

Women and wine: Analysis of this important market segment

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Abstract

What do women want? This question is being asked by global wine producers and marketers as the significance of the female market segment has been recognised for its contribution to sales and income. In recent years, Beringer Blass has employed an all-female team to design and market 'White Lie', a wine targeted specifically at women wine consumers (Todd, 2005). Bruwer, Li, Bastian and Alant (2005) also noted the emergence of wines positioned primarily for female consumers, such as 'Bend on the River' in Germany and 'Annabella' in Australia. But does the female wine consumer actually behave substantially differently from her male counterpart? This multi-national study sought to understand whether significant differences in wine purchasing or consumption behaviour could indeed be explained by gender. Knowledge of gender-based behavioural differences would be of use to the wine industry in terms of targeting and satisfying specific market segments.

Gender and Consumer Behaviour

Previous research has focused on the differences between genders in terms of their roles in society and how these ascribed roles influence their behaviour as consumers. In more recent decades, as the proportion of women in the workplace has increased, the traditionally ascribed society roles of males and females have blurred. In fact, Grigsby (1992) suggested that a majority of Americans have rejected the traditional and conservative view depicting the role of women as keeping house and raising children. Gender has also been examined in terms of market segmentation, product, communication and retail strategies. For example, gender has been identified as being an important segmentation variable in terms of mobile phone technology adoption (Nysveen, Pedersen & Thorbjornsen, 2005).

The Importance of the Female Wine Consumer

Thomson (2007) noted that women are purchasing wine more than ever before. This claim is supported by other authors. Jennings and Wood (1994) stated that 70 percent of wines sold in the UK are purchased by women in supermarkets as part of their regular grocery shopping routine. In the US market, some have reported that women make over 60 percent of wine purchases (George, 2005); others have suggested that this figure is even higher at around 80 percent of all wine sold (Todd, 2005). Wolf (2000) noted that the US wine drinker is also more likely to be female than male, with reported data indicating that 56.7 percent of wine consumers are women and 43.3 percent are men. However, this Californian study also found that gender had no significant influence upon whether a consumer was a heavy or light wine spender (Wolf, 2000). In contrast, an Australian focus group study reported that females buy more expensive wine than their male counterparts (Bruwer et al., 2005). The literature generally suggests that women purchase wine more often and spend disproportionately more on wine than men; this helps to illustrate why the female wine purchaser has been of such significant interest to wine producers and marketers in recent years.

The Wine Purchase Decision

With the current global glut of wine, it is important to understand how consumers narrow their selection from a vast and bewildering display of wines down to a single bottle. Indeed, wine purchasing is a particularly challenging task for the average consumer; Lockshin (2005) noted that no other supermarket category comes close to consisting of the 300 or more brands which are typically displayed in a wine aisle. The criteria which are evaluated by the purchasing consumer are therefore of considerable interest to global wine producers and marketers.

As the quality of a wine is unknown until such time as the bottle is opened, extrinsic product attributes are frequently utilised by wine consumers as heuristic cues to indicate quality. Consumers may use these as a risk reduction strategy, and there is little doubt that consumers associate risk with their wine purchasing decisions. Barber, Almanza and Donovan (2006) evaluated how wine purchasing behaviour was moderated by gender; females were found to be significantly more likely to find the task of purchasing a wine an intimidating one. Female purchasers also expressed that they were concerned about making the 'wrong choice'. George (2005) further suggested that there was a belief held across the wine industry that women are more confounded by wine than are men.

Consumers utilise an assortment of attributes during the wine purchasing process. Several studies have examined how the attributes evaluated by wine consumers are moderated by gender, but the results lack consistency. A US study reported that women had a significantly greater tendency to (a) utilise extrinsic product cues such as medals and price, (b) to purchase a brand they were familiar with, and (c) to select a bottle based upon artwork (Atkin, Nowak & Garcia, 2007). The authors suggested that cues such as medals, price and brand name are used by female consumers as risk reduction strategies. The findings of an Australian study were similar; females were found to utilise label style to a greater degree than males and to make wine purchase decisions at an affective rather than a cognitive level (Mueller & Lockshin, 2008). Similarly, a study of New Zealand wine consumers reported that the image, picture, logo and colours used were ranked as being significantly more important by females than males (Thomas & Pickering, 2003). In total, the study found that the relative importance assigned to eight of the label elements were significantly moderated by consumer gender. In contrast, one US study reported that females were not more likely

than males to select a wine based upon its label design and overall packaging (Barber et al., 2006) and an Australian study (Batt & Dean, 2000) also reported no correlation between gender and wine presentation. The Batt and Dean (2000) study did report that the origin of the wine was of greater importance during the purchase decision to males than it was to females. Thomson (2007) interviewed wine retailers and marketers and reported that women and men respond to different attributes and cues when purchasing wine. However, the observations of the retailers and marketers were often contradictory; some reported that women were more influenced by awards, variety and menu ideas, some noted that women buy on package and price, and others stated that women seek reassurance by purchasing strong brands (Thomson, 2007).

