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The Ontario wine industry and the support for VQA wines



Background on the research

“Going local” is a growing trend in food and wine industries. Consumers increasingly are concerned about the environment and demand locally grown food and wine. However, consumers typically are less educated about wine than about food. They often require more guidance from restaurateurs about wine and VQA. This ongoing research aims to develop a better understanding of the factors that influence restaurateurs’ decision making with respect to wine, and particularly the factors that increase their likelihood of becoming proponents of VQA wines.

Results to date

More than 250 restaurateurs across Ontario participated in the study, making this one of the most encompassing investigations to date of the Ontario restaurant industry. Restaurateurs’ support of VQA wines is enhanced by several factors: (1) guiding principles for running the restaurant - restaurateurs who are committed to putting a personal stamp on their restaurants and seeking acclaim, (2) international winemaking traditions - because VQA wines tend to be more similar in profile to European wines (i.e. similarly cool climate and variable vintages), these wines are more likely to appeal to restaurateurs that prefer wines made in the Old World rather than in the New World tradition, (3) perception of the industry and nature of competition - restaurateurs who feel the support of VQA wines by the government and regulators and are endorsed by customers and peers, (4) personal interests, expertise and attitudes - restaurateurs who are highly innovative, environmentally conscious, patriotic and perceive themselves as intellectually engaged with wine and wine-related issues.

Application of findings

This study shows several approaches that restaurateurs can use to be successful when marketing VQA wines at their location. Critical acclaim can differentiate a restaurant from the rest of the crowd especially when a more distinctive wine list of VQA wines is offered to consumers. Restaurant staff that are knowledgeable about wineries’ stories and winemaking approaches and who share such stories with their customers can facilitate VQA sales. Effective promotion of VQA wine sales is particularly important when restaurants are innovative and when consumers are looking for novelty and locally grown products.

Contact information

Dirk De Clercq, PhD

Professor, Organizational Behaviour, Human Resources, Entrepreneurship & Ethics (OBHREE), Brock University

ddeclercq@brocku.ca

905 688 5550 x5187

Narongsak (Tek) Thongpapanl, PhD

Associate Professor, Marketing, International Business & Strategy (MIBS), Brock University

nthongpa@brocku.ca

905 688 5550 x5195

Maxim Voronov, PhD

Associate Professor, Marketing, International Business & Strategy (MIBS), Brock University

mvoronov@brocku.ca

905 688 5550 x5189



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Little things that make a difference, but shouldn't - insights into consumer behaviour



Background on the research

For end-of-sequence judgments, such as when a consumer samples a set of wines at a winery and decides at the end which one was their favourite, researchers have concluded that items early in the sequence have the overall advantage. This is called a primacy advantage. On the other hand, some researchers have observed and concluded that in an end-of-sequence choice scenario, the most recent items sampled (i.e. the last) are preferred. These effects have been called recency effects. What is the evaluation process consumers engage in that leads to these effects?

Results to date

- A. Study 1 (step-by-step sequence evaluation): 199 students and members of the local community were recruited to participate in a study of "attitudes and values towards wine". Each participant tasted either two, three, four or five wine samples and then chose a favourite at the end of the sequence.
- B. Study 2 (single elimination pair-wise tournament): 227 participants (chosen as above) were asked to pick a favourite between two wine samples. Depending on the participants' randomly assigned condition, this process (for two, three, four or five wine pairs) was repeated with a new sample being presented after each choice was made, with participants being asked to compare their favourite from the previous pair of wines to the newly presented sample.

In both studies, unknown to participants each wine sample tasted was the same wine poured from the same bottle. Results for Study 1 illustrated that high knowledge consumers did not experience any primacy or recency effects contrarily to low knowledge consumers. On the other hand, in Study 2 the high knowledge consumers experienced both primacy and recency effects contrarily to low knowledge consumers.

Application of findings

Winery owners should be aware of sequential sampling effects on consumer decision making. Being aware of the different evaluation processes of high and low knowledge wine consumers will allow wine owners to control for or take advantage of these sequential effects.

Contact information

Antonia Mantonakis, PhD

Assistant Professor, Marketing, International Business & Strategy (MIBS), Brock University

antonia.mantonakis@brocku.ca

905 688 5550 x5383

Collaborators

Matthew Philp, Queen's University, Kingston, ON; Dr. Isabelle Lesschaeve, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Vineland Station, ON; and Dr. Reid Hastie, University of Chicago Booth School of Business, Chicago, IL.