Use of Culture in the Website Brand Management of Kentucky Wine Producers

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Digital and social media offer new opportunities for communication for brands, producers, and their stakeholders, especially for local producers with limited access to multiple industry-related marketing and communication resources. This study examines the digital brand management practices presented on the websites of Kentucky wine producers. The study analyzed all available Kentucky wine websites during the length of the study (2013-2015) with emphasis on the use of culture in the brand messaging. Cultural symbols were identified as the primary associations adopted by Kentucky wine brands for differentiation and recognition. Kentucky wine producers employ a combination of local, unique, international wine community, and cultural consumption symbols to create distinct brand messages. Not only did brand management strategies encourage wine purchases, but also winery visits for wine tasting and on-site purchases, interpreted as cultural rituals (practices that create and/or reinforce meanings associated with specific cultural symbols) for this report. The study extends research on the use of culture in digital brand management, the employment of cultural rituals for brand messaging, and the use of digital communication channels for small organizations in competitive creative, crafts, and cultural industries (industries where value is derived from the product's cultural importance rather than economic benefit). Keywords: Digital Qualitative Research, Digital Culture, Wine Research, Brand Management, Textual Analysis

Introduction

For small, developing wine regions with limited resources, digital and social media offer attractive channels of communication and points of contact with potential customers and stakeholders. These avenues for marketing and brand management have provided new opportunities for developing wine regions with little brand awareness outside of region's most loyal, and oftentimes, local, consumers. A secondary benefit of digital and social media has been the evolution in the communication experience as the messages take on new forms with new purposes in the producer/stakeholder relationship due to the messages' new digital context or platform (Finne & Grönroos, 2009; Gurău, 2008).

While the general impact of integrated online marketing communication[1] may be recognized (Gurău, 2008; Mulhern, 2009), there is interest in the documentation and analysis of IMC on digital platforms as digital IMC practice informs brand management theory and understanding (Kitchen, Kim, & Schultz, 2008). This research is especially important for wine brands as improved brand management may be the difference between success and failure, and

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[1] Integrated online marketing communication is also referred to as digital integrated marketing communication, or integrated marketing communication in online environments. These terms are used interchangeably in this study to refer to Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) found on the internet and social media. For clarity, attempts are made to specify the digital platform, primarily winery websites, throughout this document.

for many developing wine regions, the success of multiple wine brands from their specific region ensures the viability of the local area as a wine region. If the developing wine region becomes large and robust enough, then the local wine region may have a positive impact on the economy and livelihoods of the local residents, as was the intention when state support was first granted to the grape growers and wine makers of Kentucky, the site of investigation for this study (Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy, 2003).

With such importance placed upon the brand management strategies of wine brands and the digital medium as a context for managing brand relationships, this study investigates the brand management attempts of winery websites in the developing wine region of the state of Kentucky in the United States. Brand management can be defined as the managing of the associations, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, and experiences evoked by the brand image, identity and brand (Keller, 2009). A brand is comprised of all of the associations and meanings along with the comparative position of the brand in relationship to competing brands in the life of the consumer at a particular time (Karmark, 2013; Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009).

Of importance for wine brands and brand management are the associations and meanings connected to the product. For wine, such associations usually involve the place, land, grapes, agricultural and production practices, and more broadly, the local culture of the wine region (Beckert, Rössel, & Schenk, 2014; Beverland, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2005). These associations then grant the wine its symbolic value, and for contemporary wine consumed as a cultural product (wine not consumed as a basic need), the wine and as an extension, the wine's brand value, is thereby determined by the symbolic evaluation negotiated by all of the brand's stakeholders, including the consumers (Beckert, Rössel, & Schenk, 2014; Merz et al., 2009). Importantly, few studies have researched the particular brand associations, cultural or otherwise, associated with small, non-Pacific Coast, American wine regions, especially the Kentucky wine region. By understanding the foundations of wine brands, their associations, and brand management, questions then emerge as to what content, especially cultural content, is connected to specific wine brands, through what means are the cultural associations promoted and negotiated, and what brand management strategies are generally employed in the Kentucky wine context? These questions lead to an overview of the Internet for wine brand management purposes.

Internet Use for Wine Brand Management

The importance of the Internet as a place/space for wine brand management, or more generally, branding, advertising, and stakeholder communication for wine brands has been recognized by wine industry practitioners and academics (Cosenza, Solomon, & Kwon, 2015; Gray, 2013; Neilson & Madill, 2014). Cosenza et al. (2015) determined the Internet had the potential to provide the international wine industry a place/space for a relatively permanent record of wine information. This digital database allows for wine-text searches, the improved likelihood of successful searches, and most importantly, ubiquitous access to wine information for consumer decision-making. As a result, this increased access to wine information has the potential to expand the reach of a wine brand, a desirable outcome for small wineries with limited resources.

Available Internet information on specific wines and wineries (via a brand website) offers new avenues of interaction with potential consumers as Internet and social media have shifted access and power of choice to consumers (Zafiropoulos, 2012). Readily available and easily accessed information on wine "motivates people to seek information in order to make a correct choice about wine or the lifestyle choices surrounding it" (Cosenza et al., 2015, p. 72). Wine is a complicated product, there are risks associated with purchases, wine must be experienced in order to accrue personal knowledge, and in lieu of personal knowledge and

expertise, information on wine lowers anxiety and allows consumers to better estimate the consequences of decisions (Atkin & Thach, 2012; Johnson & Bruwer, 2004; Thach, 2009). Finally, websites remain an essential element of wine branding as social media has not been proven to have overtaken the Internet for persuasiveness and value associated with wine (Wilson & Quinton, 2012). As Thach (2009) argues, with the Internet's potential for wine (Wine 2.0), a web presence offers new, unique, and important opportunities for wineries.

Due to lack of resources and attention from the international wine community, the Internet (both websites and social media or summarily, Thach's Wine 2.0) has become the most affordable, most easily accessible, and widely available form of media communication between wine producers and their stakeholders, including Kentucky winemakers. For this reason, quality website construction and wine brand website-originating communication are now essential. Similarly, these communication advances have piqued the interest of academics interested in digital marketing, branding, and the wine industry (Neilson & Madill, 2014; Quinton & Harridge-March, 2003; Taylor, Parboteeah, & Snipes, 2010; Velikova, Wilcox, & Dodd, 2011; Yuan, Morrison, Linton, Feng, & Jeon, 2004). However, brand management research concerning the primary challenges in distinguishing a specific wine brand from more popular regional, national, and international brands remains, especially on the analysis of specific brand management strategies for smaller, developing wine regions and brands. Kentucky wine does not have the equivalent customer brand awareness and recognition that more established wine brands possess, even in comparison to other non-Pacific Coast wine regions such as the Southwest, East Coast, or Great Lakes wine regions. As a result of the lack of resources and the emergence of the Internet and social media, digital platforms have become the primary outlets of information and persuasive messages for small wineries, including Kentucky wineries. These outlets are used as alternatives to traditional industry marketing such as radio, print, television and in-store promotions. An initial exploratory question was constructed to identify which digital strategies and tactics are used by Kentucky winemakers:

> E1a: How do Kentucky wine brands attract customers through digital brand management?
> Previous research[2] revealed the importance of Kentucky wine websites for the origination of messages. IRB permission for this study and related studies (as part of a larger project) were approved by the University of Kentucky's IRB review board. As research revealed the importance of Kentucky winery websites, the question evolved into:
> E1b: How do Kentucky wine brands use websites for brand management?

Due to the competition in the wine market and the lack of distinction surrounding Kentucky wines, a second exploratory question was developed alongside E1a & b:

> E2: How do Kentucky wine brands create distinction and difference for their wines?

