas, insight, humour, opinion, gossip and news (Drury, 2008). Zeng et al. (2010) similarly defined social media as a conversational, distributed mode of content generation, dissemination and communication among communities. Fundamentally, social media is about relationships and connections between people and organisations.

To facilitate these relationships and connections, literally hundreds of different social media platforms have emerged (Harris, 2009). Social media platforms include those developed for social networking, text messaging, sharing photos, podcasts, blogs, wikis, streaming videos and discussion groups. Increasingly, these platforms are accessible to consumers (and businesses) through mobile devices. The most well-known platforms include mechanisms for social or professional networking such as Facebook and LinkedIn, tools for video sharing such as YouTube, and blogging engines such as Twitter.

The use of social media has exploded in a way that traditional mass media never did; it took 38 years for the radio to attract 50 million listeners, 13 years for television to gain 50 million viewers and just one and a half years for Facebook to reach 50 million participants (Nair, 2011). Facebook today has more than 1.9 billion monthly users and Twitter has exceeded 302 million monthly users (Protalinski, 2013; Twitter, 2015). Kietzmann et al. (2011) suggest that there are approximately 90 million new tweets or blogs being created each and every day. Research also suggests that 70 percent of consumers now visit social media sites for brand or product information and almost half of these consumers will make a purchase decision based on this information (DEI Worldwide, 2008). These figures give some indication of the importance of social media to people. Smith (2009, p. 559) stated that “wherever people are online they are actively engaged with a wide variety of social media platforms, from blogs to social networking to video sharing” and that Asian internet users are the most active users. Customers are using social media to research products and services, as well as to engage with businesses and other customers who may offer them valuable opinions (Garretson, 2008).

Although social media is relatively new to the business world, it is rapidly becoming just as important to businesses as it is to customers. To illustrate this, eMarketer in 2006

predicted that advertising expenditure in the US in online social media platforms would eclipse \$1.8 billion by 2010 (Drury, 2008). Businesses are utilising social media as (a) a source of research information for product design and even co-creation; (b) a marketing tool to drive sales; and (c) a means for managing stakeholder relationships (Zeng et al., 2010). Social media gives a business access to engage personally and directly with customers around the globe. Nair (2011) noted that customers today expect that companies will have a social media presence and Hanna et al. (2011) noted that companies across many different industries now view the use of social media as a mandatory element of their marketing strategy. Reyneke, Pitt and Berthon (2011) suggest that brands are using social media to attempt to reach current customers, to gain new customers and to build or maintain their reputation. The critical point for businesses to note however, is that with mass media they were able to shape their message, but with social media they lose control of it. Drury (2008) describes this as a move from marketing that is one dimensional, to a two-way conversation between customers and organisations. In effect, social media turns mass media upside down and creates a media for the masses (Baker & Green, 2008), and a media channel in which customers engagement in the co-creation of brand value has become more of a goal than other traditional 'brand-building' activity.

Social Media and the Wine Industry

Having a social media presence is as important as having a road sign that points to a winery's cellar door argues Habel and Goodman (2010). Despite this, wineries have been reasonably slow to incorporate social media into their marketing strategies, and research reports that even wineries who have begun using social media don't know where it fits within their strategy (Dolan, Goodman & Habel, 2013). Christou and Nella (2012) suggest that wineries may differ in their perceptions of social media compared to other industries, as they have not embraced the new technologies to the same extent. Research in an emerging American wine region (Velikova, Wilcox & Dodd, 2011) revealed that most wineries were aware of the popularity of social media, but few knew how it could be helpful to them, similar to earlier findings in the Australian wine industry (Dolan, Goodman & Habel, 2013). Similarly, both Stricker et al. (2003) and Thach (2009) that many US wineries have a Web 1.0 approach - they have built a website to passively provide information but have not adopted interactive social media tools to any great extent. In France, a study of luxury Bordeaux wine brands revealed that they did not have a clearly defined social media strategy (Reyneke, Pitt & Berthon, 2011). Other authors have also noted that the wine industry has been slower than other industries to adopt online applications (e.g. Bruwer & Wood, 2005; Gebauer & Ginsburg, 2003; Quinton & Harridge-March, 2003).

