# Marketing wines to South African Millennials: the effect of expert opinions on the perceived quality of Pinotage wines

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**Keywords**

millennials; expert opinions; Pinotage; South Africa; choice experiment

**Research Question**

Do expert opinions influence the hedonic liking of Pinotage for South African millennials, and does this differ by gender and prior exposure to wine?

**Methods**

Sensory hedonic testing was conducted in 10 one hour sessions over four days in a sensory lab amongst 101 millennials. Participants tasted three sets of seven wines.

**Results**

Participants preferred cheaper wines
Expert opinions and packaging positively influence liking of Pinotage when the opinion is very positive and the wine is not preferred

**Abstract**

Marketing wines to South African Millennials: the effect of expert opinions on the perceived quality of Pinotage wines

Margaux Vannevel1, Jeanne Brand2, Valeria Panzeri3, Nick Vink1
Despite South Africa being a wine producing country, South Africa’s wine consumption is relatively low with only 7.31 litres per capita consumed in 2014. It will be important for South African wine producers to capture the potential of new and emerging markets to sustain the South African wine industry in the future and to grow domestic consumption. In recent years, Generation Y, also known as the Millenial generation born between 1977 and 1995, has emerged as one of the most important consumer groups. This generation has substantial purchasing power and is one of the largest groups ever in any economy. As a result, the Millenial generation can be divided into two groups: a younger segment (20 to 28 years old) and an older segment (29 to 38 years old). Due to the size of this segment, it is important to understand the consumer behaviour of this demographic group in South Africa. Furthermore, while Pinotage is known as the South African grape, little research has been done on the consumer liking and acceptance of Pinotage in South Africa. In order to capture the potential of the emerging Millenial market, it will be important for Pinotage producers to comprehend how they can effectively market Pinotage to the Millennials. One specific marketing tool that can be used to target Generation Y is expert opinions. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the use of expert opinions as a marketing tool to market Pinotage to South African Millennials. This study investigated the following three research objectives: (1) whether expert opinions influence the hedonic liking of Pinotage for South African Millennials, (2) whether the relevance of expert opinions differs for male and female Millennials, (3) whether the relevance of expert opinions differs for Millennials with a high involvement in wine compared to Millennials with a low involvement in wine. The study consisted of sensory hedonic testing to measure the acceptance of different Pinotage wines and was conducted in the sensory lab of the Department of Viticulture and Oenology at the University of Stellenbosch. Participants were mainly Stellenbosch University students and employees who were contacted through e-mail. A total of 126 young Millennials took part in the study, of which eventually 101 datasets were used for statistical analysis. All acceptance research data for this study was captured over a series of four days and ten one-hour tasting sessions. Each participant had to take part in a one hour tasting session. Participants were asked to taste three sets of seven Pinotage wines where they had to indicate their liking of each wine on a 9-point hedonic scale. Each set of Pinotage wines contained the same seven wines but were presented in a randomized order. The first set of seven wines were presented without any information. Respondents had to indicate liking based on pure taste. The second set of wines were paired with different expert opinions. The expert opinions ranged in strength from a bad review to a gold medal. The third set of wines were presented with each wine’s total packaging. Wines that received a medal award in the expert opinions setting had the medal displayed on the wine bottle.

A preliminary analysis of the results of the blind tasting of the Pinotage wines presented some interesting results. On average, all the wines were liked slightly. However, participants appeared to prefer the taste of the cheaper wines compared to the more expensive wines. These findings are in line with previous findings that average novice wine drinkers in blind tastings prefer less expensive wines over more expensive wines. Results from the expert opinion tasting suggest that expert opinions will positively influence the hedonic liking of Pinotage when the expert opinion is very positive (e.g. gold medal) and the wine is not preferred when tasted blind. Positive expert opinions do not seem to increase hedonic liking even more when the taste of the wine is originally liked when tasted blind. Furthermore, the packaging tasting produced similar results. When the packaging of the wine has a medal and the wine is not liked when tasted blind, the perceived quality increases significantly. However, packaging seemed to slightly offset the influence of the expert opinions for some wines. Results do not confirm if it is the effect of the packaging itself or the brand perception that has an influence. No differences were found between the hedonic liking of low and high involved Millennials. However, results show some significant differences between male and female Millennials. In general, female Millennials rate the liking of Pinotage significantly lower than male Millennials in the blind tasting. According to previous studies, it has been stated that women are able to pick up more subtleties in wine compared to men. Therefore, women often prefer subtle white wines over red wines with dry tannin astringency and bitterness. This could explain the tendency for female Millennials to rate Pinotage significantly lower than male Millennials when tasting blind. However, while male Millennials do not seem to be influenced by expert opinions or packaging, female Millennials are highly influenced by both. If the information provided is positive, female Millennials will increase their hedonic liking.
score for the wine.

This study has confirmed expert opinions as an effective marketing tool to market Pinotage to South African Millennials. While positive expert opinions did not reinforce perceived quality for already generally liked wines, they increased perceived quality for wines that were not liked in general. Future research should focus on the credibility of different expert opinions to increase the effective use of this marketing tool. Furthermore, packaging can slightly offset the influence of a positive expert opinion on the perceived quality of Pinotage. However, this effect is only limited and does not seem to invalidate the positive influence of expert opinions. In this study, it is not clear if the effect of packaging is related to the packaging itself or the brand perception of this wine. Future research should investigate this further. Seeing that this study did not confirm the difference in consumer behaviour between low and high involved wine consumers, it is recommended to repeat the study with a bigger focus on level of involvement. Nevertheless, it can be suggested to educate Millennials on the strength and importance of the different expert opinions to increase the effective use of this marketing tool.

Finally, female Millennials specifically seem to be influenced by expert opinions and packaging. Results show a relative dislike for Pinotage compared to male Millennials when tasting Pinotage blind. However, expert opinions and packaging increased liking significantly for women. A recommendation could be made to educate female Millennials on red wine and specifically Pinotage. Furthermore, female Millennials should be targeted with extrinsic cues such as expert opinions and packaging. Further research should investigate the influential strength of each type of expert opinion for female Millennials as to increase the effectiveness of the marketing tool.