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[2] This study evolved out of a larger project (see Triana, 2015). As a result, certain references will be made to personal communication with Kentucky wine industry experts and practitioners which were also part of the related research. The communication with experts and practitioners was essential for contextualizing the use of Kentucky digital brand management, for understanding the specific context and environment of Kentucky winemaking, and for clarifying Kentucky winemaking cultural references to the local society and culture. The personal communication was essential for site-specific sense-making.

Almost immediately, the answer was apparent: through the use of cultural associations[3]. This study explicates the relationship between digital brand management and the use of culture to market Kentucky wines.

Wine as a Cultural Product and a Research Question

When in use or operationalized, cultural activation of Kentucky wine symbols was evaluated by employing Rothenbuhler's (1998) definition of ritual communication "as the voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behavior to symbolically effect or participate in the serious life" (p. 27). To paraphrase Rothenbuhler, *symbolically effect* denotes the use of symbols and communication, both verbal and nonverbal, to influence or contribute to a social, collaborative, and cultural communicative act. The *serious life* separates human's more meaningful acts and ceremonies (i.e., rituals) which usually contain underlying intentions and meanings from the everyday habits and behaviors that are routines, such as turning off the alarm clock in the morning and are sometimes referred to as rituals. Carrey (1989) connected culture, communication, and ritual through his conception of cultural communication; however, Carrey did not include the operationalization of his concept. Rothenbuhler's definition, while not a specific operationalization of cultural communication, presented criteria applicable for textual and visual expression of culture via ritual communication. Through Carrey (1989) and Rothenbuhler (1998) the following research question was developed:

R1: How are cultural associations employed for brand management purposes on Kentucky wine industry websites?

Websites have the potential as vehicles of cultural communication as well as data storage for the cultural records (see Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, for an overview of the value of records for qualitative analysis). The following section discusses the justification for using secondary texts for cultural understanding and valuation.

Justification for a cultural interpretation of websites as secondary texts.

Kentucky wine websites are not the Kentucky wines. Instead, they are secondary texts or records demonstrating the attributed cultural values associated with the cultural products (Oriard, 1993). For Kentucky wines, these texts are produced for brand management purposes. Oriard (1993) produced a four-point argument for the critical textual interpretation of a cultural product through its secondary texts. Oriard (1993) developed four negative considerations justifying why secondary texts should be used for cultural interpretations. Cultural meaning cannot be produced through (1) an atomized experience, (2) instrumental use, (3) predictive results, and (4) an inauthentic experience.

Wine can be used to justify the appropriateness of using Oriard's (1993) interpretation of secondary texts for cultural analysis: (1) while wine is individually consumed, the value and quality of the wine is negotiated by the wine community through consumer demand for the wine, wine industry awards, and wine media recognition. The community co-produces and reinforces wine's cultural meanings, not the individual. (2) Historically, wine was used instrumentally, as a substitute for contaminated water supplies (Lukacs, 2012). However, in modern times, wine is not needed as a substitute for impure water supplies. The consumption

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[3] Cultural associations were identified in earlier research associated with the larger project. Also, researchers have identified the importance of place for wine marketing which is oftentimes connected to local culture. The importance of place and culture for wine branding is addressed in subsequent sections of this paper. The conceptual framework also discusses how website texts and brand management can be interpreted as culture.

of wine (beyond inebriation) communicates a cultural act, be it for class or communal solidarity, expression of monetary or social success, or for ritual performance related to "the serious life" (Rothenbuhler, 1998, p. 27). (3) Based on chemical analysis, the baseline of a quality or poor wine can be determined; however, there is a tremendous amount of variation based on subjective criteria once a wine has surpassed the chemical baseline for consumption. This evaluative process includes moments of surprise, comparison to wine ideals, interpretations of wine, and negotiation with other wine stakeholders over the cultural value of the wine. This process limits predictive results. Finally, (4), which is associated with (3), since the consumption of wine can be surprising and unique, the process creates an authentic experience, an original experience that cannot be reproduced exactly ever again. Oriard's understanding of how secondary texts communicate and reinforce the meanings of cultural products aligns with this study's goal of identifying the "what and how" of Kentucky wine's cultural branding.

Finally, Mehan (2001) and Schudson (1989) connect material and textual analysis with important aspects of culture and communication that cannot be understood unless material evidence is analyzed. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) echo this interpretation of material culture. Material culture evokes "our memory of the discourses and cultural associations that have built up around it over time" (p. 222). Thus, textual analysis of websites is an appropriate method for understanding the cultural associations and brand management of Kentucky wine producers.

Methods

Culture, and the use of culture in branding, is space, place, and temporally bound. Therefore, collecting, identifying, describing, and analyzing how culture is used in Kentucky wine brand management influenced the choice of methods for the study. Website data was collected for the purpose of coding and analysis of brand associations and the communicative strategies used to express those associations. The Kentucky wine culture was observed via language and communicative acts on Kentucky winery websites, and their symbolic references were interpreted for meaning. Due to the nature of the research questions, a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was deemed appropriate in order to make sense of the meanings humans associate with phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2016).

The constant-comparison method included in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987) was applied to the analysis of the data. Potential meanings were identified in the signs, symbols, and language found on Kentucky wine producers' websites. The data could then be compared, concentrating on the digital texts' relationships, differences, and communicatively-reflexive acts (Cilliers & Spurrett, 1999).

With concern to cultural products, Bourdieu (1993) asserted that the positions of actors within the cultural industry and their products could be determined through the relationships of each cultural actor in relationship to every other cultural actor. Bourdieu's understanding of cultural industries supports the application of the constant-comparison method for analysis of differences and relationships between Kentucky wine websites. Theoretically, comparative textual analysis was determined as an appropriate method for the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Strauss, 1987). Most directly, the symbols and cultural meanings of the websites were analyzed through researcher interpretation informed by previous wine industry research, the wine industry and IMC literature, and comparative textual analysis (Triana, 2015). The symbols and cultural meanings were isolated and determined based on the way cultural referents were positioned and linked to one another. These cultural combinations create unique cultural symbols and meanings which were imbedded in the integrated online marketing communication found on the winery website. Once the integrated online marketing

message was determined (with an emphasis placed on the use and combination of the individual cultural elements), the website's overall integrated online marketing message was compared with the message of other Kentucky winery websites. Each winery website's message was evaluated based on the local winery's industry position generated through the use of cultural referents. These positions are understood based on the relationship one Kentucky winery has to another in the same manner as Bourdieu (1993) described of the French theater industry. In other words and for example, a website that emphasizes the Appalachian mountains more than horses would like the consumer to associate the winery's wine with this region rather than horse farming or racing whereas another winery website might emphasize the aforementioned horses (through a slideshow of horses next to the winery), or another winery may reference the larger wine industry by utilizing the language and phrases found in wine literature such as "notes of _____," (place your favorite fruit flavor in the blank). These differences in cultural associations orient the wineries to one another, and for the stakeholder or consumer, help inform consumption choices, purchases, cultural and ritual practices.

Site for the Study

The Kentucky wine industry is a relatively new Midwestern wine region that is sometimes more broadly grouped with Eastern American wines as opposed to the established American Pacific Coast wines of California, Washington, and Oregon. Small and comparatively new (modern production began in the late 1990s), Kentucky's wine region is dwarfed by its closest regional competitors, Missouri and Indiana. Nevertheless, grape growing and winemaking were identified as areas for potential agricultural growth after the collapse of the state's tobacco industry as a result of the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (TMSA). The TMSA ended government support for tobacco farmers although federal financial payments were allocated to tobacco growing states in order to diversify states' agricultural industries (The National Association of Attorneys General, 1998). Currently, Kentucky wine has an estimated[4] seventy wineries and 113 grape producers (Kentucky Department of Agriculture, 2017). This number is relatively small. For comparison, Missouri boasts an estimated 100 wineries and 400 grape producers (Missouri Wines, 2017). Winemaker websites remain the primary digital source of communication and information originating from wine producers.

