

Digital engagement as a tool for regional marketing in wine tourism: a comparative study of Galicia and Tuscany

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Article

Keywords: wine tourism, digital footprint, regional positioning, Google Trends, designations of origin, Galicia, Tuscany

Posted Date: October 19th, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11007015/v1>

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Abstract

This study examines how the digital visibility of designations of origin and grape varieties contributes to the international positioning of wine tourism regions, comparing Galicia and Tuscany as two distinctive models of regional wine branding. Using a comparative longitudinal approach based on Google Trends data from 2004 to 2026, the analysis explores search interest in the main Galician Designations of Origin, Tuscan DOCG denominations, and key grape varieties associated with both regions. The findings reveal two contrasting patterns: Tuscany shows a consolidated territorial branding model led by internationally recognised denominations such as Chianti and Brunello di Montalcino, whereas Galicia relies more strongly on varietal visibility, especially Albariño and increasingly Godello. The results also indicate stronger summer seasonality in Galicia, suggesting closer links with coastal tourism flows. The study highlights the value of digital footprint analysis for understanding wine tourism destination branding.

1. Introduction

Wine tourism has established itself globally as a niche tourism sub-sector and a key catalyst, given its cross-cutting nature for the sustainable development of rural areas, promoting the conservation of cultural and landscape heritage whilst diversifying local sources of income (Carlsen and Charters, 2006; López-Guzmán et al., 2013). This evolution is fully in line with the paradigm of agricultural multifunctionality, understood as the strategic capacity of the primary sector not only to produce agricultural goods, but also to generate secondary services, act as a steward of the landscape and ensure the socio-economic survival of rural areas (OECD, 2001; Vettorello, 2025). As Hall et al. (2000) point out, wine tourism is defined by visits to vineyards, wineries and festivals, where tasting and experiencing the unique qualities of the wine-producing region are the main motivating factors. This shift in the tourism paradigm is rooted in the profound historical evolution of the European wine market, which has moved from a traditional model of mass consumption and bulk sales towards highly specialised, export-oriented production backed by rigorous quality certifications linked to origin, such as DOC, DOCG, DOP and IGP (Zenobi, 2025).

In the context of contemporary trends, characterised by the fragmentation of holiday periods and the hyper-segmentation of the product, wine tourism is positioned as a key component of gastronomic tourism and a clear example of sensory and experiential tourism (Fernández Alonso et al., 2017). This perspective is embedded within the comprehensive concept of 'tourism of taste', a paradigm that brings together various types such as agricultural, culinary and enogastronomic tourism (Hall et al., 2000; Sidali et al., 2011). Under this approach, food and wine tourism acts as a powerful pull factor for tourist destinations, as is the case in the well-established model of Tuscany (Lemmi and Siena Tangheroni, 2015). This view is supported by the European Charter of Wine Tourism, which defines it as the development of all tourism and leisure activities dedicated to the cultural and oenological enjoyment of the vineyard, wine and its territory (Vintur, 2006; RECEVIN, 2006). Wine tourism must therefore be approached simultaneously as a specialised form of rural, cultural and nature tourism, as it promotes the pursuit of knowledge, traditions and values linked to local ethnography and agriculture (Boatto and Gennari, 2011). From this perspective, sustainability transcends mere environmental responsibility to become a genuine opportunity for economic and social development and business resilience (Vettorello, 2025). Display quotations of over 40 words, or as needed.

This approach is closely aligned with the principles of experiential marketing, which holds that the wine sector requires strategies aimed at creating holistic experiences that engage the customer's senses and emotional dimension (Schmitt, 1999). For today's consumer, a truly transformative experience occurs when they interact directly with their surroundings, endowing a simple tasting with personal and memorable significance (Arnould and Price, 1993). At the microeconomic level, this conceptualisation is consistent with the contributions of Getz (2000), who emphasises that wine tourism enables wineries to generate direct sales and enhance the perceived value of their products. Wine tourism acts as a bridge between culture, tradition and innovation, prioritising authenticity and promoting the regeneration of marginalised areas, combating problems such as depopulation and environmental degradation (Foggiato, 2025). It has ceased to be a secondary activity and has become a structural component of wineries' business models, contributing decisively to the creation of economic value and the global competitiveness of the wine sector (Garibaldi and Capasso, 2026). This diversification of production is now imperative, as the sector faces a complex phase of structural transition characterised by excessive bureaucratic burdens, international geopolitical instability, a sharp rise in energy and raw material costs, and the impact of institutional campaigns against alcohol

consumption (Zenobi, 2025). Furthermore, food and wine are part of a holistic concept of quality of life and well-being (wellness), where the local origin of food and its properties enhance the physical and psychological well-being of visitors (Golinucci, 2025).

The economic impact of wine tourism worldwide is significant. In fact, the market is currently valued at \$11.5 billion – of which Europe accounts for 30% – with projections forecasting that it will exceed \$40 billion by 2030, based on an average annual growth rate of 19.9% (Grand View Research, 2024, cited in Garibaldi, 2025). In the pre-pandemic scenario, the sector attracted more than 14 million visitors in Italy, generating a turnover of 2.5 billion euros (Beltramo et al., 2024). Food and wine tourism as a whole contributes over €40 billion to the Italian economy (€9.2 billion direct, €17.2 billion indirect and €13.7 billion induced, according to 2023 data), recording a high benefit-to-cost ratio of 6.9 (Garibaldi, 2024).

On another note, the design of wine tourism offerings requires a profound adaptation to the demands of the new visitor, who expects to be an active participant. Non-agricultural activities such as ‘tourist grape harvesting’, picnics amongst the vineyards or personalised labelling experiences allow tourists to immerse themselves in the daily routine of winegrowers (Vettorello, 2025). Globally, traditional activities continue to be led by wine tastings (79%), winery tours (68%) and vineyard tours (61%) (Szolnoki, 2025). In mature European markets, there is a very high appreciation of the vineyard, with 90% of businesses offering tours at average prices ranging from 36 to 50 euros (Garibaldi and Capasso, 2026). Data from the Italian market show a structural “leap in quality”, with 37.9% of wine tourists taking long trips of 4 days or more, and 42.2% visiting three or more wineries, compared to 15.3% recorded in 2019 (Associazione Italiana Turismo Enogastronomico and ISMEA, 2024).

2. Methodology

The main methodology was based on an analysis of online search interest via Google Trends as a proxy for the global positioning of the regions of Tuscany and Galicia at an international level through their wines.

Analysing search volume, user behaviour and trends over time provides a fundamental starting point for tourism organisations to optimise their promotional strategies (Rossi, 2014). This is why methodologies based on digital footprint analysis, such as Google Trends, are ideal tools for observing the evolution of brand positioning in Designations of Origin (DO), allowing for a comparison of digital interest between leading regions such as Galicia and Tuscany.

