

**PURCHASING WINE AS A GIFT;
INFLUENCING FACTORS AND PREFERENCES:
AN EMPIRICAL QUALITATIVE APPROACH**

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ABSTRACT

A number of research studies have looked into consumer buying behaviour as regards wine. However, as yet no-one has focussed specifically on the factors which pertain to consumers buying wine to offer as gifts. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify which factors affect the decision of the wine buyer in this context. A further aim is to develop a number of hypotheses which will form the basis of a future quantitative study.

The research methodology begins with a review of the relevant literature. From this a research design using projective methods in the interviews was considered as being the most appropriate way to proceed. After a pre-test, the methodology was refined and then conducted using a research group of twelve persons. This group was selected according to gender, age and whether they were considered to be ‘connoisseurs’ or ‘laypeople’ as regards purchasing and consuming wine. A total of nineteen hypotheses were then developed which will form the basis of future avenues of research.

The findings suggest that a good portion of the factors which influence buyers when purchasing wine as a gift are exogenous and can be found in existing literature. The influence of these factors in the context varies, however, depending on the knowledge of the purchaser, the perceived risk, as well as the relation to and social status of the recipient. A further important factor is the specific requirement of the gift situation e.g. as a birthday or retirement present. The existing study highlights the fact that the purpose of an acquisition is of overriding importance when buying wine as a gift – dominating all other influencing factors which are subsequently only subject to it. Extrinsic or intrinsic cues vary strongly in importance as a function of the specific purchasing context the buyer faces.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Wine is multifaceted, rich in tradition and can, in many regards, be distinguished from other consumer products. Nowadays wine serves not primarily as a thirst quencher but often has cultural functions: meeting friends and family, socialising, indicating social class, consumed in conjunction with eating and visiting restaurants, as an aperitif, etc. Therefore this product has, in relation to others, specific cultural and luxury product attributes (Philipps, 2003).

In a 2005 survey, 88% of a representative sample of 600 wine buyers, interviewed by the Vienna University of Economics (WU) Advertising and Market Research Institute, were of the opinion that wine is 'an ideal drink for celebrations and special occasions' clarifying and confirming the positive conception of this consumer product (ÖWM, 2006).

What is of particular note is the giving of wine as a gift for special occasions and celebrations (Eichler, 1991). According to the above-mentioned study, wine buyers regularly purchase wine as a present (11% of all purchases). This means that the purchasing of wine as a gift is the third most important reason, after 'dinner parties with guests at home' and 'simply to relax' (ÖWM, 2006).

In Austria in 2005, 74.6 million litres of wine with a value of EUR 236 million was sold (ÖWM, 2006). When referencing this data to the study at the WU, where wine buyers stated that 11% of the bottles purchased regularly serve as a present, it can be seen that this topic is of particular relevance. In the small Austrian market alone approximately EUR 24.7 million was therefore spent on wines serving as a gift. Given the German or British wine market (turnover 2006: EUR 3.37 billion (DWI, 2007), respectively GBP 14.5 billion (International Wine & Spirit Centre, 2007), it becomes clear that knowing more about wine buyers' intentions and attitudes towards wines purchased as a gift is important for those engaged in marketing activities in this sector.

Concerning the consumer purchasing decision, it is influenced not only by 'situation specific motivation factors' (Trommsdorff, 1998) but also by numerous other marketing stimuli and surrounding related factors, which are part of the exogenous factors which influence consumer behaviour (Kotler & Bliemel, 2001). The impact of these factors and the consumer perceptions of product attributes can differ from situation to situation and are strongly influenced when a good is purchased to serve as a gift (Goodwin, Smith & Spiggle, 1990). In addition, the personal involvement of the buyer can change with different situations (DeVere, Scott & Shulby, 1983). When purchasing a gift, the relation to and social status of the recipient comes into account (Lowrey, Otnes & Ruth, 2004) and influences the donor (Parsons, 2002).

Further findings indicate that wine is not only found in the category of low involvement gifts that are relatively easy to obtain (like flowers or chocolates) but also in the high involvement category where expensive, high quality and individual gifts are sought after (such as jewellery, perfumes or luxury clothing). This makes wine (along with a small number of other universal presents such as books) an ideal gift item (Belk, 1982). In the high involvement 'luxury' version, wine serves, on the one hand as a special gift which – in the best cases – can even evoke happy or common memories whereas on the other hand it also serves as an immediately available, rather cheap all-purpose gift that will always be suitable and appreciated.