As the secondary texts sourced for cultural evaluation, Kentucky wine websites were chosen as the site of cultural analysis as websites are the primary media channel for communication between Kentucky wine producer, potential customers, and stakeholders. Websites were chosen instead of other secondary texts as the websites were determined to be the most appropriate digital source for intentional attempts at establishing cultural associations through brand management. Other forms of Kentucky wine digital communication (primarily social media) were much more fluid in cultural value as these messages contained more contextual questions and uncertainty. While imperfect, the Kentucky wine producers' websites reflect branding attempts of a significant stakeholder in the Kentucky wine community, and because of the producers' position, the communication could be associated with specific wines, had the potential to be more intentional and considered.

The rationale for this decision originated during a conversation with a Kentucky winemaker. The winemaker noted the increased control winemakers have through websites versus social media (Kentucky winemaker, personal communication, 2013)[5]. Wilson and

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[4] The number of wineries and grape producers fluctuates yearly as producers come online and go offline every year.

[5] As the Kentucky winery industry is small, the researcher encouraged participation by promising confidentiality and discretion (in fact, at first, some Kentucky winemakers were hesitant to participate or provide detailed

Quinton's (2012) findings on the dominance of wine websites over social media also supported this rationale. The participatory nature of social media allows for an altering of messages by stakeholders, and as such, is not the ideal outlet for Kentucky wine producers to influence interpretations of their Kentucky wines. While the cultural meanings of cultural products is dynamic and constantly in flux, due to the position and influence of the wine producer over the cultural product and associated messages, the primary media channel for the wine producer is a significant option for sparking alternations in the potential cultural meanings of the cultural product. Thus, Kentucky wine websites were chosen as initial digital textual sites for analysis as a central node in the negotiation of meaning.

Inclusion in the study was determined by the Kentucky winery websites posted on Kentuckywine.com, the state government supported website for Kentucky wineries. For wineries to be listed on the website, the winery must register with the Kentucky Grape and Wine Council, the state's official governing body overseeing the Kentucky wine industry. Registration on the website signifies official entry into the Kentucky wine industry and was determined to be an appropriate marker of suitability for textual analysis.

Sampling. Sixty-eight websites were analyzed for this study. This sample consisted of every Kentuckywine.com registered website within Kentucky as of 2014. There is believed to be somewhere between sixty and seventy commercial wineries in Kentucky, and this sample, while convenient, contains somewhere between ninety-seven and 100% of all the commercial wineries in Kentucky as of 2014. This textual analysis is a comprehensive account of the digital brand management of Kentucky wineries in 2014 and 2015.

Coding and Analysis. The data collected was interpreted using at a minimum, a two-order coding process with subsequent steps. The first-order coding was an exploratory, open-coding of Kentucky winery websites' uses of cultural referents and specific brand management strategies. The second-order concepts were analyzed in search of patterns, themes, tropes, and/or concepts that could be organized into categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 266). The next stage involved integration and dimensionalization. Coded data was compared in order to identify and analyze relationships. The properties and characteristics of the concepts and categories were explicated in order to gain an understanding of the cultural associations and brand management strategies commonly employed on Kentucky wine websites (Spiggle, 1994). The primary concepts and categories are discussed in subsequent sections, such as the words, phrases and images associated with the international wine community. Then, the associations and strategies were described and considered in relationship to the wineries, the specifics of the winery, wine producer, the wine, and the construction of the website.

A conscious choice was made to code concepts and themes on one website and then construct the website "position" before moving onto the next website. A summary of each position was drafted. The researcher "stepped-away" from the constructed position for a time before returning to the evaluation, assessing the description in a holistic fashion. Only after this process was there any cross-comparison with other websites. Codes and categories were dynamic and updated as needed during the analysis.

For example, if a central Kentucky winery emphasized horses (as many central Kentucky wineries do), but then a Louisville, Kentucky winery also referenced horses, further research was conducted to determine the similarity or difference in the use of horses in the winery messages. In this example, most central Kentucky wineries referenced horse farms while wineries closer to Louisville Kentucky were more likely to reference Churchill Downs,

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responses until trust was established). Winery and winemaker names were removed as part of the confidentiality agreement in order to encourage participation and engender trust.

found in Louisville and home of the Kentucky Derby. Even though the two wineries reference the cultural importance of horses, the specificity of the referents highlights specific geographical differences which is more likely to have an effect on local consumers but will also resonate with potential consumers that identify Kentucky with horses but not recognize the difference in the details of the horse reference. This slight difference could not be fully understood until the Louisville winery website was analyzed, and at that point, the understanding of the use of horses in winery, website marketing was updated.

Notes on Reliability and Credibility for This Study

There are questions surrounding the quantitative approach to the validation of qualitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Therefore, conceptualizations of reliability and credibility were used as an alternative for this study. Credibility, established through the presentation of the research process in as clear an approach as possible, was employed as the primary form of reliability for this qualitative study (see Bowen, 2010; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Maxwell, 1992; Mishler, 1990 for discussions of credibility as a form of reliability in qualitative research).

Trustworthiness. The validity perspective for this study was adopted from Mishler (1990). Since all scientific works are "contextually grounded linguistic and interpretive practices," the validity is based on a trustworthy interpretation (Mishler, 1990, p. 421). Trustworthiness is exemplified through a "tacit understanding of the actual, situated practices in a field of inquiry" (p. 415). Brinberg and McGrath (1985) and Bowen (2010) support trustworthiness as part of the process by which qualitative studies construct credibility (and thus, reliability). Therefore, credibility is established by "the process(es) through which we make claims for and valuate the 'trustworthiness' of reported observations, interpretations, and generalizations" (Mishler, 1990, p. 419). This approach places emphasis on the inferences, arguments, conclusions, successful explication, and recommendations made from the analysis of data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Maxwell, 1992). Readers must have the opportunity to understand the data, findings, interpretation, and inferences. Secondly, the explication must align with the conceptual framework and methods employed. This interpretation of trustworthiness as a means of establishing credibility was applied to this study.

Reflexivity. As a "human instrument," there were a number of subjective concerns in analyzing the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). First, the knowledge that cultural wine consumption is an elite and leisure activity directs researchers towards status and class symbols. However, Bourdieu's (1993) conceptualization of cultural industry positions demonstrated that numerous social classes consume cultural products, albeit different products. Therefore, sensitivity to class, as long as analysis was aware and comprehensive, was appropriate for the study.

Due to experience with the wine industry, and as a result of exploratory research for this subject, industry education became an essential aspect for analysis. There is an educational component related to all cultural products including wine (Bourdieu, 1993; Triana, 2015, 2017). Finally, the findings were presented to academic colleagues and to Kentucky wine stakeholders, while maintaining the confidentiality of the winery websites, to control for potential winery stakeholder bias (some people like one winery's wine or a winemaker more than another one). This presentation of results was considered a form of "member checking."

Findings

These findings relate to the original research question for this study:

R1: How are cultural associations employed for brand management purposes on Kentucky wine industry websites?

Website Textual Analysis

The textual analysis was conducted on Kentucky winery websites under the assumption that while websites are dynamic, evolving artifacts, they are valuable snapshots offering potential insights into the associations wine producers wish to connect with their wines and wineries. The findings were considered referents and nonverbal signs imbedded with meaning (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The data was coded and analyzed based on the choice of cultural associations selected by the website creators and attributed to the wines and wineries analyzed. The coding developed from a basic level of description, and then to the categorization of elements based on themes. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) predicted, the cross-website and cross-data analysis allowed the researcher to become sensitized to the associations, brand management strategies, and website features that were most prominent in the data.

The websites were considered personal documents consisting of subjective presentations of persuasive arguments and cultural associations intended to (a) persuade a potential consumer to purchase the wine, and (b) present cultural signs that possess meanings that producers wished to have associated with the wine. Overall, sixty-eight winery websites were analyzed. Of the sixty-eight potential websites, ten of the wineries did not have a website link with their information, did not have a working connection or website for their website link, or the link was rerouted to an erroneous website. Two entries were secondary stores for existing wineries where both winery links were re-routed to the same website. These two entries were counted as working websites but were not analyzed separately.

