Wine Brand Personality Transmission:
Is the Label Enough?

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Motivation:
Currently, there are over 7,000 brands in the United States wine industry, but chances are that a bottle of wine came from one of only thirty companies (McMillan 2009). As the number of wine brands increase, producers face increasing competition and consumers face increased choices. Through wine brands and wine marketing, marketers seek to deliver information and a brand’s definitive promise to the consumer whether, symbolic, experiential, or self-expressive benefits.

Although advertising is a key marketing communication vehicle, it does not convey brand meaning and strengthen the consumer-brand relationship as much as packaging does (Underwood 2003). Product packaging goes beyond its tangible presence and becomes an intimate part of the consumer’s life, potentially symbolizing a type of lived experience between the consumer and brand (Underwood 2003). Packaging and information on the package are major influences on wine purchasing decisions.

Product packaging contributes to how consumers interpret a brand, particularly brand personality. Brand personality or the “set of human characteristics associated with a brand” has been researched interest across product categories (Aaker 1997). Findings supports that consumers can identify with brands by incorporating packaging that stresses brand personality through multiple structural and visual elements, including a combination of brand logo, colors, fonts, package material, pictorials, product descriptions, and shapes (Underwood 2003). The use of alternative wine packaging strategies, specifically wine labels, are recognized as serving a role in gaining brand awareness, loyalty, and purchase intent. The question becomes, in what way do labels communicate brand personality? Are there individuals that are more receptive to a brand’s personality messaging than others?

While research on scales to measure brand personality is plentiful, little research has been conducted to measure consumer’s perceptions of brand personality solely based off a single component of strategy, in this case wine labels. Wine is known to be a self-expressive product; therefore if congruency between human personality and brand personality result in purchase intent, there could be clear economic and marketing opportunities. Marketers would be well served to leverage these results and design their labels based off of the dimensions of their brand personality. Also, by looking at consumer’s purchase intent after distinguishing brand personality, brand owners can determine if consumers favor a product that clearly emphasizes one personality trait or multiple dimensions (perhaps a distinctive versus a muted brand personality).

Objectives:
The primary objective of this research is to determine how consumers perceive the brand personality of wines based on different wine labels and determine the impacts of a consumer’s own personality characteristics on their wine label interpretation. The secondary objective of this research is to define the wine brand owner’s classification of brand personality and determine the circumstances under which the label is effective at transmitting the brand’s personality characteristics. Therefore, allowing brand creators to determine if the brand personality they are attempting to create matches consumer perception.
Methods:
General wine consumers that have no prior knowledge of selected wine labels needed to be isolated. Wine consumers are less likely to have prior knowledge and experience with smaller, newly developed brands and therefore, three wine labels from *Wine Business Monthly’s* “Hot Small Brands 2003-2011” were selected: JC Cellars, Four Vines Peasant, and Lone Madrone. These brands received recognition due to recent innovations, unexpected varietals, or leadership roles taken in their regions and are thus considered “successful”, but may still have relatively low awareness among general wine consumers, making them a good fit for this research (Roth 2011). As a basis for comparison, the last wine label chosen was from the brand HRM Rex-Goliath, part of Constellation Brand’s product portfolio. This whimsical brand has been popular with Millennial wine consumers and is marketed and sold throughout the United States. Therefore, wine consumers may have more awareness of this label compared to the three prior chosen wine labels.

A consumer survey was developed and consisted of twenty-three closed choice and interval response questions that covered knowledge/awareness of the selected wine labels, respondent’s individual personality classification, brand personality assessment of the selected wine labels, and consumer demographics. Respondents were asked their awareness of the four selected labels and their assessment of the brand’s personality characteristics using Bourdreaux and Palmer’s (2007) framework. In addition, respondents were asked their likelihood to buy the brand and which of the four labels they would mostly likely purchase. The survey was administered using a snowball technique in local markets and 259 useable responses were obtained.

In addition to the consumer survey, a brand contributor for each of the four wine labels was interviewed and asked to identify their target market, case production numbers, promotional dollars, and their brand’s personality characteristics using Bourdreaux and Palmer’s (2007) framework. This information is used for comparison to consumer’s perceptions of their label.

Preliminary results:
Of the three smaller wine brands, between 73% and 86% of the survey respondents were not at all aware of the brands. In contrast, the majority of respondents had, as expected, high awareness of the Rex-Goliath brand. Among individuals with no prior awareness of the brands, the wine labels were perceived differently by respondents based on gender and the respondent’s own personality characteristics. There were statistically significant differences between the brand’s identified target market and the interpretation of the brand’s personality by survey respondents in relation to target market characteristics.

Implications:
Although Aaker’s (1997) brand personality framework has been successfully applied and used for measuring convergence between consumers and brands in other research, this research isolates a single feature of brand’s strategy and isolates consumers based on brand awareness. The results have strong practical implications for researchers and wine brands alike in determining the role of the wine label in transmitting brand personality characteristics.
References:


