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RECOMMENDATIONS IN MARKETING OF WINE EXHIBITIONS THE CASE OF VINISTRA, CROATIA

PRELIMINARY COMMUNICATION

Wine exhibitions as a part of special interest tourism represent one of the emerging tourism niches. They are focused on a specific segment of consumers who are interested in wine. The main aim of this paper was to determine the relationship between recommendations and various marketing aspects of wine exhibitions. Data was collected on 1st May 2010 as a part of a research on visitors attending wine exhibition Vinistra in Poreč, Croatia. Responders were grouped based on their usage of recommendations. Differences between the two groups were tested using t-test. Significant differences were found from the aspect of attractiveness and arrangements of stands, intention to acquire wines tasted during wine exhibition and improvement of wine quality and bottle design. The results suggest that recommendations are important part in marketing wine exhibitions, so they can be used in further development of this kind of special interest tourism which is not necessary related to main tourism season.

Keywords: wine exhibitions, marketing, recommendations, special interest tourism, Croatia

INTRODUCTION

Festival and events with a strong cultural component increase the number of international visitor and contribute to the local economy, and on a global scale these events are substantially increasing in numbers¹. Getz² considers festivals and events as a part of special interest tourism, recognizing them to contribute to sustainable development and to improve the relationship between host and guest.

Wine festivals and exhibitions have emphasized cultural component³ ("wine-drinking culture"), especially pronounced in certain traditionally wine-producing regions or nations, so it is possible to consider wine festivals as a part of cultural events in a wider sense. But, they also represent a potential major source of information for the consumers who are interested in wine purchasing.

The main aim of this paper was to determine the relationship between recommendations and various marketing aspects of wine exhibitions.

1. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Marketing communication can be understood as a meaningful exchange of information, which requires a two-way process between the producing organisations and the consumers, with the purpose of achieving benefits and finally profits to the producing organisations⁴. "They provide the means by which brands and

¹ Lee, C.K., Lee, Y.K., Wicks, B.E., "Segmentation of festival motivation by nationality and satisfaction", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 25, 2004, 61

² Getz, D. *Festivals, special events and tourism*, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991.

³ Demossier, M. "Consuming Wine in France: The "Wandering" drinker and the *Vin-anomie*", 130, in: Wilson, T.M., *Drinking cultures: alcohol and identity*, Oxford-New York, Berg, 2005.

⁴ McCabe, S., *Marketing Communications in Tourism and Hospitality: Concept, Strategies and Cases*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009., 6

organisations are presented to their audience. The goal is to stimulate a dialogue that will, ideally, lead to a succession of purchases. Complete engagement. This interaction represents an exchange between each organisation and each consumer, and, according to the quality and satisfaction of the exchange process, will or will not be repeated⁵. Advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations represents a conventional set of marketing tools used for achieve the marketing communications' goals. For the purposes of a successful marketing communications' planning, it is important the understanding of how, where and when consumers access information, how they respond and the means by which this process can be effectively managed. Having in mind the wide variety of business and organisations, private and public, the term "information" is used in preference to "advertising" or "promotions"⁶. Marketing communications must be targeted to defined audiences (*segments*), because the consumers are "inundated" with media and marketing communications and also due to cost reduction for the organisations.

Marketing communication for tourism and hospitality is affected by some particular characteristics of the consumption of tourism and hospitality services. The influential factor affecting the marketing approach and the content of communications can include⁷:

- the **importance of word-of-mouth** communication in consumers' decision-making process,
- the links between consumption and status/identity,
- the impact of consumers' personality traits and motivations on brand loyalty,
- macro-social factors which influence consumption,
- the extent to which tourism & hospitality consumption is an established norm of social life.

Once the communication message has been encoded, the choice of the adequate communication channel (or mix of channels) is essential. The type of channel selected will influence consumers differently. **Personal channels** (personal selling or *word-of-mouth* forms of communications) are highly influential but are capable of communicating to a limited number of consumers. On the other hand, **non-personal channels** (e.g. mass media advertising) is less persuasive but can reach a very large audience of consumers⁸.

