

## **IMPORTANCE OF WINERY VISITOR GROUP SIZE ON FEELINGS OF GRATITUDE AND OBLIGATION**

**Kolyesnikova, N., Dodd, T.H., Laverie, D.A.  
Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, USA**

### Abstract

Building on reciprocity theory, the study investigated the role of gratitude and obligation in wine purchases at tasting rooms. While visiting wineries, customers may either feel grateful to winery personnel for the quality of services received or they may develop a sense of obligation. These feelings result from the free tasting or hospitality offered at the winery and may trigger a perceived need to buy wine. In this research, wine and souvenirs bought out of gratitude and obligation were defined as *gratuity purchasing*. A new instrument to measure gratitude and obligation was developed and administered to winery visitors. Findings show that feelings of gratitude and obligation were positively correlated with purchasing at wineries. In addition, the study investigated whether purchasing at wineries depended on the number of travel companions. Visitors who travel to wineries in smaller groups were found to be more grateful to winery personnel and more obliged to buy wine than those visitors who traveled in larger groups. Consequently, visitors who travel in smaller groups tend to spend more money on wine than larger groups. Implications for wine managers are included.

Key Words: wine tourism, gratitude, obligation

### Introduction

Wine tourism is big business across the United States and worldwide. According to the Wine Institute (2004), more than 14 million people visit Californian wine-producing areas each year. Tourism directly related to the wine industry in California results in expenditures of \$1.3 billion annually. California has a long history associated with wine. However, wine tourism also has been developing in other U.S. states, which have not been traditional wine making regions. The Texas Wine Marketing Research Institute reported that the overall impact of the wine industry on the state economy was due to substantial expenditures in hospitality and tourism related to the wine industry. In 2004, tourists visiting Texas wineries spent an estimated \$27.7 million (Dodd, Kolyesnikova, & Revilla, 2004).

In the worldwide context, Australia was one of the first countries to recognize that both national tourism and wine industries can capitalize on the growing interest in visiting wine regions. The Winemakers Federation of Australia (2005) recently reported that the estimated value of wine tourism in Australia is nearly \$1 billion.

Wine tourism has also blossomed in South Africa. According to the South Africa Wine Industry Information and Systems Organization (2004), wine tourism is the fastest growing industry in the country. Recently, some Eastern European countries like Hungary, have begun to establish wine trails in an effort to attract Western European

tourists (C. M. Hall, Sharples, Cambourne, & Macionis, 2000). Thus, wine tourism can provide positive contributions to both the wine and tourism industries, as well as to regional economies.

The current study aimed to demonstrate the importance of consumer behavior in wine tourism. An understanding of winery visitors' purchasing behavior can help provide important insights for wineries managers.

Sometimes, wine purchasing decisions can be explained simply by objective characteristics of the product, for example price of the wine. Subjective consumer preferences, such as taste of wine or preferences for certain varieties, are likely to have considerable impacts on purchasing decisions as well. In many instances, however, the real reasons for purchases may be subconscious and difficult to identify. For example, visitors to wineries may feel grateful to winery personnel for the quality of services received while at the winery. Alternatively, a sense of obligation, rather than gratitude, may be dominant. This sense of obligation may result from the free tasting and hospitality offered at the winery. The current study attempted to investigate feelings of gratitude and obligation that may prompt purchasing at wineries.

From the marketing approach, gratitude and obligation may lead to what we suggest to be called *gratuity purchasing*. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "gratuity" means, "a gift or present (usually of money), often in return of favor or services, the amount depending on the inclination of the giver" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 780). The Random House Webster's College Dictionary suggested the following definition of "gratuity": "(a) something given without claim or demand, (b) something given voluntarily, usually for service" (*Random House Webster's College Dictionary*, 1998, p. 43). Thus, the term *gratuity purchasing* seems appropriate to the context of investigation.

No previous studies were located which examined feelings that may stimulate gratuity purchasing. The current study aimed to examine feelings of gratitude and obligation that may lead to a perceived need to buy wine in return for services received at a winery.

