

## **Consumer Knowledge and Preferences for Wine amongst Visitors to Burgundy**

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### ***Abstract:***

*Purpose* - The study aims to develop a profile of Burgundy tourists and to examine visitor attitudes towards the wines of the region, with the specific emphasis on the effect of visitor product knowledge on the evaluation of Burgundy wines.

*Design/methodology/approach* - The samples consisted of Burgundy tourists from the Anglophone countries. Consumer survey was utilized for data collection. The survey was distributed both on-site (to current visitors) and on-line (to past visitors).

*Findings* - Burgundy tourists were found to be older (average age 48) and extremely well educated. The primary purpose of visit was holiday/vacation for the majority. However, a moderate number of visitors have come explicitly to visit wineries. Product knowledge level has an impact on the evaluation of the local wines. More knowledgeable visitors think Burgundy wines are world class, but of limited variety and tend to be overpriced. While the least knowledgeable group were mostly first-time visitors, a relatively high percentage in the somewhat knowledgeable group indicated this was their second visit to Burgundy.

*Practical implications* - Burgundy local authorities and the wine industry benefit from the profiling information on their visitors. The results contribute to the understanding on how to target tourists with different levels of wine knowledge. The industry also needs to make the least knowledgeable visitors' experiences in Burgundy educational and enjoyable, which in turn may spark their interest in wine and intent to revisit the region.

**Keywords:** Burgundy; wine tourists; subjective knowledge; perceptions of wines

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Burgundy is a key French tourist destination, renowned for its history, food, and undoubtedly wine. Increasingly the local authorities want to employ wine as leverage for tourism. Thus, it now appears relevant to investigate wine tourism in this region. In part, wine tourism in Burgundy is one example of the wider and under-researched European offer as a whole. Additionally, this research investigation allows us to explore how tourists feel about that specific offer – their expectations, motivations and perceptions, which is evidently important if a successful tourism proposition is to be sustained.

The geographical context for this research is the Côte d'Or in Burgundy. For many connoisseurs, the Côte d'Or is what they automatically think of when they consider Burgundy. The region is a narrow wine producing area (less than 15 km wide and 60 km in length), which extends southwest from Dijon, the administrative centre of the region. The two most important wine towns in the region are Beaune and Nuits St Georges. These are the focal points for wine tourism. Most villages along the route produce wine, and thus are the home to small domaines. As is common in Europe, wine tourism has not been formally planned here, but evolved from wine producers' commercial activities. Additionally, as in other European wine making regions, a number of producers who sell wine at their cellar doors would deny the notion that they are engaged in wine tourism; instead – they say that they merely sell wine to visitors. Recognizing the importance (or the mere existence) of wine tourism as a critical means to make Burgundy wines more accessible and understandable to a wider audience builds the foundation for the proposed study.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT**

### **2.1. Profiling Wine Tourists**

Researchers have long been approaching wine tourism as a form of consumer behaviour, where tourists interested in wine purposefully travel to wine destinations. Studies on profiling wine tourists offer various approaches for the examination of behaviour and characteristics of wine tourists. Because the current research focuses on the examination of tourist attitudes to wine (general attitudes and attitudes to Burgundy wines in particular) and their product knowledge, it takes a three-dimensional model suggested by Charters and Ali-Knight {, 2002 #30} as the framework for the proposed study. The three dimensions are: (a) purpose of visit; (b) general tourist motivation; and (c) relationship to other tourist activities. For the purposes of this conference paper, profiling of Burgundy wine tourists will be based the first two dimensions, as well as socio-demographic characteristics. The third broader proposition on the relationship to other activities in the region will be discussed in a separate publication.

With regards to detailing wine tourist characteristics, wine knowledge is taken as the focal point of analysis in the current study. Tourists naturally differ in their levels of product knowledge. Research shows that these differences largely determine tourist behaviour. The

importance of product knowledge for wine tourism research is discussed in more detail in the following section.

## **2.2. Wine Knowledge**

The wine market presents consumers with a vast variety of heterogeneous products. Today's consumers are faced with an overwhelming range of information on grape varieties, appellations, vintages, and wine quality ratings. With the wine market being so multifaceted, product knowledge is an important factor dictating the decision-making processes undergone in consumer minds.