The wine market is incredibly complex due to the fact that, in comparison to purchasing other consumer goods, consumer buying of wine has numerous influencing factors. The customer is confronted with a wide range of information which influences the purchase (Lockskin & Hall, 2003). In addition to price, product characteristics, product brand, country of origin, grape variety, the name of the winemaker, the vintage, the alcohol content, taste, packaging and quality, there are also motivation factors. Personal dispositions regarding involvement and perceived risks also play a significant role when making a purchase decision in the retail outlet itself (Lockskin & Hall, 2003).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous models and theories of how consumers come to a buying decision and what factors influence this decision can be found in the literature. Busemeyer and Rapoport (1988) investigated several alternative models of deferred decision making and Svenson (1992) developed a frame of reference for the study of pre- and post-decision processes. Many of these theories and models have also been applied to investigate the decision-making process of wine buyers. Auböck (2005) adapted the typologies established to systematize the purchasing process by Weinberg (1981) when he tried to analyse wine buyers. Two years earlier Gosch (2003) referred to Bänisch (1996) and Kotler & Bliemel (2001) to show that the purchasing decision process for wine is also mostly influenced by other persons, who were identified as *initiator*, *influencer*, *decision-maker*, *buyer* and *user* (Kotler & Bliemel, 2001).

Wine is a product which consists of numerous 'experience attributes' which can only be judged in line with consumption. (Speed, 1998). The possibilities for the buyer to evaluate the quality, taste and other attributes at the moment of purchase are therefore very limited. Consequently, extrinsic cues and in particular packaging and bottle design play an important role for the buyer (Speed, 1998). Research in this area is focusing more and more on product packaging as a marketing communications vehicle. Brand managers agree that this field should receive more attention in marketing research, especially within the wine industry. (Underwood & Klein, 2002) 'Academic interest in packaging has become more pronounced over the past decade [...] with scholars measuring relationships such as the impact of package size (Wansink, 1996), product pictures (Underwood & Klein, 2002) or elongation on consumer preferences' (Orth, Malkewitz, 2006).

Empirical studies have measured the impact of package appearance on consumer attention, categorization and evaluation during brand choice (Schoormans & Robben, 1997; Garber, Burke & Jones, 2000; Rocchi & Stefani, 2006). Orth and Malkewitz (2006) state that 'reports on wine brands such as *Fetzer* changing their packaging typically discuss the brand image or the essence that management hopes to communicate through the new packaging design (Caputo, 2005). Marketers charge designers with the task of developing appealing wine packaging that communicates desired brand images and corporate identity (Mackay, 2005).' Gergaud and Livat (2006) state that 'regarding wines, consumers mainly rely on the label to infer quality'.

Using a multi-attribute Conjoint Analysis, Haller & Ebster of the University of Applied Science in Burgenland/Austria discovered in 2005 that after the price, the closure of a bottle influenced the purchase intention most, followed by grape variety and country/region of origin. After these factors, and with comparably smaller significance, came label, alcohol

content and bottle shape as influencing factors (Haller & Ebster 2006). It has to be mentioned, though, that this very same year (2005) marked a turning point in Austria's wine industry as one out of three producers changed from natural cork to alternative closures – mostly screw caps.

Applying the Best/Worst method developed by Louviere and introduced to wine marketing research by Goodman, Lockshin & Cohen (2005), Leitner (2007) found that for wine buyers the grape variety along with 'knew/tasted the wine already' and country/region of origin were of significant importance, followed by (well-known) brands, 'matching well with food', 'nice front label' and 'provides information on the back label'. Differences in importance of single factors for wine-connoisseurs compared to laypeople have also been detected (Leitner, 2007).

A paper & pencil survey at the University of Applied Science in Burgenland/Austria in 2007 showed that only by taking into account the occasion of consumption (and not generally), is it possible to identify and distinguish important influencing factors on the purchase decision. These results contradict the findings of Haller & Ebster (2006), Leitner (2007) and others. Thus, there are factors which always seem to play a certain role and influence the buyer when purchasing wine, but these factors differ from having a high to nearly no influence at all depending on the situation/occasion (Stöckl, 2007). While e.g. a low price could play a significant role when buyers purchase wine for themselves, it has a lower influence when a bottle is purchased to serve as a gift. Similarly, the closure becomes irrelevant when wine is ordered by the glass in a wine tavern, bar or restaurant, whereas in the gift situation it is of crucial importance (Stöckl, 2007).

