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WINE TOURISM: INVOLVEMENT AND INTENTION OF POTENTIAL TOURISTS TO VISIT CALIFORNIA WINERIES: EAST VS. WEST

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the effects of consumers' involvement in the pre-purchase stages on their willingness to visit wineries in California. The extant theory provides support for a positive linkage between product involvement, consumption, and propensity to visit a wine destination. Using a simple yet elegant model, and focusing on only two pre-purchase stages (cognitive and affective) of consumer behavior, the findings suggest while Asian consumers do not yet seem enthusiastic about wine consumption, they do seem to engage in information search prior to drinking wine. Also, California wineries need differentiated marketing strategies to attract wine tourists from Asia and Europe.

Key Words: wine consumption, wine tourism, consumer involvement, California

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INTRODUCTION

California attracts a large number of visitors every year which helps generate revenue for the state. The number of overseas visitors to California increased from 27.9 million in 2011 to 29.8 million in 2012. Of these visitors 22% indicated California as their most preferred destination (CIC Research, Inc., 2012). During 2013, the year for which most recent data are available, travel spending in California was \$110 billion which was a 3.2% increase from the previous year. Of these total spending, about \$2.6 billion – or 2.4% – was spent for by travelers to Napa and Sonoma counties. Although apparently trivial, this spending, when expressed in per capita terms, represents the highest per capita spending among all counties in California – Napa and Sonoma generated direct travel spending at \$7,412 and \$3,117 per capita respectively (California Travel and Tourism Commission, 2014; Sonoma County Economic Development Board, 2013).

Wine tourism has seen a gradual rise in recent years. Apart from an increase in demand for wine in general, several factors drive tourism toward wineries compared to other competing experiences. The psychographic profile of the international wine tourist indicates a preference for experimental travel (Hall et al., 2000). This type of travel involves doing rather than seeing and is a trend of tourism in general. Visitation of wineries lends itself to these shorter trips. These trends have helped in growing the demand for wine tourism.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research fills a gap in wine tourism literature, taking into account the effects of consumers' involvement in the pre-purchase stages on their willingness to visit wineries in California or in a foreign country. The theoretical framework presented in this paper provides support for a strong linkage between product involvement, consumption, and eventual propensity to visit a wine destination. As of this writing this paper constitutes the first of its kind econometric study of these effects.

Academic study of wine tourism is only about 20 years old. While California, in general, and Napa valley, in particular, remains a top attraction for wine enthusiasts, rigorous study on California wine tourism is sparse. The Australian Wine Tourism Conference in 1998 was the first forum in which researchers presented their findings (Carlsen, 2004). There is a severe paucity of academic research focusing on the marketing of US wine to international consumers. As California wine production continues to grow, this \$45 billion industry continues to face substantial hurdles. Most small wineries lack the international business acumen to effectively compete in the global market place. Wine tourism has become an

important social and business activity that links gateway cities to regional areas. Therefore, an effective option for small wineries to bridge this gap – to a certain extent – would be to attract more international tourists. The significance of wine tourism was best exemplified by the recent joint efforts of the California Wine Institute and the California Travel and Tourism Commission (CTTC). However, no project has so far been undertaken for small US wineries to improve their regional brand image and market reach in order to boost profitability.

