



EVANGELISM

AND THE AMAZING
SPREAD OF QUALITY
REPUTATION OF
ONTARIO WINEMAKING

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Research Overview

This research overview provides a summary of a five-year long study of Ontario winemaking and Ontario Wine Industry's thirty-year quest for recognition as a world-class wine region.

What makes Ontario winemaking such an incredible story to study is its practitioners' success in overcoming a range of challenges. These challenges include the environmental adversity associated with growing grapes in Ontario, overcoming the negative perceptions of key audiences tied to early table wine production, as well as the disbelief of many consumers that fine wine can be produced in Ontario's cold climates. In this project we used both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand the origins of this success.

While prior work has emphasized the important role of adopting global winemaking practices, the emergence of standards, as well as the proactive role of government and institutional bodies in supporting Ontario's winemakers, our project emphasized the work of winemakers and evangelist connoisseurs that have made Ontario fine wine such a success. Specifically, we explored how wine connoisseurs have come to passionately evangelize on behalf of Ontario winemaking, and how they have built the public support that has helped to build great reputation for Ontario winemaking in the region and beyond¹.

Taken together, our findings emphasize the key role that the impassioned relational work has had for the success of Ontario's wineries and the industry as a whole. In particular the positive nature of building strong communities not only within and among wineries but with those connoisseur members of key audiences that can appreciate and advocate for their products. As described by one restaurantur interviewee that has become an evangelist dedicated to spreading Ontario winemaking:

“ I didn't have any people coming in looking for an Ontario wine. We had to convert some of our customers into understanding an Ontario wine or believing in an Ontario wine. And that's the customer that now will come in and ask for it again. ”

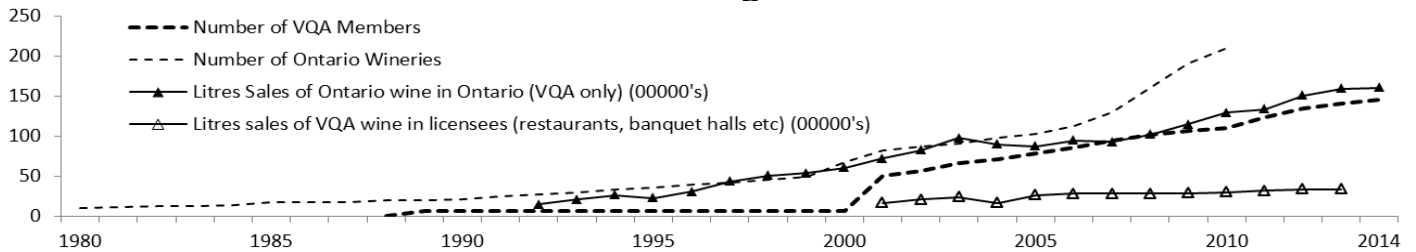
It is important to note that the focus of this second study were not consumers but members of key audiences that due to their knowledge and social positions (professions or organizational roles) can have a broad impact in spreading positive news regarding Ontario winemaking to others.

¹In this paper it is important to note that we did not focus on “average consumers”. Our emphasis was on connoisseurs, individuals with a high degree of identification with wine culture. We found that “average consumers” in general were highly unlikely to engage in evangelism on behalf of Ontario winemaking.



Figure 1 below demonstrates the growth of the industry as well as prominence of our evangelists' (and their organizations') efforts to advocate and organize on behalf of Ontario's winemakers. Rather than being purely monetarily driven, these individuals (often voluntarily) took on risk to invest themselves in sharing the unconventional practice and advocate on behalf of the industry that they came to "love". This advocacy spread the gospel of Ontario winemaking. Globally.

Figure 1: Overview of Fine Winemaking Practice ('VQA') Dissemination and Related Evangelist Activities