To identify relevant terms, almost all terms related to the wines of both regions were searched for and compared, focusing on the official names of the Designations of Origin in both regions and the main wine varieties produced there. For the selection of terms, wine industry reports from both regions (López Iglesias et al, 2023; Regione Toscana and ISMEA, 2025) were used as a reference, as well as information on grape varieties provided by the Tuscan DOCGs and the Galician DOs. The phased process for selecting terms was as follows:

1. Compilation of terms to be analysed in both regions and categorisation by DO and grape variety (Table II).
2. Elimination of terms that cause distortion.
3. Joint comparison and comparison of relative digital interest by region.

The comparative searches were carried out on 09/03/2026 using the following parameters:

- Search term
- Worldwide
- From 2004 to present
- Web searches

Given the limitation on terms, only those terms were included which, based on the analysis and search type indicated above, exceeded a relative interest score of 1 compared to the set of terms with the highest relevance in terms of interest.

As a potential limitation of the research, when conducting the analysis on a global scale, it was necessary to eliminate certain terms which, although specific to the Tuscan or Galician regions, caused distortion in the graphs due to the high relative interest

generated in other countries around the world. In the case of France, the removal of terms that cause distortion at an international level due to their overwhelming weight in France can be understood as a limitation of the research. This is the case for terms related to grape varieties used in Tuscany, such as Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot; although none of these terms are of great relevance in Italy according to Google Trends, they appear over-represented in the international context, with search interest centred on France. In the Galician case, the limitation focused on the ‘Torrones’ grape variety, which has very little relative importance in Galicia, both in terms of production and digital interest. However, internationally it carries significant weight due to digital interest centred in Brazil, where this is a widely used grape variety. In any case, before these terms were removed from the analysis, it was verified that their weight in both Italy and Spain was negligible.

3. Results

3.1. The state of the wine tourism sector: A comparative analysis between Galicia and Tuscany

Within Europe, Spain and Italy represent two of the most important wine-producing powers, where the analysis of specific and contrasting realities is of great academic interest. In this regard, Tuscany (Italy) and Galicia (Spain) offer an excellent comparative framework, as they represent two distinct models in terms of ownership structure, production volume, maturity of the destination, governance, and demographic and digital penetration dynamics (Table I). Whilst Italy receives over 16 million food and wine tourists annually (Seccia and Garibaldi, 2021; Garibaldi, 2024), in Spain visits to wineries and wine museums reached nearly 3 million in 2023 (ACEVIN, 2024). The professionalisation of the sector in Galicia has found a strategic lever in the integration of winemaking tradition with innovation, where the revival of indigenous grape varieties has served as a driver of regional identity and wine tourism appeal (Del Campo Tejedor, 2024). For its part, Tuscany represents a mature destination where the offering has diversified to meet global expectations, drawing on the symbiosis between landscape, culture and a highly professionalised, business-oriented tourism infrastructure.

Table I. Comparative summary of wine tourism development: Galicia vs. Tuscany

Criterion / Dimension	Tuscany model (Italy)	Galiccia model (Spain)
Population and Area	~3.7 million inhabitants / ~60,000 ha of vineyards (67% on hills).	~2.7 million inhabitants / ~33,200 ha of vineyards in total.
Agricultural Structure	Medium-sized and large estates (<i>tenutas, castellos, fattorias</i>); significant economies of scale.	Marked small-scale farming; highly fragmented plots (half a hectare) and complex terrain.
Quality Systems	Focus on world-renowned brands (<i>Chianti, Brunello di Montalcino, Vino Nobile</i>) under DOCG.	5 Designations of Origin with historical and small-scale roots, based on indigenous grape varieties.
Governance and Routes	A mature network of <i>Strade del Vino</i> , integrated with consortia and public-private <i>advocacy coalitions</i> .	Wine Routes (affiliated with ACEVIN), with a competitive divide between the coast and the inland regions, currently undergoing professionalisation.
Market Maturity	Seasonally adjusted international visitor numbers (spring-autumn); high prices; international profile (65% from the US and Northern Europe).	Emerging-mid-range product; heavy reliance on the summer season and coastal areas; strong component of domestic (70%) and regional tourism.
Key Attractions	Historical heritage, luxury, cultural landscape, castles and classic red wines.	Seafood cuisine, green landscapes, local festivals and heroic viticulture.
Digital Maturity	Advanced and integrated into the omnichannel competitive strategy (AI/Digital).	Emerging focus and nascent transactional digitalisation.

Source: Own elaboration.

In mature and successful destinations such as Tuscany, the positive results of the tourism sector depend closely on the maturity of the institutional environment and local governance models (Carbonai, 2016). This momentum has led to the creation of a mixed governance system regulated by the State (Vaquero Piñeiro, 2015), structuring the offering around the landscape through the extensive creation of 'Wine Routes' (Strade del Vino) (Asero and Patti, 2009). These routes are methodologically configured as defined itineraries that integrate natural, cultural and environmental values alongside vineyards and wineries open to the public (Fávero and Antunes, 2007; López-Guzmán and Sánchez Cañizares, 2008). The fundamental purpose of this network model is to generate a collaborative fabric that strengthens the local community (Stefano and Cinelli Colombini, 2020). The success of the Strade dei Vini lies in structuring tourist routes where wine acts as a common thread to market a range of high-quality agri-food products protected under PDO and PGI designations, shaping the territory as a genuine 'public space' (Carbonai, 2016). The Tuscan offering serves as a powerful international attraction grounded in the production of world-renowned wines such as Chianti Classico, Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, with local stakeholders acting as an advocacy coalition dedicated to the unrestricted protection of their historical, urban and rural heritage (Carbonai, 2016). It was precisely in Tuscany that pioneering events with a major impact were invented, such as "Cantine Aperte" – the flagship event devised by the historic Movimento Turismo del Vino, founded in 1993, which marked the beginning of modern wine tourism in Europe (Bettella, 2023) – and "Calici di Stelle" (Corinto, 2018). These festivals serve as a strategic draw that helps to boost the development of tourist routes (Yuan et al., 2005). Furthermore, the region stands out for promoting comprehensive platforms such as Vetrina Toscana, or initiatives like Nobile Biking, implementing disruptive innovations such as the Digital Wine Tastings at the Ciacchi Piccolomini D'Aragona estate and the use of Interactive Transparent OLED technology at the Ornellaia estate (Caselli, 2021). Tuscan routes are at a stage of sophistication where the current challenge lies in managing mass visitor flows, sustainability and the hyper-segmentation of the experience towards relational luxury, supported by art foundations linked to wine (such as the facilities at Castello di Ama or Antinori nel Chianti Classico) that attract a segment with extremely high purchasing power, which in turn boosts the brand's digital visibility.

