



Wine tourism experience: A netnography study

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ABSTRACT

Wine tourism is a growing activity, contributing to the economic development of wine regions. The main objective of this study is to thoroughly examine the wine tourism experience using the experience economy model (4Es). Netnography was selected as a research method. This study considers 825 original reviews posted on TripAdvisor by tourists who visited Cognac (France). The results show that the experiences are globally positive. Among the four dimensions of the conceptual framework, the experiences related to education and entertainment dimensions are predominant. Theoretically, the 4Es model related to the wine tourism experience has been enriched. Furthermore, the research highlights the relevance of the holistic analysis and “sweet spot” concept of the 4Es model. From a managerial perspective, the absorption side of the experience - either active or passive requires reinforcement by an immersive experience to offer a “sweet spot” to potential visitors.

1. Introduction

Wine tourism is classified as a form of special interest tourism (Hall et al., 2000) comprising visits to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals, and wine shows in wine tourism destinations (Hall & Macionis, 1998). Marzo-Navarro and Pedraja-Iglesias (2010) add other aspects to this definition, such as local attractions or experiencing the lifestyle of the local people, for example, staying overnight at the vineyards. Wine tourism is a growing activity contributing to the economic development of wine regions (Molina, Gomez, Gonzalez-Diaz, & Esteban, 2015), and a complementary vector between the wine production industry and the tourism sector (Hojman & Hunter-Jones, 2012). In France, wine regions are major tourist destinations. In 2016, 10 million wine tourists visited these destinations, representing 5.2 billion EUR in terms of expenditure. For 2009 to 2016, the average growth rate of wine tourists visiting French wine destinations was 33%. Hence, the average annual growth rate of foreign wine tourists is 5% compared to French tourists at 3.7% (Atout France, 2017).

Recently, the dynamic development of wine tourism has contributed to building a strong brand image for wine destinations and intensifying the competition between them. To improve their attractiveness and competitiveness, destination managers promote satisfactory experiences to form a subsequent customer attachment to place-based brands while visiting a destination (Orth et al., 2012).

From an academic point of view, studies on wine tourism appeared during 1990–2000 (Getz, 2000; Mitchell & Hall, 2006). Studies often address three themes: destinations' strategies, actors in the wine

tourism industry, and wine tourists' behaviors. The first research stream examines the initiatives related to promoting a wine tourism destination, the costs and benefits incurred by this activity, and its consequences on destination image (Hojman & Hunter-Jones, 2012). The second focuses on wine producers' tourism strategies (Dawson, Holmes, Jacobs, & Wade, 2011). The third investigates wine tourists' behavior and motivations for choosing a wine destination (Carlsen & Boksberger, 2015).

More recently, researchers looked into the experiential dimension of wine tourism (e.g., Carmichael, 2005; Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009; Pikkemaat, Peters, Boksberger, & Secco, 2009; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012, 2013). In tourism marketing research, the experiential dimension is placed at the center of tourism consumption. Tourism experience has become a central concept for both practitioners and academics (Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, 2015). Essentially, studies give particular attention to research on nature, dimensions, and the role of the tourism experience. This research interest is entirely justified because the tourism industry is a business that sells experiences (Kim, 2010). Time dedicated to leisure is precisely that, allowing tourists to live new and different experiences compared to their everyday life. Moreover, the experiential view redefines the roles of tourism professionals and tourists by considering the tourist as a fully-fledged actor in the production of his or her own experience. Wine tourism traditionally emphasizes senses, emotions, and enjoyment of pastoral settings; thus, the expanding body of customer experience literature, while still evolving, affords a logical connection to wine tourism (Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Carmichael, 2005; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012).

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While most current studies focus on the visitor's experience in a winery, a wine route, or an event related to wine (e.g., Carmichael, 2005; Pikkemaat et al., 2009), this study takes a more global approach at the level of a wine tourism destination to examine wine tourists' experiences. Indeed, wine tourists desire quality culinary offerings; attractions, including cultural, recreational, and retail choices; human interactions; and a wine region landscape to enjoy (Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Carmichael, 2005; Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009; Dawson et al., 2011). In addition, the motivations for choosing a wine region as a tourist destination go beyond a simple desire to experience wine (Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009). This suggests interrelated activities within the overall wine tourism experience (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012). However, little wine tourism research addresses this type of global approach. Research to date has yet to take a holistic approach to understand the nature of the wine tourist experience (Beames, 2003). Thereby, from a holistic perspective, this research focuses on the tourists' experience in relation to activities and places dedicated to wine tourism. The research question is as follows: What are the dimensions of the wine tourism experience that drive focal marketing strategies of wine tourism destination stakeholders?