Cultural associations were organized into the following categories (see Table 1): Kentucky cultural references, unique winemaker characteristics, international wine community associations, and wine cultural consumption rituals. Description and analysis of each category follows. Finally, these categories, sub-groupings, and a website's holistic impact were evaluated for their use of cultural associations in the service of Kentucky winery brand management.

Table 1
Kentucky Cultural Associations

Primary Categories	Sub-Categories	# of Websites using association
Kentucky cultural references	a) Local geographic, climate, and soil references	60+
	b) Bourbon Industry or Bourbon Trail	15
	c) Kentucky Agriculture or Agricultural History of the site	21
	d) Tobacco farming	5
Unique winemaker characteristics	a) Extensive Expertise	7
	b) Ethnic Heritage	4
	c) Farm Conversion	15
	d) Personal Images	11
	e) Blog	8
	f) Industry Newcomer	10
International wine community associations	a) Awards	21
	b) Wine descriptions	29

	c) Wine and Food Pairings	6
	d) Terroirs[6] & European wine regions	
	e) Wine Supplies	10
	f) Grape and Wine varietals[7]	6
		65
Wine cultural consumption rituals	a) Wine Tasting	62
	b) Wine and Food consumption rituals	7
	c) Wine as a leisure activity	39
	d) Agritourism	14

These texts help to understand what the references mean to Kentucky winemakers in association to their wines and what cultural meaning is being communicated to Kentucky wine stakeholders in attempts to persuade potential consumers to purchase Kentucky wine. The bulk of the findings will focus on the differences among the cultural associations of Kentucky winery websites depending on the specific website viewed. Cost and availability information was not present on all websites, the inclusion or absence of such information will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections, especially concerning websites that included online shopping options.

Kentucky cultural references. Kentucky cultural references could be divided into a number of grouped cultural themes with locally, relevant cultural associations. Overall, local cultural references could be divided into references related to the land, grapes, climate, and social, in essence, agriculturally and industry, locally appropriate cultural references (such as horse racing) or historically relevant references to the industry or to the area. Prominent categories included local geographic, climate, soil references, Kentucky agriculture (including the horse industry), Kentucky or local agricultural history, the history of the farm or site, tobacco farming, or the bourbon industry or bourbon trail (agritourism).

Almost all of the Kentucky websites (n<60) made a local or regional geographic reference to Kentucky, be it textual or visual, on the specific website. Such brand management and marketing communication techniques were expected as location/place indicators are commonly used in wine marketing (Banks, Kelly, Lewis, & Sharpe, 2007; Bruwer & Johnson 2010; Johnson & Bruwer, 2007; Thode & Maskulka, 1998; Wargenau & Che, 2006). These local references served to differentiate Kentucky wine from other areas and indirectly implicated local residents that would recognize the cultural associations as potential customers. Local associations with geographic regions, such as horses in the Bluegrass Region of Kentucky, were quite common on websites for bluegrass wineries. Wineries located amongst the much more pronounced rolling hills of northern Kentucky were more likely to include references to grazing farms, camping, and hunting. The eastern Appalachian wineries mentioned the Appalachian Mountains, oftentimes living in valleys or growing their vines on the side of the hills. Western Kentucky wineries were more likely to mention growing corn and soybean, animal farming, and, depending on the winery's distance from Louisville, Churchill Downs or the urban environment of the city. Kentucky wide references, such as the Kentucky Derby, horses, and bourbon or the bourbon trail were mentioned by a significant minority of the wineries (n<15).

Two other significant references were the mentioning of the soil and agricultural history of either the winery or of the area. For soil, whether the fertile soil or the significant difference of the soil in Kentucky, the presence of limestone was mentioned even though, historically, grape vines grow and produce better fruit in difficult or inhospitable soil. The latter reference to history was most commonly a reference to the agricultural history of the winery (not as a

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[6] Terroir is a French term used to differentiate wine regions.
[7] Varietals refer to grapes and/or wines made from a single variety of grape (e.g., Cabernet or Merlot).

winery, but as site of agricultural production), and then to specific buildings on the winery premises. For many wineries, houses, barns, and other structures were renovated and included as a facility dedicated to wine production (see figures 1, 2, 3 & 4).

The Kentucky Proud Label (KyP), Kentucky's official symbol of locally associated or produced agricultural goods, was found on many of the websites, often on the front page (n=21). Even though the KyP label was found on almost a third of the websites, the more common agricultural reference was to the local grapes, local farmers, local communities, local wine associations, and local markets were common. The KyP label was more prominent the closer the winery was to the center of the state. Proximity to members of KyP and to resources and institutional support may be the reason for more KyP references closer to the center of the state.

Interestingly, five of the wineries made direct connections to tobacco farming. This reference is an important aspect of the Kentucky wine industry as grape growing and winemaking was identified as an area of potential economic growth that could make up for the revenue losses related to tobacco (Kentucky Grape and Wine Council, 2013).

Overall, Kentucky cultural associations, especially local geographic associations, trumped all other cultural references on websites. The following screenshots demonstrate the reference to Kentucky cultural associations. In the first screenshot[8], the horse is seen in between the grape vines, integrating horses, grape growing, and wine.

Figure1: Vineyard and Kentucky horse associations

While the previous picture demonstrates the seamlessness of incorporating grape growing and wine associations with Kentucky associations, some associations were much more overt. In the following image, the horse, or horses are used as a reference to the history of the winery (as a former farm), and the connection to Kentucky heritage.

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[8] Any screenshots taken from actual websites were publicly accessible and copyright permission was ensured. Winery attribution was avoided in this paper as evaluations were both positive and negative. However, individuals familiar with the winery or the winery website may recognize the images.

Figure 2: Horses as heritage

To some, there may be difficulty in differentiating between Kentucky barns and barns from other regions, but for Kentucky residents, the following barn images should be recognizable.

Figure 3: Barn and vineyard

Figure 4: Barn as tasting room

In Figure 3, much like the image of the horse in the vineyard, the barn is integrated with the vineyard. What is often a picture of Kentucky barns and open horse fields is now an image of

barns and vineyards. In Figure 4, there is no mistaking the barn for another type of structure. The Kentucky, rural, and farm associations are clear and meant to be connected with wine and the specific wineries. The choice to use local and regional geographic and agricultural associations acknowledges that the primary consumer of Kentucky wines is the local, regional, and state-resident, consumer.

Individual winemaker and winery reputation. Almost all winery pages had an "about" page. Websites still varied on the amount of personal information they disclosed, but the wineries with heavily involved winemakers asserted their uniqueness. In documenting the history of modern wine, Lukacs (2012) documented that a strong winemaker presence almost always accompanied a successful winery, and Kentucky wineries promoted their successful winemakers. Thus, this marketing tactic makes sense as one of the most significant forms of differentiation. Of particular note were winemakers that promoted their achievements and awards, experience, or education. Most successful (i.e., award winning) winemakers possessed ten or more years of industry experience with one winemaker having over twenty years of experience. Wine education involved both industrial and educational experiences in Europe or California. For many of these winemakers, trial and error amateur batches were produced before the wineries developed palatable wines for commercial operations. These experiences were normally recorded in the "about" sections of websites.

Winemaker experience was not the only winemaker characteristic communicated. Unique characteristics were disseminated as well. The winery with the youngest winemaker, and also one of the few female winemakers, was prominently promoted with a special page devoted to the vintner. Another winery expressed a medieval or "castle" theme that bordered on obsession, including all aspects of its merchandise and service. Peculiarities were not contained to vintner identity. The presentation of wines could verge on the irreverent or informal. In such cases, these wineries expressed winemaking as fun and eschewing winemaking customs and culture. One website contained ramblings on the universe, spiritual connections between the land on humans, and lacked updates. Overall, many websites promoted any characteristics believed to be appealing to customers or as a means of differentiating the specific winery from others, even if the characteristics broke from any brand coherence, a primary concept of integrated marketing communication and brand management (Keller, 2009).

