

Navigating the Wine Involvement Continuum

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Abstract

The range, reasons and various motivations that underpin a consumer's wine purchasing behaviour are explained by a concept known as product involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985). An individual's product involvement tends to increase over time, with Clarke and Belk (1979) having established that the influence of a consumption occasion on a purchasing decision diminishes through repurchase experiences. However, as initially postulated in Spawton (1990), and replicated by Hall and Winchester (1999), there is at least one segment of consumers with extensive experience in wine consumption who also exhibit very low levels of wine involvement.

Low levels of product involvement are also inversely correlated with perceptions of risk (Dholakia, 2001). Lacey, Bruwer and Li (2009) confirming in the restaurant environment that perceived risk declined with increases in wine involvement. Consequently, higher wine-involved consumers tend to buy more volume, at a greater purchase frequency and pay more per purchase on average than customers with lower wine involvement (Hollebeek, Jaeger, Brodie, & Balemi, 2007; Lockshin, Spawton, & Macintosh, 1997). However, the extant literature on increases in wine involvement is silent on indications of how, whether, or when wine involvement increases occur beyond the evidence that it occurs for some consumers based on a number of wine experiences. Thus, this 'Big Picture' research contention is to investigate the process of involvement progression from non, to low, through to high for wine consumers.

Key Words: Wine Involvement, Historical method, retrospective Interviews

INTRODUCTION

A number of members of the wine trade argue that too few consumers drink good wine. Although some consumers do find their way to vinous Nirvana, those that spend the required money on good wine illustrate the culmination of a long-term process, freckled with changes in behaviour from vinous Neophyte, through to seasoned professionals. What is unknown at this point in time, is the manner in which a consumer's interest in wine changes over time.

RESEARCH BASIS

The purpose of this research is to identify how wine consumption patterns change over time. This question is of a qualitative nature, and thus demands the use of a research method that explores these issues in depth. Product involvement for an exceptionally technical consumer good like wine could also require an extensive sample of respondents. Further, there is the

potential for responses to this research question to cover extensive timelines. As such, this study benefit from the use of retrospective interviews following the historical method (Golder, 2000). This method has recently gained both popularity and prestige in marketing research, with such seminal papers like Chandy and Tellis (2000) on the Journal of Marketing's 'Curse of Incumbency', and more recently the Journal of Marketing Research's editor, Rajdeep Grewal, citing the importance of that method in a foreword of the journal's February (2017) edition.

RATIONALE

The primary advantage in using this method is that change in behaviour can be investigated over time (Krishnan & Sharpiro, 1999). A prospective research method can be used to measure influence and change from the present, into the future. However, time must pass in order for change measurement to occur, and any loss of respondents over time can lead to reductions in the significance and value of results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A retrospective method offers the advantage over a prospective method because change can be investigated from periods in the past, up to the present. As long as the research is exploratory, change, and a timeline can be clearly defined, this method is suitable (Corti, Binns, Howat, Blaze-Temple, & Kai Lo, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)

SUPPORT FOR METHOD

Recalling information from memory elicits probing the synapses of storage of long-term memories. This process of recall is best effected when respondents are primed by the provision of familiar and/or unique triggers connected to these memories (Baddeley, 2004; Westerberg et al., 2006). Therefore, the synopsis of this methodology is to prime respondents on the process in which they progressed (or not) from wine consumer initiate, along a pathway to their current level of wine consumer involvement.

Recollection of long-term memories can help in connecting linked concepts in the consumer's mind, such as the influence of related events in history. Specific wine events may be attributable to the process of consumers progressing along a continuum of involvement. These events could be of the positive; the 'The French Paradox', or negative; 'The antifreeze crisis' type, but offer the potential to illustrate externally validating experiences to help illustrate the process of consumers moving along a continuum of wine involvement from initiate to connoisseur.

Subsequent probing of memories can also create connections between concepts that may not have initially been evident. Thus, the idea in this process is to minimize recall repetitions, while capturing as diverse a range of considerations connected to a respondent's wine consumption as possible during any repetitions of the methodology. These are the conflicts of most note to the use of retrospective recall in this research.

Thus, an emerging model of the retrospective methodology of data collection is to start by asking respondents to provide a verbal, basic recall of wine consumption patterns, in their own words, over their lifetime. By initiating an initial recollection of experiences in the respondent's own words, the idea is to let the respondent set the familiar and unique regarding their wine

consumption history (Anderson & Bower, 1980). By not probing for details, or connections with other issues, there is the intent to capture the top-of-mind considerations in historical consumption, while impacting the likelihood of subsequent recall being affected by the probing process.