In contrast, in Spain, the development of a strong inland tourism sector in which wine tourism plays an indisputable leading role has become a key tool for promoting better territorial balance and revitalising rural areas far from traditional tourist circuits (Vázquez Duarte and García Vázquez, 2025). Although it is a relatively recent development in Spain compared to other European markets, its growth is driven by new tourist consumption patterns, with travellers tending to split their holidays into short 'getaways' and local trips (Rodríguez García et al., 2010; Dinamiza Asesores, 2022). The formal structuring of the sector gained momentum in 2001, when the Spanish Association of Wine Cities (ACEVIN) launched the Spanish Wine Routes project with the aim of defining and developing quality standards for this tourism product (Álvarez García et al., 2014; del Río Rama et al., 2013). This initiative was established within the framework of the Quality Programme for Tourism Products under the Comprehensive Plan for the Quality of Spanish Tourism (PICTE 2000–2006), conceived as a socio-economic development strategy based on public-private cooperation. However, this nascent development in Spain also gives rise to significant structural challenges in the supply side, characterised by a low level of overall tourism development in rural areas, a limited range of complementary offerings, inadequate promotion, and the problem that tourists rarely stay overnight in the geographical area of the wineries (Millán Vázquez de la Torre and Dancausa Millán, 2012). The profile of the wine tourist in Spain is characterised by a high degree of loyalty to the region and behaviour focused on experiential engagement, where the day-tripper seeks to become a tourist by staying overnight, diversifying their spending on complementary activities (ACEVIN, 2023). To ensure success, an integrated approach is required that brings together the diversity of existing resources in the region (ACEVIN, 2018; Andrade-Suárez and Caamaño-Franco, 2020; Cruz-Ruiz et al., 2020). At the national level, the role of the Wine Routes is fundamental, acting as the main driver of territorial integration through a diversified offering that includes 740 member wineries and a network bringing together 2,611 wine tourism services across 37 routes (ACEVIN, 2024). The most popular activities at national level include visits to wineries (85.15%), visits to villages (70.60%) and enjoying local cuisine (64.92%) (ACEVIN, 2022).

In the regional context of Galicia, wine tourism is experiencing significant growth and is seen as an essential strategy for economic diversification and territorial cohesion, helping to retain the population in rural areas and deseasonalise tourism demand, which traditionally depended on coastal tourism and the Camino de Santiago. The region is home to 841 agri-food businesses, 60% of which are exclusively dedicated to wine production (Pérez-Romero et al., 2022), firmly structured around the quality of its five Designations of Origin (DO) with historical and small-scale farming roots: Rías Baixas, Ribeiro, Ribeira Sacra, Valdeorras and Monterrei. The first wine route to be registered in Spain was that of Cambados, within the Rías Baixas DO. The Rías Baixas DO, established in 1988, has experienced extraordinary growth, expanding from its initial 14 wineries to the current 176, producing over 26 million litres of certified wine thanks to its more than 4,900 winegrowers (Rías Baixas DO Regulatory Council, 2025). The impact of this activity on the Galician labour market is significant: in the Rías Baixas alone, the sector generates 7,600 stable direct jobs and 5,200 temporary ones, accounting for up to 20% of employment during the harvest season in key areas such as the Salnés region (Rías Baixas D.O. Regulatory Council, 2025).

The image of Rías Baixas has been heavily based on this food and wine promotion, which has enabled it to position itself effectively in the minds of tourists, generate high repeat visit rates and motivate the business community (Caamaño-Franco et al., 2020). The Rías Baixas Wine Route possesses clear and sustained competitive advantages over other destinations thanks to the adoption of successful strategies involving various stakeholders (Rodrigues Soares and Macedo Castro Gabriel, 2016). From the perspective of the businesses along the route, the wine tourism offering is the most highly valued aspect of the destination's image, surpassing the accommodation and gastronomic offerings themselves (Del Río Rama et al., 2014). In 2023, it ranked as the seventh most visited route nationally and is currently the only Galician route to hold official ACEVIN certification, recording 144,743 wine tourists (Patiño Romarís, 2025). However, operational management faces the severe challenges posed by its wine-growing landscape, which is characterised by a high degree of small-scale landholding: the Rías Baixas DO covers around 4,500 hectares divided into more than 23,380 plots farmed by almost 5,000 winegrowers, with the Val do Salnés sub-region being the predominant hub accounting for 96% of Albariño grape production (Patiño Romarís, 2025). Professionalisation has driven the creation of integrated products with high added value, such as 'Wine tourism by bike' via mountain bike routes.

In contrast, in other parts of Galicia, particularly in the south and the interior of the region (areas such as the Ribeiro and Monterrei Designations of Origin), development faces organisational barriers. There is a marked territorial divide: whilst the coast accounts for much of the region's tourism success, the interior faces significant challenges. The Ribeiro DO, despite possessing a unifying historical identity, excellent connectivity and complementary resources such as thermal spas and

historical heritage, still shows a notable weakness in its tourist flows (Pérez-Fra et al., 2021). According to official data, whilst the Rías Baixas Wine Route attracts well over 116,000 visitors, historic inland regions such as Ribeiro barely exceed 13,000 (ACEVIN, 2019). In the Valdeorras region, the so-called 'Godello miracle' has established its wines on the international stage, based on the ability of family-run wineries to combine traditional knowledge with technological innovation throughout the value chain (Del Campo Tejedor, 2024; Bresciani, Vrontis & Thrassou, 2013; Vrontis, Bresciani & Giacosa, 2016). Furthermore, the Ribeira Sacra D.O. (authorised in 1996) covers 2,500 hectares (5.2% of Galicia's vineyard area), distributed across five historic sub-zones along the Miño and Sil river valleys (Ribeira Sacra D.O. Regulatory Council). It stands out as a prime example due to the spectacular nature of its landscapes dedicated to 'heroic viticulture' on terraces and steep riverbanks – where cultivation adapts to valleys with distinct climatic characteristics and rainfall ranging from 700 to 900 mm, favouring varieties such as Mencía, Godello or Loureira—and has been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, making wine tourism and its digital presence key drivers for the development of the region's Destination Place Brand (DPB) (López Troitiño et al., 2025; Patiño Romarís et al., 2026).