Histories of the wineries and winemakers were included. Oftentimes, the history or bio was in longer paragraph form. Specific ethnic heritages were noted, Italian being the most common, but any wine-related heritage, even if the heritage was not from a traditional European wine country, was promoted. Along with heritage references, references to the amount of time spent or generations spent at the winery locale or at the farm were common. The longest time spent by one family on a winery site was five family generations although many of the farms claim foundation dates as far back as the late 1700's. These references claim connections to the first Kentucky winery as Kentucky claims to have founded the United States' first commercial winery.

Many of the family connections involved farm resources re-allocated for wine production. Naturally, documentation of farm conversion created a link between family, farm history, Kentucky cultural symbols, and wine. Farms converted into wineries were common among websites (n>15—it was unclear whether or not some of the wineries were originally farms). Also, in many cases, pictures of family members, and even pets, were included in the webpages (n=11), and a number of wines and wineries were named after prominent family figures. Again, these family connections linked the winery with the past, with the land, and with Kentucky or international wine associations. Rothenbuhler (1998) argued that these mediated communicative acts are mythmaking strategies necessary for managing social

change, and in this case, these references may be an attempt to link to perceived winemaking legacies or myths such as wine being an ancient practice or the use of family names for wineries and vineyards (Lukacs, 2012). Furthermore, these connections create historical narratives in an attempt to increase the winery's legitimacy with various stakeholders. The accuracy of the mythmaking is not a primary concern (see Lukacs, 2012 for a discussion of story fabrication in the wine industry). The purpose is to create an official, permanent record that legitimizes the brand through documentation. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) reinforce the importance of material artifacts in documenting legitimacy.

Eight of the winemakers or wine owners presented blogs. Two of the blogs were not updated and only one of the blogs was consistently updated. While blogs were an interesting choice and look into the winemaking process and thoughts of the winemaker, most of the blogs contained few entries or were not consistently updated.

Ten of the wineries were founded by individuals that had no connection to agriculture or wine. This number is double the number of wineries claiming a direct connection to tobacco farming. Furthermore, this relatively new industry appears to be open to female winemakers and especially wine owners. Even though women are a significant minority among wine producers, two of the most prominent and award-winning wineries are owned or operated by women. In a number of cases, women were usually partners at wineries. If they are not producing the wines, they are running the wineries and overseeing their services offered.

The individual winemaker references were direct cultural associations between winemaker, wine, and winery. The direct reference allowed the uniqueness of winemakers to standout, and this direct reference can be associated with the wine as well. Documentation of brand and land histories legitimized brands, although the failure to update webpages and the inclusion of too unique or non-related winemaker information has the potential of alienating customers, which may negatively impact the brand.

International wine community. The most common international wine community website references consisted of awards listed, descriptions of wines, wine and food pairings, food rituals and food service, the reference to terroirs, the "old world" and famous European wine regions, although the offering of wine supplies, such as wine aerators and wine racks, were also evidence of the larger wine community. Finally, grape and wine varietals descriptions were evidence of the influence and attempts at connecting with the international wine community.

Twenty-one of the Kentucky wineries claimed to have won a wine award. Predominantly, the awards are won at regional or Eastern competitions. Competitions ranged from Indiana and Kentucky competitions, but also as far as the Finger Lakes competition in New York. Even a few of the wineries competed in Western United States' competitions, such as the San Francisco competition, a competition with international prestige. Even if the awards won are regional or national awards, awards for wine are an international affair, and so associations with awards won is considered an international association. With over a third of the wineries announcing their honors, the winemakers believe this association important to consumers and important for increasing prestige, reputation, and desirability of the wine.

To individuals familiar with the wine industry, American honors and awards hold less meaning. Still, Kentucky winemakers do have evidence of the legitimacy expected by the international wine community.[9]

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[9] American wine competitions award more wines than European competitions, so some competitive awards remain suspect. Nevertheless, see The Paris Wine Tasting of 1976, or the Judgment of Paris for the importance of these competitions. The Judgment of Paris was the European competition where California became a respected wine region as a Californian wine was awarded best wine over French wines (Lukacs, 2012).

Wine descriptions evince even more evidence of reference to international wine community. Wine descriptions carry the familiar feel, style, and word choice found in any wine magazine. Almost half of the websites (n=29) made use of international wine descriptions, pictures of wines in glasses, or wine bottles, or of pouring wine. Most websites had pictures of wine or wine bottles, but these images were not considered international references if the images were not accentuated as part of the ritual of wine consumption (the former image being too vague or instrumental for coding. Reference to the ritual was required). Descriptions of the wine making process were also included in this category. In order to protect the identity of the wineries, the following example of an international wine description is paraphrased, but it is reminiscent of many of the international wine descriptions found on Kentucky wine websites:

> This wine is a bold, fruity, full-bodied wine with hints of chocolate and tobacco, with a finish rich in spices. The wine pairs well with hard cheeses, or along with a dessert of chocolate and strawberries. This wine is a dry red and can also be paired with steak or chicken for dinner.

Conventional indicators of international wine descriptions involved the noting of flavors that do not directly relate to grapes, such as other fruit or food flavors and mineral or soil associations (i.e., "earthy," or "tobacco" flavors), a common practice with wine critics and enthusiasts.

On a textual as well as visual interface, wines require a vocabulary for description, and rather than trying to develop a new lexicon, websites chose to use international wine descriptions. When websites did not use international wine associations or direct grape varietal descriptions (discussed in a separate category), the descriptions were either abstract, or in some cases, the websites did not provide descriptions of how their wines should taste. General descriptions or lack of descriptions were not coded under a specific category.

Food and wine pairings and food services were evident on a minority of sites (n=6). Many wineries offered food services, but they did not dedicate descriptions, food and wine pairings, and separate website pages to the food and wine associations. For the minority of wineries that dedicated web-space to food, the effort dedicated to making the linkage between food and wine was determined to be a significant justification for a coded category. This "food" category was organized underneath the international wine references as the practice of pairing food and particular wines originated in the larger wine community (Lukacs, 2012).

For example, winery websites would explain which wines paired well with which foods, or, for wineries that offered extensive food services, wineries that provided menus, lists of wines, or again, the recommended wine pairings if one came to eat and imbibe. A few wineries offered information on the international language and consumption associated with wine, and even one winery offered wine tasting and food pairing education and lessons. These references were in the minority, but, based on the language, pairings, visual images, and space allotted, these examples were considered clear evidence of international wine associations. The following figure is an example of the food and wine associations.

In Figure 5, the wine is blurred which is an example of how the researcher differentiated wine as a reference from food as the emphasis of the communication. As an example of the international food and wine reference, the meal is lamb, not a common meat in Kentucky. Red wines are often associated with the red meats as well, an international wine reference.

Figure 5: Food and wine pairing

One of the most interesting references was the mentioning of European or "old-world" connections at the wineries, already foreshadowed by the connection to European heritages. There were also references to terroirs, to specific European wine regions, especially Bordeaux and Tuscany regions, a Dante quote, and mention of the "Rhine of Kentucky" in reference to the German wine making region. These references are all attempts to connect to the international community.

Five of the wineries offered the opportunity to purchase wine accessories online. The acknowledgement of appropriate tools and accessories for interacting with wine reference an international community. Such references were easy markers of an understanding and involvement in an international wine community. There was a tremendous amount of indirect international wine community references. A common example was the use of stock images of wine barrels. The indirect nature of the general associations and stock images somewhat lessened the power of the international associations unless the connection was directly referenced on the webpage. Barrels are used in the aging of many alcoholic beverages, so the image does serve a dual purpose since Kentucky is a famous bourbon region, but the image is also a common wine reference throughout the world (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: The use of wine barrels as international wine reference

Another quite common international reference was the grape vine, leaves, or fruit as a close-up shot (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: The "Grape-close-up" a common international wine reference.

