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## Encouraging wine storytelling in the tourist experience: a preliminary study

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**Abstract.** Wine tourism has long since ceased to be just a visit to wine producing regions and wineries, just to taste or buy wine. In fact, wine tourism has become more complex as a tourist product, due to the requirement of visitors to obtain a differentiated experience, composed of multiple elements. 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 preliminary approach aims to evaluate the role of wine storytelling as an antecedent in the wine tourism experience, namely on other constructs as winescape attributes, sensorial attraction, wine excitement and cultural experience. A range of practical implications are provided for wine tourism managers, marketers and wine guided tours namely on the importance on the training the storytelling skill by the wine cellars staff. 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, storytelling, 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]. The tourist's involvement with the visited region results in a state of "wine excitement", which starts already with the decision making about the trip and extends throughout the visit [2]. This wine excitement makes the visitor more receptive to absorb the stories that make the wines, the producer and the region, to stand out in their minds and to make it a memorable experience. It is widely accepted that service providers involved in the wine tourism product, must deliver an experience that encompasses, not only the wines and gastronomy of the producing region, but mainly the global environment i.e., the winescape and its culture and tradition [1].

This study aims to evaluate the preliminary insights of wine storytelling as an antecedent in the wine tourism experience, namely on other constructs as winescape attributes, sensorial attraction, wine excitement and cultural experience and to explore the moderation effect of winescape attributes and sensorial attraction between storytelling and wine excitement and cultural experience. A literature review relating constructs domain, scale items and hypothesis development follows, methodology approach applied. Finally, the conclusions, implications, and future research directions are presented.

### 1 Special Interest Tourism (SIT) and Wine storytelling

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 [3]. It is multifaceted and geographically complex activity, where different services are ordered and delivered in different stages, from origin to destination [1]. 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 [4-6].

This emotional connection that allows visitors to absorb the cultural heritage, from social and landscape elements of the region and its producers, often starts with wine tasting [7]. By establishing an emotional connection with visitors, producers can position themselves in their minds as “brands of love”. This positioning allows them to differentiate themselves from their competitors, whether they are regions or direct competitors [8]. For the story to capture the attention of visitors, the narrative must contain elements of authenticity and emotion that coincide with the intention of the visit. The fact that each region and producer use different grapes and vinification methods, allied to the specific conditions of the wine terroir and the winescape, allows to build personalized narratives [7]. The experience of wine tourism is coated with hedonism, being wine a product that aims to offer sensations that give us pleasure through the senses [10]. The sensory experience when tasting wines is transversal to any visitor, regardless of their level of knowledge about oenology and the ability to distinguish the characteristics of the wines or the most professional method of tasting them [11]. The sensory analysis of tasted wines at the winery is influenced by the involvement with winescape and affect perception, memory, and emotions, regarding wines, the producer and the wine region [12].

## **2 The Portuguese Wine Industry and Covid-19 Implications**

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 [1].

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 [1]. 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.

However, recently, [13] demonstrated that infectious disease outbreaks (including COVID-19) impeded on tourism growth given the industry's reliance on human mobility. At the same time, however, the threats international tourism poses to global public health during a pandemic should also well recognized [14]. As Covid-19 spread started globally from China to the rest of the world, in the APAC region, North America, Africa and Europe, the virus is as contagious economically as it is medically. The social media has been continuously reporting the situation on the national or regional level [15].

### 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 role of wine storytelling as an antecedent in the wine tourism experience, namely on other constructs as winescape attributes, sensorial attraction, wine excitement and cultural experience. A range of practical implications are provided for wine tourism managers, marketers and wine guided tours namely on the importance on the training the storytelling skill by the wine cellars staff.

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 stories should include elements that attract the attention of visitors, causing excitement around the region and its wines.

