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WINE EDUCATION COURSES ON  
CONSUMER PERCEPTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although it is very difficult to find any research that has been devoted to establish the value of wine education courses on consumers, gatekeepers are pinning a lot of hope on wine education to create or restore value. The purpose of this research was to investigate if wine courses lead to any changes in perception, consumption pattern and modify the consumer's degree of involvement for the category.

We compared results of the same survey filled in twice by new wine course students in Montreal, Québec, Canada: prior to their first class and at the end of the course five weeks later; followed up by two questionnaires after three and twenty-four months. All survey questions were assessed in a five-point Likert type scale and the outcomes were statistically treated using t-student test.

The results obtained imply that the perceptions, behavior and commitment towards the category changes after having followed a wine course. An economic value was created for the proponent of the courses (the retailer) as the majority of students declared spending more afterwards. In addition, value was also created for the students as they declare an increase in involvement, a sense of empowerment, an increase in frequency of usage of the product but not in the intensity.

Keywords: student, wine education, economic value, empowerment

## **INTRODUCTION**

Although the value of wine education has not been researched to any extent, Mr. Dan Jago the category director for beer wine and spirit at TESCO feels positively strongly about the value of wine education. Stop push and pray, engage: At the 2010 Harper's conference, top retailers agreed educating or engaging with customers on wine was vital, adding that the wine trade is in turmoil. For UK retailers, wine education is a beacon of hope for the wine trade. Suppliers believe it will cure binge drinking, restore margins by encouraging consumers to pay more. The problem in the UK is that the retail industry is not adding value and consumers are price loyal, not quality loyal. Most supermarket categories have 10 or so brands, wine typically has hundreds if not thousands but, somehow, this is not adding to the value chain. The consumers may be confused but Jago thinks it is the duty of the trade to listen to customers, educate and innovate. Therefore, the wine industry should identify the need to further dispel the notion that wine is a difficult and confusing beverage. The industry understands that in a pull marketing scenario, you want your stakeholders to become quality loyal instead of price loyal.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The value of wine education is an under-studied subject. To this day, when looking for sources of literature on the value of wine education courses one finds very little, as this topic has not been researched to any extent (Taylor et al., 2009). Customer education is key to unlocking value in products and with education comes an increase in product usage intensity, loyalty and a willingness to explore. It may lead to cross-trading, up-trading and/or down-trading. Enthusiastic and educated customers may become more involved, and with the power of social media, may help stimulate demand.

The trade is pinning a lot of hope on wine education and those with higher levels of knowledge tend to consume more wine (Dodd et al., 2005). "I believe vehemently that education is the best way ahead" Dan Jago (Harpers, 2010a). At the 2010 Harper's conference, top retailers agreed

educating or engaging<sup>1</sup> with customers on wine was vital, adding that the wine trade is in "turmoil" (Harpers, 2010a). Wine education is "a beacon of hope" for the wine trade. Suppliers believe "it will cure binge drinking, restore margins" by encouraging consumers to pay more, and "generally will keep businesses afloat" (Nielsen, 2010). "I'd like to help customers understand why they should spend a little more to get something that really is better and I'd like them to understand their role in responsible drinking, to enjoy two or three units a day rather than a lot on Friday night" Dan Jago (Meininger's, 2007). Alex Hunt MW of Berkman (UK) stated that people can only be educated if they want to be educated – creating that initial desire is where the best retailers seem to excel (Nielsen, 2011). "What we see piled high on every gondola end is the branded, the mundane and the heavily promoted. Whether it's pork bellies or pig iron, a commodity market has few margin opportunities. This situation will not change until we, as an industry, begin to add value" (Nielsen, 2010). "What do customers want? I'm not sure they know, and I'm not sure we as businesses are very good at helping them" Dan Jago (Harper, 2010b). My feeling is that consumers have never had so much choice but they have never been so confused. The whole world is making a good standard of wine today and they need some guidance." Michael Broadbent (Decanter, 2010). "Fear is something we spend too much time ignoring" (Harper, 2010b).

