

UNDERSTANDING THE DIGITAL BEHAVIOR OF YOUNGER WINE CONSUMERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR WINERY MARKETING STRATEGIES

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

The digital transformation of the wine industry has significantly reshaped the ways consumers interact with wine brands, access information, and make purchasing decisions. At the same time, younger consumer segments, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, are becoming increasingly influential in the global wine market, exhibiting distinct preferences, values, and digital behaviors compared to previous generations. These consumers rely heavily on social media, online reviews, influencer recommendations, and digital platforms throughout their decision-making processes, creating new opportunities and challenges for wineries. The purpose of this paper is to examine the existing literature on the digital behavior of younger wine consumers and to identify the implications for contemporary winery marketing strategies. Using a narrative literature review approach, the study synthesizes findings from previous research on consumer behavior, digital marketing, electronic word-of-mouth, social media engagement, and influencer marketing within the wine sector. The review highlights that younger consumers are particularly attracted to authentic, experience-oriented, and interactive forms of communication, while sustainability and transparency increasingly influence their purchasing decisions. Furthermore, digital platforms play a crucial role in shaping brand perceptions, trust, and consumer engagement. The findings suggest that wineries should adopt consumer-centered digital marketing strategies based on storytelling, social media engagement, influencer collaborations, and sustainability communication. By providing an integrated overview of current knowledge, this paper contributes to a better understanding of evolving consumer trends and offers practical recommendations for wineries seeking to strengthen their competitiveness in an increasingly digital marketplace.

Keywords: digital marketing; wine industry; younger consumers; Generation Z; Millennials; social media; consumer behavior.

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INTRODUCTION

The wine industry has traditionally relied on heritage, terroir, and face-to-face interactions to communicate value and build relationships with consumers. However, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has significantly transformed the marketing landscape, compelling wineries to adapt their communication strategies to an increasingly connected and technology-oriented marketplace (Viana, 2016; Szolnoki et al., 2018). Digital platforms, including social media networks, e-commerce channels, mobile applications, and online review systems, have become essential tools for influencing consumer perceptions, purchase decisions, and brand engagement within the wine sector (Galati et al., 2017).

At the same time, demographic changes are reshaping wine consumption patterns worldwide. Younger generations, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, are emerging as influential consumer segments with distinct

preferences, values, and purchasing behaviors (Bruwer et al., 2011; Castellini & Samoggia, 2018). Unlike previous generations, these consumers are digital natives who routinely rely on online information sources, peer recommendations, and social media content throughout their decision-making processes. Their purchasing choices are increasingly influenced by authenticity, sustainability, experiential consumption, and personalized digital interactions rather than by traditional forms of advertising (Pomarici & Vecchio, 2014; Savelli et al., 2023).

Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook have become important environments where younger consumers discover, evaluate, and discuss wine products. Furthermore, the growing popularity of influencers, content creators, and user-generated content has altered the way wine brands communicate with potential customers (Ingrassia et al., 2022). Digital word-of-mouth and online communities often play a decisive role in shaping consumer attitudes, trust, and

purchase intentions (Kotonya et al., 2018). Consequently, wineries are challenged to develop innovative marketing approaches capable of engaging younger audiences through relevant, authentic, and interactive digital experiences (Hall et al., 2023).

Despite the growing importance of younger consumers, attracting and retaining these market segments remains a significant challenge for many wineries. Wine is often perceived by younger individuals as a complex product associated with traditional consumption practices and a high level of product knowledge (Capitello et al., 2015). Moreover, increasing competition from alternative alcoholic beverages, changing lifestyle preferences, and the growing emphasis on health-conscious consumption further complicate wineries' efforts to connect with younger audiences (Colussi et al., 2024).

Although previous studies have examined various aspects of wine consumer behavior and digital marketing, the existing literature remains fragmented regarding the specific digital behaviors of younger wine consumers and their implications for winery marketing strategies. Research has frequently focused either on wine purchasing behavior or on individual digital marketing tools, while fewer studies have attempted to integrate these perspectives into a comprehensive understanding of how younger consumers interact with wine brands in digital environments (Castellini & Samoggia, 2018; Hall et al., 2023).

Against this background, the present paper aims to synthesize and critically examine the existing literature on the digital behavior of younger wine consumers and to identify the main implications for winery marketing strategies. By consolidating current knowledge in this area, the study contributes to a better understanding of the evolving relationship between younger consumers and wine brands in the digital era, while offering practical insights for wineries seeking to enhance their competitiveness and market relevance.

