

**Meat is male; Champagne is female; Cheese is unisex:
An examination of perceived gender images of wine**

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Purpose: The current study aims to explore the relationship between a metaphor of masculinity and femininity and different types of wine.

Design/methodology/approach: The data were collected through telephone interviews. The sample was selected from a list-assisted database of U.S. telephone numbers through random digit dialing. To qualify for participation, individuals had to be of legal drinking age and be wine consumers. Trained interviewers guided the participants through a structured telephone interview script. Four hundred completed interviews were entered into the data analysis.

Findings: The results clearly indicate that certain types of wine (red, white, rosé, sparkling, champagne, port, and sherry) all have gender associations attached to them. The findings also suggest that consumer preferences for a certain type of wine (red, white, or rosé) and consumer's gender seem to bias (to a degree) their perception of the gender of the wine. For example, a male that prefers white wine tends to see white wine as more masculine. This is especially notable for women that prefer reds - females that prefer red wine perceive red wine more feminine. Thus, there is a tendency to view preferred wine as being closer to consumer's own gender.

Practical implications: Perceived gender images associated with different types of wine may be helpful in developing advertising campaigns and promotional strategies that focus either on men or on women; or be gender-neutral. This study found that for a number of wine categories (white, rosé, sparkling, champagne, sherry) there is a strong feminine association. Consumers see these products as having lighter, more feminine characteristics and this association is very strong across all of the categories. Marketers of these types of wine will need to take this into account even if they are planning on targeting male consumers. For red wine and port, the perceived masculinity also has some significant implications for wineries or those involved in wine promotion.

Key words: gender image, masculinity, femininity, metaphors

1. INTRODUCTION

Wine is often referred to in the academic literature as a drink more appealing to women (e.g., Charters et al., 2011; Pettigrew, 2003) and evidence from the industry supports this notion (Todd, 2005). Despite multiple research efforts to identify gender differences in wine preferences, motivational factors to drink wine, consumption and purchasing behavior – the findings are inconsistent (see, for example, Barber, Almanza, & Donovan, 2006; Bruwer, Lesschaeve, & Campbell, 2012; Forbes, 2012; Kolyesnikova & Dodd, 2009; Thach, 2012). While previous studies certainly add to current knowledge regarding the influence of gender on different aspects of wine consumption, these studies took into consideration only the biological sex of wine consumers. The current study extends the gender-based line of research and suggests that rather than focusing only on whether the consumers are males or females, a deeper understanding of consumer behavior may be achieved by examining perceived gender images associated with wine.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework for this study is based on the metaphoric relationship research. A metaphor has been defined as "a literally false, declarative assertion of existential equivalence that compares two concepts or things, where one concept called the primary concept is claimed to be another, the secondary concept" (Hunt & Menon, 1995, p. 82). For example, "the tannins are pure velvet" is a metaphor to describe the structural properties of wine, where a characteristic of wine (tannins) is the primary concept and a textile (velvet) is the secondary.

The importance of metaphors in marketing has been well established in the literature. Metaphors are recognized to be influencing cognition and consumption (Rozin, Hormes, Faith, & Wansink, 2012). Marketers employ metaphors to evoke consumer imagination, provoke comparisons, suggest similarity between a product and a concept, or explain a complex or technical product (Bremer & Lee, 1997). Metaphor's task is to "vividly, colorfully and dramatically convey the message" (Hunt & Menon, 1995, p. 82).

Metaphors are useful in consumer behavior research. Metaphoric linkage can facilitate the understanding of hidden decision making factors that underlie product preferences across different demographics (Rozin, et al., 2012).

Metaphors associated with human characteristics are often used to describe a product or a brand. With reference to wine, in a comprehensive discussion on figurative language used in tasting notes, Caballero (2009) points out that wine is often being described as a human being. Indeed, terms like 'nose', 'body', 'legs' or 'tears' are common descriptors of sensory experiences associated with wine and these terms distinctly represent human descriptors. Another frequently used human trait associated with products and brands is gender. Of particular interest to this research is the relationship between a metaphor of masculinity and femininity and wine.

