

THE MARKETING OF EXPERIENCES IN THE WINE INDUSTRY IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *Today, many companies have turned their attention from the traditional "features and benefits" to the activity of creating experiences for their customers. In this way, the emotional activation of the customer is attempted, in addition to the rational part of buying the product. As part of this work, we have carried out quantitative marketing research, to find out the opinions of Romanian consumers related to the wine consumption experience. The general objectives of the research are the following: identify consumption habits among Romanian wine consumers; identify how Romanian consumers prefer to enjoy their favourite wine; determine the preferences of Romanian consumers regarding the colour and type of preferred wine; determining the frequency of the purchase of wine by Romanian consumers and the place where they purchase their preferred types of wine. The research results can address to wine-producing companies from Romania, wine distributors, hotels, and restaurants, for the future development of activities in this field.*

Key words: *wine industry, marketing of experiences, quantitative marketing research, consumption behaviors.*

1. Introduction

From the perspective of traditional marketing, consumers are viewed as rational decision-makers who care about the functional characteristics and benefits of a product or service. On the other hand, experiential marketing considers consumers as human beings, both rational and emotional, who want to live pleasant experiences. An experience occurs when a company uses services as a stage and goods as props to engage people in a way that creates a memorable event. So experiential marketing tries to recall a strong emotion, a (cognitive) response by using sensory techniques (Schmitt, 2012).

Experiential marketing is used when going beyond satisfying basic needs to challenge the consumer and excite the consumer by introducing the brand into the customer's everyday experiences. Experiential marketing relies on understanding people's passions and the connections that naturally and uniquely create between them and brand equity

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Consumer needs are met through a marketing offer, a combination of products, services, information, and experiences. Marketing offers are not just limited to physical products but include services that are inherently intangible and do not result in the ownership of anything.

Experiential marketing is indeed the future of marketing, it has increased efficiency in attracting new customers and improving the brand image for existing customers.

The work carried out aims at the elements of experience marketing in the food industry, more specifically in the wine industry, having a decisive role in customer loyalty, by offering something more than simple products, offering special experiences made for customers.

As part of this work, we have carried out quantitative marketing research, to find out the opinions of Romanian consumers related to the wine consumption experience.

2. Literature Review

Experiential marketing encourages the increased purchase of more services by current customers, but also attracts older customers and encourages repeat purchases. At the same time, it leads to a general and spontaneous increase in the awareness of the company, to increased sales, and to recommending used goods and services to others.

Bernd Schmitt believed that experiential marketing is distinct in four main ways:

1. Focuses on consumer experiences;
2. Treats consumption as a holistic experience;
3. Recognizes both rational and emotional differences in consumption;
4. Uses eclectic methodologies (Schmitt, 2012).

In 1990, the idea of customer experience appeared by Holbrook and Hirschman when they thought of a new experiential approach to consumer behaviour (Holbrook and Hirschman, 2007). Customer experience comes from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization that causes a reaction. This is strictly personal and involves the client's participation on different levels: rational, emotional, physical sensory, and spiritual.

More and more companies have begun to use stimuli such as smell, sound, or texture to build an increasingly strong emotional connection with consumers to attract them as much as possible to their brands.

An important segment of the market is that of wine, as a commodity, and it cannot be left out of the progress registered in the field of sales.

The purpose of the marketing of experiences is to form a memorable and emotional connection between the customer and the brand so that it might generate customer loyalty and influence the purchasing decision. Sometimes, the commercial experience is closer to a journey, as in the case of a "story" (Solanki, 2022).

Marketing in the field of wine can be defined as "the set of means that allow the commercialization of a wine profitably and sustainably, to a customer, so that he can recommend that wine to another potential buyer" as stated by Rouzet (Rouzet and Seguin, 2003).

The wine market in Romania seems quite disorganized, and one of the causes is represented by the fact that the marketing strategies are inconsistent or carried out in an unprofessional way (Binder, 2022).

