Branding an emerging wine region: Do appellation or sub-appellation matter?

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Emerging wine regions have the challenge to establish their names among a plethora of renowned appellations. Traditional wine countries have based their reputations on an appellation system delineating viticultural areas according to the wine quality they produced. New producing wine regions developed their marketing around varietals or brands. However, most of them have established recently a system to establish geographical indications ensuring truth in labeling to consumers. The Vintners Quality Alliance of Ontario has recognized in 2007 ten sub-appellations in Niagara Peninsula, one of the four Ontario wine appellations. We propose to investigate the impact of the Niagara Peninsula wine appellation, sub-appellations, and price point on consumer acceptability of Riesling wines. We hypothesized that mature drinkers who drink regularly premium wines would likely use regional branding as a quality cue when buying wine.

Seventy-seven white wine involved consumers (49 women and 28 men), were recruited from the Niagara Peninsula region. They were invited to participate in two one-hour sessions one week apart. During session 1, consumers were presented with 38 visual concepts displayed on laptop monitors in random order. They were asked to look at each concept during ten seconds and then rate on a 15-cm line scale, how much they expected to like the wine described by the concept. Each visual concept was created by systematically varying the levels of 9 cues (appellation, sub-appellation indication, font size of regional indications, closure type, label style, logo VQA, reserve mention, vintage and price range according to a fractional design). To address our research question, six concepts varying only the three cues of interest out of 9 (appellation, sub-appellation, and price point) were introduced as supplementary samples to collect expected liking scores. These six samples were presented in session 2 in a 6x4 between consumers design, where 4 groups of consumers tested 4 different wines with similar sensory profiles. Within a group, the same Riesling wine was presented with 6 concepts presented one at a time and in a random order. Consumers were asked to look at the concept and to taste the wine before rating their liking on a 10 point scale. Data were recorded on computerized questionnaires.

Analysis of the expected liking scores of the 38 hypothetical wine concepts are reported elsewhere. Difference between experienced and expected liking scores for the six samples was not affected by the wine type, which permitted to pool data across wines. A four-way ANOVA revealed that price (p=0.03) and appellation (p=0.10) moderated the change of acceptability when wine was tested with information although both were dependent on consumers. A cluster analysis revealed three consumer segments (n1=46, n2=20, n3=11); n1 was driven by price, n2 by appellation, sub-appellation and price, and for n3, liking was dependent on both price and regional indications. Although we confirmed that involved wine consumers were sensitive to regional indications, our results suggested that this effect was still moderated by price point in the case of an emerging wine region.

Acknowledgement: This project was funded by the OMAFRA/University of Guelph program #26480 and has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (File # 07-286), where the data collection took place.