3. GENDER-DOMINANT PRODUCTS

Many products are traditionally associated with a particular gender; and such products are generally considered gender dominant (Allison, Golden, Mullet, & Coogan, 1980; Alreck, Settle, & Belch, 1982). These products are perceived by consumers as having qualities associated with either masculinity or femininity. There is a steady and persistent interest in consumer behavior research on what forms these perceptions. Previous research shows that consumer perception of product gender dominance can be based on the consumer personal gender self-image (Stern, Tewari, & Gould, 1993; Worth, Smith, & Mackie, 1992), on the typical product usage (by males or females) (Sirgy, 1982), or on the biological sex of respondents (Allison, et al., 1980; Gould & Weil, 1991; Kahle & Homer, 1985).

Consumer evaluation of a product as having qualities associated with masculinity or femininity can influence consumer perception of which demographic (males or females) is most appropriate for a given product (Worth, et al., 1992). Despite the lack of agreement in research findings (see Palan, 2001, 'Summary of Consumer Behavior Gender Identity Studies'), many businesses nonetheless continue to base their advertising campaigns on the belief that products with ascribed masculine qualities appeal to males; and products with ascribed feminine qualities appeal to females (Alreck, et al., 1982). Current evidence from the wine industry supports this tendency. Many winemakers today market wine primarily to women (Newman, 2012). Some companies switch from advertising in magazines for wine professionals (e.g., *Wine Enthusiast* or *Wine Spectator*) to outlets that are less focused on wine but have large female readerships.

4. THE WINE CONTEXT

Wine is often considered a “female drink” for a variety of reasons. For instance, women typically account for a higher percentage of wine consumers in many New World markets. For example, more women than men identify wine as their preferred alcoholic beverage in Australia (Pettigrew, 2003). Similarly, in the United States, females generally represent a higher percentage of wine consumers compared to males (Adams Beverage Group, 2006; Kolyesnikova, Dodd, & Wilcox, 2009; Thach, 2012; Wine Institute, 2007). Even in some emerging wine markets, for example in Japan, women choose to drink wine more frequently than men. Women in Japan also seem to outnumber men in wine tastings, classes, and seminars (Aoki, 2011).

Ritchie and Valentin (2011) offer one reason to explain the popularity of wine among women - because of the unit size, a bottle of wine is used to demonstrate sharing (a trait particularly associated with femininity (Cross & Markus, 1993)), unlike beer which is a single consumption unit. Women may be using wine both to demonstrate equality in round buying or to show social inclusiveness in public consumption situations (Fox, 2004).

Men and women were found to have different wine preferences, perceptions about wine in terms of the occasion or motivational factors to consume wine – to outline just a few differences. Pettigrew (2003) reported the apparent preference of Australian females for wine over other types of alcohol and the opposite tendency for many men to avoid wine consumption in certain informal contexts. Similarly, in her recent study on gender differences between U.S consumers, Thach (2012) reported that more women than men select wine over other alcoholic beverages. Interestingly, however, Thach found more similarities than differences between men and women in terms of wine-drinking occasions, motivations to drink and preferred wine styles. For example, both men and women drink wine because they enjoy the taste of it and like drinking wine to enhance food and to relax. Distinctive

differences were observed in that men are more interested in exhibiting wine knowledge and discussing the technical aspects of the product, whereas women value the relaxation aspect and socialization with friends over wine.

Similarly, a recent cross-cultural exploration of gender issues across four nations (Forbes, 2012) found more commonalities than differences between males and females. The frequency with which consumers drink wine was not significantly moderated by their gender. Furthermore, gender had little significant impact on the importance of various wine attributes evaluated by consumers.

Findings on gender differences in preferences for different wine types are not consistent either across different markets. For example, in Canada, females were found to be drinking significantly more white and males more red wine (Bruwer, et al., 2012). However, no strong differences in wine style preference between genders were found in a sample of U.S. wine consumers (Thach, 2012), although some differences were observed in non-meal situations.

Despite the alleged ‘feminine image’ of wine, to our knowledge, no study exists that empirically tested consumer perceived gender image of wine. The current study aims to fill this void in the academic wine literature. Additionally, because of the reported inconsistencies in men’s and women’s wine preferences, we argue that perceived images of the wine’s gender may be different for different types of wine. Thus, we suggest that wine should not be approached as one broad category. Rather, different types of wine should be considered individually. The most recognized preferences in the literature and the industry are by color (red, white, and rosé). The current study will examine these consumer preferences in relationship with the perceived gender of each type of wine.

