# An Exploratory Study into Wine Drinking in Bars, Pubs And Nightclubs in the United States

By

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## Abstract

Wine is not only consumed with food, but drinkers are now more often choosing wine by itself while patronizing bars and nightclubs. In the fast growing US wine market, this phenomenon has received little scholarly research. Using both quantitative data from an online survey and qualitative data gathered from a focus group, this study explores how situational factors motivate and influence wine consumption in bars and nightclubs. Suggestions for future research are discussed.

#### Introduction

Wine sales in the United States are continuing their climb with a 6.8% increase in revenues in 2007 over the previous year (Quakenbush, 2008). There are many factors contributing to this unprecedented growth which is creating the largest market for wine in the world. For the first time ever, core consumers, those adults who drink at least one glass of wine a week, outnumber those people who enjoy wine but drink it less frequently (Wine Business Insider, 2007). No longer is wine saved for only special occasions, rather wine is becoming an everyday beverage and wine drinking is showing up in places never before associated with wine, such as sporting events, outdoor activities, nightclubs, dance parties, and bars. Changes in the context of wine consumption is often attributed to the fact that consumers are adopting wine at a younger age and the Millennial Generation, those consumers in their twenties, now represents the fastest growing demographic of wine drinkers (Nowak, Thach and Olsen, 2006). Younger consumers appear to have different attitudes about wine and prefer wines that are more approachable, easy to drink, and fit into their busy, social lifestyles (Cuneo, 2000).

For many young adults, wine is becoming their drink of choice and they are more likely to choose wine over beer and spirits when it is available. The combination of the increased popularity of wine among younger consumers and the acceptance of wine drinking in new situations has contributed to the appearance of a new wine trend, the cocktail wine. Either on its own or mixed with other flavors or beverages, wine is now showing up bars and nightclubs and competing with beer and mixed drinks for the attention of patrons (Chapa, 2007).

The idea that wine might be enjoyed as a cocktail drink can be considered rather surprising given the history of how wine has typically been promoted and the generally accepted notion of the place where wine should be consumed. For many wine lovers the proper place for wine is at the dinner table (Straus, 2008). One special appeal of wine has been its natural affinity for food and the belief that the combination of food and wine makes both the food and the wine more delicious. The strong connection between wine and food appears to be as old as wine consumption itself. We can only speculate on how and when the first wines made were consumed, but it seems reasonable to assume that stone-age hunters may have found that wine made their tough, wild meat more palatable

(Pellechia 2006, p. 5.) Certainly by the time of the Greeks, wine was recognized as an intrinsic part of the meal and it appears that the connection between the two has remained throughout history (Johnson, 2004).

The fact that wine enhances food remains a cornerstone of wine consumption even today. The art of wine and food pairing has become a highly evolved discipline with numerous books published to guide consumers in their choices. More and more fine restaurants employ sommeliers to provide guests with recommendations on the perfect wine to match their dinners. Wineries often feature on their websites advice on how to pair their wines with foods. Growth in sales of Riesling is attributed to its ability to pair well with food (Tinney, 2006), and the growing awareness of Spanish wines in the US is partly attributed their being featured on more menus in the increasingly popular Tapa bars.

With so much emphasis placed on the proper matching of wine and food, one could easily forget there are many who find pleasure in enjoying wine on its own. Yet the idea of wine as an aperitif is certainly not new, and wine has long been consumed in sidewalk cafés in Europe as people relax and socialize in the late afternoon and evening. This trend however has not been a part of American culture. Many bars and pubs feature happy hours with drink specials for the after work crowd, but it is typically beer or mixed drinks that are promoted. Fancier nightclubs more often promote mixed drinks, with the bartender's ability to blend, shake and serve cocktails a show in and of itself.

