

# Wine tourism: futures sales and cultural context of consumption

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□ *Purpose.* The aim is to explore the role of wine tourism for the future sales of high reputation wine. Therefore, this paper assumes that a part of these sales is done thanks to services linked to wine tourism and which were offered to future consumers.

□ *Design/methodology/approach.* Our study focuses on the champagne industry and its Chinese market. We work on a quantitative study of 360 Chinese consumers and a qualitative study of 24 of other Chinese consumers. The quantitative study has been analysed through a typology construct which led to the qualitative investigation. This latter focuses on one kind of consumers divided between people who visited the Champagne region and these who did not.

□ *Findings:* This study highlights the role of wine tourism to improve the perception of wines and its limit to improve future sales. We show that the wine tourism have a substantial and interactive effect on the behaviour of Chinese consumers who visit the Champagne region but the gap between the western values and the Chinese ones limits its impact on future sales in China.

□ *Practical implications:* The results show that there is a real interest in improving wine tourism, even for wines that are perceived to be the highest quality, such as champagnes. Wine tourism can be considered as a powerful and relatively inexpensive marketing tool to improve the new consumer's commitment in their domestic market. However, this role can be considered only with an adaption of values diffused by the producers to the social context of foreign visitors.

Key words: Wine tourism, Future sales, High reputation wine, Consumer Behaviour

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Wine tourism is currently a key issue for the European wine industry. As wine production around the world continues to exceed consumption, techniques which develop brand loyalty and stimulate sales need to be developed. Whilst substantial research has been carried out into wine tourism in the New World ( e.g. Dodd, 1997; Carlsen & Charters, 2006; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Getz & Brown, 2006; Mitchell, Hall, & McIntosh, 2000) much less has been done in Europe, and little of that is primary research (for exceptions see Correia, Passos Ascenção, & Charters, 2004; Frochot, 2001). Wine tourism has existed in Europe since antiquity (Cambourne et al., 2000), and was developed in parts of Europe (particularly Germany) early in the 20th century; however, it has rarely been formally planned – again in comparison with its role in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

In France, there is now political interest in the role of wine tourism, driven by the agriculture ministry (Dubrule, 2007). In practice, wine tourism has operated in France for some time. France is the most popular tourist destination in the world, and many of those tourists visit wine regions and wine producers. However, anecdotally there is a perception that wine tourism is less well focused and organized in France than in the new world, and certainly much less academic research has been conducted there. The situation in France is also complicated by the fact that, in the face of a ‘crise viticole’ (Demossier, 2005; Jordan, Zidda, & Lockshin, 2007), as producers are increasingly struggling to sell their wine, they are turning to wine tourism as one possible solution. In Europe interest in wine tourism amongst producers only develops when there is a viticultural crisis. Where there is a sudden drop in sales, and perhaps a crisis in rural development generally, it is instantly considered a solution to maintaining local economic and social coherence (Bonnieux & Rainelli, 2000), without any real analysis of the preconditions for effective wine tourism or the attitudes and commitment required of producers to make it work.

However, this position seems quite restrictive. Several studies showed that wine tourism can have an impact on future wine sales. Houghton (2002) measured increases in post festival purchases compared to pre-festival purchasing. O’Neil, Palmer and Charters (2002) developed a similar approach, examining the impact on continued sales resulting from the quality of service during the visit. Moreover, Mitchell and Hall (2004) showed repeat visits can predispose visitors to longer-term loyalty. In this way, it is necessary to go beyond the French position of ‘crisis management’ to justify the development of wine tourism. That is especially true for regions produce wines that are perceived to be the highest quality, such as champagne, where wine tourism will not invariably add to goodwill and may even be seen to damage the producer’s image (Choisy, 1996). The reputation of champagne is the result of the region’s determination to continually improve its image. This wine is currently very successful, while other French vineyards are undergoing a ‘crise viticole’. Currently, wine tourism is more sought after by the regional authorities than by the producers themselves. These latter consider it as a source of useless expenditure and time costs in the light of their current success, especially when they mainly export their wine and focus on higher priced wine (Charters and Menival, 2011). Thus, the issue is to know if there is a relationship between wine tourism and consumers’ behaviour which could influence the future export sales of high reputation wine such as champagne.

## **2. METHOD**

In order to examine this issue further, our study focuses on the champagne industry and the Chinese consumer’s perception of this region for two reasons.

Firstly, China is clearly becoming an important market for the future sales of Champagne, as for other wines. Foreign wines are becoming more and more a lifestyle fashion especially for

the emerging middle and upper classes (Liu and Murphy 2007) who can now find foreign wines such as champagne in their market thanks to more open policies since 2001 (Hu and al, 2008). Secondly, wine tourism in Champagne could be interesting based on some current empirical evidence. The Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne (CIVC) notes that in 2010 50% of consumption of champagne in China came from expatriates, 11% from tourists, 11% from local consumers and 28% from Chinese people raised abroad. In this way, 28% of consumers are directly influenced by their experience abroad. This development is especially true with the growth in the number of Chinese visitors to France. Whilst 90% of the 77 million tourists coming to France come from Europe, the number of Chinese tourists has strongly increased since 2004 and currently represents one third of Asian tourists, after Japanese people.

