

Is Wine Tourism a niche tourism? Antecedents and consequences of wine as a niche tourism, a conceptual model

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Abstract. Tourism is a phenomenon that moves millions of people around the world, taking as a major driver of the global economy. Every year, much due to the frequent changes in the tourism environment, fosters competition between and within tourist destinations. In specific, the wine tourism activity involves the participation of a certain group of people, called wine tourists, who look for experiences related to wines and wineries at wine tourism destinations. Trends in global tourism demand suggest the emergence of sophisticated consumers looking for new, different and specific tourist experiences. In such context, niche marketing seems a relevant response to market dynamics. Wine tourism activities consist of, above all, wine tastings and cellar, wine house and wine museum visits. Currently, and in the future, wine tourism has provided and boosted the creation of genuine and unique tourist experiences, more and more differentiated tailor-made. This study discusses the increasing phenomena of wine tourism and the relationship marketing perspective associated to specific tourism contexts. Based in the literature review, we propose a model that connects Antecedentes: Wine Knowledge (WK) e Prior Involvement (PI) Experience: Emotions (E), Consequences: Involvement Enhancement (IE) e Word of Mouth (WOM). A future study should include emotional factors. The new vogue of wine tourism forces us to challenge and re-visit the power relationships that exist within contemporary tourism and the host–guest relationship. As an interdisciplinary approach, this research contributes positively to the development of theory in relationship marketing and tourism contexts in wine management (theoretical implications). At the end, guidelines for future work will be presented.

Keywords: wine tourism, niche tourism, experience, emotions, wine knowledge

Introduction

Wine tourism as the intersection between tourist and winemaking activities has been a much explored theme, nationally and internationally, by the scientific community, which has boosted scientific investigation about this issue. This phenomenon is due to the potential that wine tourism has as a destination and a product, not only as an offer, but as something people are looking for. That way, wine tourism has demonstrated impact, progress and evolution in the development of the tourist system, mainly because of new perspectives and trends, as well as identified challenges [1]. This theme is relevant due to the recovery and value of historical and cultural heritage of wine cellars, wine houses, farms and wine hotels that started looking at wine tourism, not only as a complementary activity, but as the central economic activity. The wine tourism units are both a wine touristic destination and a product, which are more and more visited and appreciated by national and international wine tourists, due to all factors, elements and attributes involving the wine product. According to the "Carta Europea do Enoturismo" [2] (p. 3), "wine tourism is a system composed by the following sub-systems: territory, tourism and wine making culture". Regarding the objectives referring to the territory actors mentioned in "Carta Europea do Enoturismo" [2] (p. 7), "the development of a strategy is suggested, based on an annual intervention programme which presents a set of objectives, mainly the creation of an attractive winemaking offer for the wine touristic consumer". The special interest in wine tourism comes from the ancient practice and long tradition of wine and vineyards, strongly related to the local culture [3]. Wine is the central product of wine tourism which has an experimental dimension based on the wine touristic experience. The present manuscript will aim, in the following sections, to highlight the theoretical framework on wine tourism and, progressively, to understand some of the determinants in terms of background, experience and consequences in this tourist segment.

1 Special Interest Tourism (SIT) and Wine Tourism

Tourism is a phenomenon that moves millions of people around the world, taking as a major driver of the global economy. Every year, much due to the frequent changes in the tourism environment, fosters competition between and within tourist destinations [4]. It is multifaceted and geographically complex activity, where different services are ordered and delivered in different stages, from origin to destination [5]. To set Special Interest Tourism (SIT) in a broader overall tourism context, [6] suggest a "Tourism Interest Continuum". Based on Culligan's framework, they propose that "through increasing travel experience, confidence and affluence, a maturation or tourist life cycle transition from "safe to more adventurous kinds of travel and holidays" occurs, with the tourist "trading up" and purchasing social prestige and ego-enhancement" [7] (p. 187). As a psychological phenomenon, a tourist trip is preceded by a specific need that generates a reason to travel and sets a goal for the trip, which follows the search for information [8]. Like other emerging sectors in a modern economy, tourism

is a dynamic and ever-changing industry. Consequently, Special Interest Tourism (SIT), both as a product or sector in its own right and as a distinct entity within the overall tourism spectrum, has been largely ignored as an important area of study within the tourism field in general. Trends in global tourism demand suggest the emergence of sophisticated consumers looking for new, different and specific tourist experiences. In such context, niche marketing seems a relevant response to market dynamics. Although niche marketing has been successfully applied to a high number and many types of businesses, there is a shortage of research addressing the way niche marketing may be applied to tourism [9-11].