Of course wine is usually available to order in a bar or nightclub; however until recently it was not the drink most people usually associated with these types of establishments. In those bars where wine drinking is more common, food is more likely to be featured (Pratten and Lovatt, 2007). But in the last decade drinking wine in place of beer or spirits in a bar or nightclub, without food has become a more common occurrence. These changes hold important implications for wine marketers. For example, Pinot Grigio, Rosé and sparkling wine sales in the US have increased recently as the wines' appeal as an aperitif is recognized (Gueller, 2003; *Wine Business Monthly*, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to better understand wine drinking when it occurs in a bar or nightclub. Since the role that a bar or nightclub plays in a society depends on its unique historical and cultural context, this study focuses on the US market. The study is exploratory in nature and investigates the motivations that might lead to the selection of wine, the image of wine and wine drinkers in bars and restaurants.

#### **Literature Review**

The recognition that one's consumer behavior is influenced by the situation in which consumption occurs is not a new concept (Belk, 1974). Wine researchers have recognized that to fully understand wine consumption, situational influences must be taken into consideration. Over the past two decades, there have been several studies by

wine researchers to classify consumers based on either their motivations for drinking wine and the context or situation in which wine consumption occurs.

One of the earliest studies to look at situational influences clustered respondents based on the occasions in which wine was consumed (Dubow, 1992). From the analyses a social group was identified, accounting for 35% of the volume of wine consumed by users in the study. Motives for wine consumption within this social group included being sociable and friendly, sharing something special and celebrating an occasion. Although these motives are ones that could lead people to a bar or club, the actual setting of the consumption experience was not investigated and these social motives could just as easily be met by sharing wine with friends at home or at a fine dining restaurant.

Researchers using Australian samples continued to investigate situational factors with regards to wine consumptions. Hall and Lockshin (2000) found that motives for wine consumption differed with the occasion in which wine was consumed and that values related to fun and enjoyment were more likely to be associated with wine at parties. Using wine for mood enhancement and developing warm relations with others was factors associated with having a casual drink with friends. Again, while parties and meeting friends for a casual drink may occur in bars and nightclubs, the same occasions could occur in one's home as well.

Research has shown that the occasion in which wine consumption occurs holds important marketing implications. Specifically, the product attributes desired by consumers have been shown to vary based on when wine is consumed (Quester and Smart, 1998). Consumers' ratings of the importance of product attributes, including price, the grape variety and wine style was different across situations, and highly involved consumers also differed in their preference of a wine's region of origin. Again, although the situation in which wine was consumed was found to be an important factor, the three situations investigated in this Australian study were wine at home with dinner, wine to take to a friend's dinner party, and wine to give as a gift. Wine consumption in a bar or nightclub was not considered.

Several other researchers in Australia have built upon this segmentation oriented research and have identified market segment in their home market comprised of individuals whose wine consumption revolves around drinking wine in social settings, usually on weekends and with or without food (Bruwer, Li and Reid, 2001; Johnson, 2003). Pettigrew (2003) used qualitative data to investigate the impact of the consumption experience on Australian consumers. Her findings suggest that wine was seen as more appropriate for having with food and beer was the drink of choice for having by itself in pubs and clubs. However gender played a role in the perceptions, as wine consumption by women was seen as more acceptable even when there was no food being served.

Outside of the Australian context, research studies looking at situational influences are relatively rare. One exception is Ritche's recent study that investigated wine consumption in the United Kingdom (2007). In her qualitative study, focus group

participants commented on drinking wine in pubs and nightclubs. Younger respondents did not see wine consumption in a pub or nightclub as appropriate behavior, especially for males. Older respondents were slightly more accepting of wine alone in a pub or nightclub, but expressed concerns that the wine available in a pub would be of low quality and would not taste good or it would be too expensive to be a good value. Ordering wine in a nightclub where patrons leave their seats to socialize or dance was seen as too risky by some respondents. The open glass drink could be stolen, or more seriously, doctored while the drinker was away from the table.

Within the United States, one study was found that investigated situational factors in wine consumption. Using a sample of panel respondents from the western United States, Orth has shown that a consumer's choice of brand and the benefits desired in a wine varied across three situations; wine for oneself, for serving to friends or for a gift (2005). Greater social benefits were found to be more sought after by younger consumers who are more likely to be concerned about the opinions of others. Again although situational differences were demonstrated, the situations investigated in the study did not include wine consumed in bars or nightclubs.

