

Who's here? An exploratory study of the characteristics and wine consumption behaviours of visitors at a New Zealand wine festival

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper explores the socio-demographic characteristics and wine consumption behaviours of visitors to a New Zealand wine and food festival and explores the extent to which they differ from a general sample of New Zealand wine consumers.

Design/methodology/approach - The data were collected via a structured self-complete survey, distributed through a combination of survey administration modes (pen-and-paper and online). Descriptive statistics and χ^2 tests of significance were used to analyse the data.

Findings – The festival attendees did not differ significantly from a general sample of wine consumers on most measures, but they did consume wine more frequently and bought more wine for home consumption. The festival sample was also more diverse than the general sample on many measures, suggesting that the reasons for being at the festival, and the experiences sought, are not homogeneous.

Practical implications – The paper provides an up-to-date profile of wine festival attendees at one festival in New Zealand, it highlights the similarities and differences between this sample and a general sample of wine consumers in New Zealand and suggests avenues for future research.

Key words: wine festival visitor profile; New Zealand.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, wine events and festivals have become increasingly important as tourist attractions and branding and promotional tools for wineries and wine regions (Bruwer, 2002; Dodd et al., 2006). These festivals and events appeal also to a growing number of consumers who are seeking memorable and personal experiences rather than sights and products in their leisure time (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Wine festivals provide ample opportunities for a diversity of such experiences including hedonic pleasure, entertainment, educational experiences and escape from everyday life (Bruwer and Alant, 2009; Charters et al., 2009; Quadri-Felitti and Fiore, 2012). Despite the growing role of wine festivals and events, the academic study of wine festival attendees –who attends them and why – is still relatively limited. However, there are a growing number of studies exploring the motivation of wine festival attendees, which have generally found escape/relaxation, wine, socialisation with friends and family and entertainment dominate (Park et al., 2008; Tanford et al., 2012; Yuan et al., 2008). Some segmentation of festival attendees on the basis of age (Dodd et al., 2006), wine knowledge (Houghton, 2008), and involvement (Yuan et al., 2008) has been reported also, but there is scope for more research of the phenomenon.

Anecdotal and academic research tends to conclude that wine festival attendees differ from wine consumers more generally, but there is less agreement on how they differ. Some researchers argue that wine festivals provide a good opportunity to attract younger, less experienced wine consumers who are able to learn about wine in a more social and less intimidating environment than at a wine class or a winery (Dodd et al., 2006; Houghton, 2001). Somewhat contradictorily, it has been argued that the fact that wine festival attendees have made an effort to attend a wine event, usually at considerable expense and involving travel, means that they are likely to be more serious wine tourists (Houghton, 2001; Park et al., 2008; Weiler et al., 2004). By contrast, others believe that the focus on fun and socialization at festivals and events means that the people who are attracted are not serious, and that the popularity and ‘party atmosphere’ of some wine events makes quality interaction difficult and may even deter serious wine consumers (Houghton, 2008).

The reality is that wine festival attendees are not homogeneous (Yuan et al., 2008). Furthermore, the heterogeneity of wine events means that different types of festivals attract quite different markets with varied motivations (Houghton, 2001; Park et al., 2008). Wine-related festivals and events exist on a continuum with regards to the centrality of wine to the event, with many festivals incorporating music, food, art and other performances to support or enhance the experience. The educational component of wine festivals can vary dramatically also; ranging from informal learning through wine tasting, to more formal seminars and workshops (Dodd et al., 2006). The location of the festival will have an impact also on the experience of the event, and likely the characteristics of the festival-goers (Dodd et al., 2006). Attending a wine festival in a rural wine region generally requires more planning, organisation and commitment than attending a wine festival in the city where one lives (Park et al., 2008).