The significance of product knowledge in wine purchasing decisions has been studied extensively {e.g., \Dodd, 2005 #43;Gluckman, 1990 #211;Viot, 2012 #812;Aurier, 1999 #516;Viot, 2012 #812;Mueller, 2008 #568}. Previous research has found that highly knowledgeable consumers are capable of recalling significantly more information and therefore, make better purchasing decisions than less knowledgeable consumers {Alba, 1983 #27}. Spawton {, 1991 #13} noted that because of the perceived complexity of wine, in many situations consumers' purchasing decisions are based on either their knowledge about wine or on previous experience with it. Dodd's et al. {, 2005 #43} study on the effect of wine knowledge on sources of information used by consumers suggested that prior experience with the product forms the basis for consumer's knowledge. Knowledge, in turn, is related to different sources of information consumers rely upon.

Equally, it is now well established in the literature that product knowledge is a significant factor in motivations and experiences of wine tourists, either directly {Charters, 2002 #30} or mediated via the dimension of involvement {Getz, 2006 #968}. For example, it has been noted by Charters and Ali-Knight {, 2002 #30} that Australian consumers seek further knowledge when they visit a wine region. For more knowledgeable wine tourists, their motivation to visit a region correlates with their product knowledge, which becomes a key factor in their desire to taste, learn and buy wine. The less knowledgeable, conversely, are less focused on tasting, and more on tours and the overall experience of being in the region. Famularo, Bruwer and Li {, 2010 #969} point out that increasing knowledge has a clear relationship with the image of wine regions and that, in turn, has an impact on a consumer willingness to buy wine from the region. Thus in order to target various visitor segments effectively, it is imperative for the industry to know how tourists with different levels of knowledge perceive the region and the local wines.

## **2.3. Burgundy Wine Tourists**

According to a personal communication given by the Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bourgogne (BIVB) to one of the authors, 30 million bottles of wine were sold at the domaines in Burgundy during 2011, representing 15% of total production. Beyond the obvious financial gains of the direct sales, cellar door visitations contribute to the development of a strong regional brand image. Thus, it is critical for the local authorities and the industry to have a good understanding of who the visitors are, what motivates them to visit the region and the cellar doors, and what their perceptions of Burgundy wines are.

Documented evidence on Burgundy tourists is scarce and includes only a few trade reports. According one such report conducted by ATOUT France {, 2010 #970} , Burgundy wine

tourists tend to be mature with an average age of 48, generally men, affluent and from outside the region, with 43% being foreign tourists. They tend to claim three main motives for visiting the region: to discover the wines and vineyards (44%); the discovery of food, regional produce and local gastronomy (27%); and the exploration of the region's cultural heritage (21%). However, beyond these bare statistics little is known about the profile and expectations of visitors to the region. This study aims to fill this gap in knowledge.

### **3. PURPOSE**

The current study aims to develop a profile of Burgundy wine tourists and to examine visitor attitudes towards Burgundy wines.

### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To achieve the objective defined above, the following research questions were advanced:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: What is the profile of the Burgundy wine tourist?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: What are the visitor attitudes towards Burgundy wines?

RQ<sub>3</sub>: Are there any differences in these attitudes amongst visitors with different levels of wine knowledge?

### **5. METHOD**

#### **5.1. Research Design and Data Collection**

A trade report by ATOUT France {, 2010 #970} revealed that tourists from the Anglophone countries represent a significant proportion of foreign tourists in Burgundy (e.g., over 15% from the UK/Ireland and almost 10% Americans). Given the significance of this group, the current study focused on this population of tourists to Burgundy. For a balanced perspective, the study incorporated two methods to recruit subjects – on-site and on-line.

On-site, the data were collected via pen-and-paper surveys distributed to English-speaking tourists at the most popular tourist sites in Burgundy. Preliminary screening of the responses indicated that the sample included people with various degrees of interest in wine. However, since wine is the major appeal of Burgundy, it was important to include subjects with more distinct interests in wine. These people visit the region for professional purposes mainly, but participate in tourist activities as well. Although this population comprises a lesser proportion of visitors to Burgundy, it is a very important visitor segment for the region, thus it was necessary to include them in the sample.

To make sure that these visitors are purposefully reached, an identical survey was developed in Qualtrics. The URL link was distributed via an invitation email and social media announcements to a database of professional contacts who have visited Burgundy in the past. Literature shows that on-line surveys using panel approaches usually attract more knowledgeable, viewpoint-orientated samples than face-to-face surveys {Duffy, 2005 #952}. To control for the past visitation provision, the first question in the survey asked if and when

the respondents visited Burgundy. A skipping logic was built in where participants who did not visit Burgundy were automatically redirected to a thank-you message at the end of the survey.