Wine as a cultural product acts as a catalyst between culture, history, and landscape, through storytelling. Each sip of wine not only fills the mouth with sensations, but simultaneously fills the mind with images and the soul with feelings [16]. As such, we hypothesize:

*H1a: Storytelling positively relates to winescape attributes*

*H1b: Storytelling positively relates to sensorial attraction*

*H1c: Storytelling positively relates to wine excitement*

*H1d: Storytelling positively relates to cultural experience*

The wines produced in a region, establish a relationship with the traditions and its inhabitants and with the local history and heritage, because they are the main motivation that originates the visit [17]. The essence of wine tourism is, therefore, based on the exploration of the various senses through the experiences provided by the elements that constitute the winescape [18]. Hence, the hypotheses are as follows:

*H2a: Winescape attributes positively relates to wine excitement*

*H2b: Winescape attributes positively relates to cultural experience*

*H2c: Winescape attributes mediates the relation between storytelling and wine excitement*

*H2d: Winescape attributes mediates the relation between storytelling and cultural experience*

Finally, the use of storytelling in wine tourism allows the visitor to absorb the history of the producer and the wine brand, the region heritage, its myths, traditions, and rituals, based on three narrative styles: descriptive, immersive and technical [19]. Drawing on these premises, the hypothesis is as follows:

*H3a: Sensorial attraction positively relates to wine excitement*

*H3b: Sensorial attraction positively relates to cultural experience*

*H3c: Sensorial attraction mediates the relation between storytelling and wine excitement*

*H3d: Sensorial attraction mediates the relation between storytelling and cultural experience*

#### **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 wine storytelling tourism contexts.

With a preliminary perspective, this manuscript has already identified that the global movement of tourism is seemingly showing an increased focus on the niche (wine) product or 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.

This is a preliminary approach that demonstrates the significant importance combined used of underlying five wine tourism experience dimensions having the storytelling has the key antecedent of the wine experience. Moreover, this study extends the scope into a wine tourism context, bringing new key drivers focused on wine tourist behavioural responses within visits to the wine cellars.

The storytelling around wines and their producers is invariably linked to the region to which they belong, and to their terroir (climate, soils, and grapes). Hence, the narrative of a wine cannot be separated from the winescape where it is produced [16]. According to [20], storytelling about (wine destination) places is recognized as a tool to enhance the reputation of regions as they compete for tourism and economic development spending in the digital age.

Place, destinations, cities, and regions offer distinctive characteristics beyond the physical geographic and topographic elements, especially concerning produce from a

particular area, region, country or territory [21]. This multisensory experience is based on the search for new hedonic sensations, from visitors emotional connection to wine, the region and its culture and heritage [18].

On the other hand, in 2020, the global outbreak of COVID-19 has made an enormous impact on a wide variety of different industries. The slump in outbound expenditure has caused a severe damage to such services as transport, tourism, catering, retail and entertainment. It is estimated by the World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC) that COVID-19 will cause the global tourism industry a huge loss that amounts to a minimum of 22 billion dollars [22]. According to the General Directorate of Health in Portugal, the new coronavirus, designated SARS-CoV-2, was first identified in December 2019 in China, in the city of Wuhan (Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market). This new agent has never been identified in humans before. The source of the infection is still unknown and the route of transmission is under investigation. Person-to-person transmission has been confirmed and infection already exists in several countries and in respondents who had not visited the Wuhan market [15]. Infectious disease outbreaks (including COVID-19) impeded on tourism growth given the industry's reliance on human mobility. At the same time, however, the threats international tourism poses to global public health during a pandemic should also well recognized [14], in specific the case of culinary tourism [23, 24]. According to [25], the COVID-19 pandemic can have a profound impact on power relations between companies and their passengers and destination stakeholders in the sense that the companies' future operation can be largely contingent on attitudes of their passengers and destination stakeholders toward tourism in the face of public health risk

A future study should include other emotional factors (e.g. brand love, commitment, trust, perceived disconfirmation). As an interdisciplinary approach, this paper contributes positively to the development of theory in relationship marketing and tourism contexts in wine management (theoretical and practical implications) [1]. However, the recommendations should be considered within the framework and limitations of the research: a convenience sample and set in two very established but also quite standardized in wine sites terms of visit format. Other research using similar methodological approaches and instruments in a new world setting, can provide different insights on the storytelling relevance and impact on the other constructs.

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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