

Optimising the effect of wine education on Asian international students

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A GWRDC-funded study has been conducted with the aim of better understanding how to educate younger Asian students about Australian wine.

Asia is on the radar of most wine industry professionals. However, many New World producers, including Australia, suffer at the expense of the strong perception of French wine in Asia, particularly China. There is a creative opportunity to leverage Australia's positive perception in Asia. Education is a core component of the Australian economy. Eighty per cent of Australian international students come from Asia (*The Times* 2013).

This presents a unique opportunity to investigate how this cohort best learns to appreciate wine. Increasing their knowledge of wine during a formative and positive period of their lives when living abroad could increase their likelihood to become ambassadors for Australian wine when returning home.

Education plays a fundamental role in helping to develop preferences such that one can influence new Asian wine drinkers to prefer Australian wine styles. However, the role of education in the wine sector has barely been investigated scientifically. To the best of the authors' knowledge, only a couple of papers dealt with this issue, but none in Australia. LaTour *et al.* (2011) showed that when novice consumers were exposed to a conceptual type of training (e.g. explanation about how the wine is produced and discussion about wine varieties), they were better able to identify wines previously tried and were less influenced by fictitious advertising. In addition, these consumers thought the wine was of higher quality and they were willing to pay a higher price for it. Another study by Sagala (2013), a Canadian wine educator, showed that participation in a wine course led to an increase in perceived subjective knowledge, the importance of varietal and regional attributes, and the willingness to talk about wine.

While LaTour *et al.* (2011) tackled the issue of different training methods, they did not study how to plan a traditional

type of wine education course. Conversely, Sagala (2013) analysed the effect of a real wine education course, but didn't test different delivery approaches. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to fill the gaps left by these two studies by understanding what educational approach is most able to improve the perception of Australian wines among younger Asian students via a realistic wine education course.

In this base study, the authors tested whether education based on regions of origin or based on grape varieties improves the likeability, willingness to pay and perceived price points for a series of red wines tasted blind. This research represents the first of a series of four studies funded by the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation (GWRDC) to understand how to better educate younger Asian students about Australian wines. In the next 18 months the researchers will develop the methods further to support the Australian wine industry in understanding and communicating to the Asian wine market.

METHOD AND SAMPLE

The method used in this study is divided into two sections: a) the selection of the wines to be assessed in the blind sessions by the participants; b) the organisation of the education courses.

For the first part of the method, the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) helped the researchers to select six red wines, which are representative of the main styles of red wines available in Australia. The focus on red wines is obvious as they represent 85% of Australian exports to China.

For the second part of the method, a convenience sample of university students living in the Adelaide metropolitan area was recruited via different social media platforms to take part in the experiment. In order to qualify for participation, students had to be between 18 and 30

years old, be born in an Asian country and lived there for at least 10 years. The students had to attend all the scheduled sessions in order to receive a gift card as compensation for their time.

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Dependent variables: All the students participated in a central location hedonic test in Adelaide. Each participant evaluated all six wines selected based on the diversity of sensory attributes as described by the AWRI sensory descriptive panel. The wines were presented monadically using a balanced randomised presentation order across respondents with three-digit coded ISO standard wine glasses. Each glass contained 30mL of wine. Participants were advised to rest between the wines and drink some water. Assessments were made on paper with an individual questionnaire presented for each wine. The participants rated each wine for:

- overall liking on a nine-point hedonic scale ('dislike extremely' to 'like extremely')
- willingness to purchase on a five-point Likert scale ('definitely would not purchase' to 'definitely would purchase')
- perceived price point on a five-point Likert scale ('\$8 or below' to 'over \$25').

Three groups of participants attended the central location hedonic test. Two groups took part in a wine education course

between the two blind tasting sessions, while the control group didn't receive any training.

Independent variables: the students who took part in the education courses were randomly assigned to join one of the two scheduled courses – education by grape variety or education by region of origin. Each course was comprised of three one-hour sessions over a 10-day period. Each session consisted of a theoretical component (25 minutes approximately) where the wine educator gave information about the grape variety (introduction, history, climate and soil, grapegrowing conditions, famous worldwide wine regions, flavour characteristics, and food pairings) or the region of origin (introduction, history, climate and soil, regional production, famous regional grape varieties).

This was followed by a tasting of three wines (35 minutes approximately) for a total of nine wines per course. The students were invited to taste the wines on their own and then the floor was open for discussion between students and the wine educators about the visual, olfactory and tasting characteristics of each wine and the relationships with the elements of theory discussed in the first part of the lecture. These nine wines were identical for all students, but the order in which the wines were presented differed in relation to the course the students attended. The selection of the grape varieties took into account the level of popularity these varieties have in the Asian market. The regions of origin were located in different states to make the study more representative of the Australian wine industry, and good quality wines from each of the three grape varieties had to be able to be sourced from each region. Table 1 summarises the way in which the wines were presented to the participants.

A total of 111 students took part in the study. The socio-demographic profiles of the three groups were not significantly

Table 1. Organisation of wines for the wine education courses.

SESSION	Min	Education by grape variety	Education by region of origin
1	25	Pinot Noir: Theory	Margaret River: Theory
	35	Pinot Noir: Margaret River, Yarra Valley, Adelaide Hills	Margaret River: Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz
2	25	Cabernet Sauvignon: Theory	Yarra Valley: Theory
	35	Cabernet Sauvignon: Margaret River, Yarra Valley, Adelaide Hills	Yarra Valley: Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz
3	25	Shiraz: Theory	Adelaide Hills: Theory
	35	Shiraz: Margaret River, Yarra Valley, Adelaide Hills	Adelaide Hills: Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz

different. All students came from an Asian country with the majority from China (48%), they were mostly 20-24 years old (60%), and they moved to Australia less than six months prior to the beginning of the course (29%). The students are almost equally spread between males and females.

