



## Examining the role of wine brand love on brand loyalty: A multi-country comparison<sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This study develops and tests a model through a multi-country study that considers consumer wine knowledge and wine experience, wine brand trust and wine brand satisfaction as antecedents of wine brand love, and wine brand loyalty as a consequence of wine brand love. Data were collected in five wine-producing countries (Australia, Chile, France, Mexico and Portugal) with a final sample of 3462 completed surveys. Hypotheses were tested with structural equation modeling and the findings confirm the importance of brand love as both a mediator and direct influence on brand loyalty for wine consumers. Furthermore, brand satisfaction was positively and significantly related to brand love. In addition, wine experience, rather than wine knowledge, positively influenced brand trust and satisfaction. Finally, results also identify differences between countries thereby providing insights into how companies should focus their marketing strategies internationally.

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### 1. Introduction

In recent years wine sales in restaurants and other hospitality businesses have grown significantly (IWRS, 2013). Increasing competition in the wine industry worldwide has augmented the need for wineries to develop improved wine marketing strategies to achieve repurchase and loyalty from consumers. Those involved with the wine industry, such as wine producers, marketers, wine outlets and retailers, need to understand the factors related to wine brand loyalty and love. This can assist with the creation of superior wine marketing strategies that produce growth in sales and profits.

Wine consumption arouses multi-sensory experiences through the bouquet, the color, the shape of the bottle, the labeling and, most importantly, the taste. A particular wine can evoke memories of special occasions, known as historic imagery (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), or stimulate fantasy imagery related to the excitement and expectation of a pleasant consumption experience. In the case of wine, consumers often seek cues to assist in the purchasing decision, such as brand name, price, variety, style, region and recommendations (Batt and Dean, 2000; Hall et al., 2001). However, there is little information about the manner in which consumers choose their wine brands.

For wine buying consumers, especially those from emerging wine countries, the wine brand helps simplify the decision-making process (Lockshin and Albisu, 2006), which is often regarded as complex with a high level of associated risk (Bruwer et al., 2002). This paper extends Dodd et al., (2005) work on sources of information used in consumer wine purchasing by incorporating the concept of brand love and testing a model of brand love in the wine consumption market across five different countries. As such it contributes to the hospitality literature in terms of hedonic consumption and to practice in providing consumer behavioral insights for those involved with wine sales.

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In the last decade marketers have appropriated love as a construct that describes consumers' intense emotional attachments to love objects, whether a brand, product or service (Ahuvia, 1993, 2005). Termed "brand love", this is defined as the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular brand name (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love therefore incorporates passion and declarations of love for the brand, attachment to the brand and positive emotions in response to the brand. Research undertaken by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) suggests that hedonic brands are more likely to gain love from satisfied customers than utilitarian brands as a result of their tendency to generate stronger emotional responses. Hedonic consumption relates "to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with products", and involves experiences that include taste, tactile impressions, visual images and scents (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; p. 92).

Studies on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry have been consistently growing and many scholars have made efforts to investigate this topic (Dev et al., 2010; Yoo and Bai, 2013). Furthermore, hospitality research has mostly attempted to apply marketing theories and findings to further develop its research scope. However, research in this field is still scarce, which implies that more theory development needs to be achieved in hospitality (Yoo and Bai, 2013). Specifically, the role of brand love and its effect on brand loyalty has not been investigated in a hospitality context.

This research, therefore, examines brand love in the context of wine consumption and focuses on wine brands. Specifically it develops and tests a model through a multi-country study in order to shed light on the degree to which there are cultural similarities or differences in relation to the antecedents and consequences of wine brand love. Although prior research has been undertaken on brand love, this is one of the first studies to test a conceptual model for wine brand love across different countries to assess cultural generalizability, thereby examining different conditions for brand love. The next section presents the wine brand context and reviews the literature that guides the conceptual model.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This section provides the background literature on the constructs of brand loyalty, brand love, brand satisfaction, brand trust and individual consumer characteristics used to develop the conceptual model in this study.