Finally, the close-up on grapes and grape leaves, the pouring of wine into a wine glass, or a wine bottle were all images commonly associated with the international wine community. These images are common associations found within wine industry magazines and on numerous wine media websites and global wineries with international reach, were easily identifiable and coded.

Figure 8: Wine in a glass, another common international wine image.

These international wine references serve two purposes. First, these references are attempts at connecting with the broader international wine consumer and industry, an important goal for long-term sustainability and expansion. These references also signal to the international wine community that the brand is knowledgeable on the industry, community, and culture.

Grape varietal and wines produced descriptions were essential signals that the wine brand understood the international wine community and was attempting to position the brand within the international wine culture. Importantly, websites allow for more description of grape varietals and wines than wine labels. The jargon and language associated with grape growing and winemaking was clear, and categories of American (i.e., Eastern American, or Continental climate grapes) American-European hybrids, or European variety (the grape varieties most commonly grown on the West Coast of America) were specified. The complexity of these distinctions is much more difficult to discuss in person, especially with the high level of variance in wine education amongst individuals, so websites become an important outlet for education and varietal information, again differentiating the brand.

Only three wineries were unclear on their grape varietals and wines produced. Grape varietal used and wines produced are important information for wine consumers for multiple reasons. First, the type of wine and taste of wine produced is heavily influenced if not dictated

by the choice of grape, and Kentucky has difficulty growing the more accepted European grape varietals. Instead, the Kentucky climate is better suited for Eastern American/Native and French-American hybrid varietals commonly grown in New York or Virginia. For consumers not familiar with the difference in taste, American grape varietals' taste has been described as "foxy," not commonly considered a complimentary descriptor (Lukacs, 2012).

A second division involves the estate versus imported grape. Estate grown grapes, a distinction which can be placed on the label to increase demand and prestige, designates the grapes as grown on the property. Relatedly, the imported grapes can be imported from a local grape grower or out-of-state. Out-of-state grapes could be imported from areas where Eastern American grapes do not grow, and European grapes are more likely to grow. Forty-six wineries produced Eastern American/Native or French-American hybrid grape varietals, although a number (n=11) produced both European and American varietals. Also, a few wineries in Western Kentucky claim to be able to grow European grape varietals. Nine wineries claimed to only use estate or Kentucky grown grapes. Six wineries offered a large amount of fruit wines, although almost all of the wineries offered dessert or blackberry wines of some sort. These designations are important to understanding how "Kentucky Proud" and how accurate the wine produced is to a wine that is "from" Kentucky. Not all wineries are clear on the importation of grapes, from where, and how much is imported. However, most Kentucky wineries that only use Kentucky, local, or estate grapes promote these designations as these distinctions are important local brand symbols associated with the establishment of the modern Kentucky wine industry (Fisher, 2012).

The available grape varietal determines what wines are produced, and depending on the grape, a winemaker can produce white wines that can range between sweet, semi-sweet, semi-dry, and dry, and red wines with the same distinction. This production then leads into textual description of how the wine should taste and its food pairings. A predominant amount of Kentucky's climate is suited for grape varietals that can be fermented into palatable white wines, and white wines are usually the "easier-to-drink" wines, so most websites promoted a white wine, even though red wines are considered more prestigious. In the end, choices made on what grapes to produce and promote, their descriptions, and awards are used to establish brand awareness and differentiation for potential customers.

Wine consumption rituals. Wine rituals are important to the modern, cultural consumption of wine, and references to such rituals were documented. Wine tastings, partnering wine with food, relaxing at a winery, or taking wine tours are all rituals associated with wine and wineries. Rothenbuhler (1998) argued that media communicates the "central symbol systems of the society at hand" (p. 90). In the case of wine, performance symbols were repeated on multiple websites. These wine performance symbols referenced the consumption of wine in the physical world in a certain environment with prescribed criteria. Therefore, the mediated reproduction of wine rituals encouraged the purchasing of Kentucky wines, which increases brand value. The wine consumption rituals were interpreted using Rothenbuhler's (1998) definition of ritual communication as a guide.

The difference between wine consumption rituals stems from the physically and locally bounded requirement of wine consumption rituals. Winery visits or wine purchases are required to complete the consumption ritual. The physical world requirement, to visit the winery and purchase the wine link the cultural associations to the brand management purposes (most directly, to the purchase of the winery's wine) presented in the theory and literature review of this article.

The rituals could be classified into one of four communicative-consumption acts: (1) wine tasting, (2) wine consumption as part of the larger food and drink ritual, (3) engagement in a leisure activity, or (4) for agritourism consumption. The specifics of individual ritual acts

as cultural-communicative symbols varied greatly amongst the four categories. Therefore, a definitive, descriptive list could not be defined, but significant difference between the purposes of each ritual could be determined.

Almost every winery offered wine tastings. Only six wineries did not, and the two most predominant reasons for not offering tastings were dry county prohibition laws or the choice to distribute wine through retail outlets and not have a tasting room. Tasting services require resources and labor, and not all wineries had access to or found it beneficial to allocate resources to tasting services. Some wineries were opened daily while others were opened on weekends, and a few by appointment. While the extent and actual experience of wine tastings could not be documented through website analysis, the number of wineries providing website information on tastings and posting of hours of operation indicated the importance of wine tastings for wineries.

Consumer consumption of wine is a significant, if not primary goal of all wineries. The following images are examples of the wine tasting ritual. Figure 9 is an image of a tasting room. Notice the focus on the wine bar in the picture. Beyond tasting rooms, the ritual of wine tasting was also a common image (see Figure 13).

Figure 9: Wine tasting rooms

Figure 10: Wine tasting images

As a sub-category of wine tastings, wine clubs were not as prominent a ritual. Still, eleven wineries promoted their wine clubs. Many of the websites included the forms in order to sign up for the wine club as well as information on the benefits of enrolling in the wine club. A number of the wine club options had graduated levels of wine club commitments.

Seven of the wineries offered food and wine or dinner service at the wineries. The lack of dinner service involves the resources and knowledge necessary to offer full food services. Of wineries that offered food services, menus were oftentimes included on the website. At many wineries, there was an interplay between Kentucky associations and international food and wine associations.

As an alternative, two of the wineries encouraged consumers to bring their own food to the wineries. These wineries had a large amount of land and multiple venues for individuals in order to enjoy food and wine in a particular, agricultural environment. While these services could be considered agritourism, the wineries recognized the importance of food and wine as an important ritual. Even though the description of this section is short (due to the utility of the pages' purpose), the dedication of web-space, specifically, tabs (oftentimes, with the word *menu* at the top) and independent webpages for winery restaurants and food offerings, demanded a separate category.

Along with wine tastings, the leisure consumption of wine, especially during events, was the most advertised ritual on websites (n=39). Wineries have space, and again, as related to agritourism, the agricultural landscape appeals to many potential consumers. Agritourism can be defined as the idea of spending time close to nature, in a rural setting, or near agricultural sites that are aesthetically pleasing. Agritourism is a significant aspect and generator of revenue for wineries and wine regions (Carlsen, 2004; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Hall, Sharples, Cambourne, & Macionis, 2009). Wineries recognize this desire, and they have adapted accordingly. There were a number of specific rituals related to wine as a leisure activity.

The sub-category of the event ritual varied in complexity and offerings depending on the winery. The events included bridal showers, birthdays, weddings, art festivals, comedy shows, dinner and murder mystery theatre, music offerings, family meetings, cooking competitions (for example, a chili contest and an amateur wine contest), and professional gatherings. While thirty-nine wineries promoted their venues for events, only four wineries openly stated that they did not offer event services. On most websites, event services had their own pages with pictures, pertinent factual information, and the contact information for scheduling events. The larger and more event-focused wineries employed event-planners and communication employees to handle events which could be contacted through the website. Figure 11 demonstrates wine as a leisure activity. Notice the expression and repose of the women along with the setting and the wine. This image is meant to invoke a form of relaxation and enjoyment.