Many other authors list influencing factors for the consumer purchase of wine. E.g. Bilkey & Nes (1987); Quester & Smart (1996); Art (2000); Hall, Lockshin & O'Mahony (2001) or Olsen, Thompson & Clarke (2003); Rasmussen & Lockshin (1999); Durrieu (2005); Hauteville & Perrouy (2005); Lockshin & Hall (2001); Lowengart & Cohen (2006); Orth (2005); Orth & McGarry (2005) and Breu (2002). Altogether the literature review revealed the following factors which influence wine buyers as either extrinsic or intrinsic cues:

Producer or brand name and image	Product characteristics - grape variety /alcohol content / vintage
Country and/or region image	Retail price
Packaging Design and information provided on the label	Place - shop type / bar or restaurant / cellar door
Motive	Communication / advertising / promotion
Certifications / medals	Involvement
Familiarity with the variety/ blend/ brand/ or region	Perceived risk

Table 1: Extrinsic and intrinsic cues influencing wine-buyers

Extrinsic cues are lower level cues that can be changed without changing the product (e.g. price, packaging, brand name, country of origin), while intrinsic cues are higher-level cues directly related to the product such as typicality, pleasure or taste (Charters & Pettigrew, 2003). One specific use of some extrinsic cues, such as price, brand name and country of origin, is as risk reduction information when purchasing products (Agarwal & Teas, 2001; Bearden & Shimp, 1982; Shimp & Bearden, 1982).

Despite the huge amount of research on extrinsic cues influencing wine buying behaviour, no research has been undertaken which considers the occasion of consumption and not the cues as the starting point.

RESEARCH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In view of the above statements and findings, this paper looks at which exogenous factors derived from the literature influence the decision-making process of the consumer, taking into consideration the involvement and perceived risk when buying wine with the intention of giving it as a gift. How these factors influence the purchaser in this particular situation is also analysed and should help us understand wants, needs and taboos in this situation. Based upon the insights gained, it should then be possible to derive more focussed marketing approaches.

The perceived risk is defined as ‘function of a consumer’s uncertainty and its consequences’ (Cox 1967). It has been argued that ‘the amount and nature of perceived risk will define consumers information needs, and consumers will seek out sources, types, and amounts of information that seem most likely to satisfy their particular information needs,’ (Cox 1967).

The focus of the study is on explorative research and attempts to gain a better insight into the behaviour of wine buyers; specifically, into their perceptions and beliefs, thought patterns and actions when purchasing wine as gift. The formulation of hypotheses was the basic aim of this study. This paper can therefore serve as a basis for quantitative testing and statistical analysis of identified factors influencing the purchase of wine as a gift. Measuring and quantifying of interrelations is generally not the aim of qualitative research (Flick, Kardoff & Steinke, 2004) which accounts for the absence of statements on frequencies, percentages and quantitatively measurable differences (Malhotra & Birks, 2006; DeRuyter & Scholl, 1998; Steinke, 2004).

METHOD

In the field of empirical research the use of projective techniques is presented in the form of unstructured, indirect questions. Therefore data about consumer opinions, perceptions, knowledge and motivation can be generated and analysed. By implementing this method, the interviewee’s perspective and personal perception (beliefs, attitudes) are projected onto another person subconsciously (Berekoven, Eckert & Ellenrieder, 2004). The advantage of projective techniques is that, among other things, there is an increase in the honesty of the answers and in the validity of the information in comparison to structured, direct techniques (Malhotra, 1996).

Using this method buyers unconsciously exhibit behaviour about which they are not ready to speak about or are not even consciously aware of (DeRuyter & Scholl, 1998; Solomon, Askegaard & Bamossy, 1999) e.g. purchasing wine as a gift that has been reduced in price. The purchase of a certain wine in the gift situation is dependent on many factors, e.g. personal preference and perceptions of quality. Additionally however, the purchase can be influenced by the personal appreciation of the wine by its intended recipient; a reason why the buyer possibly does not answer the questions truthfully about the price of the wine purchased.