The marketers highlight that most supermarket categories have 10 or so brands, wine typically has over 700 (Lockshin, 2003); but, somehow, this is not adding to the value chain (Nielsen, 2010). There is a paralysis of choice. For the producer, complexity destroys profitability; it takes power away from the producers to put it in the hands of the retailer (Hegarty, 2010). Wine is a fragmented market facing a confused audience, battered by the retail trade, battered by oversupply (Hegarty, 2010). Marketers think that to tell the story about a product is in itself valuable. The more you tell, the more you sell (Hawthorne, 1998). But is this knowledge passed on automatically in the wake of having followed wine education courses? Apparently not. Most wine education courses fail due to the strong emphasis on wine knowledge that no one remembers after the class instead of focusing on aesthetic appreciation that is more effectively retained and can lead to the increased consumption of wine (Dewald and Jones, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> Sainsbury's drinks chief Justin James said he preferred the word "engagement" to "education".

Currently, 80 per cent of wine consumers are either “uninvolved” or uneducated about wine (Hussain et al., 2007). "Involvement" is a term borrowed from the psychology literature to designate people who have a much greater interest in certain things when compared to other things (Lockshin, 1998). Consumers are generally categorised as either low or high involvement. Higher involvement consumers utilize more information and are interested in learning more (Lockshin et al., 2006). The traditional wine education courses do not seem to appeal to the low-involvement or uninvolved customer; it has been and continues to be ‘a bridge too far’ for the uninvolved. The vast majority of wine consumers just want to be able to buy a bottle of wine they will like every time (Stallcup, 2005).

Customer education is the process by which companies systematically share their knowledge and skills with external customers to foster the development of positive customer attitudes (Honebein, 1997). Over the next two decades, businesses will come to think of their customers as learners and of themselves as educators. They will promote learning experience for profit, and their customers will profit from that experience (Davis, Botkin, 1995). Customer education is neither an event nor an object, but rather a process to be managed with the same precision as the creation of the product itself (Gitomer, Zemke, 1999).

Simply giving customers what they want isn't enough anymore. To gain an edge, companies must help customers learn what they want (Kotler, 2008). Customers hold the key to unlocking value in products and companies should help them acquire the skills (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2005).

Skills improvement has a significant effect on product usage intensity (Aubert, 2005). Customer loyalty was found to be positively and significantly related to technical service quality, functional service quality, and customer education (Bell et al., 2007). At home, more self-confident consumers expressed a willingness to try new brands (Olsen et al., 2003).

There are two opposing buying trends at work, trading up and treasure hunting—two sides of a powerful economic trend that have been gathering increasing momentum in the United States, Australia, Canada, China, Europe, India, Japan (Silverstein et al., 2008). Silverstein calls this new trend *Artful Consumerism* or treasure hunting, which means finding products with the best value, the best quality and the best price.

Educated customers are poised to become champions for a product category of their liking. If they enthuse about their newly acquired skills and increased knowledge, they might stimulate

demand because they will be seen by their peers as the ones able to give "referrals by a trusted source" (Stratten, 2010). Because they are overwhelmed with choices and because they like the category, consumers take courses but researchers are sceptical about the actual wine courses ability to really educate or influence them.

The key objective of this research was to evaluate if wine appreciation courses lead consumers to engage differently with wine. Engaging the wine consumer may be the solution to many problems facing the industry nowadays, mainly restoring value in the category and moving from a price-driven to a value-driven consumer who appreciates wine differently and uses the product in a socially responsible manner. This study tried to answer the following question: "What is the value of wine education?" and assess the problems the wine trade is facing through the eyes of actors in the retail segment who possess a global perspective. This evaluation was done in Canada, especially the Quebec market, where there is a strong presence of wine education.

Research question and its five sub-questions.

What is the value of wine education courses and do they engage the Quebec consumer?

Sub-questions:

- 1- Did wine education customers learn anything from attending the courses and if so, what is it?
- 2- Do wine education courses change perceptions in students mind? Are they engaging differently with the product, and in what way?
- 3- Do they know how to taste wine better and do they know their taste preferences better?
- 4- Do wine education courses lead to up-trading or cross-trading? Do they engage more discretionary money in the category?
- 5- Do wine education lead customers to intensify their relationship with wine, and to what degree?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Having selected Quebec and SAQ wine appreciation courses for this longitudinal quantitative research, in the spring of 2010 a draft questionnaire was created based on a five point Likert scale: 1-Do not agree at all, 2 Do not really agree, 3- Neutral, 4-Somewhat agree, 5- Totally agree

A May 2010 pilot class was used to test the prototype questionnaire and the results were submitted to 'Student's' t test for statistical analysis significance. Test being positive it was decided to proceed with the project.