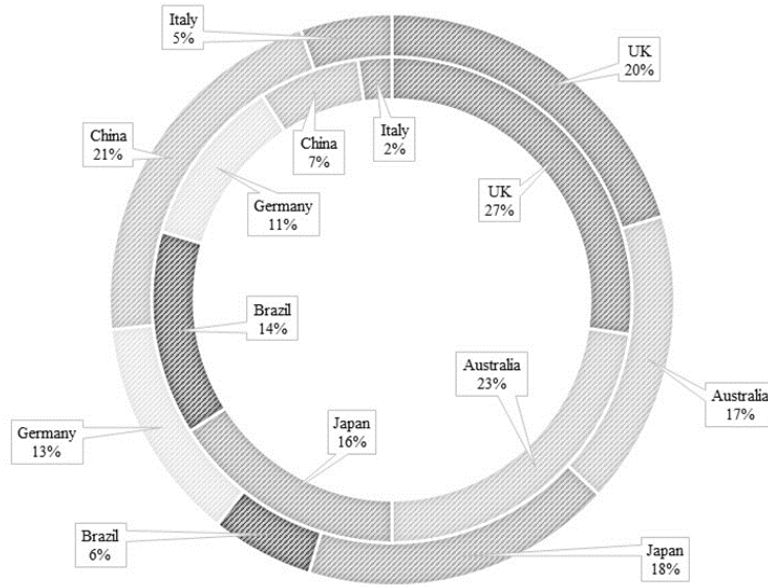
In this context, it is important that researchers study the consumers and identify certain determinants, driving a visitor's willingness to embark on a trip for a visit to a winery. Recent empirical literature has primarily focused on the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of wine tourists in mostly Australia and New Zealand, as well as tourism resources and marketing strategies in various destinations (Bruwer, 2003; Charters and Ali-Knight, 2000; Galloway et al., 2008; Sparks, 2007). Not much empirical research has focused on the characteristics of potential wine tourists to California Wineries.

WINE TOURISM IN CALIFORNIA

The coverage of data collection were resource-constrained and thus the selection of the countries were limited to only Japan, China, and Italy. According to the 2012 Napa Valley Visitor Profile, the number of visitors from Japan, China, and Italy were among the lowest among top 10 countries (Figures 1 and 2).

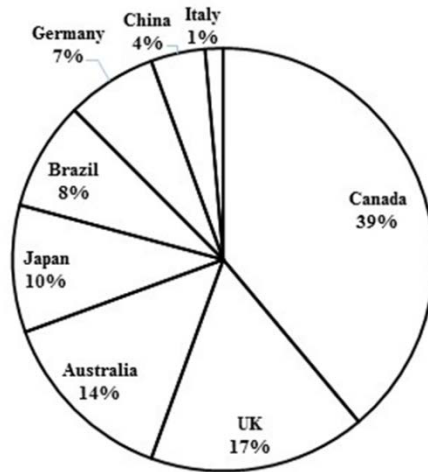
Both Figures 1 and 2 show why it is important for researchers and marketing managers to devote attention to visitors from the three countries. While these three countries produced 18%, 21%, and 5% of all foreign 2012 visitors to California respectively, only 16%, 7%, and 2% of Napa visitors originated from these three countries, indicating a need for more potent marketing efforts to attract visitors from these countries.

Figure 1. International visitors from selected countries to California and Napa



Source: CIC Research, Inc (2012)

Figure 2. International visitors from selected countries to Napa Valley, 2012 (%)



Source: Napa Valley Visitor (2012)

Wine consumers and tourists in China and Japan

Worldwide wine consumption increased by a 0.7% to 24,434 ml in 2011 (Winetitles, 2011) driven largely by gains in the United States and China but offset by the continuing drop in consumption in Italy and a drop in all of Europe. Not surprisingly, China deserves special attention. Although, Italy – as one of the leading “Old World” wine producers – remains as one of the top attractions for wine tourists, China is just awakening to the fact that wine tourism can become an attractive source of revenue for their emerging wine market. The implementation of the new Common Market Organization (CMO) in the European Union (EU) has resulted in recent shrinkage in vineyard area. European vineyards, accounting for almost 60% of the world vine surface, has decreased from 4,520,000 ha in 2008 to 4,253,000 ha in 2011. On the other hand, in 2011, China became the world’s fourth largest country, surpassing Turkey, by vineyard area and produced more than 490,000 tons of wine, ranking seventh among the top wine producers in the world. China, the 6th largest producer in 2000, now leads the world in grape production (including wine grapes, table grapes, and raisins).

Although wine has begun to be a preferred drink in China only recently, it surpassed the UK as the fifth largest wine consumer of wine in 2011 (Winetitles, 2011). Not surprisingly, the most noticeable trend in contemporary Chinese society is the increased volume of leisure travel, as a greater proportion of the urban household income is allocated to leisure and entertainment activities. These spending patterns has spawned a new sector in Chinese economy – leisure tourism in the form of wine tourism (Qiu et al., 2013).