Furthermore, the study investigated whether expenditures at wineries were influenced by the presence of travel companions at the time of purchasing. The idea that other people's opinions impact customers' choice of products has been suggested for some time (Holbrook, O'Shaughnessy, & Bell, 1990; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Ward, 1974). Despite consumer researchers' long recognition that social context (i.e., presence of other people) is of great significance to product consumption, there is a lack of research related to the social nature of consumer behavior. The current study examined whether differences existed between smaller and larger groups of visitors in terms of gratitude, obligation, and purchasing behavior at wineries. By drawing on consumer behavior, marketing, and social psychology literature, the study extended current research on wine consumers.

### Problem Statement

Although comprehensive research has been conducted recently on winery visitors (Brown & Getz, 2005; J. Bruwer, 2003; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Mitchell, Hall, & McIntosh, 2000; Yuan, Cai, Morrison, & Linton, 2005), no previous studies were located which examined a need to buy wine in return for services provided at wineries. The role of gratitude and obligation has not been investigated previously in the wine context.

### Purpose of the Study

The current study aimed to explore whether or not winery visitors feel a need to buy wine due to a perceived need to reciprocate for services received at tasting rooms. The study also aimed to examine whether differences existed with respect to gratitude, obligation, and purchasing behavior depending on the number of visitors in the group.

### Research Questions

Based on the purpose of the study, three research questions were advanced.

RQ1. Do feeling of gratitude and obligation influence visitors' purchasing decisions?

RQ2. Do visitors of smaller and larger groups differ in terms of their purchasing behavior at wineries?

RQ3. Are there differences between smaller and larger groups of visitors with respect to gratitude and obligation?

### Literature Review

Gratuity purchasing can be theoretically supported by a concept known in social psychology as *reciprocity*. The basic proposition of the reciprocity rule is that people feel obligated to make future repayments for what they have received. Simply put, people feel a need to repay, in kind, what other people have provided them. For example, if somebody helps us, we often feel a need to repay the kindness later. Most people almost instantly feel a sense of obligation after someone treats them kindly (Whatley, Webster, Smith, & Rhodes, 1999). According to the reciprocity norm, people feel an emotional need to reciprocate for positive behavior received.

In explaining how the reciprocity rule works, the author of the original reciprocity theory, Alvin Gouldner (1960), stated, "Insofar as men live under such rule of reciprocity, when one party benefits from another, an obligation is generated. The recipient is now *indebted* to the donor, and he remains so until he repays" (p. 174). The norm of reciprocity, therefore, creates motives for returning benefits.

Reciprocity has applications in numerous fields related to human behavior. In negotiations, lawyers are often advised to use the reciprocity rule to persuade their counterparts to make concessions. One way to achieve concessions is for a lawyer to start with a concession. This can create in a counterpart a sense of obligation to respond

similarly (Guthrie, 2004). In retailing, food stores offer free samples in hope that consumers will like the product and perhaps feel some obligation to buy (Cialdini, 2001). Likewise, banks offer free trial periods for new services; health clubs offer free workouts. Customers are thus exposed to products or services without taking a risk of purchasing them; but businesses also anticipate that free trials will make customers feel indebted to buy their goods or services. Because reciprocity appears to be a universal phenomenon, it can be applied to many aspects of social life.

In addition to numerous examples of how human behavior can be regulated by reciprocity, there is ample empirical evidence to support reciprocity theory. Social scientists argue that reciprocity is one of the earliest and most powerful moral principles taught to children, and therefore, is a social norm (Berkowitz, 1972; Cialdini & Rhoads, 2001; Elster, 1989; Whatley et al., 1999). Stated differently, we are taught from early childhood that returning kindness is simply the proper thing to do. Further review of the theoretical background leads to the introduction of the key forces that explain the norm of reciprocity, namely gratitude and obligation.