5. PURPOSE OF STUDY

The current study aims to explore the relationship between a metaphor of masculinity and femininity and different types of wine. Understanding consumer perceptions of product gender images has been important with other products as they have narrowed the focus for advertising and product positioning. For example, research shows that a greater percentages of males than females were perceived to drink beer, confirming the choice of beer as a ‘masculine’ product (Worth, et al., 1992). Beer producers have been able to focus on particular segments by constructing advertising to appropriately reach these targets by focusing on gender issues. This study is an initial attempt to try to understand the masculinity and femininity of various types of wine.

6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the above mentioned reasons to justify the purpose of the research, the current study was designed to address three research questions:

RQ₁: What is the general consumer perception of the gender of different types of wine?

RQ₂: Is there a relationship between males’ and females’ perceptions of the gender of the wine?

RQ₃: Is there a relationship between the preferred type of wine and perceived gender of the wine?

7. METHOD

7.1. Respondents and Procedures

The population of interest was wine consumers. U.S. households were contacted by phone through a telephone survey center. The sample was selected from a list-assisted database of telephone numbers through random digit dialing. To qualify for participation in the study, individuals had to: (a) be of legal drinking age in the U.S. (21 years of age and older); (b) consume wine; and (c) consumed wine within the past 12 months. The twelve month time frame helped include individuals who might not be highly involved with wine and might consume wine primarily during the holiday seasons.

Trained interviewers introduced themselves to potential participants, provided the name of the university affiliation and a statement concerning the academic purpose of the research. If the respondents agreed to participate, the screening questions were asked to determine eligibility for participation. If the respondents passed the screening, the callers proceeded with a structured script of the interview. On average, the interview lasted for about 10 minutes. A computer assisted data entry system prompted callers through the questionnaire. Responses were entered directly into a computer data file hosted on a main server.

The data were collected within a three-month period, over the summer of 2012. Callers initially dialed 16,235 telephone numbers, reaching 12,121 potential respondents (74.7 per cent). To ensure reliable response and cooperation rates, unanswered telephone numbers were called back five times at different times within a period of one week before being replaced. Of those respondents who answered the phone, 2,289 people (18.9 per cent) qualified for the survey participation. Of those who qualified, 17.5 percent agreed to participate. The final sample consisted of 400 completed interviews.

7.2. Measures

Overall, the survey consisted of forty questions and measured various aspects of wine preferences and consumption behavior; attitudes to local wines; decider/purchaser roles; and metaphoric relationships between wine and gender. Since the focal point of the current manuscript is the discussion about the metaphoric linkage, only specific measures and data related to the topic under investigation will be discussed in the paper.

To investigate the validity of a metaphor, Rozin et al. (2012) suggested a multimethod framework consisting of six quantitative methodologies, the most explicit of which is direct measurement profiling. The current study adopted this method. The callers read the instruction statement, *I will now read a short list of different products. Please indicate to what extent you perceive these products as 'masculine' or 'feminine'?* Respondents rated a range of food products and different types of wine as masculine or feminine. Responses were coded as '1' masculine or '2' feminine. The list of products included meat, chocolate, cheese, red wine, white wine, rosé wine, blush wine, champagne, sparkling wine, port, and sherry.

Preferences for different types of wine were measured by one item - *What type of wine is your favorite?* Answer choices included red wine, white wine, and rosé. Only one (most favorite) answer was allowed.

8. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

RQ₁ and RQ₂ were intended to examine consumer perception of the gender of different types of wine and a possible relationship between males' and females' perceptions of the gender of the wine. The analysis was descriptive, examining each product as to its perceived gender (in general) and by the gender of the respondent (Table 1). The results suggest few surprises. Meat is perceived as strongly masculine (94%), while chocolate is decidedly feminine (90%) according to the sample. Products other than wine (especially meat) were included in the list to have references to previous studies. Multiple studies converged on the hypothesis that meat is more male than female (Fiddes, 1992; Rozin, et al., 2012; Sobal, 2005; Twigg, 1979). "Meat, especially red meat, is an archetypical masculine food. Men often emphasize meat, and women often minimize meat, in displaying gender as individuals" (Sobal, 2005, p. 135) The results of the current study are fairly consistent with previous findings and suggest a degree of representativeness of the sample.

With reference to wine, white wine (92%), sparkling wine (93%), champagne (86%), rosé (91%) and blush (93%) all were deemed substantially feminine; whereas port (81%) was perceived as masculine. Red wine was deemed masculine by a 2 to 1 margin. The only product less well-defined in a gender sense was cheese (43% masculine and 57% feminine).