Despite this noted slow start, the global wine industry is increasingly engaging in social media, particularly through the adoption of the most popular social media platforms. Although there is a low rate of website adoption amongst Greek wineries, almost 60 percent of those wineries with a website were found to provide a link to their Facebook or Twitter page and 13 percent included a link to YouTube videos (Notta & Vlachvei, 2013). Research in Germany (Szolnoki et al., 2013) reported that 60 percent of wineries are communicating with their customers via social media, with the most prevalent platforms being Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In addition, 40 percent of respondents indicated that they planned to implement additional social media activities in the near future. Bouquet (2012) reported that 94 percent of interviewed American winery respondents were active on Facebook, compared to only 53 percent of French wineries, whilst consumer Facebook usage is 43 and 39 percent respectively (interworldstats.com). No previous literature has been found to have examined the use of social media platforms or future plans for social media strategies in the Australian and New Zealand wine industries.

As the adoption of social media by wineries is increasing, research has started to examine what it is being used for. Dolan, Goodman and Habel (2013) examined a sample of fourteen Australian wineries and revealed that these businesses are using Facebook as a communication platform across one, or more, of three identified communication orientations. Australian wineries utilise Facebook for (a) promoting events by providing details about booking procedures, availability and pricing; (b) selling wine by providing information such as product tasting notes, reviews, awards and sales incentives; and (c) relationship building to develop a sense of community through information such as environmental credentials, support for charities, and other human interest stories about the winery and the people behind it (Dolan, Goodman & Habel, 2013). Research in the US categorised winery websites as having either a marketing-orientation or a wine-orientation, and one of the differing factors between the categories was the presence or absence of links to social media sites; only wineries with marketing-oriented websites provided social media links (Velikova, Wilcox & Dodd, 2011). Laverie et al. (2011) argue that having a social media presence is a new and low-cost way for wineries to build loyal, ongoing relationships with consumers and a brand community. Alpha Omega, a boutique Californian winery, reported that they began using social media in an attempt to reverse their financial losses, and credit their ability to connect with customers directly via social media as the reason for increased revenue (Carlton & Kesmodel, 2011). Similarly, Bouquet (2012) reported that over half of US wineries are utilising Facebook as a medium to generate customer sales. No previous literature has identified what social media is being used for across a large sample of Australian and New Zealand wineries.

In addition to wine producers using social media, wine consumers are using it to talk about wine too, hence the notion of co-creation of value with brands. User-generated content, most often in the form of wine blogs, are a growing communication phenomenon. Yarrow (2009) reported that over the past decade, the number of wine blogs has grown from one to over 700, with some of the larger blogs attracting more than 40,000 hits per month. Topics include basic wine information, wine reviews, information on wine regions or other wine-related matters (Thach, 2010). Research by the Wine Market Council (2010) reported that 45 percent of core wine consumers follow wine people on Twitter and 46 percent said that their friends and family post Tweets about wine. Thach (2010) also suggests that consumer-generated wine reviews are increasing and wineries need to pay more attention to what is written about their brands on wine blogs.

Whilst some wineries have embraced the new social media technologies, others have claimed that various issues prevent them from doing so. Research with seventeen Yarra Valley wineries (Strickland, 2013) revealed that the majority had a low level of understanding and did not know how to use social media platforms. Other respondents reported that they did not have the time to investigate how to use social media and 90 percent expressed concern that there was no evidence that having a social media presence provided financial returns in the wine industry (Strickland, 2013). Whilst the Strickland (2013) study is focused on Australia, no literature has been found to have examined the barriers that prevent or limit utilisation of social media strategies across a large sample of Australian and New Zealand wineries.

Strickland (2013) notes that very few previous studies have been undertaken to specifically identify social media use in the wine industry. Thach (2009) also reported that there is little evidence regarding the use of social media in the wine industry. This study addresses this gap by examining the adoption of social media across the Australian and New Zealand (known together as Australasia) wine industries. The following research questions have been developed from the literature review and will be answered in this paper:

- RQ1. Have Australasian wineries adopted social media platforms?
- RQ2. Which social media platforms are Australasian wineries using?