#### Gratitude and Obligation

In his original theory, Gouldner (1960) suggested that the two conditions that make the reciprocity rule work, are gratitude and obligation. Gouldner mentioned that these two states operate as independent predictors of reciprocal behavior, “the sentiment of gratitude joins forces with the sentiment of rectitude and adds a safety-margin in the motivation to conformity” (p. 176).

Attempts have been made to investigate the impact of these two factors on reciprocal behavior. There is empirical evidence that gratitude can be a predictor of reciprocal actions (Goei & Boster, 2005; Graham, 1988). Several studies implied that gratitude can potentially explain further compliance (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). The studies on obligation, however, provided inconsistent results regarding the role of obligation in the favor-compliance relationships. Some studies have found that favor increases obligation, and obligation, in its turn, increases compliance (Greenberg & Frisch, 1972; Greenberg & Saxe, 1975). Other studies reported no relationship between obligation and compliance (Goei & Boster, 2005).

This research aimed to empirically test gratitude and obligation in consumer behavior. It was expected that if visitors' experiences at wineries are enjoyable, they may feel appreciative of the staff who provided services. Therefore, visitors are likely to develop a sense of gratitude. These feelings, in turn, may lead to a perceived need to buy wine or wine souvenirs at the end of their visits. At least subconsciously, visitors understand that the winery personnel will benefit if they purchase wine at the end of their visit to a tasting room. In view of the reciprocity norm, the exchange of benefits should be mutually beneficial. So, on the one hand, consumers may see purchasing as a way to express their gratitude. Alternatively, purchasing can occur because of a perceived need

to comply with the reciprocity norm. In summary, there are good theoretical reasons to believe that gratitude and obligation may impact winery visitors' purchasing behavior.

Most previous research on gratitude and obligation was qualitative in nature. It is not until recently that significant attempts have been made to approach the gratitude and obligation as measurable constructs. Goei and Boster (2005) advanced research on reciprocal behavior by making conceptual distinctions between gratitude and obligation. Their results demonstrated that gratitude and obligation can be empirically distinguished and should be approached as two separate constructs.

With a very few exceptions, the existing research on reciprocity did not take into consideration additional external or internal factors that may influence individual levels of gratitude and obligation. Some researchers examined the effect of public versus private conditions on gratitude and obligation (Whatley et al., 1999). The reciprocity rule was found to work better in public conditions, when the actions are visible to other people. Other researchers investigated the relationship between a beneficiary and a benefactor (Bar-Tal, Bar-Zohar, Greenberg, & Hermon, 1977; Goei & Boster, 2005). Their results indicated that people more often comply with requests of those who have done them small favors (Boster, Rodriguez, Cruz, & Marshall, 1995; R. M. Groves, Cialdini, & Couper, 1992; D. J. Howard, 1995), especially if the relationship between a beneficiary and a benefactor are close (Bar-Tal et al., 1977), or expected to be long-termed (Pervan, Bove, & Johnson, 2004).

There also appears a need to look at additional factors that can potentially influence purchasing at wineries. In the present research, gratuity purchasing was approached not only as a combination of gratitude and obligation, but also with respect to the number of visitors in the group. The presence of travel companions was investigated with respect to gratuity purchasing. In other words, the research examined whether purchasing at wineries depended on how many people there were in the group.

#### Wine Tourism Research Overview

Although there has been a substantial growth of studies on winery visitors in recent years, the amount of research is relatively small compared to other service industries such as retailing. Studies on winery visitors focused mainly on consumers' sociodemographic characteristics (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997), psychographic attributes (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002), combined with attitudinal measures (Dodd & Gustafson, 1997). Several consumer behavior attributes were examined, including product and purchase involvement (Dodd, 1994; Yuan & Dodd, 2001), experience and social interaction (R. Groves, Charters, & Reynolds, 2000), occasion (J. Hall & Lockshin, 1999), and consumer knowledge about wine (Dodd, Laverie, Wilcox, & Duhan, 2005). These attributes have been found explanatory for wine purchasing behavior. However, no studies were found that addressed the social psychological perspective of winery visitors' behavior.

