

QUALITY STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED IN THE ROMANIAN WINE MARKET

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Abstract: *In a highly competitive market such as wine, implementing quality strategies is necessary to succeed. Consumers are increasingly knowledgeable and demanding. The paper aims at identifying the primary quality strategies used in the wine market in Romania and at determining the opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of consumers regarding it. For this purpose, an exploratory analysis combined with quantitative market research was carried out.*

Key words: *quality, strategy, wine, market research.*

1. Introduction

Quality is before most priorities within an organization, and its improvement is the objective that every institution must pursue. The attention of any organization must be directed toward customer satisfaction. All purchasing decisions are based on price and quality. If the price is generally known, each consumer perceives the quality differently. This fact has led many successful companies to broaden their perspective from “product quality”

to “total customer satisfaction.” This means that in order to define quality, it is necessary to establish and express, in simple terms, the needs, requirements, expectations, perceptions, and satisfaction of consumers (Cosmescu, 2008). Quality and sustainability strategies are prioritized in the company's diagnosis and its strategic approach (Neacsu, 2020, HG. 512, 2016).

With a history of nearly 7,000 years, wine has evolved along with consumer preferences and winemaking techniques, thus emerging a wine civilization. The wine is used for consumption. Of all the drinks in the world, wines have the quality of being best associated with food, being itself a culinary product. It appears as an adjunct to gastronomy that cannot be missed from any table that wants to be a pleasant moment (Epuran, et al., 2018).

The European Union is the largest producer of wine in the world. Between 2016 and 2020, its average annual production was 165 million hectoliters. In 2020, it accounted for 45% of wine-growing regions, 64% of production, and 48% of consumption. The wine

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sector is the largest agri-food sector in the EU in terms of exports (7.6 % of the agri-food value exported in 2020) (CE, 2023).

The paper aims at identifying the primary quality strategies used in Romania's wine market and at determining consumers' opinions, attitudes, and perceptions regarding them and the wine market. For this purpose, an exploratory analysis combined with quantitative market research was carried out.

2. Analysis of the quality strategies used on the wine market in Romania

The demands of consumers towards the quality of wines have continuously increased. However, this fact has been associated with improving this quality using better and better oenological practices. There is a significant difference between the quality of wine produced by applying modern technology under directed and controlled conditions and that of wine obtained by rudimentary methods, between the elegant and chiseled wine obtained in the first case and the often unbalanced and defective wine obtained in the second.

The quality of the wines is directly based on the quality of the grapes provided by the cultivated varieties and the conditions of the harvest year. Naturally, the quality of the harvest varies greatly depending on the year, oscillating between “poor” and “exceptional” (Charters and Pettigrew, 2007). An important measure that the wine grower has is the time of picking. Picking earlier or later, depending on the product to be obtained and the prospects of the ripening process of the grapes, a particular regulation of quality can be achieved on a specific fan that can sometimes be quite wide.

As a result of their great variety, wines have been the subject of numerous scientific research in the field and, consequently, of some complete classifications.

In the Romanian wine market, implementing quality strategies is a priority and necessary for market survival.

The strategy of domination through quality involves maintaining a market or market segment that requires a high volume of sales and a high level of efficiency and entails implementing a set of measures (Mehran and Mehran, 2013). This strategy has also been adopted by Recaş Wineries, who have invested in understanding and meeting the requirements set by users and customers and adapting distribution channels to market specifics.

The strategy of implementing the latest technologies has been successfully adopted by Recaş Wineries, which have purchased harvesting equipment (for example, a grape harvesting combine does the work of 200 people and can harvest up to 10 hectares in a single night), an auto-fermentation installation entirely made of stainless steel, following EU standards, which allows the technologists at Recaş to establish an optimal fermentation temperature, as well as large-capacity tanks for storing the finished product.