An accurate evaluation of perceived risks and involvement by means of structured test designs can be difficult (Schaipp & Plaum, 1995). By recognising the sense and purpose of the research, the respondent tends to give socially acceptable answers, for example when asked by recognised wine connoisseurs. In contrast, the application of projective procedures offers a certain masking of the investigative purpose; answers may, therefore, be obtained that are not as constrained by social pressures, ethical aspects and societal norms (Salcher, 1978). For these reasons, the projective procedure approach was considered to be well suited to determining factors that influence purchasing wine as a gift.

Taking into consideration the research aim and the basic definition of the problem, from the wide range of research methods available for the project, the following three were selected:

- Sentence completion
- Projective Questionnaire
- Picture caption tool

SAMPLE

Having a representative cross section of subjects is not the aim of qualitative research which is designed more to give an insight into the thought processes and behaviour of the subjects (Malhotra & Birks, 2006).

Based upon these qualitative research principles and requirements, a sample was formed. The pre-test had six subject consumers and the main research was composed of twelve subjects. Since only the data from the main research is used here, particular attention is given to these subjects.

The selection of the participants was made after a monitoring process which took place over a time period of three weeks. During this process particular attention was paid to the veracity of participants' claims to be either connoisseurs or laypeople. Their self-assessed classification as being either a 'wine connoisseur' or a 'wine layperson' corresponded to prior observations made about their

- wine buying habits (purchase rate)
- wine drinking habits (regularity of consumption)
- general wine knowledge (i.e. grape varieties, regions)
- interest in wine (possessing and reading literature about wine)
- wine collecting intentions (having a place to store wine, purchasing wine for storing purposes).

Finally the sample consisted of twelve individuals who were relatives, friends or acquaintances of one of the authors. This personal nomination method made the sample easy to reach as well as easy to classify. Furthermore, the authors could take as read that the selected individuals would be unafraid of the interviewer or the research process itself. Neither of the twelve individuals of the sample is or was employed within the wine industry, nor is any member of the group involved in any wine marketing or wine business research.

An important aspect of subject selection was to have a relatively balanced cross-section of age and gender, in addition to the intensity of their involvement in the wine field. The participants, additionally, all belonged to one ethnic group (European, white) with no

migration background¹. However, their ‘social status’ as regards income, education and family size, differed. For participating no incentives were provided - the fact that the interviewer was known to the interviewees made this possible.

The sample was composed of:

	Gender	Age	Profession	Involvement	
				Connoisseur	Layperson
1	Male	20	Student		x
2	Female	23	Student	x	
3	Male	24	Student	x	
4	Male	28	Employee		x
5	Male	33	Employee	x	
6	Female	34	Employee		x
7	Female	43	Employee	x	
8	Male	43	Employee		x
9	Female	52	Freelance		x
10	Female	54	Employee	x	
11	Male	77	Retiree	x	
12	Female	86	Retiree		x

Table 2: Sample characteristics

¹ Of Austria's total population, 16.3% have a migration background (Statistik Austria, 2007)

RESEARCH

The empirical study was carried out in March 2007 in Austria. The subjects were selected with the goal to achieve a balance of the above-mentioned attributes. They were asked to answer questions for approximately 50 minutes about 'wine as a gift'. The consumers were interviewed alone in quiet and relaxed surroundings and had the opportunity to express themselves without being influenced in any way by the interviewer. Only one (female) interviewer carried out all six interviews for the pre-test and all twelve interviews for the study.

The consumers were briefed about the interview process: that they would undertake a sentence completion task, answer questions on behaviour and attitudes of their neighbour, as well as talk about a picture story about buying 'wine as gift'.

First, the interviewees were asked to complete 28 sentences such as 'People who purchase wine for less than five Euros to give as a gift... ' or 'To reduce the risk of buying the wrong wine as a present, the buyer... ' or 'People who purchase a present for a close friend... '. As can be seen, the interviewee was never directly asked for his or her opinion or wine knowledge but to comment on 'people's' habits or preferences.

Second, the interviewees were asked to reply to questions regarding their neighbour. E.g. 'Where do you think your neighbour would buy a wine to give as a gift?', 'When do you think your neighbour would choose a rather cheap wine to give as a gift?' or 'Which features does a wine need to have so that your neighbour would purchase it as a gift?'.