Product	Perception	Frequency	Per	Respondents Gender
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Table 1. Consumer perception of the products' gender

	of Product Gender		cent	Male		Female	
				Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
Meat	Masculine	348	94%	153	44%	195	56%
	Feminine	21	6%	6	29%	15	71%
Chocolate	Masculine	33	10%	21	64%	12	36%
	Feminine	299	90%	115	38%	184	62%
Cheese	Masculine	101	43%	60	59%	41	41%
	Feminine	140	57%	44	31%	96	69%
Red wine	Masculine	206	67%	113	55%	93	45%
	Feminine	101	33%	24	24%	77	76%
White wine	Masculine	29	8%	14	48%	15	52%
	Feminine	316	92%	139	44%	177	56%
Rose	Masculine	30	9%	11	37%	19	63%
	Feminine	317	91%	139	44%	178	56%
Blush	Masculine	24	7%	12	50%	12	50%
	Feminine	312	93%	138	44%	174	56%
Champagne	Masculine	40	14%	18	45%	22	55%
	Feminine	248	86%	108	44%	140	56%
Sparkling wine	Masculine	21	7%	13	62%	8	38%
	Feminine	291	93%	117	40%	174	60%
Port	Masculine	252	81%	110	44%	142	56%
	Feminine	58	19%	27	47%	31	53%
Sherry	Masculine	99	32%	44	44%	55	56%
	Feminine	214	68%	93	43%	121	57%

The question remains (RQ₃), when a preference for a product is expressed, does it influence the perception of the product's gender? To address this question, wine preference was added to the analysis. Although the analysis was not statistically elegant, the number of cross-classifications kept it from being straightforward. Respondents were identified by their wine preference, their gender and then whether they perceived the wine type to be masculine or feminine. The effect is reported in Table 2 and given context by comparison to the data in Table 1. For example, 55% of women felt red wine to be masculine unless red wine was their preferred drink in which case the percent dropped to 45%. Of men who preferred white wine, 15% felt it was masculine as compared to only 10% of men reporting their perception without regard to preference. These results suggest that consumer preferences for a certain type of wine (red, white, or rosé) and consumer's gender seem to bias (to a degree) their perception of the gender of the wine. Thus, there seems to be a tendency to view preferred wine as being closer to consumer's own gender.

Favorite Wine	Respondents Gender	Perception of Wine Gender			
		Masculine		Feminine	
		Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
Red wine	Male	85	88%	12	12%
	Female	35	45%	42	55%
White wine	Male	5	15%	28	85%
	Female	4	5%	69	95%
Rosé	Male	0	0%	7	100%
	Female	4	15%	22	85%

Table 2. The relationship between favorite wine and perception of the gender of the wine

9. DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, IMPLICATIONS

This study is an initial attempt to explore the relationship between different types of wine and perceptions of whether they have connotations of masculinity or femininity. The results clearly indicate that certain types of wine (red, white, rosé, sparkling, champagne, port, and sherry) all have gender associations attached to them. The interaction of consumer gender and product significantly influenced perceptions of both masculine and feminine image. Both males and females appeared to perceive the product spectrum as containing more of the image of their respective biological sex.

These attachments are likely to be strong and enduring. One possibility is that these perceptions can be passed along within families and through societies. The perceptions of how consumers have seen wine associated to parents, grandparents and other referents may influence consumer gender associations with wine today. Potential reference group influences on the perceptions of the gender image of wine seems to be a useful extension of this topic for future research. Further research in this area could also expand the associations with behavior and image across different cultures.

There are a number of implications for people involved in the wine industry. Perceived gender images associated with different types of wine may be helpful in developing advertising campaigns and promotional strategies that focus either on men or on women; or

be gender-neutral. This study found that for a number of wine categories (white, rosé, sparkling, champagne, sherry) there is a strong feminine association. Consumers see these products as having lighter, more feminine characteristics and this association is very strong across all of the categories. Marketers of these types of wine will need to take this into account even if they are planning on targeting male consumers. For red wine and port, the perceived masculinity also has some significant implications for wineries or those involved in wine promotion. Rather than just a focus on whether consumers are male or female, the idea of digging into gender images could provide a deeper understanding of consumer behavior.

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