In the fall of 2010, the questionnaire got distributed in 25 SAQ wine appreciation classes. This course is a five weeks one night a week three hours class. Those classes were held in six different rented locations in Montreal and the Greater Montreal Area. By filling it on the first night prior to the first class and, after five weeks, on the last night of the course the same students were tested and it led to an average of 260 collected paired questionnaires. During the winter of 2011 a second and different questionnaire (via Internet) was sent to the students who had agreed in providing an email address and it created a subset of 134 respondents. The Internet surveys got paired and, in the spring of 2011, the data from both surveys was analyzed and each were submitted to a statistical 'Student' t test analysis. A clarification question regarding intensity and frequency of drinking got sent in July of 2011 to a subset of 10 persons from the subset no.2. The time span for the whole research was 15 months (spring of 2010 to summer of 2011).

When comparing results over the three periods we used Subset 2 (n=134) to make sure we had answers from the same population throughout.

Finally, Fall of 2012, exactly twenty four months after students had initially enrolled, a third different questionnaire with some new and identical questions from the first Internet one got sent by email to see if students kept their commitment in the category. It produced from our reference Subset 2 a third Subset of n=70 surveys.

First, we study the variation of distributions mean between the first week and the last week of the workshop using a 'Student's' t test on paired variables. For those tests:

The significance level is set at  $\alpha = 5\%$ . We suppose that the mean stays unchanged in the null hypothesis, meaning that the workshop had no major impact ( $H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2$  where  $\mu_1$  is the mean at the beginning and  $\mu_2$  is the mean at the end of the workshop).



The alternate hypothesis is chosen according to the question. In general, we will investigate whether the workshop improved the participants' knowledge perception and modifies cues and attributes selection.

This procedure systematically leads to a one-tailed test ( $H_1: \mu_1 > \mu_2$  or  $H_1: \mu_1 < \mu_2$ ). Alternative hypothesis:  $H_1: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$

Tests that returned a p value  $< 0.05$  are deemed statistically significant (95% confidence level). At  $p < 0.01$ , tests are deemed highly significant (99% confidence level). A p value  $> 0.05$  is not deemed statistically significant.

At three months we performed a T test on the mean ( $\mu=3$ ) to see if the answers were neutral or not. For this we used a two-tailed T test. The significance level is equally set at  $\alpha=5\%$ . Null hypothesis= mean=3, Alternative hypothesis=  $\mu \neq 3$

## **RESULTS**

The results obtained showed the consumer engaging with wine at the end of the five-week course changed at several levels (table 1):

Educational empowerment: wine course increased the subjective knowledge perception on wine for no prior wine education students. It increased the subjective knowledge perception on wine for wine experienced students.

Sensory cues valorization: wine course improved the importance of the varietal attribute (+15%) and the students are less against choosing a wine because of the low alcohol attribute.

Origin cues valorization: wine course improved the importance of the region attribute (+10%).

Behavioural engagement: wine course improved the participant's enthusiasm for communicating about wine. It improved the student's attention to the wines on promotion in the store, and it increased by 2.7% the budget allocation for an at home special occasion or a gift.

In contrast, in other situation the wine courses did not change consumer's attitudes or behaviors:

Sensory cues: no change in wine and food pairing interest after the wine classes, but two thirds of student's value good wine and food pairing.

**Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and P value of first survey administered in class at beginning and end of the course.**

Questions	First week		Fifth week		P value
	Mean	SDev	Mean	SDev	
I don't know much about wine but	3,83	1,24	3,5	1,25	<0.00
I know about wine and have been	2,69	1,14	3,03	1,09	<0.00
I love wine and like to talk about it	3,53	1,22	3,78	1,06	<0.05
Wine on promotion	2,41	1,22	2,66	1,26	<0.05
Varietal	3,36	1,11	3,68	0,91	<0.00
Shelf information	2,82	1,19	2,94	1,14	ns
Region	3,71	1,01	3,92	0,79	<0.00
Alcohol level below 13%	1,55	0,89	1,76	0,96	<0.00
Wine was recommended to me	3,79	0,98	3,77	0,97	ns
It allowed for a good food and wine	3,74	1,04	3,86	0,9	ns
I liked back label information	2,92	1,11	3,26	3,12	ns
I have had the wine before and	3,9	0,98	3,77	0,98	ns
Wine has won a medal	2,54	1,18	2,59	1,14	ns
The label was attractive	2,56	1,14	2,54	1,12	ns
I like the brand	3,01	1,09	3,06	1,07	ns
Wine is organic	1,81	0,99	1,81	0,93	ns

Behavioural engagement: no change in the buying or drinking frequency of the students.