This strategy was also implemented by Ceptura Wineries, which adopted the newest and most innovative technologies in the winemaking process, an almost entirely automated process (ONVPV, 2023):

- Destemming and sorting the grapes to use the healthiest berries in the winemaking process;

- Fermentation of the must at low temperatures to preserve the primary aromas, and stainless steel fermentation tanks with a double jacket to control the temperature during the fermentation process. For the wines matured in barrels, the most famous French specialists are used, considered the best in the world.
- Ultra-modern bottling line with high processing capacity using the cold bottling system to preserve the natural and unique qualities of the wine.

The differentiation strategy through quality is based on the knowledge of the forms of manifestation and the level of realization of the quality characteristics of the products or services (Chong, et al., 2020). The company Zarea S.A., having a wide range of products, uses this strategy, offering the opportunity to capitalize on the potential of research and development and different technologies, through which new markets are conquered and superior quality classes are offered concerning the competition.

The strategy focused on different quality levels is used by Ceptura Wineries to meet the expectations of an increasingly sophisticated consumer audience with advanced preferences who prefer new and unique experiences. The wine-consuming public has become a dynamic audience that gets bored quickly and prefers new experiences. Ceptura Winery, through its products positioned on quality steps, covers a complete range in terms of customer preferences, as follows:

- The first range of products intended for the retail network is composed of Cervus Cepturum products;
- The following range is represented by Astrum Cervi products intended primarily for consumption for events;
- The Dominum Cervi range is designed, together with the Cervus Magnus Monte range of the HORECA sector and online; only occasionally it can be found in the retail network;
- Premium products, Black and White Ceptura are intended for specialty stores, generally addressed to connoisseurs.

3. Material and Methods

The purpose of the quantitative research is to determine consumers' opinions, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the wine market in Romania and the quality strategies used in this field.

The objectives intended to achieve the purpose of the research are:

O1 – Identification of respondents' opinions regarding the wine market in Romania;

O2 – Identifying the criteria underlying the selection of a wine;

O3 – Determining the respondents' opinions and attitudes towards the quality strategies implemented in the wine market in Romania.

The aim was to obtain as many completed questionnaires as possible. The study was conducted on a sample of 518 people, structured as follows: 52% women (270 people) and 48% men (248 people), of which 62% are from urban areas and 38% are from rural areas.

The sizeable geographical dispersion of the researched population led to the application of the questionnaire through the Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) technique. The questionnaire was completed using the Google Forms application. The questionnaire included 26 questions, of which 19 were aimed at collecting information on the analyzed subject, and the final 7 questions were aimed at characterizing the respondents. The period in which this study was carried out is May 2023 - June 2023. After collecting the information using the questionnaire, statistical data was processed using the IBM SPSS system.

4. Results and Discussion

The most important results of the quantitative research are structured around the three specific objectives pursued.

O1 – *Identifying the opinions of respondents regarding the Romanian wine market*

To begin with, the research aimed to identify the alcoholic beverages preferred by the respondents. Wine came in first place (38.8%), followed closely by beer (28%), then distilled beverages (20.8%), and others (12.4%).

Another aspect intended to be identified was the frequency of wine consumption by the respondents (Figure 1). Most respondents (30.3%) drink wine 1-2 times a week, usually on weekends. 19.7% of respondents drink wine occasionally, a few times a year at events and holidays; 28.6% of respondents drink wine a few times a month; 15.3% of respondents drink wine once a day, usually at dinner or lunch; and 6.1% of respondents drink wine multiple times a day.