Wine consumer researchers previously have recognized the importance of social situations for wine consumption (Johan Bruwer, Li, & Reid, 2002; Gouldner, 1960; R. Groves et al., 2000; Spawton, 1991). In social situations, people may be concerned about what others will think of their wine selection and how they will appear if they make a poor choice (J. Hall & Winchester, 2000). Yet, most of these studies did not use social situations as a subject of primary investigation. With reference to wine tourism, winery visitors are often viewed as individuals who travel to wineries alone. In reality, however, winery visitors most often travel in the presence of others and tourists' choices of destination, as well as purchasing decisions, may be influenced by travel companions.

The brief overview of the wine tourism research revealed a need to approach visitors' behavior from the sociological perspective. Specifically, the current research examined the role of gratitude and obligation in gratuity purchasing. In addition, the importance of travel companions' presence was investigated in the wine context.

### Methodology

The population of interest was visitors to wineries in Texas. Six wineries geographically dispersed throughout the state of Texas, were used as sites to gather data from visitors.

Due to the exploratory character of the current study, a nonprobability, purposive sample was used. The purposive sample included subjects on the basis of a specific characteristic; in this case – winery visitors.

Data collection was conducted during the weekends of summer 2005. Research personnel collected data by personal distribution of the questionnaire to winery visitors. It is important to note that attempts were made to include both visitors who bought wine and/or souvenirs at the tasting rooms and those who did not make a purchase. The decision to include all visitors, regardless of their purchases, was determined by the purpose of the study to examine feelings of gratitude and obligation, or lack thereof, while at a winery.

The questionnaire was designed to measure a number of factors that may affect consumer purchasing decisions at wineries. With respect to gratitude and obligation, no scale was located that could be directly applied to the current study. Therefore, a multi-item scale was developed to measure gratitude and obligation. Several items were included on the scale to allow for elimination of poor performing items through pretesting.

### Instrument Development

For the development of the instrument, both pretesting and a pilot study were employed. Pretesting was administered to undergraduate hospitality students at a southwestern U.S. university. Simulated scenarios were developed to create a situation similar to visiting a winery in terms of generating feelings of gratitude and obligation. The scenarios ended with a list of open-ended questions about feelings of gratitude,

obligation, and other factors that could potentially lead to gratuity purchasing. The purpose of the pretesting was to obtain a comprehensive list of reasons for purchasing. Based on the analysis of the participants' responses, an initial list of items that could potentially be antecedents to gratuity purchasing was developed.

The researchers then employed a second pretesting to ensure the power of measurement. The second pretesting was conducted through a focus group. Twelve people, who have visited wineries previously, were recruited to participate in the focus group. During the focus group discussion, questions were asked about factors that influenced the participants' decisions to buy or not to buy wine and/or souvenirs while at a winery. Given that gratuity purchasing may be of a subconscious nature, questions about feelings of appreciation to winery personnel, obligation, normative pressure, and other factors related to gratuity purchasing were asked both indirectly and directly.

Based on the content analyses of the scenarios generated for the pretest and the focus group, the final list of six factors to measure gratitude and obligation was included on the questionnaire. A seven-point Likert type scale was used to measure the degree to which these factors affected visitors' decisions to purchase wine (1= least likely to affect purchasing, 7 = most likely to affect purchasing).

A pilot study was conducted to gain information about the data collection process and to identify problems with regards to the developed questionnaire. The pilot study was an effort to increase validity of the instrument. The data from the pilot study were analyzed for the reliability of the instrument. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. All scales in the pilot study obtained reliabilities above .70.

### Final Survey Instrument

The survey focused on measuring the impact of gratitude, obligation, and the presence of travel companions on visitors' purchasing decisions at wineries. The final instrument contained a total of 30 questions. Six items measured gratitude and obligation. The gratitude scale included items, which measured positive affective response to receiving services at a winery, namely desire to say "thank you" to winery personnel, appreciation of the wine tasting, and appreciation of the tour. The obligation scale included items which measured a negative, possibly uncomfortable, state that visitors may experience. Items on the obligation factor included ethical indebtedness, purchase expectation, and normative pressure (e.g., "I feel that buying wine is a socially proper thing to do").