Strategic assets and tangible and intangible infrastructure (routes, museums and festivals) shape the visitor experience and define resilience and competitiveness in the face of the challenges of global digitalisation (Compés López and Szolnoki, 2020). Wine routes act as product clusters that form the backbone of the region, although in Galicia they still face physical and digital infrastructure challenges (Compés López and Szolnoki, 2020), reinforcing the wine landscape as a central element of its identity (Patiño Romarís et al., 2026). Alongside them, wine museums represent a highly significant asset, given that 28.82% of wine tourists already include a visit to wine museums in their itinerary (ACEVIN, 2022). Galician museums such as the Museo do Viño de Galicia, the Museo Etnolóxico and the Museo Etnográfico e do Viño de Cambados fulfil a dual function: they safeguard the tangible and intangible heritage of ancestral practices and serve as interpretation centres that educate tourists prior to their visit to the winery, acting as catalysts for seasonality reduction and the attraction of high-quality cultural tourism. In the Ribeira Sacra, the built heritage itself acts as a living museum, where traditional wineries, huts, terraced vineyards and viewpoints enrich the interpretative experience (Patiño Romarís et al., 2026). In Tuscany, meanwhile, wine museums range from large institutions such as the Greve in Chianti Wine Museum or the Museo della Vite e del Vino in Rufina, to private collections housed in castles and estates that incorporate contemporary art galleries or avant-garde architectural installations that enhance brand positioning.

Finally, wine festivals represent one of the main drivers of visibility and visitor attraction, complementing the activity of the routes and facilitating the diversification of the offering in highly competitive wine-producing micro-regions (Patiño Romarís, 2025; Patiño Romarís et al., 2026). In Galicia, the Ribeiro Wine Fair in Ribadavia stands out as a historic and pioneering event, the first edition of which dates back to 1964; (Ribeiro D.O. Regulatory Council). The Festa do Albariño in Cambados (founded in 1953 and held on the first weekend of August) has been declared of International Tourist Interest and is one of the oldest food and wine festivals in Spain (Patiño Romarís et al., 2026). In Tuscany, the calendar is driven by nationally coordinated initiatives such as Cantine Aperte, or local fairs such as the Chianti Classico Expo or Benvenuto Brunello, events that generate an extraordinary volume of digital interactions and specialist publications globally.

3.2. Global analysis of digital interest

3.2.1 Analysis of the evolution of digital interest in search engines for terms related to wine from the regions of Galicia and of Tuscany

In this analysis, we examine the digital interest in the terms with the highest digital relevance on Google Trends from 2004 to the present day. The analysis was conducted based on terms extracted from both wine varieties and the names of designations of origin, comparing the eight terms from each region with the greatest international significance. This has enabled us, firstly, to identify the brand element of each region with regard to wine, as well as to compare trends in each region. By analysing the terms with the highest digital relevance collectively and without distinguishing between wine varieties and designations of origin, we can observe the relative importance of the DOs compared to wine varieties based on their digital interest. Thus, according to our research, the terms with the highest digital interest in both regions are as follows:

Table II: Ranking of terms with the highest digital interest compared by region based on data accumulated from 2004 to 2026

	Term	Rank	Average interest
Galicia	Albariño	Grape variety	44
	Rías Baixas	DO	8
	Godello	Grape Variety	6
	Valdeorras	Grape variety	5
	Ribeira Sacra	DO	4
	Ribeiro	DO	4
	Monterrei	DO	2
	Treixadura	Grape variety	1
Tuscany	Chianti	DOCG	56
	Brunello di Montalcino	DOCG	17
	Sangiovese	Grape variety	12
	Malvasia	Grape variety	7
	Carmignano	DOCG	6
	Vermentino	Grape variety	5
	Suvereto	DOCG	3
	Trebbiano	Grape variety	3

Source: Compiled by the author based on Google Trends data

Table II shows that, in both Tuscany and Galicia, one specific term clearly dominates the digital landscape and accounts for the highest relative search interest within the compared set. In the case of Galicia, the Albariño grape variety concentrates the greatest share of relative digital interest associated with the region's wine-related terms. Far below this leading term are the Rías Baixas Designation of Origin and the Godello grape variety. In the case of Tuscany, "Chianti" stands out as the main focus of digital interest, followed by the DOCG "Brunello di Montalcino" and the "Sangiovese" grape variety, although both remain considerably behind Chianti in terms of relative search interest. Although Table II presents cumulative digital interest from 2004 to early 2026, the ranking does not necessarily reflect the current prominence of each term. To better understand present-day digital interest and its evolution over time, it is therefore necessary to analyse the longitudinal trajectory of each term across the period studied.

Analysis of the Galician case

In the Galician case, Fig. 1 shows the clear dominance of the term 'Albariño' as a wine brand in the region of Galicia. Consequently, the Rías Baixas region emerges as the DO with the highest digital interest. Although it has been the most digitally prominent element since 2004, 2017 appears to mark a turning point with the disappearance of other brands associated with the DOs and the gradual expansion of 'Albariño' alongside the emergence of 'Godello' as a distinct and prominent brand. Currently, in relative and comparative terms, we can only speak of two elements with any digital significance in the world of wine in Galicia: Albariño and Godello. In this regard, the most prominent regions of Galicia in terms of digital interest are the coastal area of Pontevedra, which belongs to the Rías Baixas DO, and, by extension of the term 'Godello', the Valdeorras and Monterrei DOs.

Digital interest in the region of Galicia shows that half of the most relevant terms are DOs and the other half are grape varieties. Thus, over the cumulative data period, DOs garner a digital interest score of 16 compared to a score of 56 for grape varieties. From this perspective, grape varieties carry significant digital weight compared to the DO brands. However, the high digital generation capacity of Albariño distorts the overall calculation. To analyse the digital potential of both sets of terms, a Theil-Sen analysis was conducted on the set of accumulated data between DOs and grape varieties (Fig. 2). As expected, the line for

grape varieties is higher than that for DOs. However, it is worth noting that in 2004 the Theil-Sen lines for DOs and grape varieties started from a similar position on the graph, which nevertheless diverged considerably as the years progressed until reaching their current peak. In fact, we can see that from 2017 onwards, the digital weight of the DOs practically disappears, driven by the decline in the weight of the Rías Baixas, Valdeorras and Ribeiro DOs (the latter to a lesser extent), whilst the line for grape varieties increases exponentially, driven by the relative rise of 'Albariño' and 'Godello'.

Analysis of the Tuscan case

In the case of the Tuscany region, there is also a clear brand element that surpasses the other terms analysed (Fig. 3). In this region, 'Chianti' is the term that attracts the lion's share of digital interest in search engines. However, unlike in the Galician case, the trend in digital interest in the term 'Chianti' remains consistent relative to the other most relevant terms. Thus, in addition to Chianti, there are other terms with digital appeal, such as 'Brunello di Montalcino' or 'Sangiovese', which have maintained a certain digital presence over the years. In the case of Tuscany, the DOCGs carry much greater weight as brand elements, with "Sangiovese" being the only significant grape variety (logically, given its widespread use across all DOCGs). To a lesser extent, the other DOCGs (Carmignano and Suvereto) maintain relatively low and stable search levels. Among the white varieties, Vermentino, Trebbiano and Malvasia show modest search volumes, but with a slightly upward trend towards the end of the period. Finally, we can observe greater consistency in digital interest over time, with the three most frequently used terms remaining stable, with similar relative interest, since the start of the analysed period.