Literature Review

Characteristics of younger wine consumers

The wine market has experienced significant demographic changes over the last decade, driven by the increasing purchasing power of Millennials and Generation Z consumers. These generations differ substantially from previous cohorts in terms of

consumption motivations, information-search behavior, and brand engagement patterns. As digital natives, younger consumers have grown up in highly connected environments where online platforms play a central role in shaping purchasing decisions (Fountain & Charters, 2010; Agnoli et al., 2011; Savelli et al., 2023).

Research suggests that Millennials are generally more open to wine innovation, experimentation, and the adoption of new wine styles than older consumers (Castellini & Samoggia, 2018). They tend to seek products that offer unique experiences, authenticity, and opportunities for social interaction (Charters et al., 2011; Pomarici & Vecchio, 2014). Unlike traditional wine consumers, who often rely on established appellations and expert recommendations, younger consumers frequently explore wine through peer influence, online reviews, and social media content (Lockshin & Corsi, 2012; Goodman et al., 2007).

Generation Z exhibits similar characteristics but demonstrates an even stronger preference for digital interaction, visual communication, and value-driven consumption. Recent studies indicate that Gen Z consumers are particularly interested in sustainability, transparency, and ethical production practices, which increasingly influence their purchasing decisions (Savelli et al., 2023; Du, 2025). At the same time, they often perceive wine as a complex product category and may feel less confident in evaluating wine quality compared to more experienced consumers (Ritchie, 2011; Stergiou et al., 2018).

Furthermore, younger consumers increasingly prioritize experiences over products. Wine consumption is frequently associated with social events, tourism experiences, and lifestyle expression rather than purely with product characteristics (Spielmann et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2008). This shift suggests that wineries must move beyond product-centered communication and develop marketing strategies capable of creating meaningful consumer experiences (Cho et al., 2017; Stergiou et al., 2018).

2.2. Digital consumer behavior in the wine industry

The digital transformation of the wine industry has fundamentally altered the ways consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives, and interact with wine brands. Digital technologies have reduced information asymmetries and provided consumers with

access to an unprecedented volume of product-related information through websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, and online communities (Thach, 2009; Viana, 2016; Carbone et al., 2022).

Younger wine consumers increasingly rely on digital channels throughout their purchasing journey. Before purchasing wine, they often consult online reviews, compare ratings, explore winery websites, and seek recommendations from social networks (Szolnoki et al., 2018; Wilson & Quinton, 2012). Platforms such as Vivino have become influential sources of information by enabling consumers to access peer-generated reviews and ratings instantly. Research conducted on the Vivino social network highlights the growing importance of user-generated content in shaping wine perceptions and consumer decision-making processes (Kotonya et al., 2018).

Digital behavior is also characterized by a greater emphasis on convenience and immediacy. Mobile technologies allow consumers to obtain information at the point of purchase, while e-commerce platforms facilitate direct interactions between wineries and consumers (Galati et al., 2017; Viana, 2016). Consequently, digital touchpoints increasingly influence not only purchase decisions but also brand loyalty and long-term customer engagement (Loureiro et al., 2019; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Moreover, younger consumers often view digital interactions as an integral component of their consumption experiences. As a result, wineries are increasingly required to provide seamless omnichannel experiences that integrate online information, social media engagement, and offline wine experiences (Martínez-Navarro et al., 2024; Carbone et al., 2022).

The role of social media, electronic word-of-mouth and influencers

Social media has become one of the most influential communication channels within the wine industry. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube enable wineries to interact directly with consumers while simultaneously facilitating the dissemination of consumer-generated content (Szolnoki et al., 2018; Capitello et al., 2015).

One of the most significant developments in digital marketing is the growing importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Unlike traditional advertising, eWOM is perceived as

more credible because it originates from other consumers rather than from brands themselves. Online reviews, comments, ratings, and recommendations can substantially influence consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and brand perceptions (Wilson & Quinton, 2012; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

The importance of eWOM appears particularly strong among younger consumers, who frequently consult online reviews before making purchasing decisions. Research consistently demonstrates that positive online interactions contribute to increased trust and stronger purchase intentions, while negative reviews may significantly affect brand perceptions (Kotonya et al., 2018; Loureiro et al., 2019).