One of the key ideas of experiential marketing is that value does not reside only in the objects purchased and in their functional and useful benefits. The value consists of the experiential elements that surround the service and the product and in the consumption experience itself (Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2023).

Unlike normal marketing, experiential marketing is focused on customer experiences so that the company has a much broader vision. Experiences appear as a result of an experience or an encounter in a certain situation. Experiences offer cognitive, behavioural, and sensory values, replacing functional ones (Schmitt, 2015). Marketers focus on touching the senses, acting, feeling, thinking, and reacting to create positive and enjoyable experiences for consumers (Soliha, Aquinia, Hayuningtias and Ramadhan, 2021).

The first aspect regarding wine marketing policies would be that related to quality. From the point of view of quality, we can divide the wines into two large groups: "table wines" and "quality wines". The manifestation of consumers towards the two categories of wine can be clarified by distinct socio-economic elements. For example, table wine consumption continues a traditionalist trend represented by life in the countryside, while developments in the quality wine market express a break with traditionalist trends. Thus, while table wine continues to represent the everyday drink of the relatively low-income classes, the "peasant's wine" and the "worker's wine", quality wine is more and more the wine of the elites, the wine of celebration, the wine of free time.

Another important aspect worth considering would be the growing role that health plays in consumer concerns. The marketing strategy must take into account the uniform regulations related to production control. Also, the emphasis placed in recent years, within the wine promotion programs, on the presentation of wine, not so much as an alcoholic drink, but rather as a food with specific nutritional and curative characteristics. Of the 13,523 thousand ha, which is the agricultural area of our country, 213,431 ha are cultivated with vines (1.58%). This culture is important to our country both as a tradition and economically. We note that the regions of Muntenia, Oltenia and Moldova together have an area cultivated with vines of almost 70%.

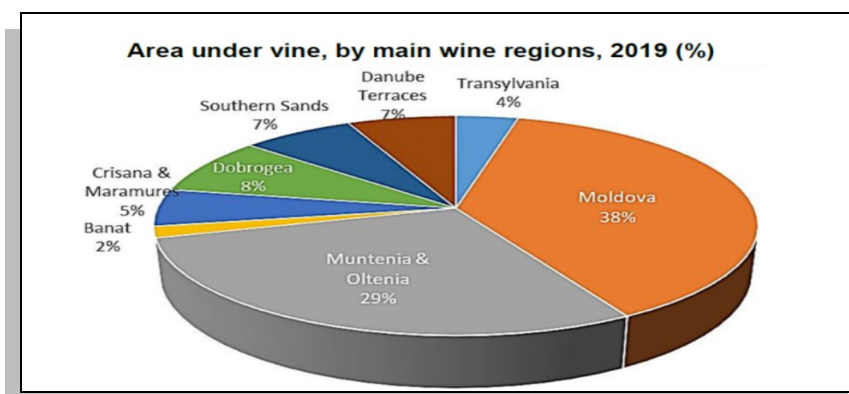


Fig. 1. Area under wine, by main region, 2019

Source: <https://www.crameromania.ro/informatii-utile/productia-locala-de-vin-pozitioneaza-romania-pe-locul-6-in-ue-%C8%99i-pe-locul-12-la-nivel-mondial-472.html>

The production and consumption of wine are a tradition of the Romanian people, passed down from generation to generation. However, in recent years, both the consumption of wine and its share in the total consumption of beverages have decreased in our country. (INSE 2020)

3. Research Methodology

In recent years, wine consumption and choice has become an increasingly documented activity for Romanians everywhere, and the development and appetite for education about the wine choices we make has changed in recent years.

In order to achieve the objectives established in this work, we have carried out a quantitative marketing research. This research aims to find out the opinions and intentions of Romanians regarding wine consumption and the experience during consumption.

We consider the following objectives of marketing research:

- identify consumption habits among Romanian wine consumers;
- identify how Romanian consumers prefer to enjoy their favorite wine;
- determine the preferences of Romanian consumers regarding the color and type of preferred wine;
- determine the frequency of purchase of wine by Romanian consumers and the place where they purchase their preferred types of wine.