A visit to America works as a confirmation of social status for affluent Chinese tourists, according to Mr. Wolfgang Georg Arlt, the director of the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute. Equally important is the fact that Chinese tourists are the largest spenders in the world, spending on average \$7,200 per visit (CNN, 2015).

The study on Japanese consumers is important for two very important reasons. First, as shown in Table 1, and Figure 1 show visitors from Japan constitute a substantial portion of tourists to California, in general, and the number is expected to rise by 21% from its 2013 base of 536,000. In particular, Figure 2 shows that 10% of 2012 visitors to Napa valley were from Japan. However, Japanese market is captivated by French and Italian wines, with a 34% and 17% market share, respectively (Euromonitor International, 2011). In a recent paper, Bruwer and Buller (2013) investigates the level of product involvement, brand loyalty, and preference for country-of-origin wine brands of Japanese wine consumers. However, very

little is still understood as to why a very small portion of Japanese tourists, despite their strong preference for California, visit Napa valley.

Table 1. Japanese tourists

	2013	% Change from Previous year
Visitors to California	536,000	-4%
Market Share	14.4%	-4.6%
Average Length of Stay (nights)	8.5	
Visitation 2014 Forecast (% change vs. 2013)	556,000	3.9%
Visitation 2018 Forecast (% change vs. 2013)	649,000	21%

Source: Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, CIC Research, Tourism Economics, OAG
(<http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Market-Strategy/Global-Markets/Japan/>)

The juxtaposition of potential wine tourists from Japan and China with those from Italy and the United States enables us to explain the differences in a couple of ways. First, we can contrast the propensity to visit a California winery of tourists from wine producing countries with those from wine consuming countries. Second, both the US and Italy share long history of wine consumption, whereas wine consumers in Japan and China are comparatively new drinkers. Therefore, a comparison between experienced and inexperienced drinkers may offer insights for wine tourism strategies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Product involvement plays a dominant role in consumer behavior theory as it exerts strong an influence over the consumer decision process (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985). Involvement determines the personal relevance of a purchase decision to a consumer (Brennan and Mavondo, 2000). High involvement consumers differ from low involvement consumers in that the former seek to maximize satisfaction through a relatively extensive search and choice process (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985). Consequently, they become information-seekers and use the information in their purchase decision (Barber, Ismail, and Dodd, 2008). Involvement ultimately influences purchasing behavior, and influences the response to marketing communication (Petty and Cacioppo, 1983). Hussain, Cholette, and Castaldi (2007) found that better knowledge of wine reduces confusion regarding wine, leading to choice of more expensive wines as well as increased consumption.

Although product involvement and purchase decision involvement occur as a series of independent actions, product involvement is an antecedent of purchase decision involvement (Cox, 2009). Our study of potential wine tourists' behavior follows this approach and pictures wine tourism behavior as a process comprising three sequential steps.

The interest a consumer takes in wine as a product will precede her information search as well as her involvement in the purchase decision. Eventually, consumption of wine engenders increased interest in expanding their knowledge of wine. One likely outcome of such enhanced interest is the willingness to embark on a trip to wineries.

In a nutshell, involved wine consumers buy wine more frequently and pay more per bottle than less involved wine consumers, subscribe to specialty magazines, visit websites, linger in the wine shops, and gather knowledge from friends or sales people (Lockshin and Spawton, 2001). While less involved consumers do consume some wine, they are more influenced by peripheral cues, such as point of sales. More involved wine consumers use complex cues to make purchase decision such as region, style, wine maker, vintage and vineyard. Low involvement buyers tend to use price, brand and label (Rasmussen and Lockshin, 1999) as cues to which wine to buy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