Alongside eWOM, social media influencers have emerged as powerful intermediaries between wineries and consumers. Influencers contribute to the simplification of wine-related information by presenting wine in a more accessible and engaging manner. Recent research indicates that influencer credibility, expertise, authenticity, and attractiveness positively affect consumer attitudes and purchase intentions toward wine products (Ingrassia et al., 2020; Du, 2025).

Furthermore, social media content increasingly emphasizes storytelling, lifestyle associations, and experiential elements rather than technical wine characteristics (Capitello et al., 2015; Viana, 2016). This trend aligns closely with younger consumers' preference for authenticity, entertainment, and emotionally engaging content (Spielmann et al., 2021).

Implications for winery marketing strategies

The evolution of younger consumers' digital behavior has important implications for winery marketing strategies. Traditional communication approaches focused primarily on product attributes and technical expertise may no longer be sufficient to engage younger audiences effectively (Lockshin & Corsi, 2012; Martínez-Navarro et al., 2024).

First, wineries should adopt a consumer-centered digital communication strategy that prioritizes engagement, interaction, and storytelling. Content that highlights winery heritage, production processes, sustainability initiatives, and behind-the-scenes activities can strengthen emotional connections with consumers (Viana, 2016; Capitello et al., 2015).

Second, social media marketing should become a central component of winery communication strategies. Short-form video content, interactive posts, live-streaming events, and user-generated content campaigns can significantly enhance visibility and engagement among younger audiences (Szolnoki et al., 2018; Ingrassia et al., 2020).

Third, wineries should actively encourage and manage electronic word-of-mouth by facilitating customer reviews, testimonials, and online discussions. Positive consumer-generated content can increase brand credibility and support purchase intentions (Wilson & Quinton, 2012; Loureiro et al., 2019).

Fourth, collaborations with influencers and digital content creators may help wineries reach younger consumers more effectively. Micro-influencers, in particular, often generate higher levels of trust and engagement due to their perceived authenticity and closer relationships with followers (Ingrassia et al., 2020; Du, 2025).

Finally, wineries should integrate sustainability communication into their digital strategies. Younger consumers increasingly seek brands that demonstrate environmental responsibility, transparency, and social commitment (Pomarici & Vecchio, 2014; Savelli et al., 2023). Therefore, communicating sustainable practices through digital channels may contribute to stronger brand differentiation and long-term consumer loyalty.

Overall, the literature suggests that successful winery marketing strategies increasingly depend on the ability to understand and respond to the digital behaviors, values, and expectations of younger consumers (Martínez-Navarro et al., 2024; Lockshin & Corsi, 2012).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach based on a narrative literature review, aiming to synthesize and critically analyze existing scientific knowledge regarding the digital behavior of younger wine consumers and its implications for winery marketing strategies. The narrative review method was selected because it allows for the integration of findings from multiple research streams, including consumer behavior, digital marketing, social media engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), influencer marketing, and sustainability communication within the wine industry.

The research process consisted of the systematic identification, selection, and analysis of relevant academic publications addressing the relationship between younger generations—particularly Millennials and Generation Z—and digital communication channels in the wine sector. The literature included peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, scientific reports, and specialized publications indexed in international databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. The selected studies were published primarily between 2005 and 2025, reflecting the rapid evolution of digital technologies and consumer behavior.

The search strategy employed a combination of keywords including: *digital marketing, wine industry, wine consumer behavior, Generation Z, Millennials, social media marketing, electronic word-of-mouth, wine tourism, consumer engagement, influencer marketing, and sustainability communication*. These terms were used individually and in various combinations to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic. Only publications written in English and directly related to wine marketing and consumer behavior were included in the review.

Following the identification stage, the selected literature was subjected to content analysis. The studies were examined according to several analytical dimensions, including consumer information-search behavior, online purchasing patterns, social media usage, trust in online reviews, influencer impact, sustainability perceptions, and digital engagement mechanisms. Particular attention was given to research investigating the preferences and attitudes of younger consumer cohorts, as these groups represent an increasingly important segment of the global wine market.

The collected information was subsequently organized into thematic categories, allowing the identification of common trends, recurring patterns, and emerging challenges in winery marketing. The synthesis process focused on highlighting the main factors influencing digital consumer behavior and assessing their managerial implications for wineries seeking to strengthen their competitiveness in a rapidly changing digital environment.