Figure 11: Wine as leisure activity

Weddings were the primary event advertised by wineries. Vineyard and wineries are idyllic sites for weddings, and many websites advertised wedding services. Weddings have become a significant economic event for Kentucky wineries (wine expert, personal conversation, April 27, 2014). Figure 12 provides two examples of wedding services. The second image is not a direct wedding reference, although the image was found on a Kentucky winery website wedding page, and the reference, not just to a wedding but to marriage proposals and dinner-dates, extends the association of wineries and wine to romantic events.

Figure 12: Wineries and weddings

A number of the aforementioned rituals overlapped with agritourism consumption. One winemaker considered wine tasting as a form of agritourism, considered himself to be in the tourism business, and believed eighty percent of his business came from tourists interested in visiting a vineyard and winery (Kentucky winemaker, personal communication, December 9, 2014). However, there are particular agritourism services offered by the wineries. First, there is interest in agricultural processes. The picking of grapes, the maceration process (separating the juice from the skins), wine barrels, stainless steel fermentation tanks, the pouring of wine into different vessels and containers, wine bottling, and overall facilities are pictured on many of the websites. Descriptions of the grape juice to wine process abound. Eight of the wineries directly mention the winemaking process as part of their agritourism offerings. This number does not include the indirect referencing of the winemaking process, or vineyard and winery tours that may include information and access to winemaking facilities, as this information could only be discerned through direct observation.

The more general discussion of tours, either offered daily, at certain times during the week, or by appointment, was more common (n=14). This number only considers wineries that promote their tours. At most vineyards and wineries, informal tours of the premises were allowed and offered. Larger vineyards and wineries, available employees, and designed tours are needed for official tour offerings. The decent number of official tours offered demonstrates the importance of this ritual and the desire by potential consumers to embark on a tour.

A burgeoning Kentucky agritourism ritual is the wine trail tour. Based on Kentucky's Bourbon Trail tour, the wine trail tour includes selected wineries included on the tour, and in return for visiting a winery on the trail, the visitor receives a stamp for each winery visited, and usually a gift, such as a shirt when all of the wineries are visited. Different wine trail tours

(such as the Back Roads Wine Trail, see Figure 13) across the state are common and popular. One winery employee stated that the wine trail gave tourists that are tired of bourbon, especially women, another alternative (wine expert, personal communication, April 27, 2014).

Figure 13: Website advertisement for a Kentucky wine trail.

One of the most interesting agritourism rituals was overnight lodging options. Five of the wineries offered overnight lodging. There is an interest in "getting-away" and spending time in a rural and agricultural setting with amenities beyond a vacation home (winemaker, personal communication, November 4, 2014). Two of the venues were in areas where hunting and camping are common. In these cases, offering lodging appeared to be the norm for the local culture. These wineries are also close to larger, urban centers, and so, "getting-away" appears to be an attractive option. Overall, agritourism offerings were used as a valued form of brand management and persuasive appeal. Of secondary importance of wine rituals for brand management involved the instruction on what Kentucky wine serves in consumers' lives. As Merz et al. (2009) stressed, through the current stakeholder interpretation of brands and brand management, brand success was heavily linked to the purpose brands serve in consumers' lives. Wine rituals demonstrate the active, primary (wine consumption), and secondary purposes (event place/space and event product purchases) wines and wineries serve for consumers.

Discussion

The use of cultural associations by Kentucky wineries on websites evolved out of brand management, advertising, and marketing challenges associated with the international wine industry. After exploratory research into this area, the following questions arose:

E1a: How do Kentucky wine brands attract potential customers through digital branding, marketing, and communication?
E1b: How do Kentucky wine brands use websites for brand management?
E2: How do Kentucky wine brands create distinction and difference for their wines?

And finally, these questions culminated in the research question:

R1: How are cultural associations employed for brand management purposes on Kentucky wine industry websites?

Since winery websites are the primary digital outlet for information and persuasive messages, this study was designed to identify which strategies and tactics are used on Kentucky winery websites? Finally, for culturally-crafted wine, the research question was narrowed to investigate the cultural associations used in winery website brand management strategies. Almost immediately, persuasive messages that combined local cultural associations, unique

winemaker and wine characteristics, and international wine community references were identified as primary means by which Kentucky winemakers purpose encouraged the purchasing of Kentucky wines.

Local geographic references and influences were the most commonly used cultural associations. The geographic influence is not surprising as wine is anchored to its primary agricultural input: grapes. Ideally, wine is produced near the vineyards where they are harvested or in the vineyard's local wine region. As mentioned earlier, research has revealed that this approach is the most common wine-related brand management strategy and employed in many wine regions. For Kentucky wine websites, when not emphasizing locally grown grapes, local geographic associations and culturally valuable references remained the primary cultural foci (for example, horses and limestone-rich soil). These cultural references differentiate Kentucky wines from one another and from other wine regions as well as signal connections with customers that recognize the brand cultural references.

The second important cultural input was the individual winemaker's experiences and influences. When deemed distinctive, the history of the winemaker, how many years making wine, and amateur or professional training in winemaking were all important factors that influenced cultural associations. A number of winemakers were influenced by France or California and made wines in those styles. The reference to the "old world," through winemaker training, wine style, or family heritage, was a common association, and such associations inferred a connection the international wine community. As a surprise, unique, and oftentimes ancillary characteristics were used in an attempt to differentiate a specific winemaker, but such distinctions could potentially harm the brand. When unique winemaking characteristics were not distinctive, the history of the farm in combination with the farm's conversion to grape growing and/or winemaking or the farm's relationship to Kentucky's winemaking history was stressed in order to legitimize the brand, a requirement for craft and art creators originally identified by Bourdieu (1993). Importantly, digital media, websites, and storage provide a permanent, relatively official, document of legitimization.

Half of Kentucky wine websites made overt reference to the international wine community. Food pairings and wine descriptions were found to be the most prominent cultural associations referencing the international wine community. Awards were mentioned, and while the persuasiveness of individual awards may vary, the inclusion of awards won is a clear attempt to legitimize Kentucky wine, evidence of Kentucky winemakers' awareness of the larger wine community and the desire to market to this community. Finally, when needed, Kentucky winemakers were willing to adopt the wine community's language to market its products rather than start anew. Even though a new vocabulary might provide differentiation, most cultural practices cannot emerge anew, anachronistic from culture and history. Furthermore, the final goal of many winemakers, both personally and for economic stability, is to engage with international wine consumers. Thus, the use of international wine descriptors appears apropos.

The prevalence of multiple cultural wine descriptors and cultural associations can be understood through the lens of education. Cultural industries do not survive without education (Bourdieu, 1993, 1984). The consumer must have the appropriate schema in order to evaluate the cultural product. Having an understanding of the appropriate schema directs a consumer as to what, how, and why a cultural product is produced in a certain manner and how to evaluate the product when consuming it. This information and education allow the consumer to engage with the product at a deeper level than surface level. The information can also support the positioning and organizing of the cultural product in the consumer's own life as well as within society. Education creates expectations that can be met by the product which creates a demand in the consumer that the product can now meet. Cultural education creates the cultural product.

Even while education may be essential to cultural products, primarily, indirect cultural education was emphasized as only three websites offered direct and specific educational services or education-centered information. Two additional websites described the importance of education in entering the winemaking field. One winery offered wine tasting/education services so that wine consumers could feel comfortable consuming Kentucky wine and another website offered explanations of grape varietals and how or why certain wines taste a certain way. Education on wine, especially Eastern American and Kentucky wine, is a form of stakeholder community brand management. Brands that offer education possess a tool for inducting new members into the Kentucky wine community. Surprisingly, few Kentucky wine websites offered direct wine-culture educational information and support. This studied identified this cultural/educational area for expansion and improvement.