These ‘top of mind’ concepts that the respondent recalls most readily are consistent with the market research process of measuring awareness (Laurent, Kapferer, & Roussel, 1995). Consequently, it is important to have the first recollection recorded in real time. Video or Audio recordings are currently considered of relatively equal value, despite the inability to ascertain non-verbal cues in the absence of a visual record of the event.

The instrument used in collecting retrospective information should be an audio medium because there needs to be fewer potential influences on behaviour. Subsequent recordings could be made by video, but the benefit of being able to review a respondent’s video footage is in the capacity to examine situational ambience, and body language, if desired.

After synchronous methods will have been used successively, an asynchronous method will be used to allow the respondent as much time as desired to think about and provide their response to the question. Repeated probing reinforces memory reliability, but response validity can only be ascertained through cross-referencing with literature and/or third parties, Data saturation will be attempted through recall method diversity.

Consequently, the emerging methodology is to

- a. Start with (recorded) verbal recall of wine purchasing and consumption history
- b. Video record a virtual recall
- c. Follow with emailed timeline summary
 - Triangulation of recall improves validity (external event timing, plus any/every third-party consolidation of recall)
- d. Provide all respondents with synopsis of wine involvement continuum schematic, and asked to apply that to their experience.

In the final stage, a schematic model will be identified, with the purpose of exploring the exhaustivity of this model for all respondents at this stage.

DISCUSSION

To be established following each stage of the methodology.

IMPLICATIONS

Consumers having more experience in wine consumption are less impacted by factors external to any wine purchase than consumers with low degrees of wine involvement. For wine producers arguing that the quality of the product should stand out beyond any other appeal, the capacity to accurately identify consumers who express this sentiment will be invaluable.

The modern wine market makes more purchase choices, of more wine, from more countries, more available than ever before to more consumers than ever in history, according to the OIV (2016). However, this increase in wine availability leading to greater choice for consumers has a countering effect on the concurrent influx of new wine consumers. Newer consumers have lower degrees of product involvement, and are thus more frequently dissuaded from purchasing a product due to a heightened perceived opportunity cost than the impact on higher involvement consumers.

As a category, wine takes up entire supermarket aisles, and can be little more than an overweight tome to the average diner at an upmarket restaurant. The litany of choices presented to the average consumer at any point of sale consistently dwarfs the range of choices made available. This range of choice thus poses a constraint to any wine producer because the idea that presenting a surfeit of choice to consumers will lead to an increase in sales has been debunked as a myth (Kurien, Paila, & Nagendra, 2014). Kurien et al. (2014 pg. 323) go on to explain that "... when customers have more choices, they buy less; [less often], and... often simplify [their purchase decision] using the wrong criteria". More choices thus end up leading to dissatisfaction with any purchase because of the cumulative opportunity cost given up with that purchase. Thus the challenge to the wine sector is to find effective means to minimize the consideration of choices presented to consumers at the point of sale.

Because wine is arguably the most fragmented consumer goods item in the world, the range of purchase occasions and prices that consumers are content to pay for any wine needs to be matched to the wine consumer's various motivations for purchase. With wine involvement requiring time in order for it to be developed, it is essential for the wine sector to establish both how, and how long it could take for consumers to progress through the wine involvement continuum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The wine sector therefore finds itself in a situation where it needs to find an effective means to increase wine involvement for consumers, or actively reduce the number of choices available for consumers at the point of sale. With the number of wine markets, and number of wine producers increasing in new world countries at a greater rate than those are disappearing in traditional wine producing countries, the alternate solution is to identify means to increase consumers' overall wine involvement.

Consumers discover wine as they begin to personalize their social experiences to other people (Wilson, 2011). This period where wine becomes adopted as an alcoholic beverage of preference marks a change in behaviour from a non-consumers to a wine consumer. However, the process of increases in wine involvement from that point on require identification, as outlined in the text above.

From the point where increases in wine involvement are identified in a consumer's timeline, it is recommended that the frequency and influences in which these changes occur be researched.

With the knowledge that time is one common factor in the progression along the wine involvement continuum, it is henceforth recommended that research using an epidemiological research method be used as a means to identify what, and to what degree identified influences affect changes in wine involvement for consumers over time.

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