2. Literature review

Tourism experiences are no longer an optional added value but a mandatory benefit of any tourism offer (Larsen, 2007). As Pine and Gilmore (1999) indicate, it is of utmost importance to create memorable experiences. In line with these remarks, wine tourism researchers recently focus particular attention to customer experience or hedonic consumption (e.g., Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009; Pikkemaat et al., 2009; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013). Hedonic consumption, in contrast to utilitarian consumption, concentrates on the intrinsic value of “feelings, fun, and fantasy” fostered by the experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The proliferation of literature on the consumer experience signifies the relevance of this theoretical framework to understand the experiences consumers seek in general (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Pine & Gilmore, 1999), and wine tourists in particular (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012, 2013). Indeed, Charters (2006, p. 214) points out that wine tourists seek an experience that “is a complex interaction of natural setting, wine, food, cultural, and historical inputs and above all, the people who service them.”

Among the experience models, Pine and Gilmore's (1998, 1999) experience economy model stands out through operational design. This experience economy model has four dimensions called the 4Es (i.e., the educational, esthetic, entertainment, and escapist experiences), and recently gained attention among wine tourism researchers (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012, 2013). The 4Es model has been suggested as appropriate for understanding tourism products such as hotels and restaurants (Gilmore & Pine, 2002), special events (Pullman & Gross, 2003), and heritage trails (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007). In fact, the 4Es model was successfully operationalized by Oh, Fiore, and Jeung (2007) in a bed and breakfast setting, by Hosany and Witham (2010) in the cruise environment, and recently by Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2013) in the wine tourism context. Furthermore, Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2012, 2013) recognize that the 4Es model offers a relevant framework to examine the wine tourism experience. To support the need for a more encompassing view of the experiential nature of wine tourism using the 4Es model, these authors successfully provide evidence for the use of one of the constructs of the 4Es model in 30 previous wine tourism studies.

Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) conceptualize the multi-dimensional nature of consumer experience and position the resulting 4Es in quadrants formed by the intersection of two continua of experience: consumer participation (active or passive) along the horizontal axis and consumer connection (absorption or immersion) along the vertical axis (Fig. 1). Active participation is “where customers personally affect the performance or event,” and passive participation is “where customers

do not directly affect or influence the performance” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 30). Immersion is described as becoming physically or virtually part of the event, performance, or environment, whereas absorption involves engaging the consumer's mind (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999).

In particular, the richest experiences are those encompassing aspects of all four realms, forming a “sweet spot” that balances elements of active and passive consumer participation and in which customers are both absorbed and immersed (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Indeed, according to Oh et al. (2007) each realm itself is unique and greatly contributes to the global destination experience, with an ideal combination of aspects of all four realms leading to an optimal tourist experience.

2.1. Educational experience in wine tourism

Education repeatedly appears as one of the main motivations in the wine tourism research literature (Getz & Carlsen, 2008). Personal development was identified as a key attribute desired by wine tourists (Sparks, 2007). Although learning was less important to repeat visitors than first-time visitors to South African wineries, it remained one of the top five motivating factors (Bruwer & Alant, 2009). Educational experience plays a significant role in creating memories and satisfaction (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013). The wine tourism supply chain includes accommodation, culinary, cultural, and recreational activities - all of which may offer an educational component. The most common educational activity is wine tasting, followed by wine-food pairing events at local restaurants. Some wineries offer home wine making seminars and partner with chefs and farmers to offer culinary classes (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012). Additionally, festivals, wine history (wine museums), and galleries (whether retail or exhibition) serve as both an educational and entertainment element (Mitchell & Hall, 2006; Pikkemaat et al., 2009; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012). However, agreeing with the Quadri-Felitti and Fiore's (2012) classification, we classify wine history (wine museum) as an entertainment experience in line with the degree of consumer participation and connection depicted in the 4Es model of the experience economy. Moreover, based on the same remark and agreeing with some authors (e.g., Axelsen & Swan, 2010; Getz & Brown, 2006), we classify wine festivals and galleries in the entertainment category.

2.2. Entertainment experience in wine tourism

Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2013) state that special events occurring in wine destinations are another inducement for wine tourists. Cultural attractions and events within wine destinations are a considerable draw for tourists (Carmichael, 2005) and may intensify tourists' entertainment experience (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013). Wine and food festivals and shows are central elements to entertain attendees (Axelsen & Swan, 2010). The connection of art, music, and cultural heritage as entertainment within wine destinations is well documented (Charters, 2006). According to Getz and Brown (2006), numerous specialty shops (e.g., wine shops) within wine destinations are also an excellent entertainment element.

2.3. Esthetic experience in wine tourism

The esthetic experience refers to immersion in a sensual environment. Tourists are passive in esthetic experiences, but immersed in the wine tourism experience (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012). Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2013) demonstrate the dominance of the esthetic experience in predicting positive memories and destination loyalty in the wine tourism context. The winescape – the cultural, environmental, and human improvements of the wine landscape – reflects wine tourists' esthetic motivation (Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Carmichael, 2005; Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009). The beauty of the winescape, vineyards,

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