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## Research Advancements in National and Global Business Theory and Practice

# HOW ITALIAN AGRIFOOD PRODUCTS COMMUNICATE THEIR AUTHENTICITY? THE BRAND-LAND LINK INVESTIGATED ON THE WEB

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## ABSTRACT

Company websites plays an important role in communicating information, but it is still unknown their potential for stirring emotions, i.e. creating involvement and, if possible, a stable relationship with the consumer.

This paper seeks to analyse the experiential dimension of websites that are exemplary of best practices in the Italian context and best represent the brand-land relationship of agrofood products with high-level of cognitive value, trying to understand as the success of certain regions in becoming famous "brands" thanks in part to the value of their products (e.g. Champagne, Gorgonzola, Montalcino, etc.)

The research was conducted by designing and testing an ad hoc model (called SObER) and by means of the focus group technique, which made it possible to identify and assess the essential variables for promoting and publicising the brand-land relationship via the Web.

*Keywords: Web 2.0, agrifood products, brand-land relationship, company's website, experiential website, experiential evaluation model*

## 1. PREMISE

Authentic agro-food products play an important role in food-and-wine heritage, particularly in Italy. Indeed, they have an *identity* – which in strategic terms can be called "unique" – arising from various factors, tangible and otherwise (Maizza & Iazzi, 2011; Scorrano *et al.*, 2013; Maizza *et al.*, 2013), such as traditions, habits, customs, history and culture, as well as climate, landscape and production methods that have become consolidated over time.

Although authentic agro-food products are enjoying consistent and growing sales, they still account for a only a small part of spending on food as a whole, which is why there may be interesting potential for growth that requires forms of promotion based on precise marketing measures. These measures must seek to enable authentic products to fulfil their potential, making them recognisable

and raising their profile, thereby creating value for the companies that make them and for their regions of origin (Ribeiro & Santos, 2008). Indeed, as Keller points out (1998, 1993; Keller *et al.*, 2005,), the concepts of *brand recognition* and *brand recall* are at the heart of the broader concept of *brand image*.

The cognitive values possessed by *origin-based products* (otherwise known as *brand-land products*, whose characteristics will be explained in greater detail in paragraph 3.1) mean that they are "information intensive" (Watson *et al.*, 1999), and are thus likely to benefit from the implementation of so-called *experiential marketing* strategies (Schmitt, 1999; Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

For these products, the role of the experiential dimension appears to be particularly significant because it enables the consumer to remember the region, its history and its culture. The product thus becomes a cognitive element that can transfer experiences (actual or imagined) to different moments and places. Seen from this perspective, the Web (Cleff & Thomas, 2017) represents a particularly useful means of channelling the experiential value of the *brand-land* association. This can take place however only if the elements (texts, images, sounds, etc.) are properly harmonised and coordinated.

Aligned to the above-mentioned reasons, the scope of the paper is to improve the online communication of the agrofood products by means their link with the own region of origin in order to recall experiential aspects and emphasise the brand-land connection. In other words, assuming that the implementation of marketing communication strategies based on "experience-providing" websites (Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006) can enable the *local dimension* to enter the *global context*, through the study of the experiential dimension (*Customer Experience Management*, Schmitt, 2003) of the websites of brand-land products and an adequate focus on those perceived as more specific/authentic (Pine & Gilmore, 2009) by the consumer, the research tries to define the *drivers of online experiential communication* for the authentic agrofood products. This could enable for these products also, to create a virtuous circle between virtual and real worlds in which brand notoriety is consolidated and becomes self-sustaining, enabling the region itself (the *land*) to become a *brand*.

## 2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The geographical, cultural, historic and social components of authentic products mean that they are categorised as "hedonistic" (Holbrook, 1980; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Indeed, they tend to occupy – in the dynamics of consumption – a space that is not definable as the mere satisfaction of a need. They are also – and above all – characterised by the full involvement of the consumer, which transcends the product and has complementary effects, linked to the sensations and emotions targeted by experiential marketing. The customers thus become the protagonists of their own experience of consumption, expressed in a curiosity to learn about and visit the places of production, to participate in "memorable" events and to enjoy unique and unrepeatable experiences

(Pencarelli & Forlani, 2006; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999).