Other aspects of the wine purchasing decision have also been found to be moderated by the consumer's gender. A survey of Australian wine consumers revealed that women were more likely than men to drink sparkling and white wine, but no significant gender differences were revealed in terms of red wine consumption (Hoffmann, 2004). A study in the US also reported that women had a higher preference for white wines than did their male counterparts; conversely, men reported a much stronger preference for red wines than did women (Barber et al., 2006). A further American study revealed that women were more likely to buy the same wine than males (Atkin et al., 2007). This suggests that females are loyal and repeat buyers of their preferred wine brands and reinforces the importance of this market segment to wine producers.

In terms of information search, Atkin, Nowak and Garcia (2007) reported that women were significantly more likely to acquire information during a purchase by asking store personnel, reading labels or reading shelf tags, whilst men showed a significant preference for acquiring information by reading books about wine. In a UK focus group study, Ritchie (2007) found that women purchased wine for in-home or casual consumption as part of their routine grocery shopping and did not consider that this constituted 'really' buying wine; in contrast both genders stated that males were responsible for performing overt and specialist wine purchases. The idea that wine buying was seen as a masculine task was further reinforced by participants reporting that in restaurant situations the wine purchasing decisions are the responsibility of males (Ritchie, 2007). These results tend to provide further support for the notion that women lack confidence in their ability to select quality wines, especially when such wines will be consumed in the presence of other people.

Whilst the aforementioned single-nation studies have reported that females purchase more wine than their male counterparts, the difference between genders in terms of their wine consumption does not seem to have been explored. The previous studies included in this report also highlight conflicting results regarding the influence of gender on attribute utilisation during wine purchase decisions. Whilst attribute utilisation amongst females and males has been previously examined, the influence of gender on the total number of attributes which are evaluated and on the importance of these attributes to the consumer during a wine purchase decision is not known.

The focal research questions posed by this study are thus:

- (1) Are there any significant gender differences in terms of wine consumption frequency?
- (2) Are there any significant gender differences in terms of the total number of attributes which are evaluated during the wine purchasing process?
- (3) Are there any significant gender differences in terms of which product attributes are evaluated during the wine purchasing process?
- (4) Are there any significant gender differences in terms of the importance which is ascribed to the attributes which are evaluated during the wine purchasing process?

Method

Wine purchasing consumers were surveyed in six cities in New Zealand, Australia, the UK and the US by means of an interviewer administered questionnaire. A total of 647 wine purchasers were approached, with 399 of these consumers agreeing to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted inside

supermarkets, general liquor stores or specialty wine stores at various times of the day and various days of the week, over a seven-day period in each city. Data were collected from May to October 2007 and all questionnaires were completed by the same interviewer.

Respondents answered questions with regards to the specific bottle of wine they had just selected to purchase. For instance, respondents were asked to identify which attributes they had utilised during their selection process and then rated the level of importance they placed on each of these evaluated attributes using a Likert scale ranging from '1 slightly important' to '5 extremely important'. Respondents indicated the frequency with which they purchased and consumed wine answering two Likert-scaled items ranging from '1 never' to '7 every day'.

Demographic information was also collected using categorical responses. The collected data were analysed in SPSS, with significance being tested at the .05 level. The sample was almost evenly split in terms of gender (51% male and 49% female); although other authors have noted the dominance of female wine consumers, this study anticipated a relatively equal split across genders because various store types, not just supermarkets, were included within the data collection plan.

Results

Wine Consumption Frequency

A one-way ANOVA was also used to determine if gender would moderate the frequency with which wine was consumed. No significant difference was found among females and males with respect to the frequency of their wine consumption, $F(1, 397) = 1.996, p = .158$. The mean wine consumption frequency for both females (5.54) and males (5.69) was found to sit between the levels of '5 weekly' and '6 most days'. Subsequent ANOVA's calculated on data from each individual country revealed that there were no significant wine consumption frequency differences between females and males in any of the individual markets of New Zealand, Australia, the UK and US.