The Christchurch/South Island Wine and Food Festival, is one of the most recent additions to the growing number of wine festivals and events in New Zealand. This festival was first held in 2011 and has occurred annually in December since then. Unlike the many festivals which are located in rural locations showcasing a particular region’s wines, this festival is based at North Hagley Park in the centre of the city of Christchurch and features wines from the five South Island wine regions. While wine is undoubtedly central to the festival, it is supported by a strong programme of musical entertainment and a range of food providers and

restaurants. There is a substantial programme of free educational events also, which are generally oversubscribed. This programme includes cooking seminars from well-known chefs and a range of wine master classes from winemakers and wine writers and critics (Christchurch/South Island Wine and Food Festival, 2013). The price of tickets to the event range from NZ\$30 to NZ\$150. General admission tickets in 2013 cost NZ\$37.50, which entitled ticket holders to entry and access to the performances and seminars, but wine tasting was extra (\$1 to \$2 per tasting). Children attending the event with an adult received free entry. With a total capacity of 8,000, all tickets sold out before the day of the event.

Despite the growing interest in wine festivals from the perspective of producers and consumers, there has been very limited academic research on the phenomenon of wine events in New Zealand, and most of this is now quite dated (Hall and Mitchell, 2004; Nicholson and Pearce, 2000). The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to answer two research questions:

- 1: What are the socio-demographic characteristics and wine consumption behavior of attendees at the Christchurch/South Island Wine and Food Festival?
- 2: Do these festival attendees differ in their socio-demographic characteristics and wine consumption behavior from a general sample of New Zealand wine consumers?

2. METHOD

This paper is based on data gathered as part of a broader cross-national research project of wine consumers (see Velikova et al., 2014). For a balanced perspective on the topic under investigation, researchers attempted to include highly involved consumers who are very interested in wine, as well as consumers with a more limited interest in wine. Participants in New Zealand were recruited through two processes: a pen-and-paper survey (self-completed) and an online survey. The survey was divided into two parts – the first one included general wine preferences and consumption behaviour, along with the socio-demographic characteristics of the sampled population; it is this component of the survey that is reported here. The pen-and-paper survey was distributed at the Christchurch/South Island Wine and Food Festival, in December 2013 by two research assistants during the first four hours of the festival on a ‘next to pass’ basis. The same questionnaire was distributed as an online survey through the researcher’s networks and contacts, and was promoted through posting the URL on Facebook. In all cases, recipients of the request were asked to forward the posted URL to family and friends. In total, 355 usable surveys were completed; 171 from festival attendees and 184 from online respondents (referred to below as the general wine consumer sample).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics

The socio-demographic characteristics tested were gender, age, education, and income. There were considerably more females than males in the festival sample (females 59.6%; males 40.4%), although the sample was less skewed than the general wine consumer sample (females 66.8%; males 33.2%). This high proportion of females in the sample of wine festival-goers is similar to that found in previous studies in New Zealand (Nicholson and Pearce, 2000) and globally (Park et al., 2008; Weiler et al., 2004; Yuan et al., 2008), and reflects the fact that females represent a higher percentage of wine consumers than males (Kolyesnikova et al., 2003; Pettigrew, 2003).

The average age of festival respondents was 42 years, which was not significantly different to the general wine consumer sample (43 years). Table 1 reveals some statistically significant

differences in the distribution of respondents, with the festival sample having a slightly higher proportion of the sample under 35 years and the general sample having more respondents aged 56 and over. In general, the festival sample has a greater spread by age category than some similar surveys and the proportion of younger people in the festival sample (13.1% aged 18-24 years) is lower than at many wine festivals previously reported (Hall and Mitchell, 2004; Houghton, 2008; Nicholson and Pearce, 2000; Park et al., 2008). This may be due to the broad range of attractions at the event. For example, the family-friendly environment (children have free entry) and the food and wine master classes and seminars may attract an older audience than other wine festivals. Furthermore, the price of entry (excluding wine tasting) may have seemed relatively high for younger people.