For this to happen, consumers must fully perceive the value of such products: in addition to the concept of **authenticity** there must also be that of brand **fame/notoriety** which, as we know, requires a suitable process of communication. The latter can be achieved by means of interactive and experiential approaches, both online (e.g. the so-called Web 2.0 formula) and offline, in accordance with the *integrated marketing communication* approach (Schultz *et al.*, 1993; Kitchen *et al.*, 2004; Duncan & Mulhern, 2004).

In Italy, an example of the safeguard and promotion of authentic products, as well as of their deep connection to their places of origin, is the producers' associations (Consorzi di Tutela). In the best cases, they have shown that organised cooperation can transform the traditional activities of a region into an *identity*, which it can then raise into a fully-fledged *brand*.

The formulation of the theoretical hypotheses was based on two theoretical macro-areas in marketing studies (summarised in the following paragraphs), which appear to be closely linked, especially in reference to the products we are dealing with here. As we have said, these products are strongly rooted in their context of origin and possess a combination of values and emotions that can be usefully employed in experiential marketing strategies.

**2.1 The Brand-Land concept**

Authentic products, in French known as *produits du terroir* (Arfini *et al.*, 2010), are products characterised by a close and indissoluble link with a specific *terroir*, i.e. with the geographical and human identity of their region of origin. The meaning of the word *terroir* developed in the mid 19th century in France, although it should be regarded as a concept in continuous evolution (Vaudour, 2005, Barham, 2003, Dedeire, 1995; Dubois, 1994).

A more extensive analysis of the aspects of authentic agro-food products leads to the identification of four dimensions: *geographical*, regarding the pedoclimatic conditions that affect the product, making it unique (from the raw materials to the production process); *historical*, understood as the sum of the knowledge and know-how accumulating over time within the place of reference, i.e. the human factor; *cultural*, resulting from the values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions that are consolidated in the region and determine the principles that guide the inhabitants' way of life and thought; *social*, as an effect of the relational and behavioural rules that characterise given contexts.

On all of this depends the deep-seated link (here called the *brand-land* relationship) that such products have with their respective place of production in the wider sense, since the features that make then authentic are not replicable or "exportable" beyond that specific context (Mastroberardino, 2004; Maizza *et al.*, 2003). The identity of a region (the so-called *place-identity*; see Siano, 2001 and Siano *et al.*, 2008), from which the specific character of the products arises, is the direct consequence of its

traditional economic activities (the so-called *place-personality*), which determine the *place-image* (Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Roth & Romeo, 1992; Usunier & Cestre, 2007, Maizza & Iazzi, 2011).

When the land (region, *terroir*), the "primary economic resource" in which "the experience of production" takes shape (Rullani, 2000) and guarantor of the product's *authenticity* (Gilmore & Pine, 2009), becomes widely known, it becomes synonymous with these features. From this perspective, the brand-land combination is linked to the concept of the common good, i.e. an intangible asset that encapsulates the values and behavioural models of a socio-geographical area in which the cultural traditions expressed by the products discussed here are consolidated. This asset generates and transfers value (including economic value) to a plurality of subjects, who, in order to preserve it and increase it, must respect its underlying essential conditions and behavioural rules. In Italy, as we have said, these criteria appear to be met particularly well by the producers' associations of the authentic products, which, in the best cases (such as those analysed here), have managed to safeguard and promote a combination of elements and traditions, even in the global context. In this way *land* is *brand* and thus, via consumer loyalty it is able to create *equity* for a plurality of subjects.

### 3.2 The experiential content of authentic products

The considerations set out above resonate with the principles of *experiential marketing* (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999), since they enable a change of perspective: it is no longer a question of promoting just the company product / service, but the experience that can enhance its value, which then becomes "unique and unrepeatable" for the consumer (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999). This approach is the fruit of two main trends (Codeluppi, 2001; Knutson *et al.*, 2006; Schmitt 1999; Pine & Gilmore, 1999): the behaviour of the modern (or post-modern) consumer, who, thanks to today's technology, has become more informed and interactive (as much with other consumers as with companies), and therefore more demanding and anxious to assert his/her personality via "emotive" purchasing choices. The increasingly companies' marketing strategies that are based not on the use value of their products/services, but on the company's values, in which the brand itself becomes an archetype of an experience, i.e. a dynamo of many experiences, via atmospheres that arouse emotions, sensations and the holistic involvement of the consumer.

By adopting this approach, which falls within the scope of so-called *Customer Experience Management* (Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006), companies therefore create and implement a strategy for managing the consumer's experience with the product, in which contexts of use and consumption are analysed, designed and proposed.