At the time of the current manuscript submission, the study was still undergoing additional data collection. To date, 100 on-site and 35 on-line surveys have been completed. Thus, the analysis for the current paper is based on the sample of 135 obtained usable responses. The available data provides preliminary insights on the topic under investigation.

## 5.2. Measures

The survey contained several content areas, three of which are relevant to the current study. The first part included questions on the purpose of visit to Burgundy; tour group size and composition; general wine preferences and consumption behaviour; along with the socio-demographic characteristics of the sampled population. These characteristics comprise the basis for a profile of Burgundy wine tourists (RQ<sub>1</sub>).

The second part was geared toward assessing consumer preferences and perceptions of Burgundy wines (RQ<sub>2</sub>). Specific measures included perceptions of Burgundy wines as *‘world class wines’*; and *‘offering a wide range of wine styles’*; along with preferences (*‘I prefer Burgundy wines to others’*) and perception of wine prices (varying from *‘very under-priced’* to *‘very over-priced’*). These measures were worded as a set of statements to which participants could express their levels of agreement on a 7-point Likert scale anchored between 1 (strongly agree) and 7 (strongly disagree), thus the lower value indicated a higher agreement with the statement.

In order to answer RQ<sub>3</sub>, visitors’ subjective self-assessed knowledge was measured. Respondents were asked to evaluate their wine knowledge based on the suggested categories – *new to wine*; *know a little about wine*; *somewhat knowledgeable about wine*; *very knowledgeable*; and *expert or professional*.

## 6. FINDINGS

### 6.1. Profile of Burgundy Tourists (RQ<sub>1</sub>)

The analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics indicated that the sample was almost equally split between males (50.4%) and females (49.6%). The visitors were highly educated, with 41.8% reporting that they have earned bachelor’s degrees and additional 45.2% have earned post-graduate degrees. As has been reported in numerous wine consumer behaviour studies, wine consumers in general (and wine tourists in particular) tend to be more educated than the general population. However, the educational levels reported by the Burgundy tourists are significantly higher than what has been reported previously in wine consumer studies.

The average age of the respondents was 48 years old, ranging from 19 to 80 years old. The majority of Burgundy tourists are visitors from the US (52.2%), followed the UK (22.5%), Australia (14.4%), Canada (8.1%), and New Zealand (2.8%). Twenty per cent work in the wine industry or on behalf of it.

One the profiling model dimensions, the vast majority (77%) chose ‘holiday/vacation’ as the primary purpose of their visit to Burgundy. Other reasons included visiting family and/or friends (11.1%), business and study or temporary work (5.2% equally). Interestingly, 17% of the respondents indicated that ‘visiting wineries’ was the primary purpose of their visit to Burgundy. Evidently, an adequate number of wine tourists arrive to Burgundy with a sole focus on tasting the region’s wines.

Seventy percent were first-time visitors. Amongst repeat visitors, most people visited the region twice. Visitors travel mostly in smaller groups, with over half traveling with a spouse or a partner. About 30% travel with friends or with family. Only a small proportion of the sample (5.2%) travel solo. Ten percent of the visitors travel with children.

The analysis of the respondents’ wine consumption behaviour and preferences revealed that the vast majority of the sample (71.9%) drink wine at least several times a week. Two-thirds of the sample indicated preferences for dry red wine.

## 6.2. Perceptions and Attitudes towards Burgundy Wines ( $RQ_2$ and $RQ_3$ )

For a proportional comparative analysis amongst visitors with various degrees of wine knowledge, the sample was split into three groups: (a) new to wine or know a little (41.5%); (b) somewhat knowledgeable (30.4%); and (c) very knowledgeable/expert (27.4%).

One-way ANOVA was employed to evaluate visitors’ attitudes towards Burgundy wines. The three groups of different levels of wine knowledge served as three levels of the independent variable. The dependent variables were the mean scores on the perceptions of prices (specifically, whether or not Burgundy wines are priced at too high a level) and attitudes statements. The ANOVA results are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at  $p < .05$  in the Student-Newman-Keuls difference comparison.

**Table 1. Visitor Perceptions of Burgundy Wines Prices**

	Overall, what do you think of Burgundy wines prices?
New to wine or know a little	3.19 <sub>a</sub>
Somewhat knowledgeable about wine	3.45 <sub>a</sub>
Very knowledgeable or expert	3.74 <sub>b</sub>
<i>F</i>	8.13
<i>Sig.</i>	.001

Note: \*  $p < .01$  The mean values represent scores on a five-point Likert scale anchored between 1 (*very under-priced*) and 5 (*very over-priced*).

