

# UNDERSTANDING THE CATEGORY ENTRY POINTS FOR WINE IN CHINA

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## **Purpose**

Cohen and Lockshin (2017) identified the pitfalls by both foreign and Chinese researchers who apply their highly-involved views of the category to wine marketing research in China. Whilst there is a growing stream of academic research on wine consumers in China (Lockshin et al. 2017), this research is still skewed towards heavy or frequent buyers. Sharp (2010) illustrates the importance of light or infrequent buyers necessary to grow a brand or even a category. There is a real challenge in the wine sector to convince brand owners and managers they need to move away from solely focusing on heavy buyers and instead develop a strategy to reach the all potential category consumers.

Romaniuk and Sharp (2016) discuss how building mental availability is a crucial component of brand growth as it makes it easier for a potential buyer to think about your brand when a buying situation arises. They explain how category entry points are the potential usage situations that drive someone into a product category. Romaniuk (2003) discussed the role of memory in brand retrieval and discussed these cues as being analogous to the distribution pathways of the mind. Therefore, a precursor to conducting mental availability research in the China wine market is the identification of the relevant category entry points for all types of buyers in the wine market.

This research will identify the relevant category entry points for the wine category in China from a consumer perspective and investigate if country of origin cues manifest as category entry points for wine in China.

## **Design/Methodology/Approach**

An online elicitation study is to be conducted with a sample of 200 urban internet users who are alcohol category consumers and have tried imported wine at least once in the last year. We will collect data as follows n=50 from 3 different tier 1 cities (Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai) plus an additional 50 respondents across a range of tier 2 cities. This will allow for some scoping research to understand if the occasions/reasons an alcohol drinker consumes wine differs by geographic location focusing on the big 3 markets as well as whether there are differences that can be attributed to less developed cities.

The instrument is roughly 30 minutes in length. It will collect alcohol sub-category consumption behaviour data first to help prime the minds of the participants to be thinking about alcohol consumption. Other studies using other categories typically only have 30-40 participants. Due to the large sample utilised for this study, this consumption data will be used to segment the responses to see if there are different category entry points for different types of alcohol consumers. The actual elicitation study uses a range of open-ended questions designed to evoke both semantic and episodic memory. The instrument intends to gather information on previous alcohol consumption and purchase experiences. Due to a split design we will investigate whether there are different category entry points for consumption versus purchase.

We expect significant overlap, but it will also be good to understand if/how this differs. We also will explore when people might consume wine by country of origin to identify if there are any differences/similarities for Australian wine versus wines from other countries. The responses will be analysed by native Chinese speakers who have been trained in this analytical technique.

### **Findings**

We are currently collecting data on this and will be able to present the results at the conference.

### **Practical Implications**

Identification of the category entry points are the first step in building an effective brand growth strategy underpinned by the theory of mental availability. The identified category entry points will then be tested as part of the next phase of this ongoing research project to measure mental availability.

### **Originality/Value**

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first large scale execution of a study to determine the category entry points for wine in China.

### **References**

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