

Exploring key service quality dimensions at a winery from an emerging market's perspective

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Abstract

Food and alcoholic consumption is influenced by cultural and family roots deeply embedded in a person's life (Gorefield, 2015), which makes it less likely that consumers will change their eating and drinking habits. Yet, wine consumption has emerged as one of the fastest growing alcoholic beverages in China. Chinese wine consumption already ranks fifth globally and increased at an annual rate of 25% between 2007 and 2011 (Wine Intelligence, 2013).

Continuing economic growth and a growing urban and higher class population have spurred wine consumption in China (Liu & Murphy, 2007). For example, the Chinese upper class will reach 91 million people by 2020 (Wine Intelligence, 2013). Having more higher-class Chinese consumers has implications for wine sales because these consumers view drinking wine as consuming a Western lifestyle, which has been considered a better and positive lifestyle (Yu et al., 2009). Also, wine may serve as a medium for Chinese consumers to express their social status, signal their wealth, and feel cosmopolitan, which might be quite different from the motivations of Western consumers (Wine Intelligence, 2013). Along with the high popularity of Western luxury brands, such as Prada and Louis Vuitton, drinking wine has become a key element in being cosmopolitan among emerging middle and higher class Chinese consumers (Fan, 2007).

Developments in the wine consumption arena have led to the emergence of wine tourism as a leisure activity among Chinese consumers (Qiu et al., 2013). More and more Chinese wine tourists are visiting domestic and international wineries (Qiu et al., 2013). For instance, the Chinese wine tourism market is the second largest international market for Australian wineries behind British visitors (Edgar, 2014). Furthermore, more than 60,000 Chinese wine tourists visited Napa Valley, California in 2014 which accounts for 14% of international tourists in Napa Valley region (Quackenbush, 2015)

Given the increasing prominence of Chinese winery tourists, there exist a need to explore which service quality attributes influence Chinese wine tourists' satisfaction

and loyalty to different wineries. Prior literature contends that Asian consumers' evaluation of service quality dimensions differ from that of Western consumers considerably on the basis of culture (de Mooij, 1998). Stauss and Mang (1999) claim that Asian consumers tend to have higher service expectations compared to that of Western consumers.

In a similar vein, Chinese wine tourists might have a different perspective on wine tourism compared to Western consumers from Italy, Spain or Australia where wine is a part of everyday life and visiting a winery is nothing special for Italian and Spanish consumers (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002). The concept of wine drinking and wine tourism is a relatively new activity among Chinese consumers (Yu et al., 2009). Given the fact that wine sales account for merely five percent of total alcoholic beverage sales in China in 2014, the majority of Chinese wine consumers do not possess extensive wine knowledge (Swindell, 2015). Yang and Paladino (2015) suggest that underlying motivations for wine consumption among Chinese consumers is strongly associated with social status and social approval. Drinking wine may illuminate a person's high social status and prestige in Chinese society because wine is a metaphor of desired Western lifestyle (Yang & Paladino, 2015). Thus, country of origin effect in wine consumption among Chinese wine consumers is important (Yang & Paladino, 2015). Chinese wine consumers view wine produced in traditional Western wine countries such as France and Germany more positively than wine produced in non-Western countries (Yang & Paladino, 2015). These factors should influence Chinese wine tourists' expectations when they visit a winery.

While a substantial body of literature exists on wine tourism, to date Chinese wine tourists have not received much academic attention. This is because, overall, wine tourism research is in its infancy stage (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002). As a consequence, researchers have not explored wine tourism among Chinese consumers in spite of the importance of this topic. Most extant wine tourism research has been developed on the basis of Western wine tourists' perspectives using Australian (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Sparks, 2007), New Zealander (Mitchell & Hall, 2004), European (Marzo-Navarro & Pedraja-Iglesias, 2009), South African (Bruwer, 2003), Chilean (Hojman & Hunter-Jones, 2012) and North American (Brown & Getz, 2005) samples of wine tourists. The application of the existing wine tourism research to Chinese wine tourists might be challenging because Chinese wine tourists may have different preferences and values, or look for different winery features compared to Western wine tourists during their winery visits.

Generally, Chinese wine consumers may not possess extensive wine knowledge and may have different motivations compared to their Western counterparts since there are still many novice wine drinkers in China who drink wine only on special occasions (Qiu et al., 2013; Wine Intelligence, 2013). There has been little effort to identify the attributes or factors that are associated with Chinese wine tourists. Given the intricacy of understanding wine tourism, which encompasses tangible products such as wine products and intangible products such as service quality and service

atmosphere, not knowing which service attributes influence satisfaction with wineries is a substantial gap.

To close this gap, the present study aims to answer the following question:

- What are the important service quality dimensions and winery feature that influence Chinese wine tourists' satisfaction and loyalty when visiting a winery?

The results of the study should contribute to the existing body of wine tourism literature and help scholars and winery operators better understand Chinese consumers' attitudes toward wine tourism and winery visits. The results of this study will provide Western winery operators who aim to attract Chinese wine tourists with useful operational strategies.

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners: This paper helps

students better understand characteristics of Chinese wine tourists. The paper also illuminates the linkage between winery service quality attributes and Chinese wine tourists' satisfaction and loyalty.

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