RESULTS

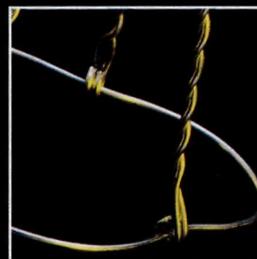
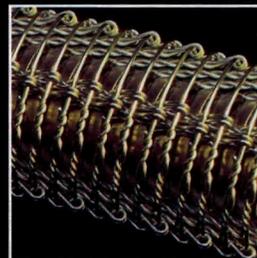
Figure 1 to Figure 3 present the results on average overall likeability, willingness to purchase, and perceived price points of the six wines tasted blind before and after the course.

Education by region of origin generated a significant positive change in overall likeability, willingness to purchase and perceived price point. In particular, the average likeability value across the six

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wines increased by 11% from 5.2/9.0 to 5.8/9.0 ($p=0.001$), which is the highest average score across the three treatments. Similarly, the willingness to purchase the six wines improved by 11% from 3.0/5.0 to 3.3/5.0, once again the highest score across the three treatments. Finally, the perceived price point moved from 2.4 to 3.2 ($p=0.000$), where 2 = '\$9-\$15' and 3 = '\$16-\$20', and 4 = '\$21-\$25'. In this case, the average perceived price point after the education course is not the highest among the three treatments, as the education by grape variety led to a final value of 3.4/5.0. However, while the education by region of origin improved the score by 30%, education by grape variety showed an improvement of only 22% between the two conditions.

As with the other two dependent variables, education by grape variety generated an average increase in overall likeability from 5.2/9.0 to 5.5/9.0, while the control group score remained substantially identical between the two sessions (5.1/9.0 and 5.2/9.0, respectively). Neither of these two changes is statistically significant. Similarly, we didn't observe any significant change in willingness to purchase for the control group (2.96/5.0 and 3.02/5.0 for the first and second evaluations, respectively) or the education by grape variety (3.0/5.0 and 3.2/5.0, respectively). Finally, no significant difference in terms of perceived price point was registered for the control group (2.5/5.0 and 2.6/5.0), while education by grape variety led to the highest willingness to purchase level (3.5/5.0), but as explained previously, the education by region of origin led to a higher percentage change between the two blind evaluations.

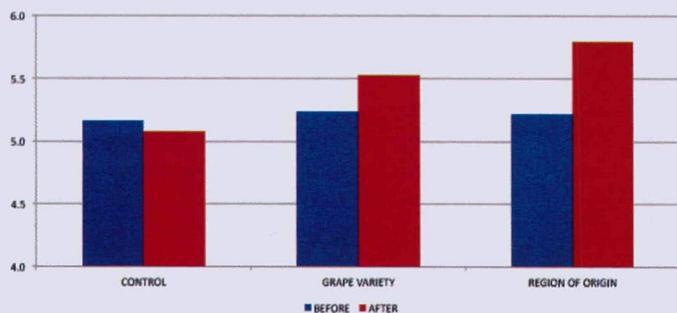


Figure 1. Likability – before vs. after wine education.

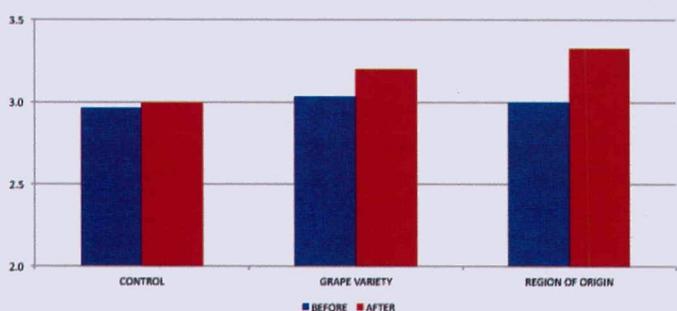


Figure 2. Willingness to purchase – before vs. after wine education.

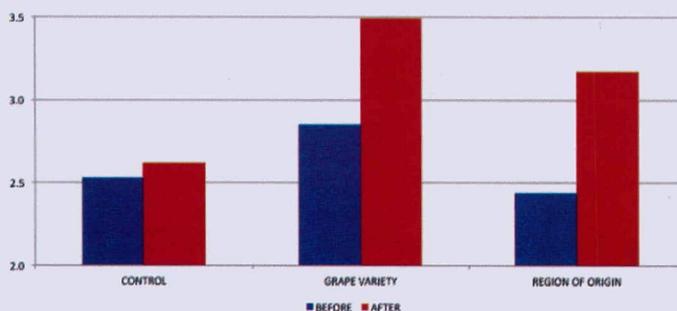


Figure 3. Perceived price point – before vs. after wine education.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides insights into the effectiveness of wine education structure, which should influence the strategies employed by Wine Australia, Australian wine producers and wine educators, both in Australia and Asia. Findings of the first phase of research demonstrate that education by region of origin is more effective than by grape variety and can improve the likeability, willingness to purchase and perceived price points of wines. This is beneficial for the positioning of Australian wines in the Asian market, where Australia still suffers from the image developed by France.

The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science is conducting a range of studies on the preferences Chinese consumers have about wine, thanks to the support of GWRDC. In particular, one of the key research projects involves the analysis of the type of lexicon or flavour descriptions Australian wines should use to be better understood by Chinese consumers. Another project – the China Wine Barometer – tracks the changes in preferences Chinese consumers have about wine in the three-year period from 2013-2015. The findings of these other projects will be applied in the wine education program to improve our communication techniques to better Asian consumers' responses to Australian wines.

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