Therefore, and according to [12], the term ‘niche tourism’ is largely borrowed from the term ‘niche marketing’, which in turn has appropriated the niche concept from the language of the relatively recent discipline of ecology. Hutchinson (1957) is widely credited with introducing the concept of ‘niche’ referring, in its widest sense, to a region in a multidimensional space characterised by environmental factors that affect the welfare of the species. At one end of the spectrum then “*niche tourism can be defined as breaking down into still relatively large market sectors (macro-niches – i.e. cultural tourism, rural tourism, sport tourism, etc.), each capable of further segmentation (micro-niches – i.e. geo-tourism, gastronomy tourism, cycling tourism, etc.). At the other end of the spectrum, niche tourism is focused on very precise small markets that would be difficult to split further*” [12] (p.6). According [12], we can consider several cases of niche tourism address a wide variety of motivations, behaviours and experiences from both the perspective of production and consumption. They provide an integrated picture of niche tourism as a whole, looking at specific scenarios, offering a comprehensive theoretical framework and discussing initiatives, policies and strategies adopted internationally.

In specific, many attempts to describe wine tourism have been made. The most widely accepted definition is: “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 visitors’ [13]. Wine tourism as the intersection between tourist and winemaking activities has been a much explored theme, nationally and internationally, by the scientific community, which has boosted scientific investigation about this issue. This phenomenon is due to the potential that wine tourism has as a destination and a product, not only as an offer, but as something people are looking for. The wine tourism activity involves the participation of a certain group of people, called wine tourists, who look for experiences related to wines and wineries at wine tourism destinations [14]. Wine tourism activities consist of, above all, wine tastings and cellar, wine house and wine museum visits. Currently, and in the future, wine tourism has provided and boosted the creation of genuine and unique tourist experiences, more and more differentiated tailor-made.

The definition and conceptualization of “wine tourism”, according to [15] has not resulted in a uniform approach. When viewed from a marketing perspective emphasis is likely to be placed on determination of the experiences sought by potential and actual wine tourists. In fact, most definitions of wine tourism do relate to the traveler’s motivation and experiences. Thus, “wine tourism” is, simultaneously a form of consumer behavior, a strategy by which destinations develop and market wine-related attractions

and imagery, and a marketing opportunity for wineries to educate, and to sell their products, directly to consumers [15].

There's seems to be a natural link between wine and tourism: "wine is a beverage that is associated with relaxation, communing with others, complementary to food consumption, learning about new things, and hospitality" [16] (p. 423). This is aligned with the vision that the prosperity of a wine region also has to take into consideration association between different critical factors of success – CFS [17]. For example, when a particular region is analysed as a wine tourism destination, the CFS have to be interrelated with the nature of the product it is being offered (the wine and the visitation services), the local lifestyle, the global branding, the land protection, entrepreneurs/individuals, partnerships and community involvement and support. Therefore the wine tourism is a very complex system where there seems to be a self-feeding effect between the tourism and the wine industries [13]. Therefore there are cases where some of the visits are due to the fact that the tourists just happen to be in the region where the winery is located, but without a particular or significant interest in wine, like it is yet the case of the Algarve wine Region in Portugal. But in some cases it is the wine region that attracts visitors that have a particular interest and involvement in wine.

2 The Wine and the Tourism sectors sector in Portugal

Internally the Portuguese wine industry is still a small sector within the national economy. Its weight in the food industry in 2019 is about 12%, and it has around 1.5% to 2.5% of the value in total exports. It employs 1.4% of the Portuguese work force, 1.9% percent of total number of active companies and a GVA of 2.0% of turnover and productive investment in the manufacturing industry. But it has a natural international vocation. On average the Portuguese wine companies export about four times more than other companies from all other sectors. In 2019, and according to ViniPortugal, the Portuguese wine exports reached 820 million euros, a new historic maximum, which represents an increase of 2.5% over the previous year. France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil and Germany form the top-5 of the destination markets for national wines. In global terms, Portugal ranks 9th in the top 10 of the world's largest wine exporters.

The tourism sector in Portugal is the largest export industry. It is responsible for 52.3% of the services exports and of 19.7% of total exports. Portugal had, in 2019, 26.9 million guests, 7.3% more than in 2018. Of these nearly 27 million people, 61% were foreigners. The tourist revenues registered an 8.7% contribution to the national GDP. Its employment has a weight of 6.9% in the national economy (336.8 thousand jobs in 2019). It also had an increase of 8.1% in the growth rate in tourist revenues and more 7.3 in the overall income in the last year. It is clear from these figures that the wine sector has a lot to profit from a closer association with the touristic sector, even only if the wine tourism can attract a smaller segment of the tourists that visit Portugal every year. The estimated number by Turismo de Portugal, of wine tourist in Portugal in 2016 was of about 2.2 million.