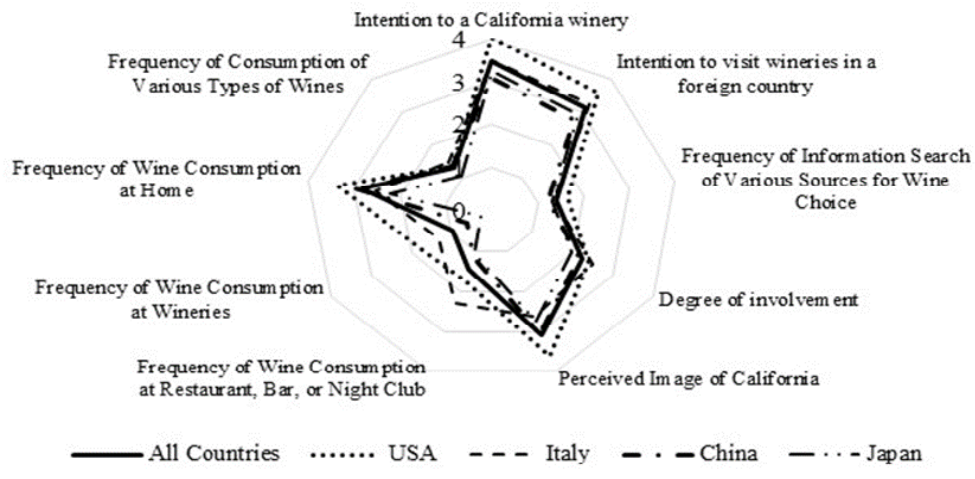
The study presents a statistical description of potential wine tourists, as well as an econometric analysis of the determinants of their intention to visit a winery in California. Data on consumer characteristics, wine consumption, involvement in wine consumption, and other related variable were collected by personal surveys. Owing to certain resource and time constraints, we adopted a non-probabilistic sampling method to draw samples from all four countries covered in the study. Eventually, we collected 699 completed surveys from wine consumers in China, Japan, Italy, and the US.

The questionnaire used close-ended, multiple-choice questions to obtain information on certain demographic variables (age, gender, income, occupation, and race), as well as behavioral variables (frequency of wine consumption, wine varieties, consumption location, enthusiasm in wine related activities, perceived image of California, and intention to visit a California winery). Using these data, we developed and empirically tested a model with the intention to visit a California winery as a dependent variable. It should also be noted that we were concerned primarily with intention, not actual behavior. We do not test formal hypotheses but explain and empirically explore how different characteristics of a consumer influences her intention to engage in wine tourism. The study uses a simple yet elegant model by focusing on only two pre-purchase stages (cognitive and affective) of consumer behavior.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The primary objective of the study is to measure the impact on a consumer's willing to travel to a Californian or a foreign winery of knowledge and involvement, along with personal characteristics of consumers and selected marketing mix variables. Figure 3 and Table 2 present means of independent and dependent variables. The study covered respondents from almost every generation – from Millennials (18) to Baby Boomers (65) with the overall average age being about 31 years. Italian respondents were the oldest – presumably the most enthusiastic drinkers – while respondents in China were the youngest. Not surprisingly, the mean ratings derived from potential wine tourists in the US on all the variables are highest among all the countries covered in the study, while those from China are among the lowest.

Figure 3. Means of variables used in the study



**Table 2. Means of variables used in the study
(ordinal scale: 1-5; 5=highest and 1=lowest)**

Independent and Dependent Variables	All Countries	USA	Italy	Japan	China
Age (years)	30.91	27.65	35.55	40.02	22.34
<i>Age Range</i>	<i>18-65</i>	<i>20-65</i>	<i>20-50</i>	<i>20-59</i>	<i>18-37</i>
<i>Female-Male ratio</i>	<i>0.97</i>	<i>0.91</i>	<i>1.53</i>	<i>1.0</i>	<i>0.82</i>
Intention to visit a California winery (<i>dependent variable</i>)	3.45	4.02	3.47	3.07	3.23
<i>Independent variables</i>					
Frequency of Information Search of Various Sources for Wine Choice	1.39	1.64	1.35	1.23	1.30
Degree of enthusiasm	2.24	2.39	2.52	2.18	1.97
Perceived Image of California	3.09	3.63	2.64	3.06	2.75
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Restaurant, Bar, or Night Club	1.46	1.72	2.29	1.16	1.07
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Wineries	0.97	1.77	1.32	0.61	0.26
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Home	2.84	3.38	2.54	2.99	2.23
Frequency of Consumption of Various Types of Wines	1.28	1.34	1.44	1.34	1.04
Number of respondents	699	215	98	200	186