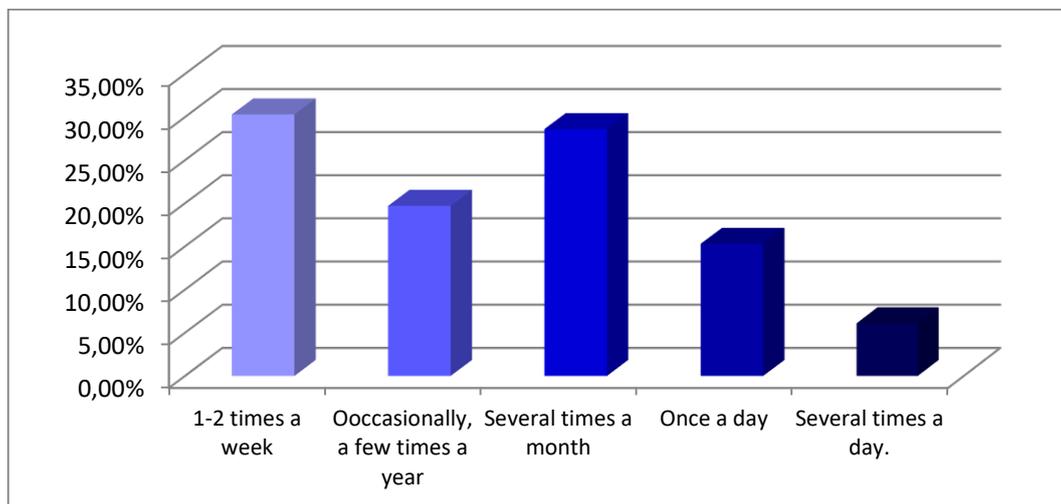


Fig. 1. *The frequency with which respondents consume wine*

Source: Own research of the author

The majority of respondents (32.4%) prefer to drink wine in the company of friends, 29.15% of respondents in the company of family and relatives, 10.4% alone, and 28.05%

of respondents it does not matter the company and the people with whom to consume the wine, the moment being the most important.

O2 – Identifying the criteria underlying the selection of a wine

The survey showed that the main criteria by which the respondents choose wine are the type of wine according to the category of accumulated sugars, the winery, and the grape variety.

Thus, according to the answers received, the most appreciated by the respondents is demi-dry wine (40.15%), followed by dry (25.68%), semi-sweet (24.71%), and sweet/liquors (9.46%).

When the respondents were asked about their preferred grape varieties for wine, their answers varied, greatly influenced by their origin and the advertising promoted in those areas. The most famous grape varieties for wine production are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Grasa de Cotnari, Feteasca Regală, Pinot Noir, and Busuioaca de Bohotin.

O3 – Determining the opinions and attitudes of the respondents towards the quality strategies implemented in the wine market in Romania

From the respondents' point of view, the main characteristics that define the quality of a wine are color (19.7%), bouquet/aroma (24.1%), body/viscosity (19.1%), taste (20.1%), alcoholic strength (8.9%) and residual sugar (8.1%).

The most applied quality strategies in the Romanian wine industry are the strategy of dominance through quality, the strategy of certification, the strategy of implementing the latest technologies, the strategy focused on different quality levels, and the strategy of differentiation through quality. The research showed that for the respondents, the most important strategies are the strategy of certification and the strategy focused on different quality levels. Thus, for the respondents, the Controlled Designation of Origin (DOC) and Geographical Indication (GI) are essential, which certify the originality of the wine from a particular region, locality, or specific place and whose quality or characteristics are essentially or exclusively due to the geographical environment, including natural and human factors and whose production, processing and preparation take place in the defined geographical area.

5. Conclusions

The Romanian wine market is in a continuous process of both development and modernization. The transition is being made from the traditional consumption of non-certified wine, produced on farms or in small wineries, to the consumption of certified wine, produced with modern technologies, which offers a guarantee of superior quality. Also, the Romanian consumer becomes an educated, sophisticated, demanding, curious consumer with expectations when purchasing a bottle of wine.

Investments in modern equipment and technologies, the quality policies adopted by the significant Romanian producers and correct marketing campaigns can direct consumers' choices toward certified wines of superior quality.

The efforts of all wine producers in Romania are focused on reversing the principle of "price before quality," a fact that emerges from the adopted quality strategies,

personalized marketing campaigns, wine tastings organized in targeted environments to educate the consumer and from the significant investments they do in the Romanian wine industry.

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I mention that some of the data presented in this article are inaccurate. They are estimates and come from the exploratory research conducted by the author.

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