

Ithaca 2018 Abstract Submission

Title

Introducing A New Tool For Assessing Consumer Tasting: Elevating Consumer Engagement and Facilitating Market Insights

I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Presentation

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Keywords

big data, sensory analysis, consumer preference

Research Question

What sensory elements are most critical in forming consumer taste preference?

Methods

Data mining of 18,000 consumer user evaluations of wine using the QUINI app

Main in

Results

The session will use insights from the database to address issues on consumer preference such as sensory drivers, expectations, price perception

Abstract

Wine is a complex ambiguous product that can be difficult for consumers to discern. Expert critics and wine writers filled the need for critical evaluation particularly for highly involved consumers. When Robert Parker entered the industry it created a seismic shift in the market whereby consumers actively sought out his ratings. Retailers found having a shelf talker that touted a score of 90 or above could move products off their shelves. Parker's evaluation tool's success was in its simplicity. Consumers understand what a score out of a 100 means, their whole education system is built upon a similar metric. Several critics like Jancis Robinson have said that something was lost in communicating the nuances and beauty in wine with such a one-dimensional system. However, producers began using that evaluation method to guide their product development. Big, fruit-forward tannic wines flooded the market.

The rise of the Internet and mobile technology promised the democratization of wine, where "real" consumers could share their views. Consumers also saw some flaws in the one-person-expert- sample and began to rely more

on their social networks for wine recommendations. The market responded and several mobile apps allowed consumers to take photos and write tasting notes for wines they liked- think Delectable, Vivino. These apps followed Parker's view that simple is better, whereby the apps allowed pictures, a simple star rating, a final score and written notes.

In academic research on wine aficionados we have found that consumers, particularly Millennials, have a great interest in learning more about wine (LaTour and LaTour 2010). Consumers gain both social and personal status by engaging in learning activities (Clarkson, Janiszewski and Cinelli 2013). Wine aficionados have always been an important part of the market, but recently their enthusiasm for learning about wine has become more obsessive. In the past decade there has been a rapid increase with the amount of wine schools, wine educational materials produced, and with curiosity and intrigue with the world of master tasters. The largest wine educational foundation—the Wine and Spirits Educational Trust (WSET)- saw its numbers increase 19% in 2017 (<https://www.wsetglobal.com/about-us/our-story/>). Thousands paid to vicariously experience the Master Sommelier exam through the movie SOMM (Teeter 2014). The number of people sitting for the Master Sommelier exam has doubled within the last five years, and the first level of sommelier education has increased as well.

There is a consumer interest in getting more depth into wine. However in spite of that interest and the amount of material available to them, roughly a third of consumers are still confused or “overwhelmed,” according to Constellation's Genome study. The problem they face is that they do not have the appropriate tools to help guide them in their analysis. Attempts at writing tasting notes, either results in something vague such as “I like this bold wine” or something that regurgitates another's opinion. Neither is particularly helpful for the consumer to better understand their taste preferences or for others to know what is liked or disliked about the wine. Mora et al 2018 suggest emotional words ought to be involved in taste evaluation and that mining consumer data can be informative.

QUINI is a visual wine education and evaluation tool that can help consumers and support producers in better understanding market preferences, and predicting future market direction. It is an app with an online platform that consumers can share (and producers can see) how wines are being evaluated on different sensory qualities, from color to aroma, to taste to finish. The app is visually appealing and walks the consumer through steps of forming an overall evaluation for the wine so that the ratings across consumers are systematic, irrespective of their wine knowledge or expertise. Users report enjoying the experience. Producers can see in real-time if the market thinks their new chardonnay, for instance, has too much or too little oak influence and whether that impacts retail choice.

For producers, this platform offers real-time insights into consumer preferences. It changes the depth and speed at which producers of virtually any size may now access actionable consumer feedback. Companies like Gallo employ panels of consumers to assess their products to meet certain sensory characteristics before releasing to market. As example, their successful Dark Horse brand was built upon seeing a market gap for a Cabernet Sauvignon that had “bold, firm, tannins” priced below \$10. They successfully extended the brand to encompass other sensory profiles based on consumer taste preference data and language. Their rose is described as “dry, bright, crisp” and their Chardonnay as “oak, smooth, caramel.”

QUINI has been on the market for several years and has amassed a wine review base of 18,500 ratings contributed by nearly 6,000 consumers. The purpose of this session is to share market insights that the company has learned through their market test. For instance, there is big data and visual analytics that can answer questions such as: Are consumers expectations being met when they taste or is the label and other marketing information leading them astray? Do consumers perceive that the wine brands are fairly priced or might there be room for price increases? What sensory elements- appearance, aroma, taste, finish- are most predictive of consumer liking? Which of these aspects is impacting a wine's overall potential in the market? Is consumer sensory feedback key in predicting future product purchase intent, offering actionable signals? Is there a difference between demographic groups (gender, age) or different user experience groups (novices vs. experienced tasters) in what they think of a wine or approach their wine tasting?

How will all this new data, generated on an on-going basis, affect economic forecasts and change the industry? This session should offer both industry and academics important insights.

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