Sociodemographic characteristics examined were gender, age, education, and income. Behavioral characteristics examined were the total number of wineries visited in lifetime, first time versus repeat visitors, wine consumption quantities (bottles of wine consumed per month), and the amount of money spent on wine per month. Two questions addressed the structure of the group of visitors. One question asked how many people there were in the group of visitors. And the second question asked who the travel companions were (e.g., spouse, relatives, friends, etc.)

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a number of statistical procedures including descriptive statistics, factor analysis, reliabilities, correlation, and ANOVA. Descriptive statistics were employed to provide an overview of visitors to Texas wineries and some of their behavioral characteristics, such as wine consumption quantities and the amount of money spent on wine monthly. Factor analysis was used to determine the underlying structures of the gratitude and obligation constructs. The data were analyzed for the reliability of the instrument. Reliabilities were examined by Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Correlation analysis was used to assess correlation indices between the variables. Finally, a series of ANOVA were employed to examine differences in purchasing behavior, gratitude, and obligation based on the number of visitors in the group.

### Findings

#### Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sampled Population

A total of 357 questionnaires were collected at Texas wineries. Descriptive statistics were employed to obtain a representation of the sample. The sociodemographic characteristics tested were gender, age, education, and income. Forty-six percent of the visitors were male, and 54% were female. These numbers seemed consistent with other studies, which reported a similar gender percentage of wine consumers. Females generally represent a higher percentage of wine consumers compared to males (Adams Beverage Group, 2005; Barber & Almanza, 2006; Hoffman, 2000; Lesch, Luk, & Leonard, 1991).

The average age of the respondents was 41 years, ranging from 21 to 69 years old. Seventy-three percent of the respondents were under 51 years of age. Notably, 18.5% were younger consumers, 21 to 30 years old. This percentage represents U.S. national and international trends of the wine industry, where younger consumers start to develop more interest in wine (Fountain & Charters, 2004; Hammett, 1997; R. Howard & Stonier, 2002). Respondents had high levels of education. Two-thirds of the sample has earned either an undergraduate or graduate degree. Only 5.6% of the visitors had not attended college.

Participants' income levels were substantially higher than the general U.S. population, with only 16% of the sample earning less than \$40,000 as a total annual household income. Almost one-third of the respondents reported that their annual household income exceeded \$100,000. For comparison, the median income of the U.S. population in 2004 was \$44,473 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

Overall, the sociodemographic background of visitors to Texas wineries (middle-aged, educated, and with higher incomes) mirrored the profile of wine consumers in general. Other studies reported similar demographic characteristics of wine consumers



(Barber & Almanza, 2006; Chaney, 2001; Dodd & Bigotte, 1997; Lesch et al., 1991; Overby, Gardial, & Woodruff, 2004).

Visitors' behavioral characteristics were examined with respect to their monthly wine consumption quantities and purchases. The majority of the respondents (51%) reported that they consume 3 or less bottles of wine per month. The median dollar amount spent on wine monthly was \$40.00.

During their visits to the wineries, seventy-five percent of the visitors purchased wine and/or souvenirs, while 25% did not make a purchase. The mean of the total amount spent at the wineries was about thirty dollars ( $M = 30.29$ ,  $SD = 34.39$ ); the median was \$20.00. The total spending represented a combined amount that visitors spent on wine and souvenirs. Wine sales per person had a mean of \$27.37 (90.4% of sales per person), while souvenir sales per person accounted for an average of \$2.92 (9.6% of sales per person).

#### Factor Analysis

Principal axis factoring with a varimax rotation was used to examine underlying structures of the gratitude and obligation constructs. Six items were entered into the analysis. Two factors were extracted, which represented measurements for gratitude and obligation. No item was found with loading less than .40. The two factors accounted for 55.67% of the total variance.