- RQ3. How are Australasian wineries utilising social media technologies?
 RQ4. What issues are preventing or limiting the adoption of social media technologies across Australasian wineries?
 RQ5. Will the adoption of social media among Australasian wineries increase in the future?

The research questions are proposed and empirically investigated in order to identify the gaps in the bridge between technological opportunity and industry capability. Research needs to understand why businesses and brands are using social media, why they are not, and the problems involved. If research is to contribute to practice, understanding this is a key step in ensuring businesses and brands can use the technological opportunities for marketing that the new web offers. In this way, this paper has managerial contributions; it seeks to establish a research agenda that investigates why businesses and brands are not adopting social media marketing, in the midst of a plethora of research concerning 'what is available'.

Method

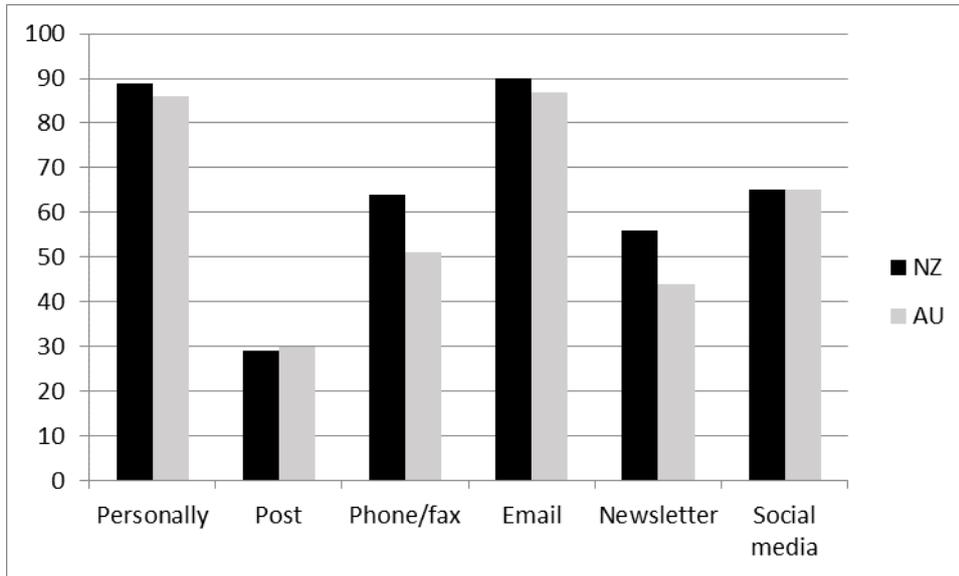
This study utilised a questionnaire that had been previously developed and tested for research with German wineries (Szolnoki et al., 2013). The questionnaire was translated into English by the original author, and one of the authors of this study reviewed and revised the translation. The questionnaire was designed to measure the attitudes and preferences of winemakers regarding social media. The questionnaire contained questions that examined general communication tools and online shops, as well as sections that focused specifically on the use of social media, the identification of social media platforms in use, the importance of social media and issues with social media.

In Australia, the data was collected in an online survey, hosted on Qualtrics. A message was sent to 2480 Australian wineries who have an email address in the Wine Industry Directory. A total of 379 usable responses were received in early 2014, giving a response rate of 15 percent. In New Zealand, the questionnaire was posted out to 575 wineries and completed by 106, giving a response rate of 18 percent. The questionnaire was posted out because the author had experienced a very low response rate when using an online method to survey New Zealand wineries in a previous 2013 study.