Third, a picture story without any text was shown to the interviewees. It showed a girl who decided to buy a wine to give to somebody as a gift. In front of the wine shelf question marks appeared above her head. Each interviewee was asked to tell the story and what the girl in the comic strip might think or worry about. While telling the story, different stimuli were shown to each interviewee. The stimuli included pictures of differently shaped bottles and four examples of different front label designs (modern, 'artistic', coat of arms, and showing the image of a vineyard).

A total of around 700 minutes of interview recordings including altogether 352 statements about 'people' buying wine as a gift, 138 answers about the 'neighbours'' behaviour and preferences as well as 12 stories based on the 'comic strip' and its linked stimuli (bottle shape and label designs) were then mapped, classified and analysed. The audio-taped interviews were written down on paper, segmented into statement-batteries, categorised and decoded. In total 25 hypothesis were derived from the findings, 19 of them are presented in this paper.

FINDINGS

INFLUENCING FACTORS AND PREFERENCES CONCERNING BOTH CONNOISSEURS AND LAYPEOPLE:

The influencing factors varied according to involvement and perceived risk across the sample wine buyers. In contrast, no obvious differences could be detected regarding age and gender in the subject group. Connoisseurs and laypeople, though, showed considerable differences in how they handle the purchasing of wine as a gift.

Nevertheless both groups have analogies. The majority of the theoretical research factors noted in the literature are also found to influence the decision of buyers – both connoisseurs and laypeople – when purchasing wine as a gift. Of these factors, though, alcoholic content, vintage and quality certification seem to have no influence at all on the decision when purchasing wine as a gift. Furthermore, depending on the gift situation, the involvement and perceived risk, the different factors have strongly varying degrees of impact.

Regarding the common influencing factors, the findings indicate that price is a major factor for both wine laypeople and connoisseurs. A price below five Euros is generally considered to be too cheap. Another strong influencing factor in this context is the relationship between the wine buyer and receiver of the gift. It has a crucial effect on the price range, quality and brand of wine.

The country of origin influences the decision process, in as much as, ideally, the wine selected should come from a geographical origin familiar to the recipient. Whereas national wines are distinguished by their region-of-origin, foreign bottles are only considered as being either French or Italian. Wines from the new world are interestingly classed as ‘overseas wines’ altogether and considered less popular for gift purposes. Giving German wine as a gift is considered to be tasteless by the (Austrian) sample.

The more important the motive for the purchase, the more the factors of quality, taste and price influence the purchase decision. For example, someone would buy a different wine for a friend's 37th birthday than the 30th, 40th or 50th where more consideration about which wine to give is sought after.

A modern or ‘artistic’ label is positively influential when buying wine as a gift. The bottle form influenced the purchase in as much as the purchaser chooses a well-known bottle form (e.g. Bordeaux-bottle). Giving wine in a Tetra Pak, wine box or plastic bottle is considered taboo.

INFLUENCING FACTORS AND PREFERENCES CONCERNING CONNOISSEURS:

Generally, wine connoisseurs are prepared to pay a higher price for a bottle serving as a gift (from EUR 6.- to EUR 25.-) than wine laypeople (from EUR 5.- to EUR 17.-). One reason for this difference lies undoubtedly in the greater appreciation of wine by the connoisseur. They consider a price below EUR 5.- as too low for the gift occasion but at the same time declare that very good wines of convincing quality do exist at this price level. The ‘average’ price a layperson would spend on a wine to give as a gift is therefore EUR 11.-, whereas the connoisseur would spend EUR 15.50 on a bottle to serve as a present.

Grape variety, along with wine colour (red or white; rosé was never even mentioned), have crucial influence for wine connoisseurs. They prefer to give a favoured national variety.

INFLUENCING FACTORS AND PREFERENCES CONCERNING LAYPEOPLE:

Additional exogenous factors that influence wine laypeople's selection, apart from the price, are colour (red or white), quality, brand, country of origin, label, bottle shape, advertising, taste and closure. Wine-prices below EUR 5.- are connoted with poor or not sufficient quality.

The closure influenced the purchase selection of wine laypeople differently than for wine connoisseurs. While for laypeople buying wine closed with crown cap, screw-top or synthetic cork is out of the question (only natural cork being considered acceptable), connoisseurs are also attracted to glass tops. Nevertheless, both groups are disinclined to purchase screw-top bottles when purchasing wine as a gift.

