

OPINION LEADERSHIP AND OPINION SEEKING AMONG DINERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN RESTAURANTS

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Introduction

Many consumers experience levels of intimidation when it comes to making wine purchases (Olsen, Thompson & Clarke, 2003; Roe & Bruwer, 2017), particularly so when dining out in a restaurant where the additional social pressure of being part of a multi-person group often also exists (Bruwer, Palacios-Arias & Cohen, 2017). Despite the generally agreed upon importance of opinion leadership and opinion seeking in marketing and consumer behaviour (Chaudhry, 2013; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008), there is a paucity of this research relating to wine, with very few studies having been executed (Chaney, 2001; Goldsmith & d’Hauteville, 1998; Vigar-Ellis, Pitt & Caruana, 2015). Not a single study has researched these constructs in the context of wine in restaurants.

Literature review

Given that wine is a ‘complicated’ product when it comes to decision-making, even more so in the restaurant environment, focused research to determine the level of influencing and of seeking advice is long overdue. Measurement of both opinion leadership (OLS) and opinion seeking (OSS) has been a challenge and hence we used the validated opinion leadership and opinion seeking scales of Flynn, Goldsmith and Eastman (1996) and adjusted them to wine as the focus product.

Research purpose

Inter-relationships between opinion leadership and opinion seeking and wine consumer behavioural variables of South African restaurant dining patrons, i.e. dining frequency, dining group size, and willingness to pay price(s) for different wine type offerings are examined in this exploratory study. The overall aim is to determine some baseline metrics, whether there are differences between these variables, and how certain socio-demographic variables relate to these.

Research methodology

An online survey was executed in South Africa by a professional consumer-panel company involving wine consumers (18 years and older) and had dined out at least once in the past month at any of the range of restaurant categories where they consumed wine on that occasion. An online survey eliminated the logistical issues and invasion of diners’ privacy faced when having to collect information *in situ* in restaurants, and had the added advantage of sampling across South Africa and its different restaurant categories. A total of 501 surveys could be utilised for further analysis.

Preliminary findings

A high Cronbach alpha reliability level was confirmed for both scales (OLS = 0.829; OSS = 0.777). Preliminary findings indicate that dining patrons’ levels of opinion leadership and opinion seeking with wine show significant differences (at 0.05 level) between dining out

frequency, quantity consumed, amount spent on wine, gender and age generations. Similar patterns could not be found for the size of the dining group and price elasticity for available wines.

Conclusions and recommendations

Both the opinion leadership and opinion seeking scales provide reliable measures of these constructs. These constructs can discriminate between dining patrons on various key wine behavioural variables pertaining to the occasion of dining out at restaurants. A behavioral model predicting these relationships between the constructs and these variables can be postulated and should withstand empirical scrutiny. Future research should examine these further and incorporate them into a behavioral model.

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