The methodological approach adopted in this study does not involve the collection of primary empirical data; therefore, the findings are derived exclusively from secondary sources. Nevertheless, the integration of diverse scientific perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of current developments in digital wine marketing and offers a solid theoretical basis for future empirical investigations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The literature reviewed highlights a substantial transformation in the relationship between younger consumers and wine brands. Unlike previous generations, Millennials and Generation Z interact with wine through highly digitalized environments, where information acquisition, product evaluation, and purchasing decisions are increasingly influenced by online platforms, social media content, and peer recommendations (Lockshin & Corsi, 2012; Savelli et al., 2023).

One of the most significant findings emerging from the literature is the central role of digital engagement in shaping consumer behavior. Younger consumers no longer act as passive recipients of marketing messages but actively participate in creating, sharing, and evaluating content related to wine products and brands (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Loureiro et al., 2019). This shift reflects broader changes in consumer behavior, where brand-consumer relationships are increasingly based on interaction, co-creation, and community participation rather than one-way communication.

The review also reveals that social media platforms have become critical sources of information and inspiration for younger wine consumers. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and other digital channels allow consumers to discover new products, learn about wine culture, and engage with wineries in a more informal and accessible manner (Szolnoki et al., 2018; Ingrassia et al., 2020). The visual and interactive nature of these platforms aligns particularly well with the communication preferences of younger generations, who

generally favor concise, authentic, and experience-oriented content.

Another important observation concerns the growing influence of electronic word-of-mouth and user-generated content. Traditional sources of authority, such as wine critics and expert evaluations, continue to play a role in wine purchasing decisions; however, younger consumers increasingly rely on reviews, ratings, and recommendations shared by peers and online communities (Kotonya et al., 2018; Wilson & Quinton, 2012). This tendency reflects a broader shift toward trust-based consumption, where perceived authenticity and social validation significantly influence purchasing behavior.

The literature further indicates that influencer marketing has emerged as an effective strategy for reducing the perceived complexity often associated with wine products. Through storytelling, product demonstrations, and lifestyle-oriented content, influencers can present wine in a more approachable and engaging manner, particularly for consumers with limited wine knowledge (Ingrassia et al., 2020). Consequently, influencer collaborations may contribute to increased brand awareness, stronger consumer engagement, and more favorable attitudes toward wine brands.

A recurring theme throughout the reviewed studies is the importance of authenticity. Younger consumers consistently demonstrate a preference for brands that communicate genuine values, transparency, and social responsibility (Pomarici & Vecchio, 2014; Spielmann et al., 2021). This finding is particularly relevant in the context of sustainability, which has become an increasingly important determinant of purchasing decisions among younger generations. Wineries that effectively communicate their environmental initiatives and sustainable production practices may therefore strengthen consumer trust and differentiation in competitive markets.

The findings also suggest that wineries should increasingly adopt an omnichannel approach that integrates online and offline experiences. Digital platforms can generate

initial consumer interest and engagement, while winery visits, wine tourism activities, and experiential events can strengthen emotional attachment and long-term loyalty (Cho et al., 2017; Yuan et al., 2008). Such integration reflects the contemporary consumer journey, which is characterized by continuous interactions across multiple touchpoints.

Overall, the literature suggests that the future competitiveness of wineries will depend largely on their ability to understand and respond to the evolving digital expectations of younger consumers. Successful marketing strategies will require a combination of social media engagement, authentic storytelling, influencer collaborations, sustainability communication, and experiential marketing initiatives that create value throughout the consumer journey (Martínez-Navarro et al., 2024; Viana, 2016).

The findings of this literature review provide several practical implications for wineries seeking to strengthen their relationships with younger consumer segments, particularly Millennials and Generation Z. As digital technologies continue to reshape consumer behavior, wineries must adapt their marketing strategies to align with the expectations and preferences of these increasingly influential market groups.

First, wineries should prioritize social media as a strategic communication channel rather than merely a promotional tool. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube offer valuable opportunities to engage younger consumers through visual storytelling, interactive content, and real-time communication. Research suggests that younger consumers are particularly responsive to authentic and engaging content that reflects the lifestyle, values, and identity associated with wine consumption (Szolnoki et al., 2018; Viana, 2016).