On the other hand, when comparing the digital weight of DOCGs and grape varieties, the digital weight shows greater stability and two Theil-Sen lines which, despite their enormous differences due to Chianti's significant dominance, are converging slightly (unlike in the Galician case) (Fig. 4). Thus, the Theil-Sen trend line for DOs (dashed red) shows a relatively flat slope, indicating that their level of interest remains relatively stable over the period analysed. The gap between the two groups remains wide, although the rise in grape varieties suggests a gradual shift in search patterns. Overall, the graph reflects a pattern in which territorial identity remains central, but in which grape varieties are beginning to gain progressively greater visibility in the digital environment. In summary, the correlation between DOCGs and grape varieties is more stable and, if we were to remove the distorting factor of Chianti, it would be almost parallel and tending towards convergence (unlike in the Galician case).

For the comparison between Galicia and Tuscany, the terms exceeding a digital interest score of 10 points in Table II were used to produce a representative figure. In the Galician case, only the term 'Albariño' was analysed, whilst in the Tuscan case, the terms Chianti, Brunello di Montalcino and Sangiovese were analysed. Given the significant weight of the term 'Chianti', the inclusion of other Galician terms would not be feasible within the same comparative graph. Thus, as can be seen in Fig. 5, the international comparison of the most influential terms in Tuscany and Galicia clearly shows the dominance of Chianti due to its significant international presence. However, if we remove this term, Albariño currently has a similar digital weight to the DOCG Brunello di Montalcino and to the most widely used grape variety in Tuscany: Sangiovese. The major difference lies in the apparent shift that Albariño seems to have undergone over the last 10 years or so in terms of its search peaks. Like other wine terms, Tuscan terms reach their peak of interest in winter, coinciding with Western Christmas festivities. As can be seen in the graph below, Tuscan terms reach their peaks near the blue bands (mainly in late November). However, since around 2016, Albariño has seen its peaks in digital interest in summer (a trend that has intensified and become established from 2020 onwards). This suggests a potential link between Albariño and the Rías Baixas DO with the high-impact sun and beach tourism in this region.

3.3. International comparative analysis and seasonality

When comparing the leading wines of both regions ("Albariño" for Galicia; "Chianti", "Brunello di Montalcino" and "Sangiovese" for Tuscany), Chianti's overwhelming global dominance stands out. However, if we exclude Chianti, "Albariño" currently matches the DOCG "Brunello di Montalcino" and the "Sangiovese" grape in terms of international digital presence.

The most notable difference lies in seasonality. Historically, wine-related terms (including those from Tuscany) see their peak search volumes during the winter, coinciding with the Western Christmas holidays (November/December). However, since 2016 (and more markedly since 2020), peaks in digital interest in "Albariño" have occurred predominantly during the summer months.

This seasonal dynamic empirically demonstrates a hyper-dependence on coastal summer tourism flows and cross-selling at wineries, directly linking interest in the wine to in-person beach leisure (Associazione Italiana Turismo Enogastronomico &

ISMEA, 2024). Whilst this represents a direct opportunity for on-site revenue during the summer, it exposes the Galician sector to a profound structural weakness. During the systemic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions on international travel caused Albariño's digital footprint to plummet, whilst Tuscan brands such as Brunello remained stable or grew thanks to their established presence in global e-commerce channels. Added to this is the alarming international competitive gap in Spanish wine tourism: whilst competing destinations record shares of foreign tourists visiting wineries of between 41% and 43%, the average number of international visitors in the Iberian Peninsula lies significantly below this, at a lagging 31.5% (Szolnoki, 2025).

4. Discussion

The comparative analysis of the digital footprint using Google Trends has profound implications for the competitiveness and long-term sustainability of the wine-producing regions studied. By cross-referencing digital interest metrics with the territorial and demographic realities of Galicia and Tuscany, two contrasting models of brand building emerge. The results reveal profound divergences that call for a critical debate on the resilience of wine tourism destinations.

The first significant finding lies in the conceptualisation of the brand in the digital environment. In the Tuscan model, global interest is dominated by the institutional brand intrinsically linked to the territory, with Denominazioni di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG) such as 'Chianti' and 'Brunello di Montalcino' acting as standard-bearers. The consolidated success of these Italian designations in both the digital and physical environments stems from a long process of territorial enhancement and market integration (Zenobi, 2025). This strategy protects geographical terms, ensuring an inimitable and globally secure competitive advantage.

In contrast, the Spanish case shows a clear decline in the "territorial brand" (Designation of Origin / Wineries) compared to the rise of the "product brand", represented by the grape variety, such as "Albariño" and, increasingly, "Godello". This loss of institutional clout suggests a lack of centralised digitalisation and internationalisation plans on the part of the governing bodies of the DOs.

The analysis of the seasonality of digital searches has provided a precise snapshot of the maturity of destinations and the nature of consumption. The Tuscan model shows stable digital interest, with historical peaks during the winter. This reflects consumption linked to winter cuisine, culture, Christmas festivities and, fundamentally, sustained exports throughout the year.

In contrast, Galicia exhibits a model that is hyper-dependent on 'sun and beach' tourism, which dominates the Rías Baixas, evidenced by the shift in search peaks for 'Albariño' towards July and August, a trend that has intensified since 2016. A much stronger correlation between physical tourism and wine is therefore observed in Galicia compared to Tuscany.

5. Conclusions

The digital footprint of a wine-producing region allows for a precise analysis of its brand health, its level of tourism maturity and its resilience in today's globalised market. This study, based on a comparative analysis of search volumes, concludes that Galicia and Tuscany represent two diametrically opposed models of online positioning.

Tuscany exemplifies the success of an institutionalised, mature and sustainable model. Its main strength lies in having established its territorial protection designations (the DOCGs, led by Chianti) internationally as inimitable and prestigious brands. This allows it to deseasonalise tourist flows to rural inland areas throughout the year, attracting an international market with high purchasing power and consolidating integrated themed accommodation infrastructures that respond effectively to external shocks (Associazione Italiana Turismo Enogastronomico and ISMEA, 2024). This model has generated stable digital interest, linked to classic patterns of winter seasonality, and is highly resilient to systemic shocks. Proof of this is that, during the standstill in tourism caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, interest in Brunello and Sangiovese actually grew. This dynamism is reflected in future investment trends among wineries, with 51% globally having clear intentions to continue investing in improving and innovating their wine tourism experiences (Szolnoki, 2025).