Results and Discussion

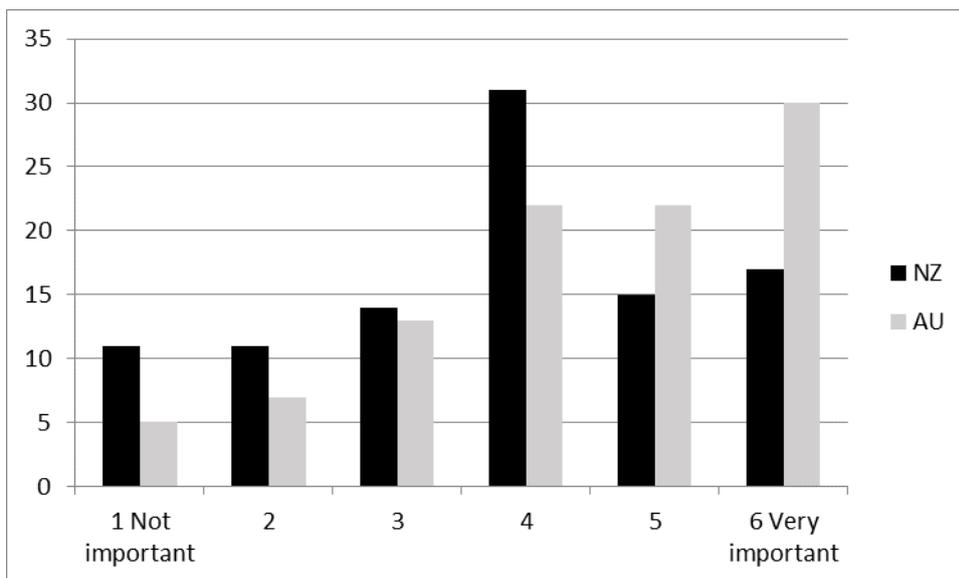
The first research question examined whether Australasian wineries have chosen to adopt social media platforms. Figure 1 illustrates the tools that Australian and New Zealand wineries are using to communicate with their customers. In both Australia and New Zealand, 65 percent of wineries have adopted social media as a tool to communicate with their customers. This result suggests that the adoption of social media by wineries is more prevalent in New Zealand and Australia than it is in either Germany (Szolnoki et al., 2013) or France (Bouquet, 2012). However, the adoption of social media amongst Australasian wineries is considerably lower than the 94 percent of US wineries who reported usage of Facebook (Bouquet, 2012). This result may relate to the rates of internet and social media penetration in the US and Australasia; the internet penetration rate in North America is 81 percent compared to 63 percent across the Oceania region and the social media penetration rates are 56 percent and 44 percent respectively (wearesocial.net). The results from both nations, when compared to the US, suggest that there is room to increase the use of social media as a tool to communicate with customers; this would be particularly important for those Australasian wineries who are engaged in exporting and thus need to reach global consumers.

Figure 1:
Tools used by wineries to communicate with their customers.



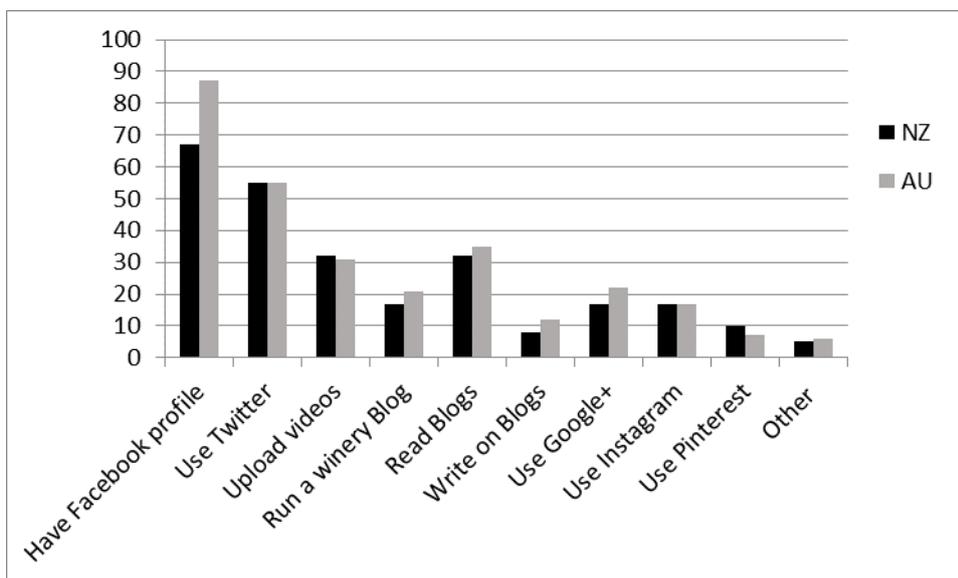
To further examine the first research question, Figure 2 provides a view of how important social media is to wineries. Over a third of New Zealand wineries and around twenty-five percent of Australian wineries rate social media as being reasonably unimportant to them. In comparison, 17 percent of New Zealand wineries regard social media as being very important to their business, as do 30 percent of Australian wineries. This result suggests that although the rate of adoption of social media as a tool to communicate with customers is the same in both nations, Australian wineries regard social media as being of much greater importance to their business. Further research would be needed to explore why this difference in importance exists between the two nations.