Word-of-mouth communication is significant because existing consumers and potential consumers may interact with highly influential people. "The recommendations of highly influential people are sought, especially during the evaluation phase of the purchase decision-process"⁹. It should be noticed that dissatisfied customers will spread negative criticism, primarily through word-of-mouth, but word-of-mouth itself remains a much under-exploited marketing communication tool. Marketing can be applied to a wide range of businesses, so marketing communications have to be adapted to the specificity of a particular business e.g. wine business.

2. SPECIFICITY OF WINE MARKETING AND WINE TOURISM

Since the last decade of the 20th century, wine has been adopted as a drink prevalent in the household, especially with women who have opted for wine in preference to beer and spirits¹⁰. According to Saad¹¹, consumers in USA prefer to drink wine (39 %) over beer (36 %) and liquor (21 %). The same survey showed that 47 % of females prefer wine over other alcohol beverages, while only 25 % of males prefer wine. It can be concluded that certain products are perceived by consumers to be gender specific, and wine has been generally perceived as a feminine beverage¹². The decision about which wine to purchase derives from a complex decision

⁵ Fill, C., *Marketing Communications: Engagement, Strategies and Practice*, Harrow, Prentice Hall, 2005., 9

⁶ McCabe, S., op.cit., 7

⁷ McCabe, S., op.cit., 11

⁸ McCabe, S., op.cit., 29-30

⁹ Varey, R.J., *Marketing communication*, London-New York, Routledge, 2002., 66

¹⁰ Barber, N., Almanza, B.A., Donovan, J.R., "Motivational factors of gender, income and age on selecting a bottle of wine", *International Journal of Wine Marketing*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2006, 218

¹¹ Saad, L. *Wine gains momentum as Americans' favourite adult beverage*, The Gallup Poll Survey, 2005, 18, according to: Barber, N., Almanza, B.A., Donovan, J.R., op.cit., 218

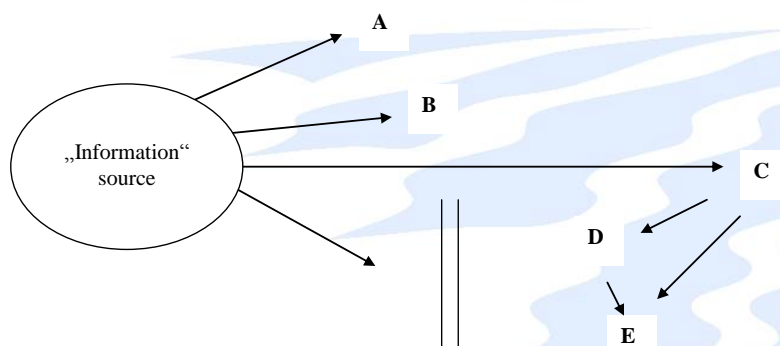
¹² Spawton, T. "Marketing Planning for Wine", *International Journal of Wine Marketing*, 1990., Vol. 2, Is, 2, 2 – 49, according to: Barber, N., Almanza, B.A., Donovan, J.R., op.cit., 218

process which includes a variety of information sources and consumers' prior knowledge¹³. That knowledge is connected with the consumers' previous experience after consuming a wine.

Wine marketing differs from marketing of other products because of specificity of the wine itself, primarily because the quality of the product (quality characteristics, colour and aroma) cannot be accessed until it has been consumed. The wine purchasing decision making process is a complex experience, resulting from the consumers' use of a variety of information sources and their prior knowledge and usage experience with the wine¹⁴. The grape variety, brand name and price were the most important informational items consumers used to assess wine products before usage, as Tomas¹⁵ and Thomas and Pickering¹⁶ determined. "Wine is one of only a few products that are (legalistically) presented and marketed in terms of its place of origin. Wine industries around the world have therefore demarcated areas referred to as regions or appellations and derivatives thereof in order to denote this aspect."¹⁷ As a result of that, consumers will pay much higher prices for wines from a well-known region when they are uncertain about the quality¹⁸, so the regional wine brand image is becoming increasingly important.

