The Impact of General Public Wine Education Courses on Consumer Perception

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ABSTRACT

In Quebec (Canada), as well as abroad, in the UK, the wine trade is pinning a lot of hope for the future of the wine category on education. Some see the topic as "vital" or "believe vehemently" in it or see wine education as a "beacon of hope" that may lead to cross trading, uptrading, restore value in the category, cure binge drinking and generally would keep businesses afloat.

Looking at the topic a little closer though, one might wonder if the gatekeepers are intuiting about wine education since it is very difficult to find any research that has been devoted to establishing the value of wine education on the behaviour and further business commitment of consumers.

The principal aim of this thesis is to investigate if, aside from the entertainment value of such courses, the wine education courses for consumers have led to any changes in perception, consumption pattern and/or led to a decrease or an increase in involvement for the category.

Specifically, the research examined the degree of change in perception, consumption habits and commitment towards wine for a newly enrolled student from the beginning to the end of a five-week course followed three months later by a follow-up questionnaire. The collected data was processed to see how the wine education program had settled in and triggered -or not- a change of habit, a new perception or commitment, including changes in financial expenditure.

The research was conducted in Quebec, in an established wine education environment provided by the SAQ, the Quebec Liquor Control Board.
(Société des Alcools du Québec). It was performed in three steps. In the first step, new students enrolling in a wine course were presented with a survey prior to beginning their first class. In the second step, the students filled the same survey on the last night of the wine course and the data got paired and analysed to look for differences. There were in excess of two hundred and sixty paired surveys collected for the different questions. The third step took place three months after the end of the courses for those willing to fill a follow-up Internet questionnaire. This created a subset of one hundred and thirty four (already paired) respondents who answered to a new questionnaire aiming at validating some data as well as answering some additional questions.

The findings of the research reveal that the perceptions, behaviour and commitment towards wine change as a result of having followed a wine appreciation course.

There was economic value creation for the proponent of the wine education courses, namely the retailer, who saw a majority of students wishing to buy more courses as well as recommending the SAQ courses to their peers. Equally, a majority of students (56%) declared having increased their monthly wine-buying budget by 16%.

There was value creation as well for the customers. People widely declared that their behaviour as a wine consumer changed in regard to wine. Wine educated consumers admitted to an aroused curiosity for the category. After the course, students declared knowing more about their taste preferences and trusted more their own palate. They were equally interested in pursuing their education. Educated consumers declared choosing their wines better and speaking more about wine. Their interest for food and wine pairing increased 15%.

Equally, there is shared value creation for both consumers and for the trade from the fact that enthusiasm and commitment to wine exist concomitantly with consuming wine in a socially responsible manner. Three months after the course, the increase in wine consumption is only marginal and done in a context of eighty six percent (86%) of students
valuing wine and gastronomy. This last finding echoes a distinct trait of the Quebec wine drinking pattern in Canada which is the prevalence of drinking wine at the table, while sharing a meal, over enjoying wine as a standalone drink.

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