Unfortunately, it is quite hard, currently, to find Chinese tourists who repeat their visits to Champagne and so fit the situation developed by Mitchell and Hall (2004). Few attempts are made to attract foreign tourists and currently the industry seems saturated by the natural flow of visitors. To highlight this unnatural position, we launched two studies. The first one was a quantitative investigation to check the current Chinese consumers' perception of champagne from descriptive report of 360 people. The second one was a qualitative approach with a sample selected from quantitative characteristics defined with our first investigative method. The primary method of data-collection was a semi-structured interview, a format adopted to give some continuity of data between interviewees, but which would also offer flexibility – allowing for other, unexpected information and ideas to feed into the data obtained. Interviews were carried out in Chinese and translated in English by a Chinese member of the research team. The interviews were logged in detailed field notes, and were additionally tape recorded. During and following the data collection stage the researchers met regularly to evaluate the process, Data analysis was an on-going and cross-comparative process (Janesick 1994), although different researchers took responsibility for various aspects of the project.

### **3. RESULTS**

The first quantitative study has been conducted to define the structure of Chinese consumer's population and to bring up to date the Jin analysis (2004). The general Chinese wine involvement stays very low. On a scale of 10, 10 being a daily wine consumption, the average frequencies are 2.12 and 1.3 for champagne. They have characteristics of Chinese wine consumption pattern (Liu and Murphy, 2007) with high average income (15432 Yuan), high degree (at least Masters), they are mainly male consumers (52%) and have an average age of 32.

Therefore, for our qualitative approach, 24 interviews were arranged in Beijing and Shanghai which are the two most important places for the Chinese wine market (Jin, 2004). Eight had visited the region of champagne at least once and during several days. The other 16 were consumers of wines which have similar characteristics of Chinese wine consumption pattern previously defined by the quantitative investigation. They had a high average income (21 000 Yuan), tertiary qualification (at least Masters), they were marginally more likely to be male (52%) with an average age of 35.

Our exploratory analysis has been concentrated on two major issues: the impact of wine tourism on the champagne perception and the impact of this impact on the champagne consumption in China.

#### *The impact of wine tourism on the champagne perception*

We started our interview with general question about foreign wines. This opening question revealed the strong position of red bordeaux wines in the Chinese market. Champagne was

never cited naturally as a top-of-mind wine. However, after questions focused on their perception of champagne and its region, we constituted two sub-groups of consumers.

The first one constituted by 6 people who visited the Champagne region already. These interviewees consider champagne as a source of a strong culture linked to French life – ‘If more Chinese visit this region, they would understand better the French culture and drink more champagne. There is a long history and a lot of champagne’. They consider champagne as a result of complex process of production which explains its scarcity and so its high price – ‘I saw that the process of production is complex and give few bottles for the world consumption. That explains its high price’. They also speak about their experience which leads to consider champagne with respect – ‘When I see a bottle of champagne, I see vineyards and men who work hard every day on it. After knowing the history of champagne, we understand that we don’t only consume wine but culture too’.

Finally, this group has a positive perception of champagne and put its culture, its process of production and its taste ahead.

The second group was constituted by the 18 left who consider champagne quite differently. They explain that champagne is for celebration and parties. Some others add weddings and special occasions such as a new job or new contract. Champagne is never considered as wine, being mysterious and often unknown – ‘Champagne is for ceremonies but stays quite unknown in China where the local champagne is preferred’.

#### *The impact of different perceptions on the champagne sales in China*

Whilst we noticed a real difference between those who visited the region of champagne and the others, here we didn’t obtain any differences. Twenty Three (on 24) interviewees share similar behaviours. They quite never buy champagne and never for them. They consider champagne too expensive, too soft and mainly reserved for women – ‘Even it’s a very important part of French wines, i don’t know it. Its taste is good but too kind, no tannin. It’s for Chinese girls and reserved for weddings, celebration.’

Eleven consumers explain that this product is too far from the Chinese culture and stay a western concern – ‘Champagne has not success in China due to the difference of cultures. In France, wine is drunk during long dinners and only completes food. In China, wine is for ambiance; we add ice and drink it quickly.’ This point is especially important, 5 of these 11 consumers having visited the champagne region already.

#### **4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

These results highlight the limit of wine tourism as tool to increase future sales.

As O’Neil, Palmer and Charters (2002), we confirmed that tourist services have an impact on the consumer’s perception of product. Moreover, conversely to Choisy (1996), tourism can enhance the product’s image, as assume by Getz (1999), even for regions produce wines that are perceived to be the highest quality. Indeed, we definitely measured a positive difference of perception due to visits of Chinese consumers in the region of champagne. These latter have better knowledge of the cultural context and better appreciation of taste of champagne compare to consumers who didn’t visit the Champagne region. So, these services can influence the consumers’ behaviour due to their role in the development of brand equity (Charters & Carlsen, 2006) whatever the level of quality perceived.

However, we cannot speak about longer-term loyalty. Whilst Mitchell and Hall (2004) showed this situation after repeat visits, it is not confirmed for Chinese consumers. We can assume that Chinese who visited the Champagne region made it for several producers during their several days trip but they didn’t show any longer term loyalty toward champagne.

This limit of wine tourism can be explained by the cultural context of consumption. All previous studies (Houghton, 2002; O'Neil, Palmer and Charters, 2002; Mitchell and Hall, 2004) which measured positive impact of wine tourism on the future sales focused on consumers which belong to the same culture of producers visited. Therefore, the values diffused during the repeated visits reached similar cultural context of visitors. It is not the case for Chinese consumers. Whilst we have successful diffusion of values linked to champagne with tourist services, it seems quite far from the Chinese culture. This gap becomes a real obstacle for the champagne consumption in China, even for consumers who visited the Champagne region. They cannot find any contexts of consumption in their country which lead them to drink champagne.

This observation does not wipe out all positive impacts of wine tourism for future sales but it underlines the necessary complementary marketing policies adapted to the cultural context of consumers and not only those of producers. Obviously, farer the consumers' culture is from the producer' one, harder the adaptation is.

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