In contrast, Galicia represents an emerging model with enormous potential, yet one that is structurally vulnerable. Galicia operates as an emerging destination whose extraordinary international growth hinges almost exclusively on its white grape varieties, particularly Albariño and Godello. This dynamic has led to a clear decline in the institutional brand of the Designations of Origin (DO) compared to the prominence of the grape variety. Although Albariño has managed to match prestigious Italian brands in search volume, it failed to sustain its growth during the pandemic. It also suffers from the so-called 'Ourense Paradox': the appellations in the region's interior (Ribeiro, Ribeira Sacra, Valdeorras and Monterrei) possess the greatest endogenous advantages and iconic landscapes of heroic viticulture, yet they attract only marginal international digital interest compared to the coast. To overcome these vulnerabilities and move towards regional excellence, Galician wine tourism destinations must proactively integrate economic, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability as immutable pillars of their offering (Bayar et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the Galician model demonstrates a greater dependence of the wine sector on the dynamics of in-person tourism, particularly summer and coastal tourism. This creates an opportunity to attract visitors, but at the same time represents a structural weakness that concentrates digital interest in the summer and makes it highly vulnerable to fluctuations in conventional tourist flows. To overcome this vulnerability and emulate the competitive success of models such as Rías Baixas, the remaining wine routes must deepen strategies for cooperation between businesses and foster a competitive ecosystem that enhances the region's overall visibility against its international competitors (Rodrigues Soares and Macedo Castro, 2016). Indeed, to reverse this imbalance and ensure that Galicia's inland geographical areas (such as Ribeiro, Monterrei, Valdeorras or Ribeira Sacra) achieve optimal positioning, it is essential that destination management organisations (DMOs) and public administrations integrate wine culture prominently into their communication strategies. The wine landscape should not be a mere backdrop, but rather the central axis upon which the tourism image and territorial identity of the inland destination are built, correcting the current discrepancies in the digital imagination (Patiño Romarís et al., 2026).

It is essential to drive forward rigorous institutional digitalisation plans and a strategic modernisation of the entire wine sector, which will showcase the region's rich food and wine heritage in a cohesive manner and mitigate the impact of demographic decline in rural areas. In short, faced with an unstable global market and constantly evolving demand patterns, wine tourism should not be viewed merely as a supplementary source of income alongside conventional exports. It is, in fact, the main driver of the wine sector's socio-economic revival, acting as the most authentic and effective means of telling the story of the identity and intrinsic cultural richness of each wine-producing region (Zenobi, 2025).

Finally, despite its potential, this research has limitations that open up new avenues for study. Firstly, the use of the analytical tool provides data on users' informational and aspirational interest, but does not directly measure economic conversion in terms of actual sales or overnight stays. Secondly, languages and nomenclatures may introduce biases in searches originating from non-Western countries, such as the Asian market, where interest in European wine is on the rise. For future lines of research, it would be of great academic value to complement big data analysis with qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews with managers of Regulatory Councils and surveys of international tourists. Furthermore, replicating this methodology by introducing climate change variables to observe how rising temperatures affect interest in fresh wines, or by comparing the data with other emerging regions (for example, Vinho Verde in Portugal versus French regions), would help to consolidate a comprehensive global framework on the role of digital positioning in wine tourism for sustainable rural development.

Declarations

Author Contribution

B.M. was responsible for the methodology and results. C.A.P. developed the theoretical framework and conclusions. A.L. prepared the final version of the manuscript and conducted the overall review, with support from B.M. and C.A.P. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Data Availability

The data supporting this study are supplied as supplementary files with the manuscript: Bruto Google trendsPalabras Galicia.csv and time_series_Worldwide_20040101-0100_20260226-2121.csv (monthly Google Trends series for Galicia and Tuscany, respectively); IT-Gal comparison.csv (selected cross-region series); averageinterest rate by region.xlsx (summary interest measures); and codes.docx (Python code and descriptions for dataprocessing and figures). These files are available to the editors and reviewers through the submission system. TheGoogle Trends values are normalized relative search interest, rather than absolute search volumes.

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Figures

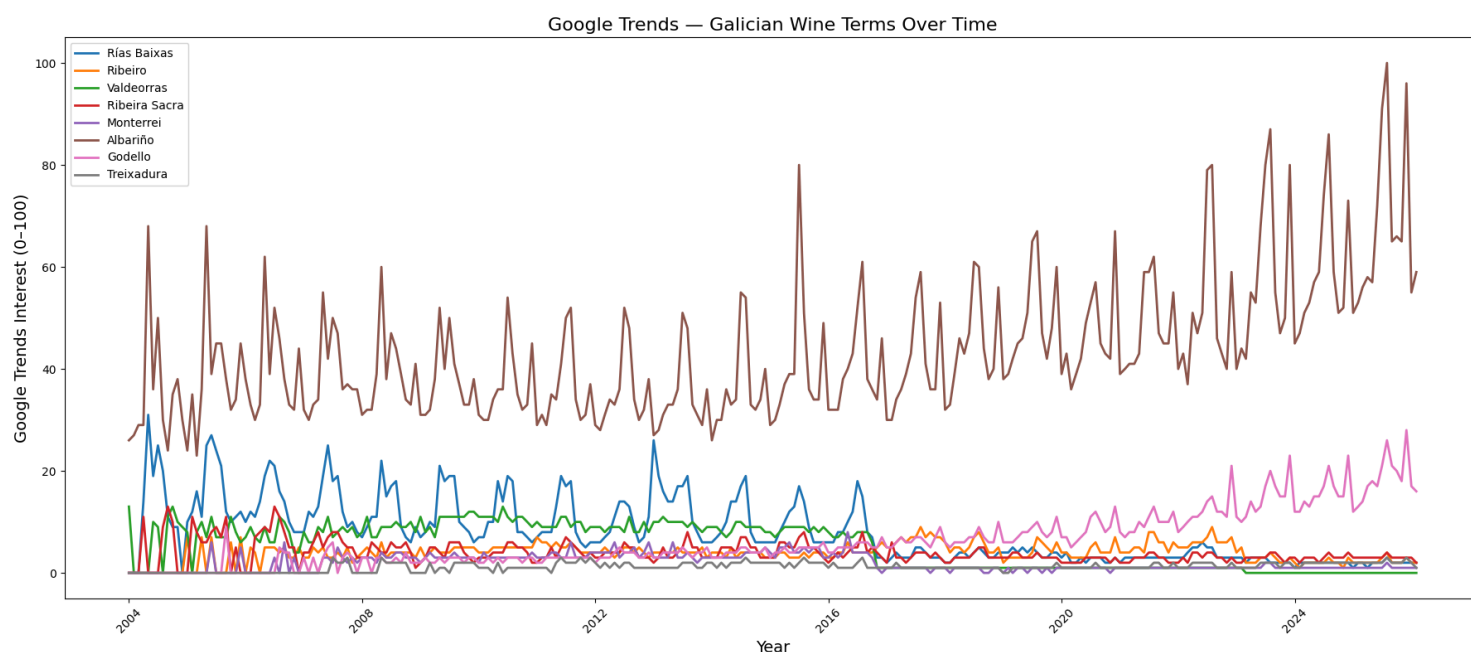


Figure 1

Google Search Trends for Galicia Wine Denominations and Grape Varieties (2004–2025)