Even when it is transmitted via advertising – the experiential dimension enables: a) the consumer to perceive the product (and the region of origin) differently, attributing a higher value to it on the basis

of his/her personal experience, making it thus not comparable with other brands; b) the company to apply a premium price by virtue of its differentiated competitive positioning.

Starting from these assumptions, and consistent with the experiential grid proposed by Schmitt (1999; Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006)[1], it was considered useful to focus the analysis on so-called *Experience Providers* (*ExPro*)[2] – in this specific case, *company websites* – and on the types of experience to be enjoyed by the consumer, the so-called *Strategic Experiential Modules* (*SEM*). In order to observe the value attributed to brand-land products by web users, the SEMs were arranged as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. The Strategic Experiential Modules (SEM) for the brand-land products

| Sense | Referring to the sensory dimension, the minimum level for creating involvement via the five senses. |
| --- | --- |
| | *Brand-Land perspective: The sensory dimension (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell), through which the perception of the product is stimulated, recalling its region of origin in particular.* |
| Feel | Pertaining to the consumer's affective involvement with the brand, in the phases of both purchase and consumption, with the aim of establishing a relationship with the consumer and increasing his/her loyalty. |
| | *Brand-Land perspective: The affective dimension, i.e. sentiments, which arouses positive emotions towards the brand, for example suggesting occasions for use of the products.* |
| Think | Regarding the cognitive/creative and problem-solving dimensions that prompt the individual to engage in a rational activity. |
| | *Brand-Land perspective: The cognitive/creative and problem-solving dimensions, by which companies seek to draw the consumers' attention via initiatives that involve the sphere of intellectual activities linked to the product and/or region of origin, as well as the connection through them.* |
| Act | Offering the consumer physical experiences, as well as *new* ways of acting and interacting with other consumers in a framework of change. |
| | *Brand-Land perspective: The dimension of acting (and interacting), in which the company promotes initiatives (which also involve the region of origin) with the aim of inducing consumers to modify their lifestyles, involving them in "physical" experiences that cause them to reflect.* |
| Relate | It aims to involve the consumer in initiatives that enable him/her to meet others who are enthusiastic about the company brand (birth of a *brand community*). |
| | *Brand-Land perspective: The dimension of personal and inter-personal relations, based on the creation of experiences that enable consumers to get in touch with their ideal selves or with a group of people that share the same interest in the product in question and its region of origin.* |

## 3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on the following logical construct: *in order to become well-known, authentic agro-food products must express their link with their region of origin by means of forms of online communication that recall experiential aspects and emphasise the brand-land connection.*

This study therefore aims to analyse the experiential dimension (*Customer Experience Management*, Schmitt, 2003) of the websites of brand-land products, to see how they can be perceived as specific/authentic (Pine & Gilmore, 2009) by the consumer. It is assumed that the implementation of

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[1] The experiential grid proposed by Schmitt (Schmitt, 1999ab; Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006) makes it possible to strategically plan the experience to be enjoyed by the consumer on the basis of two dimensions: i) *Strategic Experiential Modules (SEM)* which can be broken down into five different aspects (in which the degree of involvement grows sequentially from one module to the next; see Table 1); ii) the *Experience Providers (ExPro)*, which determine/provide/stimulate the various experiences; they activate the experiential modules (SEMs) and are associated with activities connected with the following elements.

[2] The *ExPros* are: *communication, visual/verbal identity, product presence, co-branding, Websites and media, people.*

marketing communication strategies based on "experience-providing" websites (Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006) can enable the *local dimension* to enter the *global context*, making it possible to create a virtuous circle between virtual and real worlds in which brand notoriety is consolidated and becomes self-sustaining, enabling the region itself (the *land*) to become a *brand* (Iaia *et al.,* 2016, 2017).