#### Reliability

Coefficient alphas were computed to obtain internal consistency estimates of reliability of the scales. Both constructs met the minimum Cronbach's coefficient reliability of .70, which indicated satisfactory reliability (Cronbach, 1951). The coefficient alphas for gratitude and obligation were .87 and .73, respectively.

#### Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between the variables. Correlation analysis revealed a relatively high positive significant correlation between gratitude and obligation ( $r = .59$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These results mirrored the proposition of the original reciprocity theory that while gratitude and obligation operate independently, they are closely interrelated (Gouldner, 1960). Previous research on gratitude and obligation dimensionality also revealed significant positive correlation between the two constructs (Goei, 2003).

With reference to the relationship between gratitude, obligation, and dollar amounts spent at wineries, the relationships were significant and positive. The correlation between gratitude and the amount of money spent at wineries was the highest ( $r = .51$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Correlation between obligation and total dollars spent at wineries was also significant ( $r = .36$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These findings suggested that the higher visitors' feelings of gratitude and obligation while at a winery, the more they are going to spend on wine and/or souvenirs.

Additional correlation analyses were employed to examine relationships between the number of visitors in the group, gratitude, obligation, and dollar amounts spent at wineries. The relationships were found significant and negative. In other words, as the number of people in the group increases, the level of gratitude and obligation, as well as the dollar amount spent at wineries, decreases. A complete correlation matrix between the variables is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation matrix for gratitude, obligation, number of people in group, and dollar amount spent at wineries

	Gratitude	Obligation	Number of people in the group	Dollar amount spent at wineries
Gratitude	–	.59**	-.51**	.51**
Obligation		–	-.26**	.36**
Number of people in group			–	-.39**
Dollar amount spent at wineries				–

Note: \*\* $p < .01$ .

#### ANOVA

A series of analyses of variance was employed to further investigate the relationship between the variables. The sample was divided into three groups: (a) visitors who traveled in groups of one or two people, (b) visitors who traveled in groups of three or four people, and (c) groups of five visitors and more. The three groups served as three levels of the independent variable. The dependent variables were the dollar amount spent at wineries, gratitude, and obligation (overall mean scores). Three one-way ANOVA were employed to determine if differences existed between the groups. The overall ANOVA results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Analyses of variance for dollar amount spent, gratitude, and obligation

	$df$	$F$	$\eta^2$	$p$
Dollar amount spent at wineries	$\frac{2}{354}$	34.68	.16	.001**
Gratitude	$\frac{2}{330}$	65.94	.29	.001**
Obligation	$\frac{2}{353}$	14.51	.08	.001**

Note: \*\*  $p < .001$ .

With respect to spending at wineries, the ANOVA was significant  $F(2,354) = 34.68$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . The number of people in the group factor accounted for 16% of the variance of the dependent variable. In terms of gratitude, the overall ANOVA was also

significant  $F(2,330) = 65.94, p \leq .001$ . The strength of the relationship between the number of people in the group and the gratitude factor was strong, with the number of people factor accounting for 29% of the variance of the dependent variable. With regards to obligation, the overall ANOVA was significant  $F(2,353) = 14.51, p \leq .001$ . The number of visitors in the group factor accounted for 8% of the variance of the obligation variable.

Because the  $F$ -values were significant, post-hoc analyses were conducted to evaluate specific differences between the groups. The mean differences between the groups for the three ANOVA are reported in Table 3.