Evangelists	1980-1994	1995-2004	2005-2014
Wine Connoisseurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ontario Wine Society (OWS) founded in Toronto (1991) CUVEE wine tasting and celebratory event (1989) Expert tastings event (1990) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Founding of Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute, Brock University (1996) Organized OWS Restaurant: Buy VQA wines "placard campaign" Volunteered for dozens of regional wine festivals and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Founded OWS: Halton Chapter (2009); OWS: Windsor/ Essex (2011); OWS: Prince Edward (2012) Published and writing wine review websites for Ontario Published wine reviews of Ontario wines for local, national, and international websites Coordinating invite-only tasting events, tours, and dinners Created CUVEE vineyard of excellence award (2008) Created "promoting the promoter awards" (for Ontario winemaking) for media, restaurants, and experts (2006)
Restaurant Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restaurant moves to selling predominantly Ontario wines (1988) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restaurant selling only Ontario VQA Restaurants selling mostly VQA wines. (Year (number)) 2004 (24) Founded OWS Niagara (2003) Volunteering for regional wine festivals and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published a book on touring Ontario's Wineries (2012) Restaurants hosting Ontario Wine Society events Volunteering for regional wine festivals and events Coordinated private wine tastings and competitions Restaurants selling predominantly VQA wines. (Year (number)) 2007 (27);2008 (32);2009 (46); 2010 (56)
Wine media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National wine book (1983;1993) Book on touring Niagara wine country (1992) Founded Ontario Wine Awards (1995) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published books on touring Niagara's wine country (2000.2003) Reported efforts of numerous Ontario wineries in broader National Winery Encyclopedias (1999, 2003) Published newsletter on Ontario wines and winemakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published books and websites telling stories and describing Ontario wineries (2005) Published books on touring , and describing tours, of Ontario wine country (2005) Started national column focused on Ontario winemakers and winemaking Published book on Ontario winemaking history (2009)



Explanatory Factors

Our research suggests that evangelists’ efforts to spread the word and built critical masses of support for Ontario’s wineries emerged from two factors.

Factor 1: The power of “ritualized” interactions

The proprietor of a winery described his engagement with stakeholders to promote Ontario wine in the following manner:

“ I convert people all the time. I don’t baptize them, but I convert them anyway. ”

While wine tastings, tours, and winery events can become a “taken for granted” manner in which wineries “market” themselves, our interviews revealed that the experience of these rituals can foster a deeper connection between wineries and key audience members that may turn these individuals into evangelists on behalf of Ontario wine. Our research suggests that the authentic nature of these ritualized interactions with winemakers and their employees served as an ongoing “source” of fun, learning, and empowerment.

We derived three categories of rituals that actors reported inspired them to evangelize:

Rituals	Definition	Impact on Evangelists
Provenance-themed	Rituals highlighting the chronology of ownership, stewardship, or custody of the winery or winemaking techniques	Emotional experiences of reverence for the accomplishments and commitment to winemaking. The experience of wine being more than “what’s in the bottle”.
Hedonistic-themed	Rituals focused on enhancing the enjoyment and pleasure associated with winemaking and wine-consumption experiences	Emotional experiences of elation from participating in these rituals and the desire to recreate and re-experience these interactions
Glory-themed	Rituals focused on praise, honors, or distinctions bestowed by status-granting audiences, as well as ostentatious displays of wealth or grandeur.	Emotional experience of awe and respect associated with the accomplishments of Ontario’s wine makers.

In particular evangelists were inspired by the fun, wonder, and pride they experienced during these rituals to spread the word of Ontario wine, share what they learn, and to organize on behalf of winemakers they relate to. During these events evangelists often retold the stories they heard during rituals as well as recreated ritualized experiences with those they encountered and engaged with in their communities.



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Factor 2: The role of their regional and gourmand identities in fostering evangelism

In addition, our analysis of evangelist interviews reveals that two personally held identities made them highly receptive to Ontario's wine rituals.

Those connoisseurs who strongly identified as *Ontarians* and as *foodies* were more likely to become evangelists on behalf of Ontario winemaking than those non-evangelists we interviewed. We believe that this is due to connecting with the shared regional history of wineries as well as being more receptive to the pleasurable themes of many tasting rituals.

Our interviews with non-evangelist connoisseurs revealed that they identified as simply consumers or had a strong professional/managerial identity that made the experience of rituals as a marketing exercise. These identities disrupted many of the positive feelings associated with ritualized interactions.

Takeaways for Ontario Wineries

The key take away from our second study, is the important role of **cultivating evangelism** among wine connoisseurs, the media, restaurateurs, and local institutions in spreading the gospel of the wineries and the broader practice of world class Ontario winemaking.

Much like going to church, the ritualized tours, wine tastings, and events of wineries created social interactions that connected them to winemakers and the wine itself. Specifically that "wine was more than what's in the bottle". Ritualized interactions, whether a wine tastings, tour, or a dinner have important role in generating not simply sales among consumers but in creating devoted advocates, or evangelists.

Put plainly, although we understand that these activities might be viewed as simply marketing by wineries, we find that these tours and tastings can be especially beneficial to individual wineries and to the region as a whole when they create authentic relationships between wineries and stakeholders.

The authenticity of the interactions and relationships is a catalyst that leads to mutually supportive and beneficial relationships.