Second, wineries should invest in short-form video content, which has become one of the most effective formats for capturing the attention of younger audiences. Videos presenting vineyard activities, production processes, wine tastings, food pairings, and

behind-the-scenes experiences can increase consumer engagement and brand visibility (Ingrassia et al., 2020).

Third, influencer marketing should be integrated into winery communication strategies. Collaborations with influencers and content creators can facilitate access to highly targeted audiences and contribute to greater brand awareness and trust. In particular, micro-influencers often generate stronger engagement due to their perceived authenticity and closer relationships with followers (Ingrassia et al., 2020).

Fourth, wineries should actively encourage consumer participation through user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth initiatives. Online reviews, testimonials, social media mentions, and consumer-generated posts can significantly enhance brand credibility and influence purchasing decisions among younger consumers (Wilson & Quinton, 2012; Kotonya et al., 2018).

Fifth, sustainability communication should become a central component of winery marketing strategies. Younger consumers increasingly evaluate brands based on their environmental and social responsibility practices. Transparent communication regarding sustainable vineyard management, eco-friendly packaging, and corporate social responsibility initiatives may contribute to stronger consumer trust and brand differentiation (Pomarici & Vecchio, 2014; Savelli et al., 2023).

Sixth, wineries should adopt an omnichannel approach that integrates digital and physical experiences. While digital platforms facilitate information search and brand discovery, experiential activities such as winery visits, wine tourism events, and interactive tastings can strengthen emotional connections and long-term loyalty (Cho et al., 2017; Yuan et al., 2008).

Finally, wineries should continuously monitor emerging digital trends and evolving consumer preferences. The rapid growth of artificial intelligence, personalized marketing, social commerce, and immersive technologies may create new opportunities for engaging

younger consumers and enhancing customer experiences in the future (Martínez-Navarro et al., 2024).

Overall, wineries that successfully combine digital engagement, authentic storytelling, sustainability communication, and experiential marketing are more likely to establish meaningful relationships with younger consumers and achieve long-term competitive advantages in an increasingly digital marketplace.

CONCLUSIONS

The digital transformation of the wine industry has fundamentally changed the ways in which consumers interact with wine brands, access information, and make purchasing decisions. This literature review has highlighted that younger consumers, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, differ significantly from previous generations in terms of their values, information-search behavior, communication preferences, and purchasing motivations. As digital natives, they increasingly rely on social media platforms, online reviews, user-generated content, and influencer recommendations throughout the consumer decision-making process.

The findings indicate that digital engagement has become a critical factor influencing consumer attitudes, brand perceptions, and purchase intentions within the wine sector. Social media platforms, electronic word-of-mouth, and digital communities play a central role in shaping consumer experiences and facilitating interactions between wineries and younger audiences. Furthermore, authenticity, sustainability, transparency, and experiential consumption have emerged as key determinants of consumer preferences, reflecting broader societal and technological changes.

The review also demonstrates that traditional wine marketing approaches focused primarily on product characteristics and expert communication may be insufficient to effectively engage younger consumers. Instead, wineries are increasingly required to adopt consumer-centered marketing strategies that

emphasize storytelling, interactivity, digital engagement, and meaningful brand experiences. The integration of online and offline touchpoints appears particularly important for building long-term relationships and enhancing consumer loyalty.

From a theoretical perspective, this paper contributes to the growing body of literature on wine consumer behavior by synthesizing current knowledge regarding the digital behavior of younger wine consumers and its implications for marketing strategy development. By bringing together findings from studies on social media, digital marketing, electronic word-of-mouth, influencer marketing, and sustainability, the review provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping contemporary wine consumption among younger generations.

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to certain limitations. As a narrative literature review, the findings depend on the scope and availability of existing research and do not include primary empirical data. Future research could further investigate the digital behavior of younger wine consumers through quantitative and qualitative studies, comparative international analyses, and longitudinal approaches. Additionally, emerging topics such as artificial intelligence, social commerce, virtual reality experiences, and personalized digital marketing deserve greater attention in future wine marketing research.

Understanding the digital behavior of younger consumers has become essential for wineries seeking to remain competitive in an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven marketplace. As consumer expectations continue to evolve, wineries that successfully combine digital innovation, authentic communication, sustainability practices, and experiential marketing will be better positioned to attract, engage, and retain future generations of wine consumers.

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