The company website represents a means of communication between the consumer and the company, which must also be able to create consumer involvement (measurable by means of specific factors such as the duration of the visit, return visits, etc.). The recourse to an experiential logic in web communication can facilitate/emphasise the brand-land connection, increasing the brand notoriety (a pre-condition for competitive success) and the competitive capacity of authentic (brand-land) agro-food products. This logic also takes account of a) the factors that prompt the consumer to visit a website, b) the formation of their perceptions (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000; Rodgers *et al.*, 2007) and c) the potential significance of *the emotional dimension* for products *with a high cognitive content.*

In this perspective, an answer was sought to the following question:

*What are the key elements for transmitting the experiential dimension and the brand-land connection of authentic agro-food products in online communication?*

To answer this question, we analysed the communication strategies of certain brands considered to reflect best practices in advertising based on the link between the product and its region of origin. These cases of excellence were identified with reference to previous research that studied in detail the salient aspects of web communication. Specifically, this study looked at the Consorzi (producers' associations) responsible for (see also Maizza *et al.,* 2013, Scorrano, 2013; Fait *et al.,* 2013; Scorrano *et al.,* 2013, Fait & Trio, 2011a, 2011b):

   i. *wine sector*, Consorzio Vino Chianti Classico, Consorzio dell'Asti D.O.C.G., Consorzio del Vino Brunello di Montalcino (for further details see: www.chianticlassico.com, www.astidocg.it, www.consorziobrunellodimontalcino.it);
   ii. *cheese sector*, Consorzio per la Tutela del Formaggio Gorgonzola, Consorzio di Tutela del Formaggio Grana Padano, Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano Reggiano (for further details see: www.gorgonzola.com, www.granapadano.it, www.parmigianoreggiano.com);
   iii. *meat product* sector, Consorzio del Prosciutto di San Daniele, Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma (for further details see: www.prosciuttosandaniele.it, www.prosciuttodiparma.com).

The model used to assess the experiential content (i.e. the overall importance of the experiential aspects) of the websites exemplifying the above-mentioned best practices is founded on *strategic experiential modules* (*SEMs – sense, feel, think, act* and *relate*) (Schmitt, 1999; Ferraresi & Schmitt, 2006), which were contextualised and categorised as elements for assessing the websites.

For this to succeed, a suitable method (dubbed *SObER*) was conceived and tested for determining and assessing a website's experiential dimension, applying it to the sector in consideration. The method is divided into the following steps:

(1) Identification and selection of the key elements with which to assess a website's experiential dimension (*Selection*), on the basis of each *strategic experiential module* with reference to the organisation of the information (textual and visual content). To this end, recourse was made to n. 3 focus group of the "inspection" type (Mich, 2007), one for each sector, composed usually of 9-10 experts in communication and marketing in the sectors, as: n. 3 sommeliers; n. 3 oil tasters; n. 3 sociologists; n. 5 communication managers; n. 3 copywriters; n. 4 marketing researchers; n. 2 CEO; n. 4 business communication experts. Discussions were conducted in July 2015 at University of Salento, by a moderator and his assistant (who played a key role in data analysis) and generally lasted ninety minutes.

(2) Observation of the behaviour of consumers, web marketing experts and people with knowledge of the agro-food sector (*Observation*), via n. 3 *user-based focus groups* (Mich, 2007), in order to analyse:

- the use of content, via navigation in the website;
- the perception of the experiential aspects, via comparative assessment of the key elements identified with the help of the experts cited in point 1;
- the degree of involvement that follows from these elements.

This led to a final evaluation of the experiential dimension, which expressed the interviewees' summary verdict. The *user based focus groups*, conducted with the same modalities of the precedents, involved: n. 4 consumers, n. 4 web marketing experts, n. 3 food sector experts; n. 5 communication managers; n. 3 sommeliers; n. 2 oil tasters; n. 1 sociologist; n. 3 marketing researchers; n. 3 CEO. Each focus group was made by 9/10 people, lasted one hour and forty-five minutes circa, and they abled participants to fill an evaluation grid (*experiential degree*) in order to express their impressions and feelings about the examined website.

(3) Processing of the opinions expressed by the interviewees (*Evaluation and Ranking*), useful for ranking the experiential content of the websites considered.

The *SObER* model, the fruit of detailed studies based on the theme of experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999), highlighted the existence of certain more intensively perceived aspects, which were thus considered to be the *drivers of online experiential communication*.

This paper thus belongs to a field of enquiry that has yet to be extensively tackled in the marketing literature, despite universal recognition of the importance of the web in advertising and users' purchasing decisions. It makes particular reference to those types of product whose presence on the market is limited to a place-based niche.

