Consumer Perceptions of Chenin Blanc

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Abstract

◦*Purpose:*
The purpose of the study is to identify consumer perceptions and attitudes towards Chenin Blanc and determine recommendations to increase sales in the U.S. market for Chenin Blanc as a category.

◦*Design/methodology/approach:*
The methodology involves a combination of different techniques: (1) a short survey followed by a (2) wine tasting where the consumers will taste 4 Chenin Blanc, 1 Riesling and 1 Chardonnay, followed by (3) a focus group discussion.

The focus groups were organized and conducted by Cal Poly students in WVIT 460, Senior Project – Wine Business during the Fall 2019 quarter. Students recruited people to participate in the focus groups.

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(1) The Survey

Participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire. The questions asked in the survey provide data to segment the respondents in terms of demographics (age and gender), wine knowledge, and wine drinking habits (frequency, typical price paid per bottle, off-premise vs on-premise habits, variety preference, and importance of wine attributes).

(2) The Tasting

Six wines were presented blind. The order of the wines was randomly determined for each focus group. The respondents tasted six unidentified wines (a blind tasting) and rated each wine on a scale of 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good), detailed its strengths and weaknesses, their willingness-to-pay and their preference in comparison with each other (rank). Four of the wines were different examples of Chenin Blanc. The remaining two were other white wines, Chardonnay and Riesling.

The four different Chenin Blancs and two other whites were:

(a) one from Loire Valley in France (higher in acidity)
2018 "Cuvee du Silex", Pascal Janvier from Jasnieres, France, $23.00 at K&L.

(b) one from Swartland in South-Africa.
2018 Terre Brulee - Tania and Vincent Careme South Africa, $13.00 at K&L

(c-d) two from Clarksburg AVA (Southern Sacramento, California, USA)
2018 Fellow Chenin with a retail price of $15.99
2017 Silt Wine Company with an approximate retail price of $25.

(e-f) two different white grapes (a chardonnay and a riesling)
2017 Chardonnay from Chamisal, Edna Valley, California, USA, with an approximate retail price of $14 at a local grocery store.
2017 Riesling from Chateau St. Michelle, Washington State, USA, with an approximate retail price of $7 at a local outlet of a national general retail store.

All prices are in US dollars per 750 ml bottle.

(3) The Post-Tasting Group Discussion

The focus group discussion was split into three parts and covered the following dimensions:

- First, the participants exchanged impressions about the wine perceptions for the six wines, the opportunities for food and wine pairing, the wine description, and guessed the variety.

- Second, the focus group leaders then revealed the wine, origin, variety and price for each wine and discussed their selling points, the price perception, and the willingness to buy.

- Third, the discussion after all six wines are discussed individually focused on the Chenin Blanc varietal, especially on how familiar the participants are with the variety, the willingness-to-purchase, the overall perception of the grape variety and the last time they had purchased the grape variety, if ever.

Each focus group session lasted about an hour. Eight focus group sessions were conducted, with 7 – 11 participants in each. A total of 64 people participated in the focus groups. Most participants were Cal Poly students, who came from 15 different majors. Overall, there were almost two female participants for each male participant. More than half of participants described themselves as "beginners" regarding wine knowledge, although over 70% reported *drinking wine at least once a week. Also, over half of participants said they are comfortable picking a bottle of wine to purchase. Over 70% reported typically paying less than $15 per 750 ml bottle of wine, and only one participant reported typically paying ($30 - $50). Price was the most important factor in deciding which wine to purchase. All but two of the participants reported that they typically purchased wine off-premise.*

◦*Findings:*
The South African Chenin Blanc had the highest average rating (3.18) and ranking (2.93). Around 40% rated it "good" to "very good." The majority of Intermediate/Advanced ranked in top 2 (56%), and the majority of Beginners put it in top 3 (53%).

One of the Clarksburg Chenin Blancs (Fellows) had the second highest average rating (3.08) and ranking (3.21); 37% rated it "good" to "very good;" majority of Beginners ranked it 2nd or 3rd (51%). A plurality of Intermediate/Advanced ranked it #5 (29%).

The French Chenin Blanc had the 4th highest avg. rating (2.98), with 34% rating it "good" to "very good." It had the 3rd highest average ranking (3.23). A plurality of Beginners ranked it 1st (32%), and a plurality of Intermediate/Advanced ranked it 2nd or 3rd (41%).

The other Clarksburg Chenin Blanc (Silt) had the lowest average rating (2.61) and was 5th in average ranking (4.16). A plurality of Beginners ranked it #5 (25%), and a majority of Intermediate/Advanced ranked it #5 or #6 (58%).

The Dry Riesling had the 3rd highest average rating (3.03) and was 4th in average ranking (3.33). A plurality of Intermediate/Advanced ranked it as their favorite wine (37%), while 26% of Beginners ranked it #1 (although the same % ranked it 5th). The unoaked Chardonnay had the second lowest average rating (2.63) and the lowest average ranking (4.18). Although 25.4% rated it "good" to "very good," a plurality of Beginners and Intermediate/Advanced ranked it last (45% and 33% respectively); still, 20% of Intermediate/Advanced ranked it #1.

◦*Practical implications:*
The study may help the U.S. Chenin Blanc industry to better know their current clients and new segments to target. Awareness is a key consideration. Focus group participants were mostly unfamiliar with the varietal, and many of those who knew about it reported not ever thinking about purchasing it.

The focus group participants thought that Chenin Blanc should be marketed as good for warm summer days, beach outings, lunch, and relaxing settings. Many participants mentioned the acidity and refreshing aspects of Chenin Blanc.

For Clarksburg in particular, participants thought that there is an opportunity to develop a niche market. Since both the grape and the Clarksburg AVA are minor players in the California wine industry, participants expressed the need for producers to band together to promote the Clarksburg AVA as a whole.

Key words: Chenin Blanc, attitudes, willingness-to-buy, price perception, segmentation