There was no change in the importance of recommendations to select a wine, although 72% of wine courses students like recommendations.

The students did not change their willingness to explore, make discoveries, refine food pairing and spend more. Likewise, no changes about the "winning medals" or "high score" attribute as their real interest was quite low <5%.

The interest by «organic" wine category was also quite low (<5%).

Red wine is preferred by 60% of the total student's population, white 7% and 37% enjoy both.

Regarding the customer engagement after three months (table 2), it was observed some changes:

Behavioral engagement: 90% of participants declared having changed their behavior as wine consumers, and 91% of participants declared choosing their wine better.

56% being almost the same number as their initial spending intention (59% of respondents declaring willing to spend more in the future) expressed in the survey at the end of the five-week course. The mean monthly spending after three months was CDN \$102.

78% of students declared speaking more about wine. In addition, 8% declared drinking more after the wine course. On the issue of drinking more after the wine course students are generally neutral. In other words, they don't change their wine consumption on average. The 8% respondents who answered "totally agree" on having increased their wine consumption cannot be characterized by their gender or age group; they are equally represented in three age groups, 18-24, 25-40, 41-54. Besides, of those who declared drinking more wine after having taken their wine course: 78% of them declared having increased their frequency of consumption but not having increased the quantity of drinking per occasion. The rest declared having increased both the usage (frequency) and intensity (amount) of drinking wine after their wine course. They represent 1.5% of the surveyed student population.

**Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations and P value after three months survey administered via Internet.**

Questions	After three months		P Value
	Mean	SDev	
Do you choose your wines better	4,37	0,53	<0.00
I speak more about wine	4	1,01	<0.00
I encourage other people to enrol in wine courses	3,8	1,01	<0.00
I drink more wine than before	2,87	1,14	ns
I try to get more information, I read more on wine,	4,1	0,95	<0.00
I know my taste preferences way better	4,2	0,78	<0.00
I took wine classes to increase my enjoyment of wine	4,2	0,82	<0.00
I took wine classes acquire theoretical knowledge on wine	4,3	0,67	<0.00
I took wine classes to acquire practical knowledge on wine	4,5	0,61	<0.00
I will surely take more wine courses	4,1	0,94	<0.00
I am looking more now to find more authentic wines	3,7	1,13	<0.00
I understand and appreciate the "terroir" concept	3,9	1,13	<0.00
I value more character and identity -vs- brand	3,91	0,85	<0.00
What matters is that I think that the wine taste good	4,24	0,82	<0.00
Wine and food pairing is important for me	4,24	0,8	<0.00
I only drink wine during meals	2,2	1,31	<0.00
I am now MORE respectful of wines that won medals	3,01	0,98	ns
I don't care much about points and medals...	3,72	1	<0.00
"Organic" wines; this is just another marketing trick!	2,84	1,17	ns
I have respect for organic wines	2,91	1,12	ns

### Educational empowerment and commitment:

82% of students declared looking for information about wine;

86% declared an interest in taking wine classes for increasing their enjoyment of wine;

91% declared their interest in acquiring theoretical knowledge about wine;

94% declared an interest in acquiring practical knowledge;

71% of people agree on being willing to take more courses; the more eager being the Millennials (18-24), and the Baby boomers (55+),

88% of people declared knowing their taste better; students expressed having gained confidence in evaluating wine: 81% trust their own palate in passing judgment on what taste good, the older they get, the more secure they feel about it. The 18-24 are modest enough to recognise some limitations in passing judgment on wine. It is interesting to match it with their thirst for knowledge.

71% of respondents declared encouraging other people to enrol in wine courses, the keenest being the Baby boomers followed by the Millennials (18-24).

### Official cues (appellation, classification etc.) valorisation :

77% better understand and appreciate the "terroir" notion, with Millennials (18-24) being less keen on it.