## 4. WEB COMMUNICATION, EXPERIENTIAL CONTENTS AND THE BEST CASES OF THE BRAND-LAND COMBINATION: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

*RQ: What are the key elements for transmitting, in online communication, the experiential dimension and the brand-land connection of authentic agro-food products?*

The following paragraph shows the main results of the investigation of the case studies considered here, conducted by means of the two kind of focus groups described above (inspection and user-based), for a total of six focus groups. So, the description below can be considered as a summary representation of the assessments, considerations and suggestions that emerged during the meetings. The interviewees' assessments on a five-point Likert scale (in which 1 is poor and 5 is excellent) will be discussed in the next paragraphs. This assessment is useful since it enables comparisons and thus comparative analysis of:

(1)      the various competitors;

(2)      the most strongly perceived SEMs;

(3)      the emotional communication expressed by the website and perceived by users (in this specific case, the space available in this paper did not allow for gap analysis).

**4.1 The origin-based products: the "sense" SEM**

The analysis conducted shows that *sense* is the "module" that is most intensely perceived by users – as argued by Pine & Gilmore (1999), "*the more sensory an experience, the more memorable it will be*". This is achieved above all by recourse to visual cues, but also to smells and flavours. Indeed, textual, visual and audio-visual content focusing on:

- the region of origin, the product and the link between the two are emphasised by means of the description and images of the *terroir* (**sight sense**), its history and its *comuni* (districts) of production (see *Chianti Classico, Brunello di Montalcino*: vines, hills, woods, fields in bloom, traditional rural buildings; cfr. Fig. 1); the structural and visual characteristics of the product and its production processes, highlighting its authenticity and uniqueness and educating consumers (**smell/taste senses**) as to how they can

recognise it (see *Chianti Classico, Brunello di Montalcino*: vintage, bunch of grapes, colour of the product); explanatory images and captions that link the specifics of the product to the pedoclimatic and historical-cultural conditions of the product's places of origin (see *Prosciutto di Parma*: characteristics of the raw materials, climate and authentic techniques used in the region; colour and black-and-white images of the valleys of Parma through history showing the conservation of a natural and uncontaminated environment, in which traditions, innovated and modernised, are handed down from generation to generation);

- the sounds of the production process (***hearing sense***), especially regarding the transformation of the product therefore linked to both the region of origin (see *Chianti Classico*: sounds of nature, conversations of farmers busy harvesting the grapes) and the product (see *Chianti Classico*: bottle of wine being opened, serving the wine, clinking of bottles during the production process; images of the winery that evoke the silence and tranquillity of the locations; auditory analysis of the maturity of the cheeses of *Parmigiano Reggiano*); sounds of tradition (traditional feasts, special events, etc. – see *Chianti Classico, Parmigiano Reggiano*); sounds of tradition (traditional feasts, special events, etc. – see *Chianti Classico, Parmigiano Reggiano*); the silence of the places of production, with a strong appeal to the concept of time, the seasons, the naturalness of the product, i.e. *slow food* and a healthy and balanced lifestyle (see *Chianti Classico, Parmigiano Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma*);

- the main "tangible" components (***touch sense***) that distinguish the product and make it immediately recognisable are recalled for experts and ordinary consumers alike (see *Chianti Classico, Brunello di Montalcino:* consistency of the soil and bunches of grapes; *Prosciutto di Parma*: delicacy of the slice; *Parmigiano Reggiano*: master cheese-makers processing the raw material in order to transform it into the finished product in accordance with traditional rules);

- the description of the product's aromas and fragrances (***smell/taste sense***), which are associated with the place of production understood in terms of its physical characteristics, i.e. the soil, climate, history and culture (see *Chianti Classico:* authenticity and uniqueness of the wine's bouquet – the floral fragrance of irises and violets, of spices and forest fruits; *Parmigiano Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma*: processing and fire branding; olfactory analysis of the maturity of the product; appeal to the cool and natural state of the places where the product is matured). The sense of taste is invoked by reference to tasting alone or with other foods, often-available ne the region (see *Chianti Classico, Brunello di Montalcino Parmigiano Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma*).

**4.2 The origin-based products: the "feel" SEM**

Although the smell and taste senses are hard to convey via the web they are communicated by videos which (for example) show the consumer the product's associations and the distinctive features of the region of origin in a wider sense, or teach the basic notions for correctly performing a sensory analysis of the product, both in an educational framework (SEM: *feel*).