Non-random sampling was used for this research. This can be used in the online environment because we do not have access to a complete list of the population studied in this environment. This type of sampling is less expensive than random sampling and requires less time, obtaining results much faster.

The survey-based inquiry was used as the research method, and the instrument is the questionnaire containing 12 questions. The questionnaire was created in Google Forms and was distributed on the social networks Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram by sending the related link. The subjects were informed about the research topic and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the importance of the answers given.

In the case of the present research, the sampling unit is represented by Romanians, and the observation unit is represented by people over the age of 18 from whom the primary data is collected. The analysis and processing of the collected data were done using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) system. (Constantin, 2006).

4. Results and Discussions

After collecting the data, we obtained 800 responses from women (168) and from men (632). We also found that approximately 72% of respondents live in the urban area, and 28% in the rural area (Table 1.)

Sample structure of respondents

Table 1

Variable	Categories	Total		Male		Female	
		(N=800)	%	(N=632)	%	(N=168)	%
Age	18-25	175	21.9	117	18.6	58	34.5
	26-35	236	29.5	159	25.1	77	45.8
	36-45	174	21.8	157	24.8	17	10.1
	46-55	115	14.3	106	16.8	9	5.4
	Over 55	100	12.5	93	14.7	7	4.2
	Total	800	100%	800	100%	800	100%
Residence	Urban	579	72.4	455	78.6	124	21.4
	Rural	221	27.6	177	80	44	20
	Total	800	100%	800	100%	800	100%

Source: Own research of the author

Analysing the collected data, we obtained the following results:

When asked about the frequency with which they consume wine, we note that 77% of the respondents stated that they consume wine once a week, 19% say that they usually consume it daily, only 3% consume it once a month, and 1% of the respondents have stated that he consumes wine several times a year. (Fig. 2)

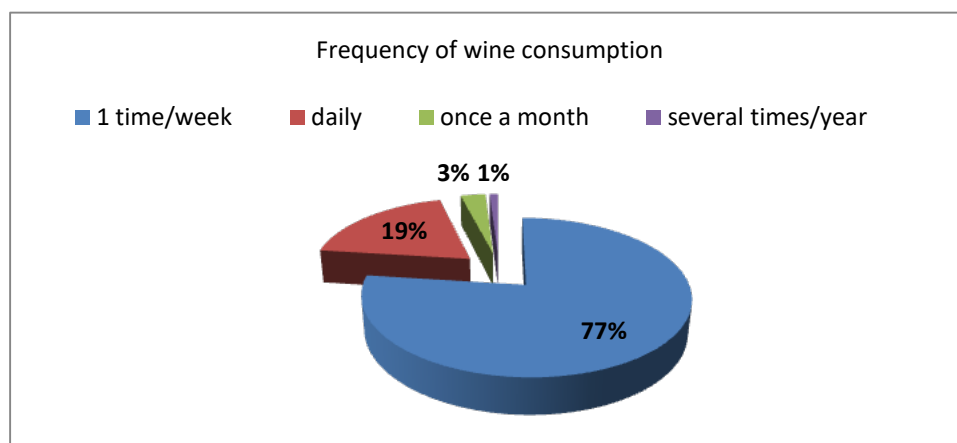


Fig. 2. Frequency of wine consumption

Source: Own research of the author

Also, the respondents said that they usually consume wine especially at the weekend (98%), and the rest also consume wine during the week.

When asked what general type of wine they prefer, the results show that: red wine is preferred in a very large proportion by approximately 500 respondents. White wine is also at the top of respondents' preferences (350 respondents), and rosé wine is highly preferred by 150 respondents. Consumer preferences are divided between the three main types of wines (Figure 3.)