### 2.1. Brand loyalty

Oliver (1999) emphasizes both behavior and attitude in his definition of brand loyalty as "a deeply held predisposition to patronize a preferred brand or service consistently in the future, causing repetitive same brand purchasing despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (p. 34). While behavioral brand loyalty relates to repeat purchases of the brand, attitudinal brand loyalty relates to the degree of dispositional commitment towards the brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Loyalty is subsequently one of the critical indicators used to measure the success of marketing strategies (Reichheld et al., 2000). Marketing communication costs can also be reduced by loyal customers who are already confident in the purchase decision and process information rapidly, reducing the need for sales promotions or advertising in comparison to brands with a low degree of loyalty. In addition, satisfied and loyal clients tend to become brand advocates who provide brand exposure and reassurance to new customers through word-of-mouth communication. Brand advocates play a powerful role in the decision making of potential

customers, who evaluate brands more positively if that brand is perceived as having a loyal customer base.

Dick and Basu (1994) have proposed that brand loyalty should be greater under conditions of positive emotional mood or affect. Brands that make consumers happy or joyful are likely to encourage greater purchase and attitudinal brand loyalty. This is an important factor as research has also shown that loyal customers are more profitable for businesses in view of their tendency to spend more and be less price sensitive (Reichheld et al., 2000).

Several researchers (Fountain et al., 2008; Nowak et al., 2006; Lockshin and Spawton, 2001; Rundle-Thiele, 2005) have examined brand loyalty in relation to the wine industry. Rundle-Thiele (2005, p. 333) argues that "the very survival of wine retailers depends on consumer loyalty", and that the wine sector provides an important context in view of deregulation and increased competition. In other research she explores a broad range of loyalty measures in her examination of wine brands (Rundle-Thiele and Bennet, 2001). She defines loyalty as "the state or quality of being loyal, where loyalty is defined as a customer's allegiance or adherence towards an object" (p. 494), and reports six types of loyalty: attitudinal, behavioral intentions, behavioral loyalty, propensity to be loyal, resistance to competing offers and complaining behavior. In this current study we examine brand loyalty as a behavioral intention to purchase a wine brand.

It is argued that strategies such as knowledge-building programs, special treatment, or recognition and loyalty programs can all play a role in constructing strong emotional bonds between the consumer and the wine brand (Nowak et al., 2006). These strategies are highly important as "brand loyalty is a fickle concept" (Lockshin and Spawton, 2001; p. 75) and is particularly difficult for the wine category which has so many brands and where the choice of wine may be situational.

Research has also shown that wineries can achieve brand loyalty by providing a memorable experience for visitors, thereby stimulating lasting emotional attachment to a brand (Fountain et al., 2008). This leads to the discussion on brand love as a factor for examination in this research.

### 2.2. Brand love

Brand love is a recent marketing construct and has been shown to influence important marketing variables such as word-of-mouth and purchase decision making (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Batra et al. (2012) found ten key components of how consumers experience brand love: great qualities, strongly held values and existential meaning, intrinsic rewards, self-identity, positive affect, passionate desire, a sense of natural fit, emotional bonding and anticipated heartbreak, willingness to invest, frequent thought and use, as well as a long relationship history. Further, they examined the applicability of theories of interpersonal love to brand love and established that respondents sometimes perceived brand and interpersonal love as comparable. Nevertheless, as a one-way emotion brand love was most often considered less important than interpersonal love.

Albert and Merunka (2013) undertook a study on brand passion, defining it as a "psychological construct comprised of excitation, infatuation, and obsession with a brand" (p. 908). The authors found that brand passion in the form of idealization and obsessive presence in the consumer's mind led to the desire to sustain a long-term relationship with the brand. Batra et al. (2012) also established that brand love was mostly expressed in a self-oriented manner, whereby consumers "were concerned with what the brand could do for them, not what they could do for the brand" (p. 5).

Although brand love has emerged as an important consumer-brand relationship construct, there is still little understanding about what generates a love relationship between a

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