In fact, the involvement of users is centred on:

1) suggestions as to when the product could be used, with reference to:

    a) the food-and-wine heritage of regional cuisine (Tuscany for *Chianti Classico*, Emilia Romagna for *Parmigiano Reggiano* and *Prosciutto di Parma*, the North of Italy for *Grana Padano* and Friuli Venezia Giulia for *Prosciutto San Daniele*) and, more generally, Italian cuisine and the Mediterranean diet;

    b) the Italian tradition of dining with the family (see *Parmigiano Reggiano*) or with friends (see *Chianti Classico*);

    c) the product's versatility of use, depending on the consumer's needs, given its capacity to adapt to the tastes of all age groups and its nutritional properties (target clientele considered: children, women, the elderly and sports players; see *Parmigiano Reggiano, Grana Padano* and *Prosciutto di Parma*);

2) *online education* (textual and/or audio-visual), aimed at helping the public to learn the steps into which the sensory analysis of the product is divided, including the preparation of dishes that envisage the use of the products in question (see *Parmigiano Reggiano, Grana Padano, Prosciutto di Parma* and *Prosciutto San Daniele*);

3) cookery courses and tasting courses to be held at the *Academies* of the Consorzio (see *Parmigiano Reggiano* and *Chianti Classico*).

In this sense, all three case studies analysed effectively implement the above-mentioned stimuli, although the Chianti Classico website is held to be the most engaging (with a score of 4/5; Parmigiano Reggiano, 5/5; Prosciutto di Parma, 4/5).

**4.3 The origin-based products: the "think and act" SEM**

With reference to the last modules to be examined, i.e. *think* and *act* (which were considered together given the substantial similarity of the two modules in the present case), it is seen that thanks to the appeal to the product's health properties, naturalness and quality of the products and the Mediterranean diet, together with the promotion of a healthy lifestyle by means of events and the involvement of sports personalities, Parmigiano Reggiano again scores highly (5/5). In addition, the site provides the user with numerous angles from which to approach the "storytelling" of the product, which, together with the other SEMs cited above, creates engagement for the user .

However, each brand focus on the healthy and balanced lifestyle that every individual should enjoy (see *Parmigiano Reggiano*: "Never manufactured, always hand-made", "The King of cheeses"; *Chianti Classico*: "the true heart of Chianti is the land", "Not all wine made in Chianti is Chianti Classico"; *Prosciutto San Daniele:* "Naturale, Italiano, Unico"; *Prosciutto di Parma*: publication of the brochure entitled "diet and well-being" and advertising "100% natural" ).

### 4.4 The origin-based products: the "relate" SEM

The *relate* sphere is made up by organisation of events, demonstrations and courses (for recreation, presentation and promotion) which bring together enthusiasts of the products being studied, with the intention of enhancing their loyalty by awareness-raising and acculturation to a healthy lifestyle and a balanced diet (see *Parmigiano Reggiano*: *"I am what I eat: dietary education project"* (organised by the *Consorzio*), involving 20,000 young people and 1,000 school teachers in Piedmont, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, Tuscany and Rome; Parmigiano Reggiano Academy "*The taste of knowledge*"; *Chianti Classico: Chianti Classico Academy, in the Gallo Nero wine school*").

## 5. CONCLUDING SUMMARY AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study sought to verify the experiential dimension of the communication used by websites by means of a model of analysis created for the task (*SObER*), tested using the focus group technique (*inspection* and *user-based*).

Given the results of the test conducted, the application of the chosen methodology, created and verified in order to *understand and assess the experiential content of websites*, is argued to be replicable in contexts other than the one investigated here, since it makes it possible to first identify the basic elements of the experiential dimension and then assess them by means of user-based focus groups. Indeed, it was noted that in online advertising, experiential content represents a new frontier, whose opportunities (enhanced by the evolution of computer technology) appear to be numerous and fruitful for both marketing studies and managerial applications.

It is easy to see that the internet can play a fundamental role in the marketing of these products via the sharing of experiential content by i) the producing companies, on the "experience of production" (Rullani, 2006); ii) the users, on the experience gained in the physical place (whether this be the store or the production site). By adopting this approach in advertising it is thus possible to involve other potential consumers via online and offline word-of-mouth communication (Prendergast *et al.*, 2010; Solima, 2010; Riva, 2010), increasing the visibility of the products and their regions of origin in the international arena. This can have a positive impact on the behaviours and purchasing decisions of consumers and tourists alike (Lau & Ng, 2001).

To summarise, the study made it possible to verify that the emotional element can be communicated

and perceived (even unconsciously), thereby enabling products with a high cognitive and experiential content (as in the case of place-based products) to gain a high profile and thus greater competitiveness in the international context.

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