Taken together, these previous studies demonstrate the importance of situational factors on wine consumption. To summarize, the studies also serve to identify the broad array of motivations that lead to wine consumption in different situations. The studies show that the benefits sought from wine and the specific brand chosen all differ depending on situational factors. However, most of the previous studies do not specifically look at wine consumed without food in a bar or nightclub setting and none of the studies looked at wine in bars or nightclubs in an American context. Since wine consumption has been shown to be affected by cultural considerations (Hall, Shaw and Doole, 1994), there remains a need for research on wine consumer behavior in bars and nightclubs in the US. This study's objective is to provide a preliminary investigation and foundation for future research to address this important market phenomenon.

# **Research Study**

This empirical study is considered exploratory in nature and made use of both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data came from an online survey that had been previously conducted to obtain data on wine consumption in the U.S. The qualitative information helped to interpret the findings of the survey and to shed more light on the motivations and perceptions of bar and nightclub patrons who order wine.

**Quantitative Data.** An online survey was administered by the trade organization Wine Vision and was sent to a convenience sample of wine drinkers in all regions of the U.S. The total number of surveys completed was 6715 and of these, over 90% were considered core wine drinkers, drinking one at least once of week or more. Core consumers were retained for analyses in this study leaving a sample size of 5939. The overall sample was 51.2% male and 48.8% female. The ages of the respondents ranged from 21 to 67.

While the survey instrument was not specifically developed for the study at hand, there were several questions that pertained to wine consumption in a bar or nightclub. The first question screened respondents as to whether they had ever ordered wine in a bar with friends. If the answer was yes, the second question asked about the frequency in which they now order wine in a bar. People who did not visit bars or nightclubs were few given the nature of the sample and they were classified as missing values. There were 5793 remaining in the sample that could be classified according to their frequency of wine consumption in bars and nightclubs. The responses to these questions were used to create 3 groups. The groups were comprised of wine consumers who never consumed wine in a bar or nightclub (Group 1), wine consumers who would sometimes consume wine in a bars or nightclub (Group 2), and those who frequently or always drinks wine when going to a bar or nightclub (Group 3). The number of respondents in Group 1 was 2379, in Group 2 the number was 1161, and the number in Group 3 was 2253.

Qualitative Data. The groups were first investigated to see if there were significant age differences among the segments. The mean 44.5 years for the group that never ordered wine was older (F= 76.45) than for Group 2 at 40.7 years and Group 1at 41.1. Based on this finding, a focus group of younger wine drinkers was conducted to capture the impressions of consumers most likely to order wine in a bar or nightclub. The focus group contained 6 participants ranging in age from 23 to 29. Although the group was younger than the average age found in the quantitative sample, they were avid wine drinkers and bar and club patrons and eager to share their opinions. There were 2 women and 4 men that provided responses. The participants could all be considered core wine drinkers, drinking at least 3 glasses of wine a week. They all regularly went out to bars and nightclubs, usually once a week on weekends, and 2 male participants went more often, about 2 to 3 times a week because they often went to bars after work. The focus group took place in a university setting in Northern California where wine consumption is common and their responses are not meant to represent the attitudes of all young people across the Unites States, rather the responses are used to suggest avenues for future research.

# **Research Findings**

Wine in Wine Bars, Casual Bars and Nightclubs. Participants in the focus group were first asked questions about the different types of bars and clubs that are found in the local area and how their wine consumption might vary depending on the nature of the establishment. Wine bars by their very definition are a place where one might feel comfortable drinking wine and so serve as a counterpoint to other types of bars and nightclubs. Several of the participants visited wine bars occasionally and all of them appreciated the fact that they focus on wine. The primary benefit appears to be the opportunity to try new wines at an affordable price.

"I really like the wine bar because I was able to try some Chateauneuf du Pape and some Bordeaux blends and they didn't cost me a fortune" (Male 1).

"I usually order reds, but the last time I was in a wine bar I was able to try a Cakebread flight so I got to try several different types of wines" (Female 1).