Since brand is an important element of the purchase of wine, it should be taken into account the fact that the brand is communicated to the consumers through marketing communications¹⁹. As it was explained earlier, recommendations (word-of-mouth) are a powerful mean of communication to the consumers, especially taken into account those circumstances of marketing-dominated communication (advertising) and those that are consumer dominated (face-to-face conversation). Personal influence can be a major factor in determining the outcome of interactions in planning persuasive communication. Having in mind the fact that people in society are individuals in transaction with their environment, marketers and other managers of communication must focus attention on *individual mental states* (attitudes, beliefs, past experiences, self-concept), *typical responses* (activity levels, sense of humour, learned modes of adjustment, locus of control) and *role related behaviour* of consumers²⁰. The two-step model of interaction (as shown in Figure 1.) explains what happens when people talk to each other about products and providers.

Figure 1. A model of two step-interaction



Source: Varey, R.J., *Marketing communication*, London-New York, Routledge, 2002., 141

¹³ Lockshin, L. "Consumer purchasing behaviour for wine: what we know and where we", *Marches et Marketing du Vin*, 2003., No. 1, 1-30, according to: Barber, N., Almanza, B.A., Donovan, J.R., op.cit., 219

¹⁴ Barber, N., Almanza, B.A., Donovan, J.R., op.cit., 219

¹⁵ Thomas, A. "Elements influencing wine purchasing: a New Zealand view", *International Journal of Wine Marketing*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2000, 1-16, according to: Nelson B., Almanza, B.A., Donovan, J.R., op.cit., 220

¹⁶ Thomas, A., Pickering, G. "The Importance of Wine Label Information", *International Journal of Wine Marketing*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2003, 58-75, according to: Nelson B., Almanza, B.A., Donovan, J.R., op.cit., 220

¹⁷ Johnson, R., Bruwer, J. "Regional brand image and perceived wine quality: the consumer perspective", *International Journal of Wine Business Research*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2007, 276

¹⁸ Schamel, G., "Geography versus brands in a global wine market", *Agribusiness*, Vol. 22, No. 3, according to: Johnson, R., Bruwer, J. "Regional brand image and perceived wine quality: the consumer perspective", *International Journal of Wine Business Research*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2007, 277

¹⁹ Murray, A., Demick, D. "Wine retailing in Ireland: the diffusion of innovation", *International Journal of Wine Business Research*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2006, 206

²⁰ Varey, R.J., *Marketing communication*, London-New York, Routledge, 2002., 141

Persons A and B have been exposed to a promotional message and look to person C (*opinion leader*) for further information in the form of opinion or advice. Person C reinforces the impact of the information received directly from the provider. However, from the aspect of persons D and E, person C is the original source (they did not see the advertisement or meet the sales representative). This (oversimplified) “flow” of information or pattern of interaction may arise through several stages.

The connection between wine and tourism has been only recently explicitly recognized in an official way (by the governments and scholars), but this connection had existed for many years before. As Hall et.al.²¹ stated “wine tourism is a significant component of both the wine and the tourism industries”. While, from a tourism perspective, wine represents an important component of the attractiveness of a destination, and can be a major motivating factor for visitors, in the same time it is a very important way for the wine industry to build up relations with consumers who can experience first hand the wine. Wine tourism can be defined as a “visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visiting”²². There are plenty of definitions of wine tourism, but they include many common characteristics: a lifestyle experience, supply and demand, an educational component, linkages to art, wine and food, incorporation with the tourism-destination image and as a marketing opportunity which enhances the economic, social and cultural values of the region²³. The key point of the wine tourism deals with providing the experience to the visitors. Although it can be done in many different ways, the most common are events and festivals, cultural heritage, dining, hospitality, education, tasting and cellar door sales, and winery tours²⁴.

The tourism experience is being evaluated by tourists (customers) in their travel and, at different scales (for example, at the regional and activity-place scales). “Wine tourism is definitely a ‘touring product’ for most visitors”²⁵. The conceptualization of the attributes of the wine product that tourists may consider when assessing the quality of their experiences in the tourism destination is shown in Figure 1. The formation of their image and framing of their experiences comes as a result of their evaluations on-site at the attraction (i.e. activity place) as well as traveling around in the region (i.e. regional setting). The core benefits for wine tourists are based on their motivations, expectations and experiences. Such needs, for example, for relaxation, education, a day out in an attractive location, may be met at both the winery and while touring the surrounding region.

Special events (as shown in Figure 2.) are at the same time an integral part of the regional attraction mix and also an individual attraction at the activity place. Since the wine festivals & exhibitions represent a form of special events, it is clearly that wine festivals are a significant attraction that allures a number of potential visitors to a tourism destination.