Figure 2:
Importance of social media to wineries.



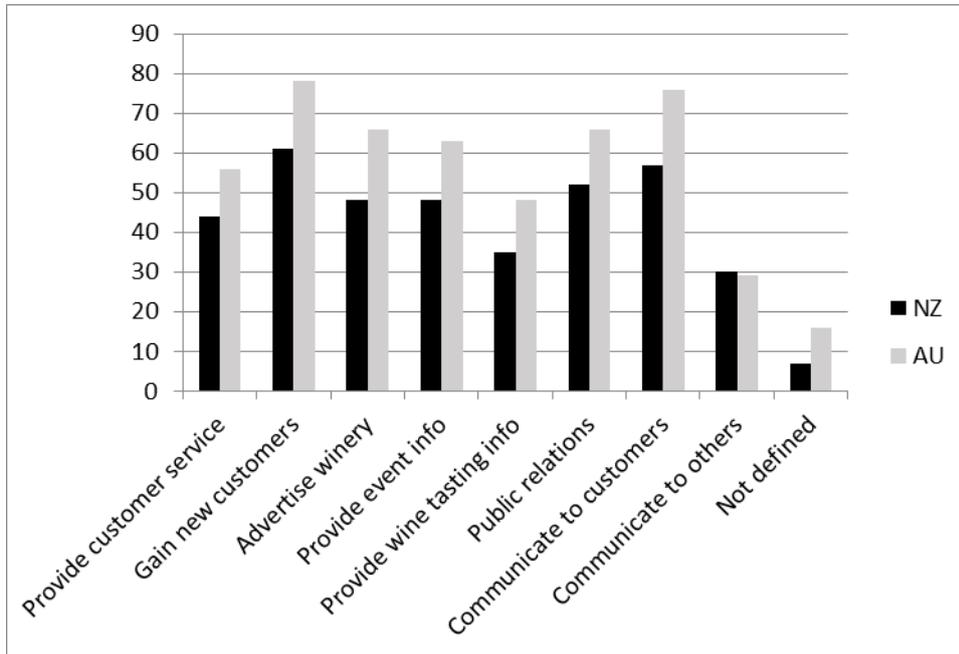
The second research question sought to identify which specific social media platforms are being used by wineries. Figure 3 illustrates the social media platforms that wineries in Australia and New Zealand are utilising. Facebook is by far the most popularly used social media platform in Australia, with 87 percent of wineries having a Facebook profile, followed by Twitter with 55 percent reporting use. There is a similar story in New Zealand, with Twitter (55%) and Facebook the most commonly used social media platforms, but with a lower incidence of Facebook usage than Australia at 67 percent. Other platforms such as Uploading Videos, Reading Blogs, Pinterest, Google+ and Instagram are at similar use levels in both markets. These results are similar to those from Germany where Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the most frequently used social media platforms amongst wineries (Szolnoki et al., 2013).

Figure 3:
Social media platforms used by wineries.



The third research question examined how Australasian wineries use the social media platforms (see Figure 4). In general, wineries across both nations predominantly use social media to communicate with customers, to gain new customers, to advertise the winery and provide event information. Interestingly, 7 percent of New Zealand wineries and 16 percent of Australian wineries cannot actually define what they are using social media for. This result provides some support for earlier research suggesting that wineries either (a) lack a clearly defined social media strategy or (b) are not sure how social media will be useful to them (e.g. Reyneke, Pitt & Berthon, 2011; Velikova, Wilcox & Dodd, 2011). An innovation is typically adopted by businesses when it is perceived that it will address a particular need; this result suggests that some Australasian wineries have adopted social media without first clearly identifying the need they are seeking to address.

Figure 4:
Reasons why wineries are using social media.



