

Ithaca 2018 Abstract Submission

Title

The effects of a winemaker dinner on brand perception and purchasing behavior

I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Presentation

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Keywords

wine marketing; winemaker dinner; wine event, brand perception; purchasing behavior

Research Question

Does a winemaker dinner, remote from the winery, affect brand perception and purchasing behavior?

Methods

Two-survey method employed: Survey 1 completed by winemaker dinner attendees prior to the event, followed by tracking survey four months later. ANOVAs were used to test for differences between means.

Results

The winemaker dinner was found to have a significant positive affect on both brand perception and purchasing behavior.

Abstract

The challenge for many wineries is to create strong bonds between their brands and consumers. There are many instances of companies affording customers and potential customers the opportunity to sample their products. For wineries, one of the most direct ways to educate consumers and influence their perceptions about their brands is through wine tourism. Wine tourism continues to increase in popularity as a form of special interest tourism (Sparks, 2006), with the United Nations holding its first ever Global Conference on Wine Tourism in the Kakheti region of Georgia in 2016 and issuing the Georgia Declaration on Wine Tourism, defining wine tourism "as a crucial component of gastronomy tourism" (UNWTO, 2016). Given that most wine brands are produced by a single winery, this naturally limits the number of visitors to those residing within close proximity of the winery and those tourists who choose to visit the area. Many wineries also use events to promote their brands, which may include festivals, tastings, and dinners in locations remote from the winery. Such events showcasing specific products are likely to attract people who are unable to or do not intend to visit the product in its brand home (Yuan, et al., 2005).

In recent years, special events have taken on an increasingly important role in both tourism and marketing (Hall &

Sharples, 2008), and are said to add brand value while building consumer relationships (Hall & Mitchell, 2008). The dilemma for companies offering marketing-based events is whether such events will in fact lead to stronger bonds with the consumer. Can a winemaker dinner that incorporates similar attributes to a winery visit, i.e., sampling the product, being educated about the product/brand, and interacting with someone close to the product/brand but in a location remote from the winery, replicate similar effects to a winery visit in positively influencing attendees' brand perceptions and purchasing behavior? For the purposes of this study a "winemaker dinner" was defined as a dinner event showcasing a specific wine brand, providing education about the specific brand, sampling of the wines, and interaction with the winemaker or someone closely connected with the brand. Given wine tourism's close alignment with gastronomy tourism (UNWTO, 2016), the pairing of the wines with food is appropriate.

In order to answer the research question, a multi-course South African winemaker dinner was held at a banqueting facility in the north-eastern United States. Participants purchased tickets to a "South African Food and Wine Experience" and were not told that the event also formed part of a study. Prior to the start of the event, each attendee was given a survey to complete about their perceptions and purchasing behavior of South African wines in general and the brand being poured specifically. The completed surveys also served as the "ticket" for the evening's prize draw, thereby incentivizing guests to complete the survey. The meal represented authentic South African cuisine, and each course was paired with a different wine from a single South African producer. During the course of the evening, a winemaker from the winery gave a general overview of South African wines and wine history, educated guests about the brand and each wine complemented by a slide presentation depicting the winery and vineyards, and interacted with the audience.

Purchasing behavior was measured by asking respondents to report on whether or not they had ever personally purchased wines produced by this winery. Given that many of the attendees were unfamiliar with the particular brand, category perception was used as a proxy for brand perception (as most attendees had some perception of South African wines, but not necessarily of the specific brand), with respondents asked about their perceptions of South African wines in general. Four months after the event, a tracking survey was emailed to respondents who had completed the original survey. This type of survey is often used for consumer behavior surveys that wish to track behavior over a period of time (Mitchell & Hall, 2004). Eighty usable responses were received.

Significantly more respondents reported having personally purchased the wine brands served at the event in the tracking survey than had reported having purchased them in the pre-event survey. There was also a significantly improved perception of South African wines in the tracking survey than had been reported in the pre-event survey, which included positive word of mouth (WOM) about both the brand and the category.

Although this study was limited in size and duration (the tracking survey was conducted just four months after the event), it does show that a winemaker dinner that incorporates similar attributes to a winery visit can be an effective way of establishing an enduring bond between the consumer and the brand, creating increased positive brand perceptions, WOM, and purchasing behavior. These findings have implications for wine marketing and further exploration in different event settings is recommended.

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