2.1. Wine Product

But why would wine as a product motivate a particular group of tourist to choose a particular wine region to visit? The selection of a wine with simultaneous consideration of a multitude of attributes requires knowledge on the consumer side. However, only a few consumers have this deeper knowledge of wine. Wine is considered a complex product. Most of its attributes tend to remain constant over time. Extrinsic variables like brand, producer, label and production factors such as vineyard, and grape varieties, amongst others, tend to be stable. However, the intrinsic nature of the product that determines its taste (factor such as acidity, sweetness, alcohol, sugar levels, etc.) will vary according to non-controllable factors such as climate or plagues on every vintage and over time [18]. This poses a potential problem to the wine consumers on their wine choice as in most cases they cannot taste the wine before buying it [19]. Wine tourism is an excellent way to overcome this difficulty by providing wine tastings in an ideal setting where the consumers can, in many cases, redeem what they pay for the visit by buying the wines of the winery they just visited.

However the limitation caused by the low cost air companies baggage limitation. For instance, and according [1], the Great Wine Capitals Best Of Wine Tourism Awards celebrate innovation and excellence in wine tourism throughout the nine greatest wine regions in the world. The Best Of program provides an opportunity for wineries and other visitor-serving businesses in each region to gain exposure and recognition for their commitment to presenting leading wine tourism options while giving visitors a one-stop list of the best places to experience. This International competition is designed to reward businesses in each member region that have distinguished themselves in terms of the excellence of their facilities and delivering quality experiences to visitors in various categories. Awards are given in the following seven categories: accommodation, wine tourism restaurants, sustainable wine tourism practices, architecture & landscape art & culture, innovative wine tourism experiences, wine tourism services [20].

These variables interact in a way that seems to differ from other products such as the expected relationship between origin and brand. This will have an impact also on the choice of wineries to visit. There's seems to be a strong connection between the wine region that is selected to visit and the wine preferences [21].

This indicates that the Wine Product involvement plays a key role in the decision making regarding the wine tourism destinations [22]. However some visits may be intentional while others may be based on opportunity (i.e., proximity, schedules, other member of the family interests, weather, etc.). Nonetheless wine tourism is usually classified as a form of special interest tourism [13] because of the main segment that searches for this type of tourism tend to exhibit a higher knowledge or curiosity about the wine product and its production. A significant consumer segment is eager to get more information and also better ways to evaluate the wine's quality [23].

2.2. Winescape in wine tourism

The general experience happens during “winescape” [13; 24]. [25] (pp. 6-7) refer to the definition of “winescape” as the interaction of "natural landscape and scenario; architectural heritage and artefacts inside a wine house; vineyards of a wine house; door of the wine house and wines; complementary products and services; signalling; and people at a wine house". Thomas, [26] (pp. 5-6, 27) conceptualized 7 key attributes of *winescape* which “significantly contribute to the satisfaction of wine with the tourist”. The 7 attributes are: 1) *winescape* set: natural landscape (for example, vineyards); 2) *winescape* atmosphere: built environment (wineries, wine house doors, buildings and heritage); 3) wine product: wine products (reputed wines, variety of wines and wines with aggregated value); 4) *winescape* complementary product: complementary services (restaurants, lodging, local production and craftwork); 5) *winescape* signalling: signalling and information (signalling of informative materials); 6) *winescape* layout: connection between layout and facilities with physical attractions (wine routes and roads); 7) *winescape* staff service: staff that interacts with wine tourist.

2.3. Main motivations of wine tourist

[27] and [15] developed researches about visitors' motivations to visit wine regions and summarized the 10 main motivations: (1) wine tastings; (2) acquire knowledge about wine; (3) live and experiment wine production; (4) enjoy the beauty of the rural environment (vineyards); (5) wine gastronomy; (6) have fun at wine events and festivals; (7) enjoy wine culture and environment (romance and elegance); (8) assessment of architecture, art of wine houses and cellars, cities and villages from the regions; (9) learn about the ecologic aspects of wine; (10) learn about the benefits of wine for our health. The visit is short and the motivations that mediate the visitors' behaviour are mainly characterized by the hedonic load, regardless the visitor which was analysed [28].

3 Conceptual Model Proposed

Preliminary research was conducted in order to develop the research instrument. Details of the preliminary research are given below. After the collection of the preliminary data, empirical data would be collected through fieldwork. This study discusses the increasing phenomena of wine tourism and the relationship marketing perspective associated to specific tourism contexts. Based in the literature review, we propose a model that connects Antecedentes: Wine Knowledge (WK) e Prior Involvement (PI) Experience: Emotions (E), Consequences: Involvement Enhancement (IE) e Word of Mouth (WOM). Several studies in marketing and wine tourism contexts have discussed the

association relationship antecedents, experience and consequences. An extensive review of the current literature reveals that no integrated theoretical framework for the holistic study of the niche tourism industry exists. The proposed research model not only has implications for future research, but also provides useful information for practitioners in the wine tourism. Based on this discussion, we propose that, in a context of wine tourism, the increase in trust, cooperation and commitment facilitates the development of behavioural satisfaction and loyalty.