In cases where the purchaser perceived a high risk in the decision-making process, a well-known brand has a positive effect on the choice of what wine to buy. Wine laypeople seem to be especially comfortable when choosing a familiar brand. Wine laypeople predominantly select red wine as a gift.

DERIVED HYPOTHESIS

H1: Giving wine is considered to be a highly appropriate gift among wine buyers.

H2: Connoisseurs differ from laypeople in that the product attributes: i.e. grape variety, labelling & design, new-to-market and awards won, have a crucial impact.

H2a: Laypeople consider the brand and the price as most important.

H3: Wine is purchased as a gift because of its social acceptability and its ability to express appreciation for the recipient.

H4a: Connoisseurs consider a bottle or small selection of wine suitable for most occasions including Christmas, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries and invitations.

H4b: Laypeople do not consider wine to be a suitable gift for Christmas or other religious holidays.

H5a: Wine buyers perceive the risk when purchasing wine as a gift to be higher than when it is for their own consumption.

H5b: To reduce the risk of a bad buy the following actions are taken before or when purchasing wine as a gift: tasting the wine before purchase, collecting information (from websites and journal articles), and/or asking connoisseurs about their experience or recommendations.

H5c: Wine laypeople consider themselves to be taking, irrespective of the importance of the occasion, a higher social risk when buying wine as a gift than connoisseurs.

H5d: Well-known brands help reduce the perceived risk of laypeople making a bad buy.

H6: The relationship between the buyer and recipient (whether closely related or merely acquainted) influences the wine choice in general, and price, quality and grape variety, in particular.

H6a: The personal taste of the wine buyer has a big influence on the purchase decision for gift wines.

H7a: The label design of the gift is chosen according to the perceived preferences of the recipient.

H7b: Wines with 'modern' or 'artistic' labels are favoured by gift buyers.

H7c: Wines with very traditional or conservative labels (such as a coat of arms, a picture of a winery or vineyard) are less favoured by gift buyers.

H8a: Wine laypeople invariably purchase wines with natural cork closures to give as a gift.

H8b: Wine connoisseurs purchase wines with natural cork or glass (vino-lok) closures.

H8c: Wines with a screw-cap are not considered to be suitable to give as a gift.

H9a: Local wines are very popular as a gift, as long as the region-of-origin has a good reputation and image.

H9b: Besides regional wines, wine connoisseurs tend to purchase Italian and French wines as gifts.

H10a: For wine-laypeople, certification marks or awards have no influence on their purchasing decision.

H10b: For wine-connoisseurs certification marks or awards have a crucial influence on their purchasing decision.

H11a: Wine buyers mostly give red wine as a present.

H11b: Wine-connoisseurs tend to have one special variety or blend, mostly regional, which they purchase when a gift is needed.

H12a: Wine laypeople tend to judge a cheap wine (less than EUR 5) rather negatively and would not buy such a wine as a gift.

H12b: The price of the gift is dependent on the importance of the occasion, the wine knowledge and enthusiasm of the recipient, the relationship between the buyer and the consignee as well as the financial standing of the donor.

H13a: Gift wines are seldom purchased at a discounter.

H13b: Gift wines are often purchased in supermarkets. Reasons are: good value for money, availability, accessibility.

H13c: If the buyer needs advice or wants to taste the wine before purchasing, a specialised wine shop is visited.

H13d: Connoisseurs mostly buy gift wines in a wine shop or directly from the producer.

H13e: Laypeople mostly purchase gift wines in supermarkets or, if it is for a very special occasion, in a wine shop.

H14: Further exogenous factors for laypeople are: colour (red or white), quality, brand, awareness of advertising, country and region-of-origin, label, bottle shape, closure and taste.

H15: Grape variety, alcohol content, vintage or awards have less impact on laypeople's purchasing decisions.

H16: Connoisseurs are mainly influenced by the colour (red or white) and the grape variety.

H17: Connoisseurs rely less on extrinsic cues (such as labelling, advertising or special offers) to come to a purchase decision than laypeople.

H18: Connoisseurs are prepared to pay between EUR 6.- and 25.- for a bottle of wine to give as a gift.

H19: Laypeople are prepared to pay between EUR 5.- and 17.- for a bottle of wine to give as a gift.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The current study especially highlights that research into the motivation to buy wine – whether to offer as a gift or to consume oneself, for example - is at an initial stage and therefore this research makes an important contribution to this growing body of knowledge.