**Table 2. Visitor Attitudes towards Burgundy wines**

	Burgundy wines are world class	I prefer Burgundy wines to others	Burgundy offers a wide range of wine styles
New to wine or know a little	1.63 <sub>a</sub>	3.23 <sub>a</sub>	1.94 <sub>a</sub>
Somewhat knowledgeable about wine	1.42 <sub>a</sub>	2.36 <sub>a</sub>	2.58 <sub>a</sub>
Very knowledgeable or expert	1.14 <sub>b</sub>	2.16 <sub>b</sub>	3.03 <sub>b</sub>
<i>F</i>	3.25	5.86	5.25
<i>Sig.</i>	.042	.004	.045

Note: \*  $p < .01$  The mean values represent scores on a seven-point Likert scale anchored between 1 (*strongly agree*) and 7 (*strongly disagree*).

In terms of demographic differences, the majority of very knowledgeable/expert respondents were males (70.3% versus 29.7% females); and conversely, the least knowledgeable group was represented by more females (64.3% versus 35.7% males). The ‘somewhat knowledge’ group was more equally split between males and females (53.7% and 46.3%, respectively). The most knowledgeable visitors were also found to be significantly younger (average age 41 years old) than less knowledgeable groups,  $F(2,132) = 4.24$ ,  $p = .016$ .

First-time visitors were the least knowledgeable group. Professionals/experts visited Burgundy many times, for business purposes mainly. Interestingly, 36% in the ‘somewhat knowledgeable’ group indicated this was their second visit to Burgundy. These are consumers who possess more than basic knowledge about wine and who chose to come back to Burgundy. It is possible that it was their first visit to Burgundy that sparked their interest in wine, which then developed into getting more education about wine and also resulted in repeat visitations to the region. The industry and the local authorities then need not to underestimate the least knowledgeable visitors. Instead, it is important to make their experiences in Burgundy educational and enjoyable to trigger their interest in wine as a product in general and intent to revisit Burgundy in particular.

## 7. DISCUSSION

This study, focusing only on English-speaking visitors (thus only about 30% of all visitors to Burgundy) tends to confirm some of the existing demographic knowledge about wine tourists in region. Burgundy tourists are older and extremely well educated. However, some other key points have emerged from the data. Unlike the previous information given by BIVB, there is an almost equal split in males and females. A high percentage have come in part for business or study, and 17% stated explicitly that wine is the primary reason for their visit.

These are also clearly a knowledgeable group of visitors, mostly males in this group, and younger than less knowledgeable consumers.

As the results clearly indicate, the product knowledge level has an impact on the evaluation of the wines of Burgundy, and in a paradoxical fashion. More knowledgeable visitors think Burgundy wines are world class, but of limited variety and tend to be overpriced. Very knowledgeable consumers are also the most loyal group as they tend to prefer Burgundy wines to others more than the other two less knowledgeable groups. This offers a clear paradox. The most knowledgeable consumers think that the range of wines is limited – yet they still prefer them to other styles and are most positive about their quality. We can postulate that knowledge that the wines are only dry, and made from one red and one white variety, limits overall stylistic variation, but nevertheless the stylistic focus is a favourite of this segment. Equally, a wide knowledge of what is available worldwide reveals that the wines, for their quality level, are expensive – yet again the people with that knowledge still choose to drink them in preference to others that are available.

The most knowledgeable are clearly drawn to the wines of the region, they are perhaps one of their preferred types of wines. Yet they remain clear-sighted about their pricing, which they find comparatively high. The fact that they wish to explore the region, and drink the wines remains positive for local producers – but it also presents an inherent weakness. What happens when this knowledgeable group – who clearly feel experienced in the whole world of wine – decide that the wines of Oregon, or Central Otago, or another region, are in fact equally world class? At that point the perceived price levels could act against the region.

## **8. IMPLICATIONS**

This exploratory study offers preliminary findings on the profile of Burgundy wine tourists, including their purpose to visit and perceptions of Burgundy wines. At a practical level, the local authorities and the industry will benefit from more information on visitors to the region. Results of the current study will also contribute to the understanding on how to target wine tourists with different levels of wine knowledge. At a theoretical level, in terms of expanding our understanding of how consumers relate to a specific (in this case wine-focused) destination, there is much, which can be gleaned from the current study. Specifically, in this study we set out to measure not just the demographics (including tour group size and composition), but also the deeper motivation for the visit to Burgundy, general wine preferences and consumption behaviour and the overall perception of the wines of the region. Crucially, as part of this investigation, was also the understanding of how the level of knowledge of visitors interacts with their perceptions of the wines of the area.

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