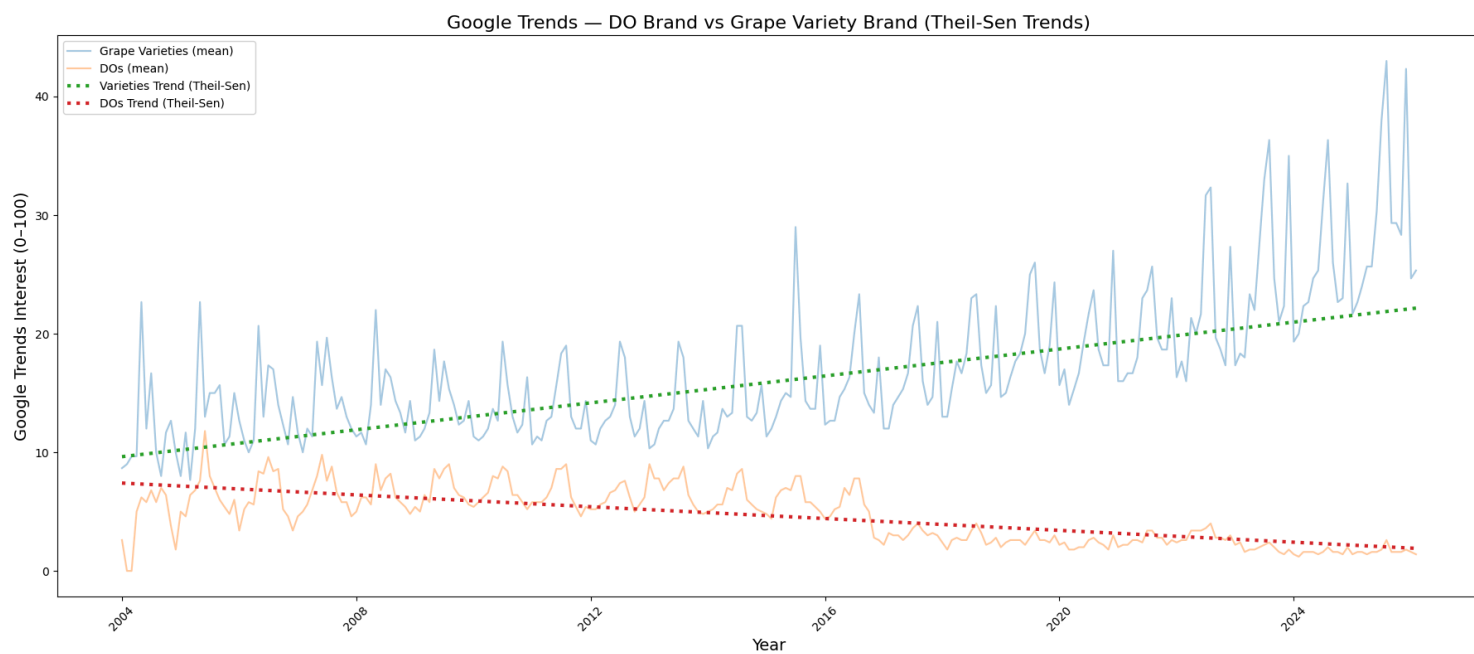


Figure 2

Long-Term Trends in Territorial vs Varietal Wine Branding in Galicia (Google Trends, Theil-Sen Estimation)

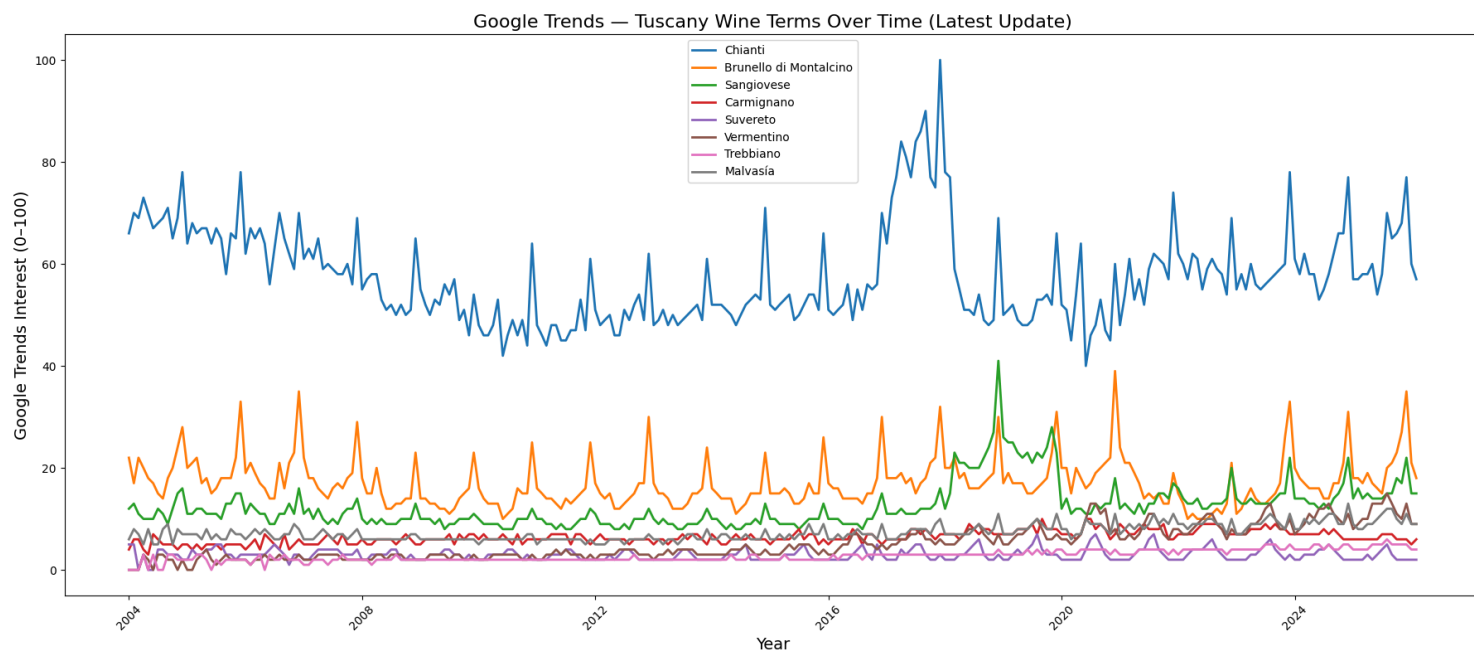


Figure 3

Google Search Trends for Tuscan Wine Denominations and Grape Varieties (2004–2025).