Table 3 Mean differences for analyses of variance between groups

Independent variable (Number of visitors in the group)	Dependent Variables					
	Dollar amount spent at wineries		Gratitude		Obligation	
	Mean <sup>1</sup>	SD	Mean <sup>1</sup>	SD	Mean <sup>1</sup>	SD
1-2 visitors	44.61 <sub>a</sub>	33.78	5.23 <sub>a</sub>	1.41	3.76 <sub>a</sub>	1.63
3-4 visitors	32.57 <sub>b</sub>	33.70	4.93 <sub>a</sub>	1.45	3.56 <sub>a</sub>	1.50
5 and more visitors	12.19 <sub>c</sub>	26.77	3.08 <sub>b</sub>	1.73	2.79 <sub>b</sub>	1.33

Note: <sup>1</sup> Means with different subscripts differ significantly at  $p < .05$  in the Tukey honestly significant difference comparison

The post-hoc test revealed significant differences in buying behavior among the three groups. Visitors who traveled in groups of one or two people spent significantly more money than visitors who traveled in groups of three or four people, and significantly more than groups of five or more people.

Follow-up tests were also conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means for the gratitude factor. The results indicated that visitors who traveled in smaller groups (less than five people in the group) experienced stronger feelings of gratitude towards the winery personnel than those visitors who traveled in larger groups.

Similar analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between visitors' feelings of obligation to buy wine at a winery and the number of visitors in the group. The results of post-hoc tests were similar to the gratitude factor. Visitors of groups of one or two people and groups of three or four visitors had similar levels of obligation to buy wine. However, visitors who traveled in groups of five and more people differed significantly from smaller groups in terms of their feelings of obligation. Therefore, larger groups' visitors reported considerably less obligation than visitors who traveled in smaller groups.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrated that gratitude and obligation are strongly correlated with visitors' purchasing behavior at wineries. The research found that as feelings of gratitude and obligation increase, so does the amount of money visitors spend on wine and/or wine souvenirs.

Additional results of the study indicated that purchasing behavior was strongly influenced by the presence of travel companions at the time of purchasing. In particular, the research found that purchasing at wineries differed depending on the number of visitors in the group. It appears that visitors who travel in smaller groups experience higher levels of gratitude and obligation than visitors of larger groups. Consequently, visitors who come to wineries in smaller groups tend to spend more money on wine and/or wine souvenirs than larger groups.

There may be several reasons that smaller groups spend more money at wineries. Perhaps, the fact that purchasing at tasting rooms takes place in public conditions may trigger a perceived need to comply with the reciprocity norm. Cialdini (2001) claimed that reciprocation almost always unfolds in a public way. Previous research has indicated that public conditions generally create greater compliance than private conditions (Whatley et al., 1999). In other words, if people know that their behavior is observable by other people, they are more likely to comply with social norms. With fewer visitors then, purchasing becomes more visible. Therefore, visitors who come to wineries in the company of one or two people are more likely to buy wine because their purchasing is more visible to their travel companions and to the winery personnel. Alternatively, purchasing is less visible for larger groups of visitors. If visitors are aware that their purchasing behavior is less noticeable, they may feel less need to buy wine at the end of their visits.

In addition, if other people within the group have purchased wine, visitors may feel that this has also discharged their obligation to buy and has provided a type of cover for them. The others in the group may engage in conversation with the winery tour guide and this perhaps provides a distraction or creates an atmosphere where there is less focus and pressure to purchase.

It is also possible that visitors of larger groups have fewer chances to communicate directly with the winery personnel, and therefore, experience less gratitude and obligation to buy wine. This may be important as developing a personal bond or relationship with consumers is likely to create a greater degree of gratitude and obligation that could translate into purchases.

Additional purchases by people in smaller groups may also be partly caused by less crowded conditions in the tasting room and at the cash register. It is possible that, in some situations with larger groups, visitors do not want to wait in line to make a purchase and because of time constraints, simply decide to leave.

Differences in purchasing behavior between the groups may also develop from different motivational factors to visit a winery. Perhaps visitors who come in smaller groups focus more on the product characteristics and their experiences at tasting rooms. In contrast, the primary reason for visiting a winery in a large group may be socializing rather than wine. Therefore, visitors who come in larger groups may concentrate more on spending time with other people in their group rather than learning about the wine or the winery.