The proposed model is presented in figure 1. Hence we propose that: H1: wine knowledge has a positive effect on emotions of wine tourism; H2: prior involvement has a positive effect on emotions of wine tourism; H3: emotions has a positive effect on involvement enhancement of wine tourism; H4: emotions has a positive effect on word of mouth of wine tourism.

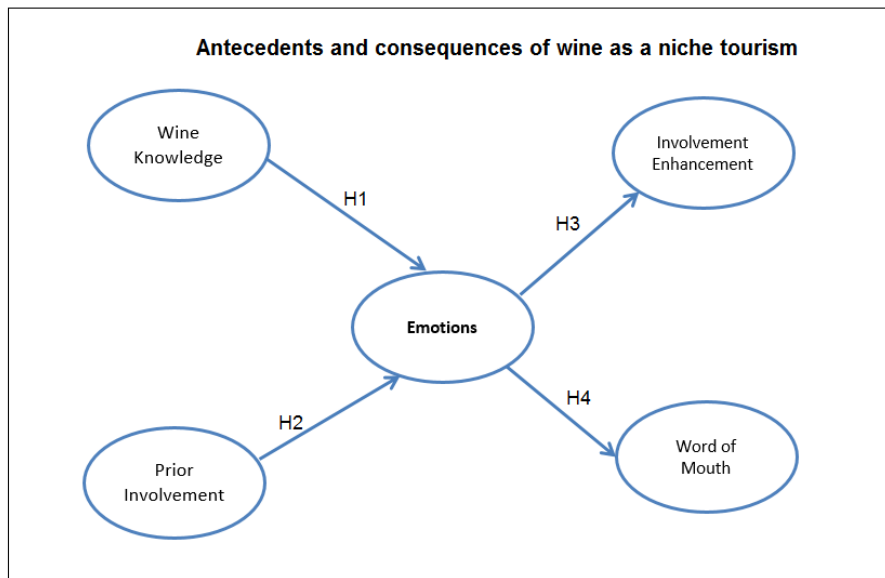


Figure 1: Antecedents and consequences of wine as a niche tourism

4. Final considerations and next steps

Wine tourism presents more and more potential regarding quantity and quality. Wine tourism has undoubtedly been a trend which has become cemented by quality and offer diversity. Due to that, it has attracted an increasing number of wine tourists who visit

and explore wine tourism spaces, registering an increasing flow which has made our country a more competitive and attractive wine tourist destination. This study discusses the increasing phenomena of wine tourism and the relationship marketing perspective associated to specific tourism contexts.

Based in the literature review, we propose a model that connects Antecedentes: Wine Knowledge (WK) e Prior Involvement (PI) Experience: Emotions (E), Consequences: Involvement Enhancement (IE) e Word of Mouth (WOM). The wine and wine tourism heritage is more than enough to justify the proposal of the conceptual model presented, strengthening wine tourism as a niche tourism. Likewise, there is an urge to put wine tourism and propel it at the level to other kinds of niche tourism worldwide known. Thus, in the wine tourism market, recognizing specific factors in wine travelers' repurchase decision making processes and understanding their specific role are becoming more and more important for any destination country and its attendant wine products and services. In this manuscript the authors have argued that definitions and models of wine tourism need to be more encompassing and include attachment perspective and guest experiences. With the change in demand and image for mass tourism, niche tourism products and markets have become more significant, both for the development of global tourism and for specific destinations.

We intend to show how these valid questions can be answered by introducing causal modelling and discussing one approach to it, structural equation modelling (SEM), which is a rigorous technique for building and testing such models. It is an advanced statistical methodology that delivers models and results that are easy to understand and employ. We intent to confirm that a causal relationship exists (i.e. measurement over time should confirm that change in one variable precedes change in the other; a controlled experiment is required that changes a single variable; the direction of causality must be correctly specified; the relationship must not disappear when common causes of both are removed and the causal effect 'makes sense' in domain knowledge) [29].

This study has already identified that the global movement of tourism is seemingly showing an increased focus on the niche product or niche service. In this case, the question seems to be whether the further growth in demand for wine management and wine tourism - as a niche tourism example -products will continue until they become a form of mass tourism. A future study should include emotional factors. The new vogue of wine tourism forces us to challenge and re-visit the power relationships that exist within contemporary tourism and the host-guest relationship. As an interdisciplinary approach, this research contributes positively to the development of theory in relationship marketing and tourism contexts in wine management (theoretical implications).

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