Our findings show that the *occasion* is the main factor when it comes to consumer decision-making when purchasing wine. First, the study indicates that, although influencing factors are widely explored, special occasions – like the purchase of wine as a gift – obviously implicate different priorities for customers. Judging from the strength of observed notions and beliefs, the purpose of the acquisition is of overriding importance – dominating all other influencing factors which are subsequently only subject to it.

Second, consumer classifications along with cluster analysis widely common in life-style research (Drieseberg, 1995) and also applied in wine-marketing research (Auböck, 2005; DWI, 2005), seem to prove limited when applied in a realistic case like in this qualitative survey. While it was detected in other studies that e.g. energetic, active, youthful and exciting brands (Aaker, 1997) facilitate stronger relationships and draw individuals who favour an exciting lifestyle, i.e. extroverts (Orth & Gal, 2007), no sign of this could be detected when it comes to a specific purchase need, in this case the ‘gift situation’.

Third, the importance of extrinsic and intrinsic cues cited by the literature is not necessarily corroborated by purchasing decisions in reality. Our findings contradict those of other authors like Haller & Ebster (2006) who detected a relatively low purchase price (EUR 4.99 for the Austrian market) as a key factor, or Leitner (2007) who found out that the grape variety is most important. Extrinsic or intrinsic cues seem to vary strongly in importance as a function of the specific purchasing context the buyer faces.

Furthermore the results of this study, linked to the fact that wine is basically a low involvement product (Aurifeille et al. 2002; D’Hauteville, 2003; Goodman, Lockshin & Cohen, 2005), suggest that it is of special importance to reduce the sensed risk; something which especially wine laypeople feel when purchasing wine as a gift (H5c).

As it appears that the tasting of a wine before purchasing is the most effective way to reduce the high perceived risk (H5b), this possibility is likely to facilitate gift buyers’ purchasing decisions. Moreover, this study suggests (after quantitative testing) that marketing actions to attract gift seekers at the POS (at retailers and wineries or in online shops) are introduced. Highlighting special wines predestined for a gift occasion e.g. a red wine (H11a) of a popular local variety and a region-of-origin, with a good reputation and image (H9a), natural cork (H8a) and a ‘modern’ or ‘artistic’ label (H7b) with a price around EUR 11.- (H19), would

lead to higher sales by gift seekers. Therefore especially in supermarkets (H13b), as well as in specialist wine shops (H13c) or at the winery (H13d), special signs like ‘great gift’, ‘especially suitable as a gift’ or a proven pictogram such as one of those illustrated in Figure 1 and 2 (Ziegler & Stöckl, 2007), could be placed.

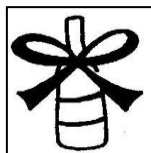


Figure 1: Pictogram 1 ‘Wine especially suitable as a gift’ (Ziegler & Stöckl, 2007)



Figure 2: Pictogram 2 ‘Wine especially suitable as a gift’ (Ziegler & Stöckl, 2007)

FUTURE RESEARCH

It would be useful to wine marketing researchers and practitioners to first of all discover the percentage of wines purchased to serve as a gift. The figure shown in the introductory part of this paper represents, as mentioned, only an Austrian sample (and a rather small one at that) and so far no insight at all can be inferred to the global ‘wine as a gift market’. For this, cultural and other factors would, presumably, play an important role.

While we believe our findings offer valuable implications for researchers, a quantitative survey to check the hypotheses is needed in order to develop appropriate market strategies for the group of consumers who purchase wines to offer as a gift.

Further, it could be helpful to extend the idea of this study to other situations wine buyers regularly face. These are typical ‘problems’ a consumer is confronted with - e.g. making a buying decision when friends are invited, deciding on a wine for a large number of people, purchasing a special bottle for a private celebration, or ordering wine in a restaurant, tavern or bar.

Studies into special packaging, for example wooden boxes, paper or plastic gift boxes or bags (Lockshin & Hall, 2003), (i.e. in-store experiments) could also offer a valuable insight for marketers who would like to increase sales, most especially, in the area where wine is being bought as a gift item. This would be even more the case if sellers were to focus on the ‘ideal’ characteristics of wine gifts, such as those presented in this paper.

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