Table 1: Demographic profile of festival visitors compared to general wine consumers

Variable	Festival %	General %	Overall %
Age*			
18 to 25 years	13.1	10.3	11.6
26 to 35 years	24.4	23.9	24.1
36 to 45 years	26.8	21.2	23.9
46 to 55 years	20.8	22.8	21.9
56 to 64 years	10.7	21.7	16.5
65 years and over	4.2	0.0	2.0
Highest qualification**			
No formal qualifications	4.1	0.5	2.3
High school qualification	21.1	7.6	14.1
Tertiary diploma or certificate	21.1	14.1	17.5
Trade certificate	11.1	4.9	7.9
Degree	21.1	25.0	23.1
Postgraduate degree	21.6	47.8	35.2
Household income per annum			
Less than NZ\$20,000	5.6	6.0	5.8
NZ\$20,000 - NZ\$40,000	7.4	2.7	4.9
NZ\$40,000 - NZ\$60,000	17.9	14.7	16.2
NZ\$60,000 - NZ\$80,000	13.6	19.6	16.8
NZ\$80,000 - NZ\$100,000	21.6	18.5	19.9
NZ\$100,000 and over	34.0	38.6	36.4

* $\chi^2(5, N = 352) = 16.041, p < .01$ ** $\chi^2(5, N = 355) = 40.971, p < .001$

In relation to educational qualifications, 42.7% of the festival sample had a degree or postgraduate degree, while a quarter of respondents had high school qualification or no formal qualifications, reflecting previous research (Houghton, 2008; Park et al., 2008; Yuan et al., 2008). There were very significant differences between the festival sample and the general wine consumer sample, however, with close to half of the latter sample (47.8%) holding a postgraduate degree and only 8.1% holding high school or no formal qualifications. While wine consumers are recognised as being generally highly-educated (Yuan et al., 2005), this over representation of the very highly qualified is perhaps a reflection of the sampling technique, which involved circulating the invitation through a number of online sources, including a university-based email list, an alumni list of tourism graduates and the e-bulletin board of a crown research institute. While this was supplemented by posting in other social

media and recipients were asked to circulate the invitation to friends and family it seems most respondents were the primary email recipients. Despite the significant differences in educational achievement between the two samples there was no significant difference in household income; both samples were over-represented in the higher earning category, which has been reported elsewhere (Hall and Mitchell, 2004).

6.2 Wine consumption behaviour

Festival-goers were asked a range of questions about their wine consumption behavior and their self-assessed wine knowledge and their responses were compared with those of the general wine consumers (see Table 2). Given their presence at a wine festival it is hardly surprising that the majority of festival respondents named wine as their most frequently consumed alcohol. While statistical analysis reveals that there is no significant differences between the festival and general wine consumer samples with regards to this dimension, it is noticeable that while three-quarters of the general wine consumer sample stated wine as most frequently consumed, only two-thirds of the festival respondents did so, with higher proportions selecting beer and spirits.

Table 2: Wine consumption behaviour of festival visitors and general wine consumers

Variable	Festival %	General %	Overall %
Most frequently consumed			
Beer	23.3	17.4	20.1
Wine	66.7	76.1	65.5
Spirits	10.1	6.5	8.2
Favourite wine style			
Red	40.0	41.3	40.7
White	42.8	45.7	44.4
Rose	2.8	2.7	2.7
Champagne/sparkling wine	14.5	10.3	12.2
Frequency of wine consumption*			
Daily	14.8	7.6	11.0
Several times a week	42.6	40.8	41.6
Once a week	26.0	29.9	28.0
About once a month	9.5	20.1	15.0
Less than once a month	7.1	1.6	4.2
Levels of wine knowledge			
Advanced knowledge	11.8	11.4	11.6
Intermediate knowledge	59.4	63.6	61.6
Basic knowledge	24.7	23.9	24.3
No prior knowledge of wine	4.1	1.1	2.5

* $\chi^2(4, N = 353) = 17.501, p = .002$

There was no significant difference between the samples regarding the preference for styles of wine, with a relatively even split between red and white wines with white wine slightly dominant. Significant differences were apparent, however, in the frequency of consumption, with festival respondents being significantly more likely to consume wine daily (14.8% compared to 7.6%), while also having a higher proportion of respondents consuming wine less than once a month (7.1% compared to 1.6%). In each sample the majority of respondents

consumed wine at least once a week, with the festival respondents somewhat more likely to do so than the general wine consumer respondents (83.4% compared to 78.3%). In keeping with this finding, festival attendees purchased significantly more bottles of wine for home consumption each month than the general wine consumer sample ($M = 5.85$; $M = 3.91$; $t(364) = p < .001$). These findings cumulatively may suggest that wine has a more central role in the lifestyle of those who would pay to go to a wine festival than the general wine consumer. Interestingly, however, there was no significant differences between the two samples with regard to self-described wine knowledge which might have been expected given the above findings. A relatively small proportion of each sample self-identifying as having ‘advanced’ wine knowledge and the majority rating their knowledge as ‘intermediate’.¹ Close to a quarter of respondents in each sample felt their wine knowledge was ‘basic’, while a very small proportion reported having ‘no prior knowledge of wine at all’, with the festival sample having a higher, but still low, proportion of respondents in this category.