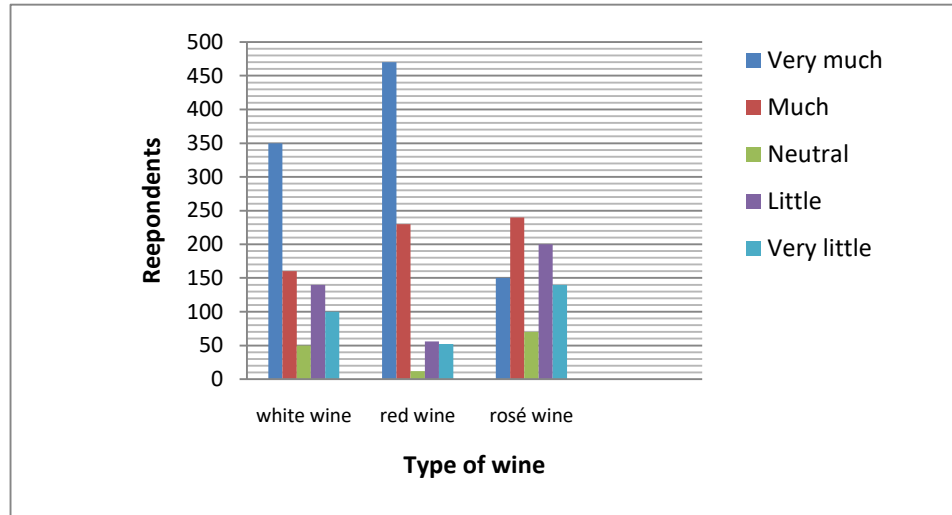


Fig. 3. Preferred type of wine

Source: Own research of the author

Regarding the wine brand preferred by the respondents, taking into account the best-known and most marketed brands in Romania, the following answers were recorded: 28% prefer Chardonnay, 15% prefer Bosuioaca de Bohotin (Romanian variety), 12% said they prefer the type of wine called Feteasca Regala. Merlot is preferred by 11% of respondents, then Cabernet Sauvignon is preferred by 25% of respondents. 16% declared that they prefer other varieties of wine, depending on the place and time of consumption. The reasons why the respondents prefer a certain type of wine are related to the taste, the way of serving, the atmosphere, and ambiance in which the wine is served, the food with which the wine is served, but also the price, quality, and color are reasons to consume a certain type of wine.

The opinion of many respondents is that publicity is not a very important selection criterion for their favorite wine. 46% opted for the indifferent option, while 16% opted for unimportant, 15% for totally unimportant, 13% for very important, and only 10% for important.

Also, after analyzing the answers, it was found that the most important criterion for the purchase of a wine is the quality, and the most important criteria for the consumption of a certain type of wine are the atmosphere and the ambiance of the place of consumption, so the experience lived during the consumption.

Regarding the place preferred by Romanians, when it comes to wine consumption, they declared that they prefer to consume wine in restaurants, in bars, on the occasion at certain events, and also at home.

After processing the data, we also found that the age of the respondents does not influence the type of wine consumed, instead, income is a decisive factor in choosing a certain type of quality wine. The living environment, rural or urban, is an important factor in choosing a certain type of wine, given that rural residents consume a lot of wine from their own production.

5. Conclusions

Experiential marketing is the future of marketing. It has increased efficiency in attracting new customers and improving the brand image for existing customers.

Given that we are in the era of speed and individualism, the first step that marketing specialists should take is a thorough knowledge of the target market. They must find a way to differentiate their brands in a more personal way than the competition. Differentiation is done more and more through the experiences offered to consumers in the consumption process.

When you go beyond the satisfaction of basic needs to challenge the consumer, to start the consumer's enthusiasm in the consumption process, then experience marketing is used.

Consumer experience includes three dimensions, namely, Sensory Experience, Emotional Experience, Social Experience. These are the dimensions that must be taken into account in the process of creating an experience for the customer.

According to the objectives that we established at the beginning of this scientific work, we consider that we have obtained very interesting and valuable information that will guide all parties interested in this wine industry. By carrying out quantitative marketing research, the consumption habits among Romanian wine consumers were identified, how Romanian consumers prefer to enjoy their favorite wine, the preferences regarding the color and type of the favorite wine, the frequency of wine purchases by Romanian consumers, as well as the place where they buy their favorite types of wine.

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