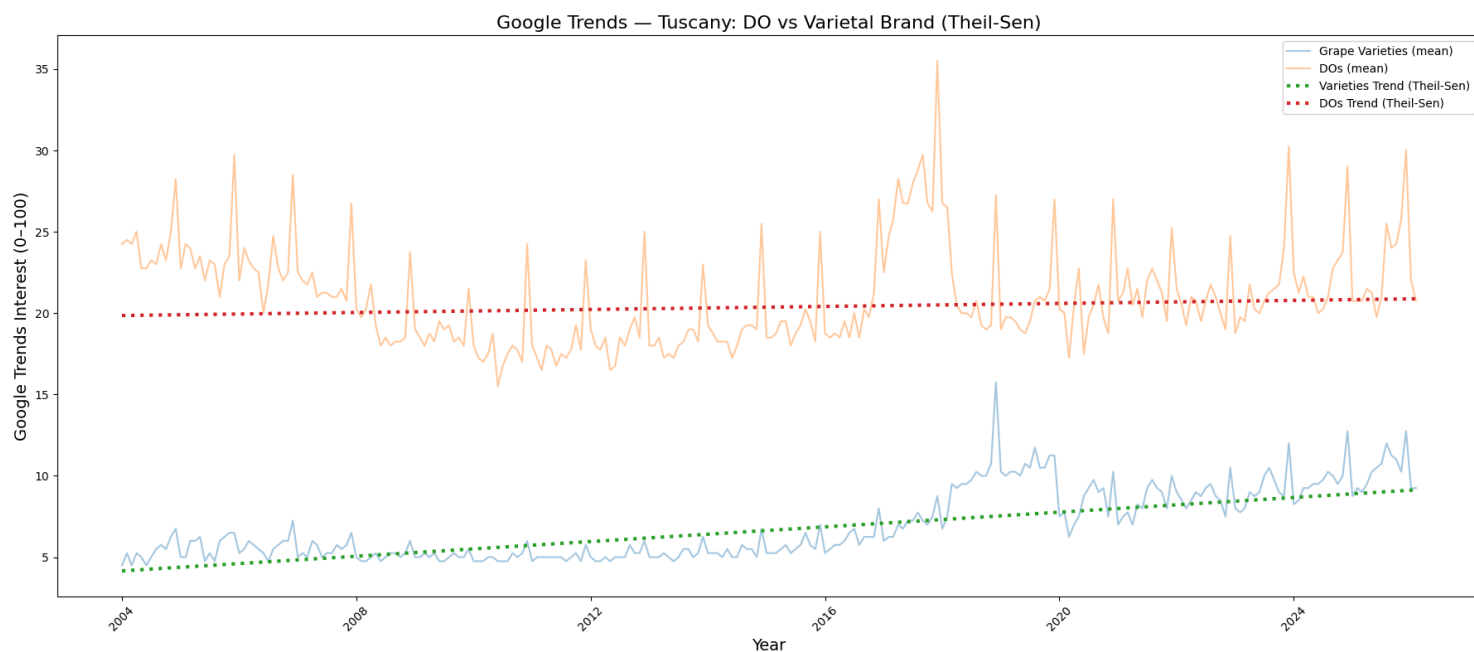


Figure 4

Long-Term Trends in Territorial vs Varietal Wine Branding in Tuscany (Google Trends, Theil-Sen Estimation)

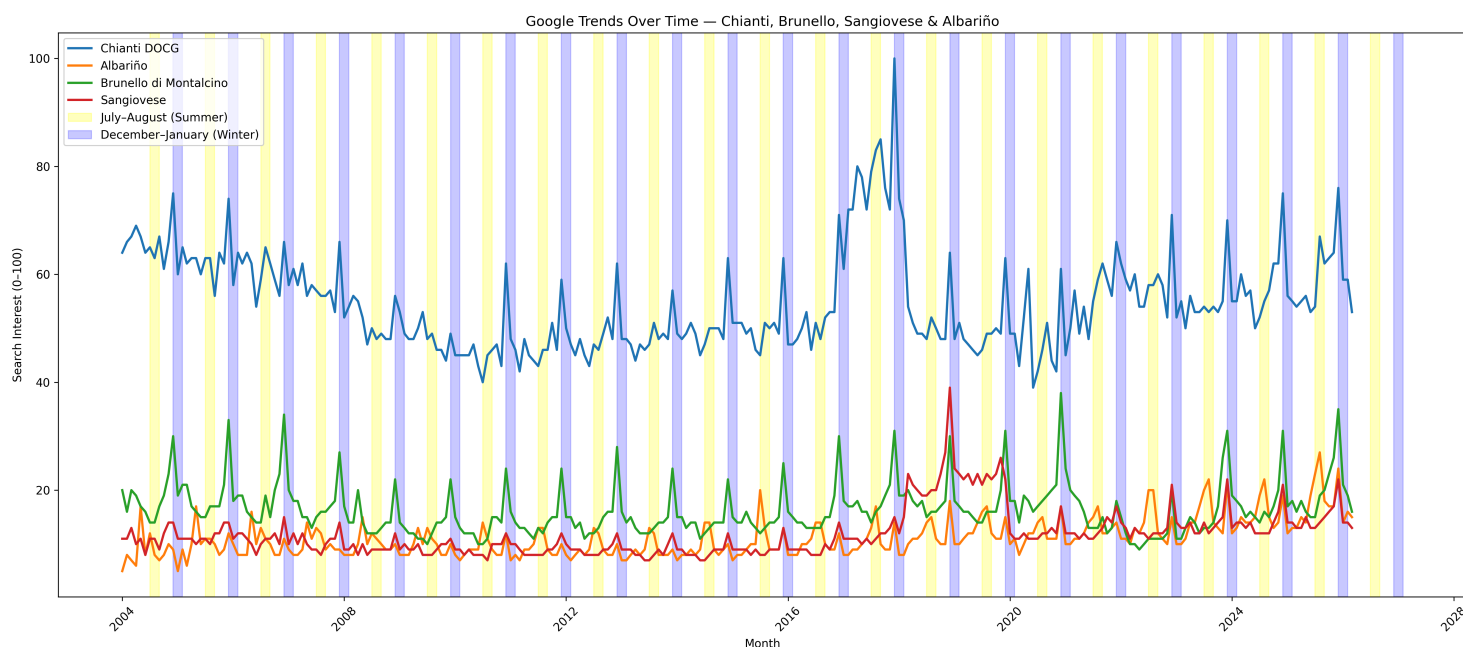


Figure 5

Seasonal Dynamics of Online Interest in Major Wine Terms: Evidence from Google Trends (2004–2025).

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