There was no statistical difference either in the average amount the samples spent per bottle of wine (festival-goers spending on average NZ\$ 16.17 and the general wine consumer spending NZ\$15.30 per bottle); both slightly above the average cost of a mid-priced bottle of wine in New Zealand (Naden, 2014). While the median price paid by each sample was the same (NZ\$15.00), the spread of responses amongst the festival goers was greater than that of the general wine consumers ($SD = NZ\$9.15$ compared to $SD = NZ\$6.44$), again suggesting more diversity within the sample of festival goers.

As indicated above, there is some suggestion in these results of the festival sample being more diverse than the general wine consumer sample in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and wine consumption behaviours. While some of these differences are due perhaps to the snowball sampling technique used to acquire the general wine consumer sample, previous research would suggest that the nature of festivals might attract a diverse market also, including young people for whom traditional wine tourism activities may be perceived as intimidating (Houghton, 2008). This tends to be borne out in further analysis, whereby the younger festival attendees are significantly different to their older counterparts. On some measures this is matched in the sample of general wine consumers, in particular regarding most frequently consumed alcohol, and favourite wine styles, however the age effect is more marked in the festival sample and is reflected in a broader range of wine consumption behaviour variables. For example, younger festival-goers reported being significantly less knowledgeable than older respondents ($\chi^2(10, N = 167) = 31.754, p < .001$) and purchased considerably less wine per month for home consumption ($\chi^2(15), N = 166) = 44.997, p < .001$); on each of these measures there were no significant differences by age in the general wine consumer sample. This suggests that younger people are attending this festival for different reasons than older attendees, however more research is need to explore this assertion.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper has outlined the profile attendees at the Christchurch/South Island Wine and Food Festival and compared this with the profile of a general wine consumer sample. While it is acknowledged that there are limitations and challenges in comparing data from online and pen-and-paper sources (Duffy et al., 2005; Szolnoki and Hoffman, 2013), the comparison of the wine festival and general wine consumer samples provides a starting point for future research. Understanding the customer for a particular festival can be important for ongoing development and modification to the event (Houghton, 2008). For example, the apparent diversity of attendees means that the organisers have to ensure that there are activities and

events to suit their needs. At the same time, the accumulation of case studies of wine festivals around the world may in time enable the development of a more theoretical understanding of wine festival consumers. The research has revealed that the Christchurch/South Island Wine and Food Festival attracts a market similar to other wine festivals in a number of ways, with a predominance of females, the highly-educated and relatively high income earners. This festival does seem to attract a smaller proportion of young wine consumers than many festivals, reflecting the fact that festivals are not homogenous in content or appeal (Houghton, 2001, 2008; Park et al., 2008).

In general, the wine festival sample is relatively similar to a general sample of New Zealand wine consumers on socio-demographic characteristic and wine consumption behaviours also. However, in relation to wine consumer behaviour, it is interesting to note that the festival sample reported consuming wine more frequently and to purchasing more wine to consume at home than the general wine consumer sample, perhaps suggesting that wine is a more regular part of their lifestyles. Notable also is the greater diversity in the festival sample than the general wine consumer sample, with more respondents at the extremes of most measures, highlighting the heterogeneity of wine festival attendees (Yuan et al., 2008), and perhaps reflecting not only differing motivations for attendance, but also the range of experiences – educational, aesthetic, entertaining and escapist – being sought and expected from the event, which deserves further attention from academic researchers.

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ⁱ 'Advanced' – international knowledge of wines, have completed wine course, confident about my wine knowledge; 'Intermediate' – know different wine styles and can identify them; 'Basic' – know the names of wine styles but can't identify the differences between them 'No prior knowledge of wine at all' - know nothing about wines.