The participants saw going to a wine bar as a different experience that going to a pub or nightclub. It was seen as providing a more relaxed mellow atmosphere.

"A wine bar is a place you can go and chill and relax with a glass of wine. It is definitely more low key.... Yea, sometimes it has a more snobby image, but it is a good place to try some wines with a small group of people. It is nice kind of place when you are with a date and want to talk." (Male 2).

With wine bars out of the way, the remainder of the focus group was spent discussing bars and nightclubs in order to better understand wine consumption in establishments not typically associated with wine. The focus group participants first discussed wine drinking in a casual bar or pub, a type of place where one did not need to dress up to be admitted. The participants mentioned the names of several casual bars and pubs in the local area that they regularly visited. Ordering wine in this type of establishments was seen as an option, but the participants mentioned that beer was an appealing alternative. The quality of wine served at casual bars was seen as a serious problem that inhibited consumption.

"If I am going to a jeans bar, I am probably going to be having a beer. I just don't think the wines at these kinds of places are very good but beer is beer and you always know what it is going to taste like, (Male 3)

"In a bar I am always afraid that the wine has sat there going bad. I mean, I was at a place and they had the whole lineup of Ravenswood on the counter and they were all open. I thought there is no way that there have been that many people here drinking wine, especially when I could look around and no one had wine. I knew that the wine was going to be old and oxidized. So why take a chance?" (Male 1).

The final type of establishment that was discussed was a fancy nightclub. This was defined as an establishment that provided music, dancing and where the patrons would be expected to follow a strict dress code to be admitted. Again, the participants could name several places that fit this description, although the majority of clubs that they were familiar with were located in a city about an hour from the university. The participants did not think that still wine was common is such establishments, but sparkling wine appeared to be more acceptable.

"A bunch of us went down to the city and went out dancing and I was drinking bubbles. So were some of the others, but a few were having beer. I would say that most of the people were into cocktails, like vodka and stuff" (Male 1).

"If I am going out to this type of place (nightclub) I am going to order a cocktail. It is really hard to walk around and dance with a glass of wine. The glass can break too easy" (Female 2).

"In a nightclub there are usually too many people all crowded in a small space and you're getting bumped around a lot, especially if there is dancing. You don't want to spill wine on someone. I like red wine and if you spill wine all over someone's nice clothes, they are going to get really mad" (Male 3).

Reasons for Avoiding Wine. Quantitative as well as qualitative data were investigated to better understand the reasons patrons do not order wine in bars and nightclubs. The first set of questions in survey looked at several reasons for not ordering wine when at a bar or restaurant. The respondents were presented with 6 statements and their level of agreement was indicated on a 5 point scale, ranging from strongly disagree 1, disagree, 2, neutral, 3, agree 4 and strongly agree 5. One-way ANOVA was used to test if there were significant differences in the mean response across groups. The results of the survey are presented in Table 1. As can be seen by the overall means, the level agreement with the statements is quite low. The low agreement levels can probably be attributed to the fact that the sample is comprised of core wine drinkers and therefore their attitudes are more likely to be favorable to wine in general. Although the overall means were low, the large sample size made it possible to detect a significant difference between groups on all statement. To shed light on the quantitative data, the focus group participants were asked questions related to each of the statements.

Table 1.
Group Means on Attitudes toward Wine Consumption

<b>Q</b> 1		G 4		-
Statements	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	F
	Never drink	Infrequently	Frequently	Statistic
	wine	drink wine	drink wine	
	N = 2379	N=1161	N=2253	
Wine should be consumed with	2.10	1.74	1.40	228.04
food, not by itself				
Wine is not a drink to have with	1.96	1.85	1.39	68.91*
the guys**				
I don't think about ordering	1.83	1.69	1.35	68.91*
wine				
No one else is drinking wine	2.06	2.00	1.72	46.42*
Wine is a drink for special	1.42	1.25	1.14	92.53*
occasions				
I don't want to look foolish	1.27	1.17	1.12	45.05*
drinking wine				

<sup>\*</sup>Significant at the .000 level of probability

<sup>\*\*</sup> Question was asked only of men. N for Group 1= 1530, Group 2= 915 and Group 3= 887.