The fourth research question sought to identify the issues that prevent or limit wineries from using social media tools. Firstly, the questionnaire examined reasons that specifically prevented the wineries from adopting Facebook or Twitter technologies (see Figures 5 and 6). Around 10 percent of New Zealand wineries reported issues with Facebook including time constraints, lack of effectiveness and the effort not being worthwhile, whilst Australian wineries reported a higher level of problems with Facebook; over 25% said they were too busy and didn't have enough time or simply that it wasn't effective. Whilst the numbers were still quite low, more New Zealand wineries reported similar issues with Twitter than with Facebook. Australian wineries, however, had more problems with Twitter, with at least a third reporting no time (30%), not effective (32%), and not knowing how to use it (33%). Across both Facebook and Twitter, Australian wineries clearly have more aversion and problems inhibiting the use of both Facebook and Twitter, than their New Zealand counterparts. Further research would be needed to determine why Australian wineries are more affected by issues that prevent the adoption of Facebook and Twitter than are their New Zealand counterparts.

Figure 5:
Reasons why wineries don't use Facebook

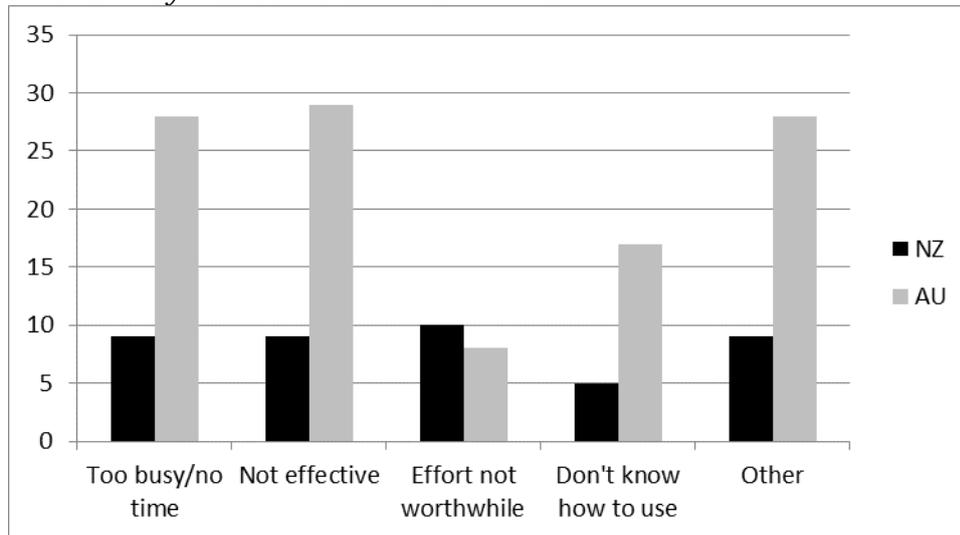
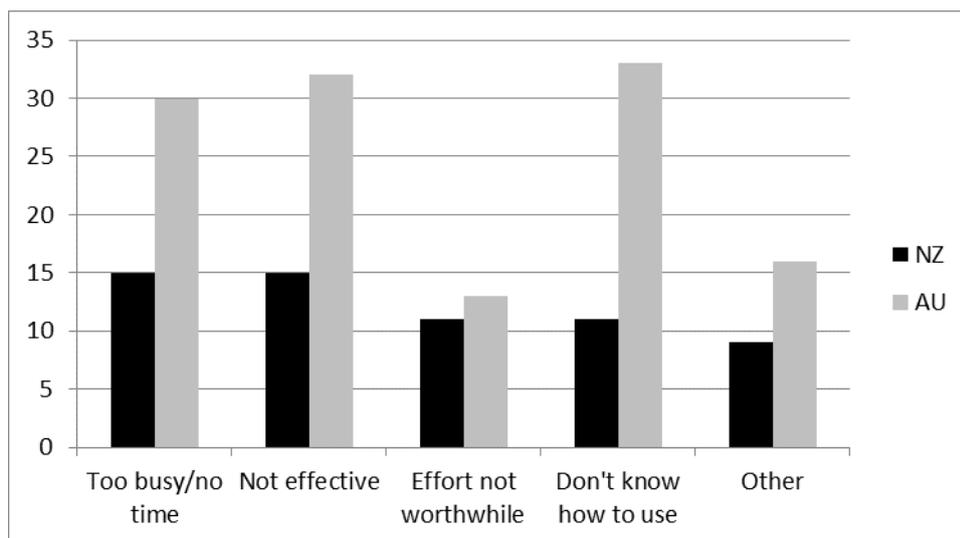
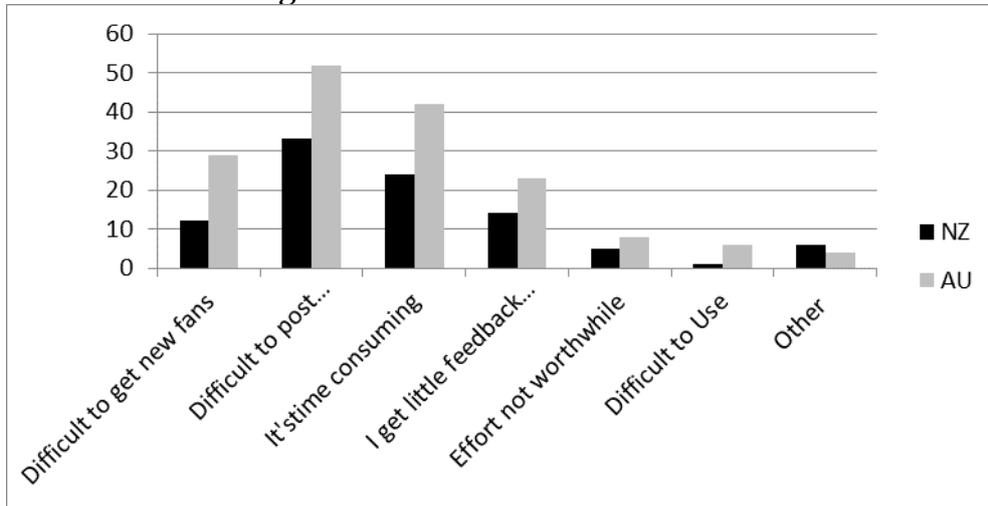