For Asian consumers, drinking wine at an off-home location or at a winery seems more infrequent compared to those in Italy or the US. Their intention to visit a winery in California is lower than that of Italian and US wine consumers. On the other hand, potential wine tourists from Japan and China hold a better image of California than their counterparts. Yet their intention to visit a California winery is weaker than Italian and American tourist. This phenomenon probably indicates California may be the source of other attractions to these tourists than just wine.

The regression analyses are presented in Tables 3 and 4. The difference between Tables 3 & 4 estimates are as follows:

- (1) In Table 3, we use three dummy variables for countries, with the US being '0' (zero) for all three dummy variables. Thus, the estimate of the constant refers to all exogenous effects on US tourists' willingness to visit a California Winery.
- (2) In Table 4 we use two dummy variables, with Italy and the US combined in one dummy variable, called 'West' (=1, 0 otherwise) and China and Japan in the other one, called 'East' (=1, 0 otherwise). Not surprisingly, the regression results do not show any estimates of the constant because the two dummy variables created

respectively refers to the effects of all exogenous effects on tourists from the ‘West’ (i.e., Italy and the US) and the ‘East’ (i.e., Japan and China.)

The estimated coefficients from both OLS and Tobit regressions are presented for econometric comparisons. One goal of this comparison was to show to econometric students in what direction and magnitude the OLS regression may produce bias results. Theoretically, OLS results are biased because OLS does allow for a negative value for the estimated dependent variable, whereas the range for dependent variable is truncated at “1” from below. A comparison of the constant shows clearly the bias. Holding all other explanatory (independent) variables fixed, the intention to visit a winery in California is clearly much weaker (0.535 in Tobit) than that reflected in the OLS run (1.071). This implies that the actual effects of independent variables are stronger than those produced in the OLS regression, as shown in the Tobit estimates. The coefficient of the dummy variable, female (to differentiate between female and male respondents) was barely statistically significant (at 10% level). The lack of significance is not surprising. More than 60% of the visitors were married or partnered (Visit Napa Valley, 2012). Also, Napa County visitors typically traveled with their spouses, partners, or companions. Some of them were even accompanied by children on the trip (Visit Napa Valley, 2006).

The regression analyses (both in Tables 3 and 4) do uncover a few statistically significant pairwise relationships between dependent variable (intention to visit a winery in California) and four independent variables:

- (1) Degree of enthusiasm and availability of description of a winery in own language: These estimates seem quite intuitive and are self-explanatory. An enthusiastic wine drinker will be more involved and thus be more likely to explore a wine region to taste wine or to discover wine making techniques, or to enjoy fine cuisine or to purchase wine from its source. Regardless of the motivation of the tourists, no other factor than a salient and vivid description in own language does a better job in kindling the desire to be interested and involved in wine tourism. Marketers must take a note of this important determinant.
- (2) Perceived image of California: These estimates bear significant marketing implications. Marketers must keep wine tourists’ enthusiasm fresh by determining what entertainment sources/variables contribute to the higher perceived image for California. If the source of attraction is something other than wine then that element of enthusiasm should be combined – directly or indirectly – with the promotional of a California winery.