### Managerial Implications

Wineries' managers need to consider the effect of gratitude and obligation on visitors' purchasing decisions. Since strong relationships were found between gratitude and purchasing behavior, visitors' experiences at wineries need to be enjoyable for gratitude to occur. Winery personnel need to find ways to enhance visitors' feelings of gratitude. The most effective way to generate feelings of gratitude is high quality customer service. Although developing feelings of obligation may have an impact on sales, obligation may also create feelings of not wishing to return. It may be important for winery managers to consider the extent to which they would like to have people feeling obligated or guilty about making a purchase.

In addition, different selling strategies seem necessary for smaller and larger groups of visitors. With larger groups, winery personnel rarely have sufficient time to communicate with each member of the group and to establish individual relationships with visitors. As a result, visitors of larger groups experience less appreciation of the personnel than visitors of smaller groups. This does not mean, however, that larger groups cannot feel grateful for their experiences at wineries. There are many reasons to feel appreciation for a visit to a tasting room. To enhance feeling of gratitude, winery management may consider more than one sales person for larger groups of visitors to help them connect with individual visitors. Since sales people at wineries often work on a part-time basis, management may require reservations for larger group of visitors to maximize efficiency of their workforce.

Given that spending time with other people within larger groups may be the primary motivational factor to visit tasting rooms, winery managers may consider providing opportunities for socializing while at a winery. For example, if the facility permits, picnic or dining areas can be added to the winery.

### Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

There were several limitations that may have impacted the results of this study. One limitation to the present research revolved around the sampling method. The sample was limited to visitors to Texas wineries. The results of this research may be region specific. Generalizations to other wine tourism sites are not warranted. To increase generalization of the results, replication of this research in a variety of settings is recommended.

Another limitation is associated with the measurement tools. For the purposes of this research, a new scale was developed to measure gratitude and obligation. Although the new instrument performed reliably in the present study, ways to further refine the scale should be explored. Therefore, using the instrument in various settings is recommended. Because the instrument had not been tested previously to the research reported herein, its construct validity needs to be examined in a variety of settings. The more a construct is used in different settings with outcomes consistent with theory, the higher its construct validity (Agresti & Finlay, 1997).

Other areas of consideration for future research were based on the assumptions drawn from the results of the current study. One suggestion was that differences in purchasing behavior between smaller and larger groups of visitor may develop from different motivational factors to visit a winery. Motivations for visiting tasting rooms were beyond the scope of the current research, but it is likely that a combination of motivations and group dynamics play an important part in purchase activities. Future studies are necessary to determine whether differences in motivational factors exist between smaller and larger groups of visitors.

### Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role that gratitude and obligation play in wine and/or wine souvenir purchases at wineries. Specifically, this study examined whether differences in visitors' purchasing behavior existed based on their feelings of gratitude and obligation while at a winery.

The results of the current study empirically supported previous experimental evidence that people feel appreciation and a need to reciprocate for what they have received. Therefore, if winery visitors find their experiences at wineries enjoyable, they are likely to develop a sense of gratitude and possibly a sense of obligation to return hospitality provided by the winery personnel. These feelings, in turn, may lead to a perceived need to buy wine or wine souvenirs at the end of their visits.

Additionally, the study aimed to investigate whether visitors of smaller and larger groups differ in terms of the amount of money they spend at wineries and with respect to feelings of gratitude and obligation. The results indicated that visitors who travel to wineries in smaller groups feel more grateful to winery personnel and more obliged to buy wine than those visitors who traveled in larger groups. Accordingly, visitors who travel in smaller groups tend to spend more money on wine than larger groups.

Overall, the primary purpose of this study was to add to the knowledge about wine consumers as no previous studies were located which examined the role of reciprocity in the wine industry. This research provided sufficient empirical evidence to suggest that gratitude and obligation impact visitors' purchasing decisions at wineries. Thus, the investigation of the gratitude and obligation concepts helped explain this aspect

of consumer behavior – the effect of the reciprocity norm on wine purchasing behavior. It is hoped that additional work will build on this initial effort in a variety of situations.

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