



Wine: Intrinsic attributes and consumers' drinking frequency, experience, and involvement



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ABSTRACT

This study developed and tested a model that links the perceived importance of sensory attributes of wine with drinking frequency and experience, and in turn links all these factors with product involvement as the central framework. Results from 493 survey responses collected in the North-western U.S. region employing path analysis and moderated regression analysis revealed that consumer drinking frequency significantly and positively influenced wine involvement while years of drinking moderated this relationship. Furthermore, involvement significantly and positively influenced the perceived importance of wine appearance and bouquet—but not wine taste. As such, highly involved consumers were more interested in ancillary product attributes, which in this case entailed appearance and bouquet. Moreover, the survey results suggest that consumers perceived the importance of intrinsic wine attributes in the same way as they would evaluate the attributes in formal wine-tasting events. Specifically, the perceived importance of appearance of wine significantly influenced perceived importance of bouquet and taste, and perceived importance of bouquet influenced perceived importance of taste.

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1. Introduction

The United States is the largest wine-consuming nation in the world with consumers buying more than 375 million cases of wine in 2013, which represents \$36.3 billion in retail sales (Wine Institute, 2014). The hospitality and tourism industries play a large role in generating these numbers. In the hospitality industry, the majority of wine sales occur in restaurants, banquet centers, bars, and nightclubs (Hall et al., 2004). In such settings, wine complements culinary experiences (Aune, 2002) and contributes to socializing, relaxation, and learning (Barber, 2005). In the tourism industry, wine-related tourism has grown into a very lucrative business with the potential to generate substantial revenue and growth (O'Neill and Charters, 2000). Travelers seek wine tourism experiences through such diverse channels as cultural heritage events and festivals, dining and lodging experiences, education, formal wine tastings, cellar door sales, and winery tours (Charters and Ali-Knight, 2002). According to the U.S. Travel Association (2007), about 17% of leisure travelers in the U.S. engage in culinary or wine-related activities while traveling.

Not surprisingly, then, wine has received considerable attention among researchers across disciplines such as hospitality, tourism, food science, enology, marketing, and consumer behavior. Wine-related research has focused on market segmentation (e.g., Bruwer et al., 2002; Thach and Olsen, 2006; Kolyesnikova et al., 2008), wine tourism (e.g., O'Neill and Palmer, 2004; Charters and Menival, 2011; Charters and Ali-Knight, 2002; Dodd and Bigotte, 1997; Dodd, 1998; Carlsen and Boksberger, 2013; Qiu et al., 2013), price (e.g., Thrane, 2004; Ali and Nauges, 2007), gastronomy (e.g., Alonso and Liu, 2011), and legal issues (e.g., Reynolds and Knowles, 2014). A large body of research has focused on consumer behavior (e.g., Lockshin et al., 2006; Rahman et al., 2014; Bruwer and Rawbone-Viljoen, 2013; Corsi et al., 2012; Bruwer and Nam, 2010). Regarding consumer behavior, involvement with wine has been a central phenomenon of study; however, most studies have focused on segmenting consumers based on their varying levels of involvement (e.g., Bruwer et al., 2002; Lockshin et al., 2001, 1997; Bruwer and Li, 2007; Barber et al., 2007). In particular, the association of involvement with consumer engagement with wine quality has not been researched extensively (Charters and Pettigrew, 2007). This study therefore examines the interplay of the consumption experience, wine involvement, and the perceived importance of the sensory or intrinsic attributes of wine.

The purpose of this study then is to develop and test a model that links the perceived importance of sensory attributes with

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drinking frequency and drinking years and in turn to link all these factors with product involvement as the central framework. Specifically, we are interested in wine involvement, which has been addressed mostly in segmentation-related studies in the extant literature. To this end, we explore how drinking frequency affects wine involvement and how the years a person has been a wine drinker moderates this relationship. In addition, we examine how involvement affects the perceived importance of intrinsic wine attributes and how these intrinsic attributes relate to each other in terms of their perceived importance to consumers.

2. Literature review

2.1. The involvement concept

Involvement has emerged as a central construct of interest in consumer behavior research. Involvement is “a person’s perceived relevance of the consumption object based in inherent needs, values, and interests” (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). Consumers are ‘involved’ with a product when they perceive the product as addressing or corresponding to something of considerable value or fundamental importance in their lives (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). Individual consumers tend to differ in their decision processes depending on the extent of their involvement with a product (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985). For instance, involvement was found to positively influence consumers’ willingness to pay a premium price for a product (Vlosky et al., 1999; Amendah and Park, 2008).