The primary purpose of these cultural/educational associated messages is to persuade consumers to participate in wine consumption rituals, which, if the purpose is not to sell wine, then to reinforce the brand image. The most common purpose for the cultural/ritual brand management strategies found on websites involved the encouragement of wine purchases for off or on-site consumption, and secondly, establishing a winery as an appropriate venue for an event where wine could be consumed or associating wine with particular cultural events.

The wine tasting ritual is the most common consumption ritual encouraged on Kentucky websites. Wine and food rituals were not common, but when offered, held significant space on websites, and conversely, when wine or food was not the focus, but wine as a form of leisure or relaxation, the purpose of the ritual was made clear. Wine as part of agritourism rituals was multifaceted. The wine trail sub-ritual entrenches the winery and vineyard visit in Kentucky society by documenting the physical location of the wineries. The sub-ritual of societal events, including weddings marks wineries and wine as appropriate settings and cultural products for valued rituals in society and connects wineries to a lucrative ceremony.

Interestingly, the wedding association has become so valuable to Kentucky wineries that one website address re-directed the researcher to a Kentucky wedding site. As time passes, the affiliation of weddings and wineries can assist in establishing Kentucky wineries as a legitimate part and experience of Kentucky culture. There is a downside to this marketing approach. The association of weddings and wineries can pigeonhole wineries and wine as best consumed when putting-on a wedding. In such cases, Kentucky wine is not considered a part of everyday life, but rather, a special occasion for pre-wedding events and weddings, or for rehearsal dinners and post-wedding receptions. There is the potential for Kentucky wine to be seen as a special drink like the mint julep, supplied in bulk for the Kentucky Derby and then put away until next year.

The textual analysis also demonstrated how websites can be used ritualistically, not a primary goal of the study, but an important by-product. Rothenbuhler (1998) argued that media content could be used as part of a ritual, and this study supported the assertion. There are a few important characteristics to consider in the use of website content when it is included in wine rituals. First, Rothenbuhler (1998) notes that "a text or artifact is not an element of ritual until it is put to use by people and functions in that way" (p. 89). Website designers used the website as a referent to physical wine consumption rituals. Rothenbuhler (1998) identified three areas where media content is used as part of a ritual or to reinforce ritual communication.

The website use of wine consumption rituals aligned with the following use of media for rituals, according to Rothenbuhler (1998). (1) Media content can be used to position a ritual within its place in a society. When wineries are advertised on websites as sites for weddings, the websites are communicating that wineries are the appropriate place for weddings, the same can be said for the use of wine bars as the appropriate place for wine tasting. (2) The conventions or forms of the rituals can be preserved through mediated content. On websites, rituals are preserved. The international wine descriptions, food pairings, associated products,

and the appropriate leisure activities are all preserved on the website. The ritual of producing a wine for potential accolades and awards is preserved. Even the purchasing of wine, of having contact information and directions, of writing about wine, and having an about section that informs potential consumers about the history of the winery, wines, the vintner (which are all conventions of the wine narrative), and the act of pouring a wine into a wine glass and evaluating its quality are all wine rituals preserved on winery websites. If consumers can associate a specific wine brand with these wine rituals, then the brand is strengthened through the ritual.

(3) Rothenbuhler (1998) believed this claim to be controversial, still, he argued that mediated content possessed a "magical" social status. The strange pseudo-presence, absence, timeliness, timelessness of mass communication granted mediated content a special place in society, which, through extension of that special place and special use, made the consumption of mediated content a ritual. Rothenbuhler (1998) described the viewing experience as "one that is not wholly here and now, one that is not wholly fact or fiction, reality or fantasy" (p. 92). Consumption of information on websites, and the use of computer, laptop, touch-pad, and winery websites contain videos, slideshows, and audio files, and possess an otherworldly position. The virtual traveling from one tab to the next, from one website to the next website, of consuming information but also experiencing a virtual space may be an other-worldly experience. The viewing of wine and winery videos online, the reading of multiple histories and about sections, of purveying the wines offered and the grape varieties used, of being lost in the world of wine, or of Kentucky wine, of being lost in this virtual world, is all part of the ritual use of mediated content. The fact that much of the information is used for persuading consumers to purchase a wine and is therefore an advertisement does not preclude ritual. Rothenbuhler (1998) notes that Goethals (1981) and Goffman (1976) considered advertising as a form of ritual. Identifying Kentucky winery website use as a form of ritual extends Rothenbuhler's concept of ritual communication. Internet use and advances in mobile technology were not in ubiquitous use when Rothenbuhler (1998) presented his concept of ritual communication. This study advances ritual communication into the realm of digital content and demonstrates the connection of culture to ritual to brand management and persuasion to consume a cultural product.

Conclusion

This study records how wine was consumed in Kentucky at a certain point and time in human society. The use of cultural associations and consumption rituals may not differ much from other places in the world, but slight distinctions, such as the importance of weddings for Kentucky wineries, may be distinctive of a time and place, the documenting of such phenomenon is a significant goal of qualitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2001). Research mentioned in the introduction to this study identify the interest and value in specific, place-based wine research, and this study adds to this body of literature. The contextual elements of this research such as the passage of time, bounds this research. This study is a partial representation of the site of inquiry most accurately characterized as the Kentucky wine industry from 2011 until 2015.

The focus for this study was on real-world, transferable use of culture, symbols, and associations. Digital environment and digital context driven communication that may be interpreted as culturally relevant referents (such as website design, digital template quality, last update dates, and range of options and required information for the digital medium) are beyond the scope of this study and have the potential to demand their own studies and article space. Simply, while these characteristics were considered in relationship to the data, results, and

analysis presented here, the aforementioned digital communication phenomena were found to be research projects in their own right

As informational outlets and symbols of the wineries and wines, the websites are valuable winery advertisements, especially when there are few traditional advertising outlets or resources available for most Kentucky wineries. Just as importantly, this study explicates how Kentucky wine websites incorporate culture into their brand management strategies through diverse, yet identifiable, categorical combinations. The primary purpose of these cultural brand management strategies is to encourage the consumption of the winery's wines and promote site visits to the wineries, and when in doubt, use local place, space, and social referents with specified, unique wine-related differentiating details. The websites also provide messages identifying Kentucky wineries as appropriate venues for conventional wine culture events (i.e., wine tastings) as well as sites for Kentucky cultural events such as weddings. The websites provide educational information allowing for cultural assimilation and the lessoning of anxiety for engaging with wine (albeit indirectly through wine-culture vocabulary), and the study identified cultural education as a room for expansion and improvement on Kentucky wine websites.

Finally, this study identified the use of Rothenbuhler's (1998) definition of ritual communication as a way to operationalize and interpret cultural communication and provided a case study for the application of ritual communication for such purposes. The study also discussed the use of cultural referents in the brand management strategies of Kentucky wineries. While culturally relevant brand management strategies may be common for spatially oriented, cultural products, this study provides a description of Kentucky's specific wine industry and sub-culture as well as a guide and comparison for the use of local culture in the brand management strategies of websites originating in developing, small scale, wine regions, specifically American wine regions. Future research directions can include the comparison of wine regions, especially by the scale of the wine region, be it regional, national, or international. Future research may also include the evolution of website brand management practices over time as technology advances as well as the comparison of website use related to other digital and social media technologies (a topic alluded to early in the paper). Finally, future studies can be directed towards consumer reception. For example, do these website strategies convince consumers to purchase the wine or visit the website? Which strategies are most successful in persuading stakeholders to consume the wine, local references, international wine references, or cultural/ritual consumption practices? For what is the purpose of understanding modern wine as a cultural product if wine's appeal as an object for potential cultural consumption is not considered?

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