Figure 6:
Reasons why wineries don't use Twitter



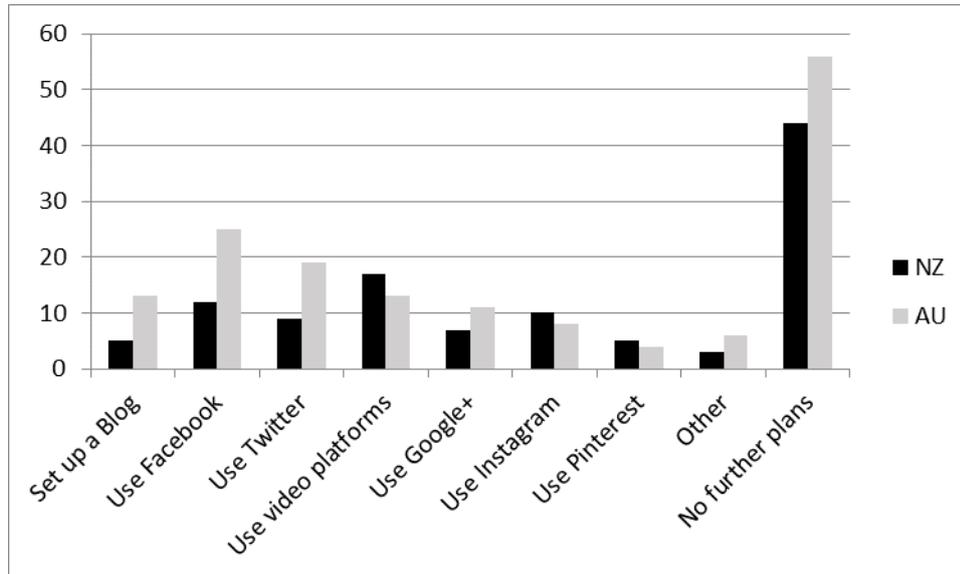
The fourth research question also sought to understand if issues existed amongst those wineries who had adopted social media technologies. Figure 7 illustrates the responses from those wineries who had specifically adopted Facebook. The difficulty with generating content is the number one problem in Australia (52%), something which could be assisted with through use of a communication orientation as proposed by Dolan, Goodman and Habel (2013). The problem with time (42%) is understandable in an industry dominated by small businesses staffed, in many cases, by a proprietor who is also the grapegrower and winemaker. The difficulty in getting new fans (29%) highlights a possible need to re-examine the goal of using social media; is it to get new fans (likes), to engage with the consumers that do 'like' your brand, to co-create (and increase) the value amongst current customers or simply to achieve reach (which can be done through paying for promotion)? Australian wineries who do use Facebook report problems with it to a higher degree than do New Zealand wineries; further research would be needed to identify why this is the case.