Zaichkowsky (1986) classified involvement into three categories: the *personal* (inherent interests, values, or needs that motivate one toward an object), the *physical* (characteristics of an object that cause differentiation and increase interest), and the *situational* (something that temporarily increases the relevance of or interest in an object). Personal involvement entails that a person’s innate value system along with his or her distinctive experiences determine the degree of involvement with an object (Zaichkowsky, 1986). Generally, involvement with an object influences attitudes and behaviors relating to that object (Slama and Tashchian, 1985).

It is worth noting that another important and widely used classification of involvement divides it into two types—product involvement and purchase-decision involvement. Product involvement is commonly classified in turn into two types—product importance (Lastovicka and Gardner, 1977) and enduring involvement (Bloch, 1981). According to Mittal (1989), hedonic or self-expressive products predominantly evoke enduring involvement whereas functional or utilitarian products can be important without inducing enduring involvement. For instance, a wine enthusiast is mostly enduringly involved with wines. On the other hand, for a detergent an individual will regard it as important without inducing any enduring involvement.

We are concerned with product involvement in this study, which is, in general, more enduring, and without doubt represents both experiential and symbolic value, not just utilitarian significance (Higie and Feick, 1989). Purchase-decision involvement, also known as situational involvement, on the other hand, represents a short-term phenomenon whereby an individual becomes involved with a ‘situation,’ usually a purchase decision (Mittal, 1989).

2.2. Wine involvement

To understand wine consumption it is necessary to understand individual behavior relating to wine consumption (Gluckman, 1990). Wine involvement is fundamental to the wine consumption phenomenon (Lockshin et al., 2001, 1997; Quester and Smart, 1998). The significance of wine involvement is evident in the extant wine-related literature, which has found, among other things, that

wine involvement is an important driver of purchase intention (Lockshin et al., 2006; Hollebeek et al., 2007). Hollebeek et al. (2007) specifically found that high-involvement customers were more easily triggered by a cue pertaining to the region of origin of a wine and less influenced by price. Bruwer and Huang (2012) asserted that high-involved consumers are more inclined to take part in BYOB (bring your own bottle) in restaurants than low-involved consumers. Additionally, high-involved consumers are more likely to purchase wines directly from cellar doors (Lacey et al., 2009). Thus, wine related consumer behavior depends heavily on the level of wine involvement.

The level of product involvement with wine demonstrates wine consumers’ generic feelings of importance and relevance with a product and their genuine level of interest in wine on a daily basis (Yuan et al., 2005). Therefore, product involvement with wine is also known as personal involvement with wine (Yuan et al., 2005). It captures an individual’s feelings of interest, enthusiasm, and excitement about the product category (Bloch, 1982). According to Dodd, personal involvement can also be characterized as product enthusiasm. Product enthusiasts are therefore consumers with an *enduring involvement* with certain products (Bloch, 1986). Houston and Rothschild (1978) suggested that enduring involvement is an amalgamation of a person’s past consumption experience and the fit between the product and his values. It corresponds inherently to how well the product associates with a person’s self-image or the pleasure he or she receives from feelings about the product or from using the product (Higie and Feick, 1989). More recently, Ogbeide and Bruwer (2013) classified enduring involvement with wine to exhibit dimensions such as pleasure/interest, lifestyle/enjoyment, and self-image/sign value.

Prior research has linked product use with product involvement. Goldsmith and d’Hauteville (1998) found heavy wine consumers to be more involved with wine, more innovative, more knowledgeable, and more likely to develop into opinion leaders regarding wine than moderate and non-users. Dodd et al. (2005) revealed that usage experience is positively associated with both objective and subjective wine-related knowledge. Cox (2009) found that subjective knowledge and a need for cognition predicted individuals’ wine involvement. Other studies have demonstrated that consumers’ wine involvement is consistent with the level of wine regularly consumed (Klatsky et al., 1990; Hall et al., 1997; Quester and Smart, 1998; Hollebeek et al., 2007).

Here we acknowledge that the reverse relationship between involvement and drinking frequency is also supported in the extant literature. In other words, studies have suggested that involvement influences drinking frequency, not the other way around (Dodd et al., 1996; Goldsmith and d’Hauteville, 1998). We believe that involvement does not happen in a vacuum and factors such as parental socialization, peer influence, and exemplars act as the root of enduring involvement (Bloch et al., 2009), the type of involvement mostly associated with wine enthusiasts. Common to all these originating factors of enduring involvement is exposure to the product and as such it can be argued that heavy consumption signifies that a person is becoming highly involved with a product. Consistent with this notion and the underlying theory of involvement, we thereby propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Drinking frequency influences wine involvement such that the greater the frequency, the higher is the level of involvement.

2.3. The moderating role of drinking years

Involvement with a product such as wine is inherently enduring (Bloch, 1982). Enduring involvement is motivated by the extent to which a product relates to an individual’s identity or the

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