

## **Wine as fashion: can fashion theory inform wine business research?**

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Several authors have discussed fads and fashions in wine consumption Bruwer, et al. 2002, Charters 2006, Hall and Mitchell 2008, Spawton 1991 and there are many examples demonstrating that the wine industry understands that wine and (clothing) fashion are important allies Nicholls and Mitchell 2008, Sbrocco 2003 Meanwhile fashion researchers consistently state that clothing is just one focus of fashion Bruzzi and Gibson 2000, Easey 2002, Hines and Bruce 2007, Kawamura 2005, Sproles and Burns 1994. Despite this there has been no attempt to apply the theoretical constructs of fashion to wine.

Fashion may refer to the style of a consumer product, the symbolic meaning attached to a product, or the process by which a product is temporarily adopted by an individual or social group Sproles and Burns 1994. The 'fashion process' is a mechanism of change with many and varied origins Sproles and Burns 1994. This conceptualization of fashion is most often applied to clothing, but wine too, as a product of aesthetic and symbolic value Charters and Pettigrew 2005, Charters 2006, can be conceptualized as a fashion item Hall and Mitchell 2008, Nicholls and Mitchell 2008. At its most basic this is evident in the lexicons of wine and (clothing) fashion, which have several core terms in common. Consumers and producers of wine and fashion may have a preferred 'style' that changes only incrementally over a relatively long period of time (several years or decades) but individual wines/items of clothing, styles and designers/wine regions or producers may go in and out of fashion in a relatively short timeframe (months, seasons or a few years). These fads (short term) or fashions (medium term) can be cyclical with certain styles reappearing as consumers and producers rediscover lost styles. Styles of wine and clothing (and sometimes their producers) may come to be known as 'icons' or 'classics' Charters 2006. Meanwhile, 'vintage' has long been talked of in relation to wine and some vintages have a higher aesthetic value than others and recently fashion has also adopted the term vintage (albeit used in a different manner) to add value to clothing.

The parallels between modern conceptualizations of fashion and wine are a useful starting point for this discussion of wine as fashion. However, it is also possible to highlight the historical, social and cultural antecedents that have influenced the consumption and production of both wine and fashion. This includes, amongst other things, the rise of consumer culture in the nineteenth century, the massification of consumption and production of aesthetic goods, the development of systems of production and the influence of the media for both wine (see Charters, 2006) and fashion (see Kawamura, 2005). It is also interesting to note the significant role that France (and, historically, Louis XIV) has played as the initiator of much of the cultural and social capital that surrounds both wine (see Charters, 2006) and fashion (see Kawamura, 2005).

Notwithstanding the parallels between wine and fashion, there are key differences that set them apart. Perhaps most notable amongst the differences is the fact that, while continual change and novelty is important in the consumption of premium wines and fashion, the value derived from such change is constructed quite differently; wine relies on change that results largely from natural phenomena (i.e. variations in vintage) while changes in fashion are manufactured (i.e. new designs each season). This is also reflected in the nature of iconic brands within each product category, with iconic wines most often associated with place (i.e. vineyard, appellation, region or country) compared with iconic fashion brands being most often associated with designers (although there are clearly exceptions). Despite these key differences this paper suggests that fashion literature can be used to explore the role of change/novelty in wine.

This conceptual paper explores the relationship between wine and fashion and suggests how fashion theory might be used to inform research and research agenda in the field of wine business research. It is divided into two sections: the first exploring fashion and wine as material objects, and; the second examining how an understanding of the 'fashion process' might be adapted to shed light on wine consumption.

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