Wine festivals are structured not only to maximize visitation by tourists, but also to achieve several objectives²⁶:

- they demonstrate a tangible, short-term economic return to participants,
- they are familiar and thus tangible to participants and perhaps exhibit a strong internal product focus (e.g. wine exhibitions/shows, public tastings).

“The impact of winery-related festivals and events on winery visitation can sometimes be substantial and dramatic”²⁷. In most wine regions, festivals are also an important activity that provides additional financial resources.²⁸

²¹ Hall, C.M., Johnson, G., Cambourne, N.M., Mitchell, R., Sharples, L., “Wine tourism: an introduction”, 1, in: Hall, C.M., Sharples, L., Cambourne, B., Macionis, N., *Wine tourism around the world: development, management and markets*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000.

²² Hall, C.M. “Wine tourism in New Zealand”, in *Tourism Down Under II: A Tourism Research Conference, Proceedings*, University of Otago, 1996, according to: Hall, C.M., Sharples, L., Cambourne, B., Macionis, N., *Wine tourism around the world: development, management and markets*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000., 3

²³ Charters, S., Ali-Knight, J., “Who is the wine tourist?”, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 23, Is. 3, June, 2002, 312

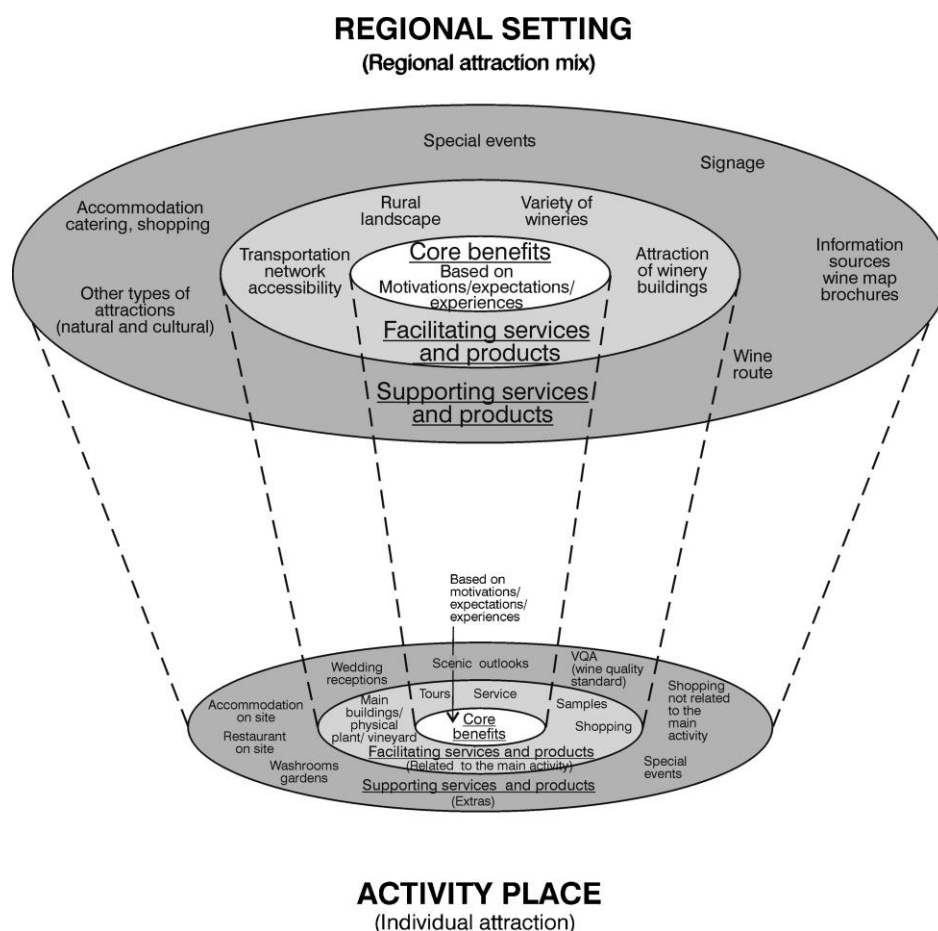
²⁴ op.cit., 312

²⁵ Carmichael, B.A., “Understanding the Wine Tourism Experience for Winery Visitors in the Niagara Region, Ontario, Canada”, *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, May, 2005, 190

²⁶ Cambourne, B., Macionis, N., „Meeting the wine-maker: wine tourism product development in an emerging wine region“, 96, in: Hall, C.M., Sharples, L., Cambourne, B., Macionis, N., *Wine tourism around the world: development, management and markets*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000.