Number of Attributes

A chi-square calculation revealed that gender had no significant moderating effect upon the total number of attributes that were evaluated by consumers during their wine purchase decision making processes. On average, males evaluated 2.515 attributes when they were selecting a wine to purchase, whilst females evaluated 2.533 attributes.

Attribute Utilisation

Chi-square calculations indicated that the frequency with which two of the wine attributes were evaluated was significantly moderated by the gender of the purchaser. Only 23% of males utilised the discount price cue, compared to 34% of female wine purchasers. Conversely, more males (24%) than females (13%) reported utilising the region of origin attribute.

Attribute Importance

The results of a one-way ANOVA revealed that gender did not significantly moderate the importance that consumers attached to the various wine attributes they had evaluated during their purchase process.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the frequency with which consumers drink wine is not significantly moderated by their gender. This lack of result is somewhat surprising given the claims that more wine is being purchased by females than males (George, 2005; Jennings & Wood, 1994; Thomson, 2007; Todd, 2005; Wolf, 2000). Whilst this study did not examine the *amount* of wine that male or females consume, the result does provide evidence that females and males are consuming wine with similar regularity. This tends to suggest that the importance of the female wine consumer may have been over-inflated, and that both genders should be focused upon with equal intensity by global wine marketers.

Perhaps even more importantly, this study has found that consumer gender does not have a significant effect on the total number of attributes which are evaluated during the wine purchase decision and nor does it influence the importance which the consumer ascribes to the attributes which they have evaluated. Again, this result provides support for the view that the behaviour of female and male wine purchasers is rather similar; this suggests that gender is not a particularly useful variable with which to segment the global wine market.

However, during the wine purchase decision making process, females evaluated the price discount cue significantly more often than did their male counterparts. This suggests that females are more concerned than males with the financial risks associated with purchasing wine. It is widely acknowledged in Western cultures that female salaries typically lag behind those of males in equivalent positions; this may be one reason for the greater utilisation of the discount price cue amongst female wine purchasers. Another possibility is that females are the predominant grocery shopper in many households; discounted wine prices are more likely to be available in supermarket stores than in specialty wine stores where they are less likely to shop. This result is clearly of value to marketers targeting the female wine consumer; price promotions are appealing to this market segment. In contrast, males were found to utilise the region of origin cue to a greater extent than females; this result provides support for the results of an earlier consumer study in Australia (Batt & Dean, 2000). Previous researchers have suggested that consumers with higher wine knowledge are more likely to utilise the region of origin cue (Rasmussen & Lockshin, 1999); the result from this study therefore implies that males have greater knowledge of wine than do females. This would concur with an earlier study of New Zealand consumers which reported that males had significantly higher levels of subjective wine knowledge than females (Mitchell & Hall, 2001). Similarly, men have been found to have a significantly stronger tendency to read books about wine (Atkin et al., 2007), again suggesting that they are more knowledgeable and thus more able to utilise the region of origin cue as an indicator of wine quality.

Some previous studies (Atkin et al., 2007; Thomson, 2007) have reported that females seek reassurance and risk reduction through the utilisation of attributes such as brand name, price, medals and awards; this study has found no evidence to support these claims. Similarly, this study has not provided support for earlier studies which have noted that females utilise artwork or label design to a greater extent than males (Atkin et al., 2007; Barber et al., 2006). These results suggest that females do not appear to be more concerned or confused by wine purchase decisions than males are; it is possible that the large amount of wine purchasing done by female consumers in recent years has increased the confidence they have in their decision making.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that women are purchasing wine more than ever before. A couple of decades ago, males would have selected wine for their partners whilst they were in a liquor store purchasing alcoholic beverages for themselves. The introduction of wine sales through supermarket stores in many nations has been one of the factors which have dramatically changed wine purchasing gender roles. The observed increase in wine purchasing by females has resulted in wine marketers paying special attention to this consumer segment.

Whilst this study does not dispute the importance of the female segment to wine marketers, it has provided evidence that the purchasing and consumption behaviour of this segment does not differ significantly from that of the male segment. The strength of this multi-national study is that consumers were interviewed in-store immediately after selecting a wine to purchase; thus the problems of recalling past behaviour from memory or describing typical behaviour were avoided. This methodology may explain why these results differ from those of previous studies in this area. With the exception of utilisation of the discount price and region of origin cues, this study suggests that the behaviour of wine purchasing consumers is not significantly affected by gender.

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