Not surprisingly the largest difference among the means was found in response to the item that wine is to be consumed with food, not by itself. However, it is worth noting that the group of respondents that never order wine in a bar or nightclub had an average response of 2.10 on this statement, indicating they are also likely to disagree with this statement. This may indicate that while they think it is fine for others to have wine without food, their personal preference is to save wine for times when food is consumed. The focus group participants were split about whether wine was best saved for food.

"I will drink wine by itself, but I really enjoy it most with food. There is something about choosing wine for the food you are having that is appealing. Most of the wine I drink is with food and even if I am going wine tasting, I am thinking about if the wine will go with certain types of foods" (Female 1).

"I don't think you have to have food with wine at all. Maybe it is because I know so many people that drink wine all the time. I just like wine so it doesn't matter to me if it is with food or not. Maybe people that aren't so into wine will see it as a food thing" (Male 2).

The second largest difference in the average response between the three groups was found with the statement that wine is not a drink to have with other guys. This question was only asked of male respondents and those men that never order wine in a bar were more likely to agree with this item. The focus group respondents were asked whether wine as something they would have with friends or a drink that is to be shared with a date or partner, not a group of friends. The gender of the respondent appears to have an influence on their perception.

"If I am going out with a bunch of guys, I will probably order beer because they do. But it depends on the group. I have friends that really don't like wine and I have even tried to teach them about it but they say no way. So if I am with them, I usually skip the wine" (Male 3).

"I want to say it doesn't matter if I see a guy with wine but it really depends. In some places it might strike me as kind of odd, like who does he think he is with his glass of wine? But then, I might think that if I see a guy drinking wine that he knows a lot about wine which is neat, so it might be a good thing" (Female 2).

The third statement looks at awareness of wine as an option in a bar and nightclub and the respondents report a difference in whether they even think about wine in such a setting. In the focus group, several male respondents indicated that in many bars and nightclub settings, ordering wine does not cross their mind.

"It all depends on the kind of place you are at, I can say that if you are at the bar at El Torrito, you are going to have tequila and you aren't even going to think about wine." (Male 3).

"When I am at a club, I usually don't think about wine. It has never been something that people drink at the clubs so I usually listen to what the others are ordering and that gives me some idea of what might sound good for the night" (Female 2).

The respondents to the survey claim not to be influenced by friends as seen by the low means on the item that they don't drink wine because no one else is drinking it. The group the most often orders wine say they are the least influenced by what others are drinking. The findings in the focus group did however suggest that there are times when the participants don't order wine because others are drinking something different.

"A lot of it just depends on who I am with. If I go out with a bunch of friends that just are not into wine, I probably will order something else (Female 2).

"If we are all together and someone says let's get margaritas, I am going to go with the margaritas. The same thing with beer, you are going to order what everyone else is getting. When I am out with my friends that know a lot about wine and that is what they want, then it doesn't feel so weird to be ordering wine (Male 3)

The fifth item measures respondent's agreement with the statement that wine is primarily for special occasions. People who frequently order wine in bars and pubs are least likely to agree with this statement, suggesting that they consume wine on a casual basis even when they are not out celebrating an occasion. The focus group generally agreed with this assessment but added that sparkling wines are still seen as most appropriate for celebrations.

"I do think that Champagne is for special occasions. I went out on New Year's and of course I was drinking Champagne. Everyone was. That is just what you have when it is New Years (Male 3).

"If you are on a date and you want to celebrate something, sparkling is the way to go. Women always appreciate that" (Male 1).

The final item on the survey states that wine is not ordered because they don't want to look foolish. While the low scores on this item suggest that the respondents to the survey don't feel that ordering wine would make one look foolish, the participants in the focus groups were slightly more aware of the possibility of looking out of place.

"If you go into a dive bar, you aren't going to order wine. It would look out of place. I don't think anyone would really care but they would probably think you might be kind of weird" (Male 3).

"I don't care what people think. I think wine is cool and most of my friends are into wine anyway so who cares what the rest of the people think. I don't let what other people think stop me from doing what I want" (Male 1).