²⁷ Golledge, S., Maddern, C., *A Survey of Tourism Activity at Victorian Wineries*, Victorian Wineries Tourism Council, 1994., according to: Cambourne, B., Macionis, N., op.cit., 95

Figure 2. Wine product attributes that affect the experience of a touring destination



Source: Carmichael, B.A., "Understanding the Wine Tourism Experience for Winery Visitors in the Niagara Region, Ontario, Canada", *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, May, 2005, 191

3. METHODOLOGY

A study focused on visitors' motivations for attending wine exhibition Vinistra in Poreč, Croatia and their wine habits was conducted on 1st May 2010. In this study the target population included those responders that were visitors who attended the wine exhibition Vinistra and were 18 years of age or older. Responders were approached by trained researchers and asked to participate in the survey. Researchers explained the purpose of the survey and said that the survey was anonymous. Data was collected through personal interview with responders. In that process convenient sampling was used.

For the purpose of gathering data, the questionnaire was constructed. It consisted of 13 questions which were divided into three sections. The first section of questions was designed to gather respondents' characteristics (age, gender, education level, occupation, net monthly personal income, settlement size, family members, country of origin/county, first or repeat visit, sources of information, reason for visiting, frequency of wine consumption and level of wine knowledge). The second section of questions involved questions relating to responders' preferences about wine consumption and purchase. In the third section, responder answered questions related to their habits of consuming and purchasing wine and rated certain aspects of wine exhibition.

²⁸ Telfer, D.J., The Nordeast Wine Route: wine tourism in Ontario, Canada and New York State, 269, in: Hall, C.M, Sharples, L., Cambourne, B., Macdonis, N., *Wine tourism around the world: development, management and markets*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000.

The responders were a prior grouped based on whether the family, friends or associates recommended the visitation (used vs. not used). Differences between the groups were determined using chi square test and t-test at 95% significance level. Variables related to different marketing aspects of wine exhibitions were: attractiveness and arrangement of stands, pleasant hostess at stands, desire to buy wine, intention to acquire wines tasted during wine exhibition, getting to know well-known wine producers, getting familiar with diversity of wine offer, and improvement of wine quality, presentation of wines and bottle design.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

A total of 143 questionnaires were collected.

The proportion of male responders (62%) was higher than that of female (38%). The mean age of the responders was 36.7 years, and the standard deviation was about 12 years. Most of the responders were between 25 and 34 years of age. More than 50% of responders obtained some kind of higher education level, but the most commonly obtained education level was secondary school. The responders had different background and occupation, most of the responders stated that they were employees, while about 6% were managers and about 18% were entrepreneurs/owners. Most of the responders were from County of Istria (67%), about 17% were from County of Primorje-Gorski kotar, and about 10% were from City of Zagreb. Most of the responders had personal monthly income between 4,001 and 6,000 kn and lived in mid-sized town. Average household of the responders had three members, but the most of the households had four members. Most of the visitors stated that they were only interested in wine (66%) and that they drank wine occasionally (54%)

Table 1. Responders' characteristics

Variables	Percent (%)	Variables	Percent (%)
Gender		Profession	
Female	38.5	Owner/Entrepreneur	18.2
Male	61.5	Manager	5.6
Age (mean 36.7, S.D. 12.5)		Employee	42.6
18-24	14.0	Student	12.6
25-34	40.6	Other	21.0
35-44	18.2	Settlement size	
45-54	16.1	Up to 2,000	22.4
55+	11.2	2,001 – 10,000	17.5
Education		10,001 -100,000	37.8
Basic education	2.1	Over 100.000	22.4
Secondary education	40.6	County/Country of origin	
College	14.0	Istria	67.1
University	35.0	Primorje-Gorski kotar	16.8
Masters/ Ph.D.	8.4	City of Zagreb	10.5
Personal net monthly income (in KN)		Other counties	2.8
Up to 2,000	2.1	Various countries	2.8
2,001 – 4,000	9.8	Household number (mean 3.4, S.D. 1.5)	
4,001 – 6,000	29.4	Live alone	9.8
6,001 – 8,000	9.8	Two members	19.6
Over 8,000	9.8	Three members	21.0
Private (n/a)	25.2	Four members	30.1
No income	14.0	Five and more members	19.6
Frequency of wine consumption		Types of visitors	
Every-day	13,3	Interested in wine	65,7
Occasionally	53,8	Amateur farmer	13,3
On special occasions	32,9	Wine expert	21,0