Figure 7:
Difficulties with using Facebook



The final research question examined whether wineries had any future plans to further adopt social media platforms (see Figure 8). A small number of New Zealand wineries were looking to utilise video platforms, Facebook, Instagram or Twitter in the future. In Australia, 25 percent of wineries were planning on future use of Facebook, and nearly 20 percent were planning on using Twitter, something which represents a challenge given the issues reported in Figures 5, 6 and 7 above. Almost half of the New Zealand wineries and just over half the Australian wineries had no future plans to extend their current use of social media. The high rate of 'no further plans' is particularly disconcerting; this may well reflect the responses showing wineries did not know what they were getting from current use or not really having it fit into their strategy, as well as the reported time and effort taken to achieve something that is not easily quantified. The large number of wineries with no further plans for social media may also reflect the difficulties that those who have adopted platforms such as Facebook have reported in this study (see Figure 7); these difficulties are likely to be discussed in conversations amongst winery owners or managers and could thus negatively affect the adoption of social media platforms across the entire industry. This is an area requiring further research if wine businesses are to better capitalise on the opportunities that social media offers for marketing.

Figure 8:
Future social media activities.



Conclusions

This exploratory study has provided an overview of the current and future adoption of social media amongst Australian and New Zealand wineries. It has identified which social media platforms are currently being used and what they are being used for. It is clear that, for many wineries, social media is already an important communication tool, although the findings do provide some support for the view that wineries, across the globe, have been somewhat slow to adopt social media, perhaps because they are not exactly sure how it will be useful to them (e.g. Christou & Nella, 2012; Reyneke, Pitt & Berthon, 2011; Velikova, Wilcox & Dodd, 2011). So, why is it important for Australasian wineries to have a social media presence? As previously reported, social media has exploded to reach billions of people globally; many of these are current or potential customers for Australasian wineries. The modern wine consumer, when standing in a store or reading a restaurant wine list, is likely to reach for their smartphone and search for information to simplify their purchase decision; they are expecting to find that wineries are communicating with their customers via social media platforms.

This study provides support for the notion that social media adoption is higher in New World wine nations than it is in Old World nations; the number of Australasian wineries using social media is higher than the number reported in both France and Germany (Bouquet, 2012; Szolnoki et al., 2013). However, it is apparent that far fewer Australasian wineries have adopted social media in comparison to their US counterparts; there is clearly room for more wineries to adopt and embrace social media technologies within their marketing strategies. There is also an issue with some wineries having adopted social media but being unable to clearly define what they are using it for. These findings indicate that improvements in terms of both adoption rate and clarification of purpose are needed. The Australian and New Zealand wine industry organisations could have a role to play in educating wineries about which social media platforms to use and how best to use them in order to build relationships, improve reputation, and ultimately increase sales. Given the export focus of both nations and the proliferation of social media activity across the global population, there is a clear need for Australasian wineries to adopt and engage in social media. Social media can, and should be, incorporated into existing marketing

strategies; the findings of this study suggest that some wineries may be struggling as to how best to do this.

Future research could include in-depth case studies of individual wineries to analyse how social media can be most successfully utilised and incorporated within a winery's overall marketing strategy; these would be useful for educating and upskilling those wineries who aren't already using social media platforms. Finally, research could be undertaken to understand, from the customer perspective, how wineries should utilise social media to best communicate and build relationships.

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