Table 3. Regression results
Dependent variable: Intention to visit wineries in California

Independent variables	OLS		Tobit	
	R ² = 0.49		Pseudo R ² = 0.21	
	Beta	<i>T-statistics</i>	Beta	<i>T-statistics</i>
Constant	1.071 ***	5.45	0.535 **	2.15
Age	-0.007 ***	-1.99	-0.009 **	-1.96
Female	0.076	1.18	0.134 *	1.68
Frequency of Information Search of Various Sources for Wine Choice	0.020	0.42	0.018	0.31
Degree of Enthusiasm about Wine	0.167 ***	3.69	0.205 ***	3.62
Perceived Image of California	0.383 ***	9.17	0.482 ***	8.96
Frequency of Consumption of Various Types of Wines	0.010	0.11	0.023	0.21
Availability of Description of a California in Own Language	0.253 ***	8.64	0.314 ***	8.63
Frequency of Domestic Wine Consumption	0.020	0.61	0.020	0.47
Frequency of Foreign Wine Consumption	0.013	0.38	0.010	0.25
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Home	0.018	0.66	0.025	0.74
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Restaurant	0.028	0.87	0.034	0.84
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Bar	-0.005	-0.18	-0.010	-0.27
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Night Club	0.017	0.44	0.023	0.50
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Wineries	0.056	1.46	0.102 **	2.08
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Wine Shops	-0.031	-0.83	-0.032	-0.69
Japan (Dummy)	-0.052	-0.49	-0.081	-0.62
China (Dummy)	-0.256 ***	-2.25	-0.333 **	-2.36
Italy (Dummy)	0.190	1.46	0.175	1.09

Note: Significant at the 0.10 level; ** Significant at the 0.05 level; *** Significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 4. Regression results (No constant)
Dependent variable: Intention to visit wineries in California

Independent variables	OLS		Tobit	
	R ² = 0.95		Pseudo R ² = NA	
	Beta	<i>T-statistics</i>	Beta	<i>T-statistics</i>
Age	-0.010 ***	-3.26	-0.013 ***	-3.37
Female	0.070	1.09	0.130 *	1.63
Frequency of Information Search of Various Sources for Wine Choice	0.020	0.44	0.021	0.37
Degree of Enthusiasm about Wine	0.180 ***	4.03	0.221 ***	3.94
Perceived Image of California	0.363 ***	8.90	0.460 ***	8.76
Frequency of Consumption of Various Types of Wines	0.000	0.00	0.07	0.07
Availability of Description of a California in Own Language	0.254 ***	8.69	0.317 ***	8.70
Frequency of Domestic Wine Consumption	0.031	0.91	0.031	0.74
Frequency of Foreign Wine Consumption	-0.014	-0.44	-0.021	-0.54
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Home	0.008	0.30	0.016	0.49
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Restaurant	0.045	1.41	0.052	1.32
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Bar	0.001	0.04	-0.006	-0.16
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Night Club	0.017	0.46	0.025	0.53
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Wineries	0.039	1.06	0.085 *	1.79
Frequency of Wine Consumption at Wine Shops	-0.026	-0.69	-0.027	-0.57
East (Dummy, Japan & China)	1.048 ***	6.42	0.495 **	2.38
West (Dummy, USA & Italy)	1.262 ***	7.09	0.756 ***	3.35

Note: Significant at the 0.10 level; ** Significant at the 0.05 level; *** Significant at the 0.01 level.

CONCLUSION

While California, in general, and Napa valley, in particular, remains a top attraction for wine enthusiasts, rigorous study on California wine tourism is sparse. The Australian Wine Tourism Conference in 1998 was the first forum in which researchers presented their findings (Carlsen, 2004). There is a severe paucity of academic research focusing on the marketing of US wine to international consumers. As California wine production continues to grow, this \$45 billion industry continues to face substantial hurdles. Most small wineries lack the international business acumen to effectively compete in the global market place.

Wine tourism has become an important social and business activity that links gateway cities to regional areas. Therefore, an effective option for small wineries to bridge this gap

– to a certain extent – would be to attract more international tourists. In this context, it is important that researchers study the consumers and identify certain determinants, driving a visitor's willingness to embark on an international trip for a visit to a winery.

Finally, owing to the small coverage in terms of number of countries and convenience sampling, the conclusions of this study should be generalized cautiously. Despite these limitations the findings indicate that California wineries need to employ differentiated marketing strategies (e.g., language of description) to attract wine tourists from Asia and Europe.

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