Source: data processed by authors

In order to determine significant differences among the groups of responders, t-test (Table 2) was conducted. Responders who did not get any recommendation to visit Vinistra gave higher rating to 10 out of 12 variables. Those responders who stated that the visit to Vinistra was recommended to them rated higher appropriateness of the facility, while desire to buy wine was rated the same by both groups. Statistically significant relationship was determined between the groups and five variables related to different marketing aspects of wine exhibitions: attractiveness and arrangements of stands, intention to acquire wines tasted during wine exhibition and improvement of wine quality and bottle design.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and results of t- test

Variable	Not used (N=81)		Used (N=62)		t-value (141, 132.9)
	M	SD	M	SD	
Attractiveness of stands	3.9	1.03	3.6	1.08	2.244*
Pleasant hostess at stands	4.5	0.82	4.3	0.78	1.683
Arrangement of stands	4.1	0.93	3.5	1.18	3.571**
Appropriate facility	4.2	1.10	4.4	1.01	-0.851
Desire to buy wine	3.6	1.38	3.6	1.28	0.125
Intention to acquire wines tasted during exhibition	3.9	1.25	3.3	1.49	2.606*
Getting to know well-known wine producers	3.6	1.30	3.4	1.45	1.084
Getting familiar with diversity of wine offer	4.3	1.02	4.3	0.93	0.013
Drinking wines produced by well-known wine producers	3.1	1.31	2.9	1.21	0.647
Improvement in wine quality	4.6	0.68	4.3	0.82	2.644**
Improvement in bottle design	4.6	0.63	4.3	0.74	2.196*
Improvement in wine presentation	4.6	0.70	4.3	0.85	-0.818

* α significant at 0.05, ** α significant at 0.01

Source: Data processed by authors

It is interesting to notice that those responders, who did not get recommendation to visit Vinistra, gave higher ratings to various marketing aspects of wine exhibition. This, a bit unexpected situation, may occur because visitors who got recommendation to visit the wine exhibition, had higher expectations compared to the other group of visitors.

There are some limitations of this study. Since these results are based on convenient sample of visitors that attended wine exhibition Vinistra, the results may not be generalized for the similar wine exhibitions. Another limitation is related to analysis of data. Due to relatively small sample size, for the purpose of this analysis total sample was considered. There might be some differences in results if the first-time visitors or different types of visitors were to be extracted and analyzed separately.

CONSLUSION

Marketing communication is a very important part of marketing mix because it is a way of presenting brands and organisations to theirs' present and potential customers. Recommendations, as a personal communication channel, are usually referred to as word-of-mouth. They are recognised as a very important marketing communication tool, but theirs' potential is much under-exploited and this refers to wine exhibitions as well.

In wine marketing wine exhibitions play important role because they promote wine-drinking culture but they also serve for promotion of wine brands and wine producers. On the other hand, wine consumers have an opportunity to get familiar with the wide range of wines by tasting them. This is a good way for them to decide which type of wine they prefer to drink and to get to know different wine brands.

By analyzing influence of recommendations on various marketing aspects related to wine exhibitions, significant differences were determined for attractiveness and arrangements of stands, intention to acquire wines tasted during wine exhibition and improvement of wine quality and bottle design. In general, visitors that did not get recommendations to visit Vinistra, gave higher ratings to those aspects probably because they had lower expectation compared to those that did get recommendations.

Considering the results, the suggestion for further research is to segment visitors of wine exhibition based on different criterion e.g. first-time and repeated visitors, different types of visitors etc. This would result in better understanding of recommendations as a personal communication channel and its effects on wine marketing. It would also enhance the effects of marketing efforts from the aspect of wine marketing.

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