The Image of Wine. Several items were asked in the survey about the overall image of wine. These questions were not specific to bars and nightclubs, but pertained to more general perceptions of wine's image. The adjectives considered in this study were Sexy, Hip Sophisticated, and Casual. Respondents were asked whether they associated the adjectives with wine and the answers were coded no = 0 and yes = 1. One-way ANOVA was used to determine if the three groups held differences of opinion of the image of wine. The means are equivalent to the proportion of the sample that said yes. The group that does not drink wine in bars and pubs held the lowest agreement that these adjectives describe wine, whereas the other two groups were much more similar in their perceptions. The results of the analysis are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Group Means on Image of Wine

Image of Wine	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	F
	Never drink wine	Infrequently	Frequently	Statistic
	N= 2379	drink wine	drink wine	
		N=1161	N=2253	
Sexy	35	47	50	67.26*
Hip	17	28	31	72.55*
Sophisticated	54	64	64	36.63*
Casual	51	57	62	31.44*

<sup>\*</sup>Significant at the .000 level of probability

The participants of the focus group were also asked about their image of wine as it relates to consumption in a bar or nightclub setting. The group of respondents who frequently order wine in a bar or nightclub were likely to consider wine a sexy, hip drink. The same group also considered wine to be a more sophisticated drink. The participants in the focus group tended to concur.

"When I see someone in a bar drinking wine, I think it makes her look more sophisticated. I would definitely be more interested in approaching her because I think she will be into wine like I am. I might be a little more intimidated, but I would still approach her because we would have something in common" (Male 2).

"I am not sure if seeing a guy with wine makes him any sexier, but I would feel more comfortable talking to him because the wine would give us something to talk about. It sort of is an icebreaker if we both are into wine because at least we know that we will have that to talk about" (Female 1).

## **Future Research**

Given the exploratory nature of this study, making recommendations for wine firms would be premature. However the results do suggest several avenues for future research. One point that was very clear from the focus groups were that not all bars and nightclubs can be treated the same when it comes to wine research. The establishments discussed ran the gamut from sophisticated wine bars to dive biker bars to loud boisterous dance venues. Each of these setting provides a very different experience when it comes to wine drinking. Future research should clearly identify the type of establishment when investigating wine consumption in bars and nightclubs. The field of atmospherics is a well developed area in retailing and concepts might be applied to the wine research to help better understand how a bar or nightclub setting could be designed to promote wine consumption, assuming that was the goal of the proprietor.

Another promising avenue for research is how to better raise awareness of wine in a bar or nightclub setting. Patrons appear to often take their cues for others in deciding on a beverage to order. Viral marketing techniques might be investigated to learn how word of mouth recommendations by friend might switch beverage choice to the wine category. Spirit and energy drink marketers have employed opinion leaders to use their product in public settings and wine marketers may want to investigate whether wine could be legally promoted in a similar fashion.

There appears to be the influence of gender that needs to be considered in more depth. Gender differences were suggested both in one's willingness to order wine in a bar and nightclub, and the impression that people have of the men that do order wine. Although the focus group participants were at first reluctant to acknowledge negative perceptions toward male wine drinkers, they did hint that they would find such behavior unusual or uncomfortable is certain situations. Wine marketers could investigate ways to make all consumers more comfortable with their beverage choice.

Wine is usually consumed in a group setting in a bar or nightclub and group dynamics seem especially relevant in understanding wine consumption. It is clear that wine consumption is facilitated among groups of friends that already share an interest in wine. It is also interesting that this common interest may make other strangers in a bar seem more approachable and easier to talk to due to the shared interest. The ability to create a "community" feeling among wine drinkers may speed its acceptance in social situations.

Finally, the image of wine is still one of sophistication and sex appeal. Although young consumers are often targeted with wine messages that make wine appear more approachable and whimsical, the findings here suggest that care should be taken not to make the wine lose is unique appeal as a drink that bestows upon the consumer a certain amount of class. In a bar or nightclub where young people are seeking to meet a potential partner, the images may signify a desirable quality.

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