62% are interested by more Authentic wines that speak of place versus Industrial wines that always taste consistently the same. Interest peaks in the 41-54 age group. Of this group, 83% are women.

### Origin cues valorisation

66% declared an interest in wines with a sense of place and identity -vs- buying a recognised Brand.

### Sensory cues valorisation

86% declared their interest in wine and food pairing. The topic of food and wine pairing is gaining momentum as the students progressed in their education. An increased interest kicks in the 25-40 age group and grows as students get more mature. Young (<41) and Mature (41+) are comparable in their interest in wine and food pairing; men are slightly more interested by the topic than women. The increased interest in gastronomy might help explain the 8% increase in consumption frequency. On Quebec interest for wine and food: "Quebec drinkers are spreading their overall consumption on more frequent, mostly gastronomic, occasions" (Paradis, 2010). 5% declared only drinking wine at the table with a meal. It is the Baby Boomers (55+) who tend to favour drinking with a meal, but two thirds of them enjoy a standalone glass of wine as well.

Other attitudes and behaviors towards wine didn't change after three months:

43% of respondents did not change their budget after 3 months. The mean budget for those respondents averages \$105, which is higher than the average expense for budget changers (= 102\$ after 16% increase). This higher budget may indicate why these respondents did not commit more money in the category after the course. 68% of the non-budget changers are less than 40 years old.

Students are neutral about medal and high scores. They would prefer passing their own judgment on wine, the 18-24 years old wishing the most for it. Less than 30% of students feel somewhat positive about scores or medal cues, Baby Boomers being the most respectful of them.

Participants maintained they neutrality and low interest about organic wines.

The after twenty four months results are echoing the after three months results. Commitment is strong and engagement is maintained, enthusiasm is intact, spending has been declared increased by 16.5% since they have started their education and it is 77% of the (n=70) respondents who declared having increased their monthly wine budget versus 56% who declared having increased it by 16% in the after three months (n=134) survey. More than two thirds of course takers declared having encouraged other people to take a wine course. 20% in the Subset 3 have effectively taken one or more wine courses.

SAQ wine education courses engage the Quebec consumer who has attended one. Course takers, with or without previous knowledge in wine, acquired subjective wine knowledge. Students have changed their behavior. Various sensory, origin and official cues gained in importance. Students declared having increased their tasting abilities; they better know their taste preferences and better choose their wine. Students have an aroused curiosity for the category after the course and want to learn more. Above all, students favour practical knowledge acquisition. We do not know if their acquired knowledge and curiosity will lead to up-trading or cross- trading but we know that, as a direct result of the course, more than half of the students declared having increased their wine budget by 16%. Wine and food pairing became more important to course takers. As for product usage and intensity, the majority remained neutral. Less than 10 % of students have augmented their wine drinking occasions but not the usage intensity. Less than 2% of course takers now drink more wine more often.

## **CONCLUSION**

For the Trade, value creation or value destruction is a serious problem, spending below the line with discounts and promotions are not creating value. In contrast, spending above the line in offering or sponsoring wine education creates value. With better knowing their taste and better choosing their wines and having developed a keen interest in wine and food pairing, course takers agreed to have changed their behaviour and are poised to start unlocking value.

The findings of this research reveal that the perceptions, behaviour and commitment towards wine changes as a result of having followed a wine appreciation course. There was economic value creation for the proponent of the wine education courses, namely the retailer, who saw a majority of students wishing to buy more courses as well as recommending the SAQ courses to their peers. Equally, a majority of students declared having increased their monthly wine-buying budget by 16%. Simultaneously, there was value creation as well for the customers. People widely declared that their behavior as a wine consumer changed in regard to wine. After the course, students declared knowing more about their taste preferences and trusted more their own palate. They were equally interested in pursuing their education and learn more. In addition, interest for food and wine pairing also increased.

Equally, there is shared value creation for consumers for the trade and society from the fact that

enthusiasm and commitment to wine exist concomitantly with consuming wine in a socially responsible manner. Three months after the course, the increase in wine consumption is only marginal and done in a context of eighty six percent (86%) of students valuing wine and gastronomy. Twenty four months later it was not 56% but 77% who declared spending more, declaring that their monthly budget was 16.5% more than when they started the course, showing a sustained spending commitment accompanied by a sense of empowerment and confidence when selecting and using the product.



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