



A preliminary study of the relationship between Australian wine consumers' wine expertise and their wine purchasing and consumption behaviour

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- Wineries recognize that consumers are the key to the success of their products. Whereas the Australian export market is in very good health, the domestic Australian market has experienced very little growth in the last years. The goal of this study is to segment the Australian domestic market based on its degree of wine expertise, and gain knowledge about its consumption and purchasing behaviors.
- In a 2002 study, Dr. Ann Noble and her team showed that *wine knowledge* and *sensory acuity* are two very different forms of expertise, and that both are needed to provide a high level of overall wine expertise. Additionally, wine knowledge itself can be further divided into two categories: *objective wine knowledge*, or how much an individual knows about wine; and *subjective wine knowledge*, or how much they think they know about wine.
- The authors recruited 61 wine consumers from two sources -an Adelaide retail outlet (n=34), and the University of Adelaide campus (n=27)-, and subject them to three types of tests: 1) an objective wine knowledge test, 2) a sensory acuity test, and 3) a subjective wine knowledge test. They then asked them a series of demographic and purchasing behavior questions. The resulting data was analyzed to give the researchers an insight into “who purchases what, where, how much, and why”.
- Let’s learn about the nature of these tests. 1) The **objective wine knowledge test** consisted of 15 questions covering a variety of wine topics, with varying degrees of difficulty, specifically designed for the Australian consumer. Respondents got one point per correct question, for a maximum score of 15. (You can check out the questionnaire on Table 1 of the original text, and see what your score is!)
- 2) The **sensory acuity test** consisted of the identification of ten common wine aromas. The respondent scored 2 points for a perfectly recognized answer (for example, “rose”, or “raspberry”); 1 point for recognizing only the family the aroma belonged to (for example, “floral”, or “fruity”); and 0 points for an incorrectly named aroma -or no answer. At this point, the results of tests 1) and 2) were averaged to come up with a total score for “**wine expertise**”.
- 3) The **subjective wine knowledge test**, aimed at gauging a respondent’s perception of their own wine knowledge, consisted of five positively- and negatively- worded questions. For example, “*Among my circles of friends, I’m one of the experts*”, or “*Compared to other people, I know less about wines*”. The scores ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree) for each question. The individual scores were calculated to provide an estimation of “**wine subjective knowledge**”.
- **Relationship between the different tests.** The scores for objective and subjective wine knowledge were highly correlated, meaning one could be considered a predictor of the other. (A previous study had shown that the correlation between what one knows and what one thinks they know was much stronger for French consumers than for American consumers). In contrast, there was poor correlation between objective

knowledge and aroma identification. This suggests that it is inappropriate to infer that someone with expertise in general wine knowledge also is skilled in wine aroma identification.

- **Wine expertise levels.** According to the wine expertise score, the respondents were divided into 3 expertise levels: high, medium, and low. This is how these expertise levels were distributed regarding *gender, age, length of drinking experience, and formal wine training*: 1) Males dominated the high expertise level and females dominated the low expertise level, with the medium level split equally between sexes. 2) Young females (< 35 years of age) were prominent in the low and medium expertise group. Older respondents were equally divided between the three expertise categories. 3) There were no differences between the three expertise levels in the amount of time the respondents had been consuming wine, that is, a longer consumption experience didn't necessarily make the respondents more knowledgeable. As expected, the older the consumers were, the longer their drinking experience tended to be. Finally, 4) there was a large positive correlation between wine expertise and formal wine training.

- **Purchasing behavior.** The high-expertise respondents tended to consume the most wine per week, spend the most money, and purchase the most 750 ml bottles (and the least 2 liter "casks"). However, the differences were not large enough to be significant among the groups.

- **Preferred wine styles.** *Red wine* was consumed preferentially by low and medium expertise males. *White wine* was preferred more by low expertise females and high expertise respondents of both sexes. *Sparkling wine* and *rose wine* were consumed mainly by low expertise females, followed by medium expertise females. *Fortified wines* were preferred mainly by low expertise males.

- **Reasons for purchasing wine.** Respondents were asked to rank 20 reasons for their decision to buy a particular wine, in terms of importance (1=not at all important; 5=extremely important). The items with the highest scores - the purchase drivers- were *wine style*, followed by *price*, for all respondents. *Wine quality* was the second most important purchase driver for the medium and high expertise groups. *Recommendations from friends, family and colleagues* ranked high for the low expertise group. In contrast, *region of origin*, and *reputation of the winemaker* ranked high only for the high expertise group. Unlike the high expertise group, the low-expertise group was easily swayed by *awards or medals*, or by *advertising, promotions, or specials*. Interestingly, high expertise respondents ranked *recommendations from wine writers* significantly higher than the other two segments.

- **Preferred purchase channels.** *Supermarket-owned national chain wine retailers* dominated the market of preferred purchase locations (about 35% of all channels). The Australian *HORECA sector* (hotel + restaurant + café, where wine is bought and consumed on the premises) was the second largest avenue for purchases (22%). *Independent wine retailers* came in third with a 15% share. *Mail order* was an important channel (12%) only for the high expertise group. Consistent with previous studies, purchases via the *internet* were very low (< 1%).

In summary, high-expertise Australian wine consumers – dominated by males - purchased more wine and consumed wine more frequently than other less knowledgeable consumers. They purchased mostly in supermarket-owned national chains, the HORECA sector and from independent wine retailers. The data suggests it would be wise for the Australian wine industry to support wine education initiatives to boost domestic sales. The authors are administering these tests on a wider national scale to gain further insights into the behavior of the Australian consumers.

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