Exploring the Influence of Numbers and Shapes on Wine Labels

How do numbers and shapes on wine labels influence consumer evaluation?

Numbers and shapes influence consumer expectations regarding sensory attributes.

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We know from decades of research that various external cues can affect consumer choice, perception and enjoyment of wine. A bottle's closure (Barber, Almanza, and Donovan 2006), shape and weight (Piqueras-Fiszman and Spence 2012), the wine's place of origin (Bruwer and Johnson 2010), professional evaluations (Landon and Smith 1997) and awards (Lockshin et al. 2006) can all influence a consumer's taste expectations and evaluation of a wine's quality. A number of studies have highlighted the importance of wine labels on consumer purchase behavior (Labroo, Dhar, and Schwarz 2008; Mueller et al. 2010). More specifically, work has highlighted brand personality of the bottle shape or wine label (Boudreaux and Palmer 2007; Orth and Malkewitz 2008) as one cue consumers use to purchase wines. Other research has pointed to how label designs improve perceptual fluency (Labroo, Dhar, and Schwarz 2008) thus increasing consumer preference. This exploratory
research extends this literature stream by exploring the impact of numbers and shapes on consumer perception of wine sensory attributes. A series of three consumer studies explore how certain numbers and shapes conform to certain wine sensory attributes thus potentially influencing consumer choice.

Study 1 explores the impact of numbers on consumer’s perception of wine attributes. Study 1 is a 2 (wine number: 3,8) x 2 (number type: numerical, written) between subjects design. Mturk subjects were shown one bottle of white wine and asked the degree to which the wine they saw was full bodied and complex. As shown in figure 1 there was a significant interaction resulting in higher evaluations of the wine with label 8 on evaluations of complexity and full-bodiedness.

Exhibit 1:

To further examine this issue we explored the fit between two wine descriptors: 1) a tight, thin wine that has a sharp lean finish and; 2) a full bodied white wine that has a smooth finish. As shown (Exhibit 2) Chi-square tests revealed that the wine label with the numerical 8 was significantly more likely to be selected as the full bodied wine \[ \chi^2(1, N = 42) = 11.61, p = .001. \] while no significant differences existed between the written number versions \[ \chi^2(1, N = 42) = 1.31, p = .19. \]

Exhibit 2:

Study 2 examined the associations that consumers make between certain shapes and various wine descriptors. Mturk subjects were provided three distinct shapes, a square, triangle and circle and were asked which descriptor best suited the shape provided. Results highlight the following descriptors and their associated shapes in exhibit 3. Multiple comparison Tukey tests confirm that means on these descriptors were significantly higher than other shapes. Further, when provided a complete wine description certain wine shapes were significantly associated with certain shapes. Aggressive, rich, chewy, parching and full-bodied wine best suited with a square. Acidic, steely, dry, light to medium bodied wine were best described as a triangle. Lastly, soft, supple, fleshy, silky, medium-bodied wine was most associated with the circle.

Exhibit 3:

Study 3 followed up on the shape survey to explore how shapes on wine labels influence consumers. This study was a 2 Wine (red/white) x 2 shape (circle/triangle) between subjects design utilizing 123 Mturk subjects. Consumers were asked to evaluate a picture of a wine and score its level of acidity. After controlling for wine knowledge and gender we found a significant interaction (p