

## AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INFORMATION AND TRAINING NEEDS OF ROMANIAN KNOWLEDGEABLE WINE CONSUMERS

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### Abstract

*This work focuses on the evaluation of the usefulness of some tools used internationally for transmitting more information about wines to consumers in order to stimulate their interest in this horticultural product. On one hand, the importance of wine contests is assessed in relation to the consumers' selection of wines. Their knowledge regarding wine contests, what represents a medal-winning wine for them and to what extent they trust this marketing tool were some of the evaluated aspects and the responses from consumers were also correlated to their self-evaluation of their own knowledge about wines. On the other hand, the usefulness of a wine museum was assessed as a tool for increasing the interest in wine in general. The declared needs of the consumers for a certain type of training and the amount of wine consumed were also correlated to their knowledge about wine. These results showed that the importance that consumers attached to wine contests is low and the interest for a wine museum is even lower, therefore the information provided to consumers should be increased first if these otherwise powerful tools are to be applied efficiently at some time in the future.*

**Keywords:** wine information, wine contest, wine museum

### INTRODUCTION

In this era of information technology, any business needs to be promoted by making use of modern tools to spread the knowledge around efficiently. In our society, wine is regarded not only as a food companion, but also as a tradition carrier and cultural asset of the people from a certain region.

In Romania, the wine tradition has deep roots, but some of the ancient heritage was lost during the communist times, therefore the involvement of the present day people into the cultural aspects related to wine should be reconstructed.

In countries with uninterrupted strong tradition in wine culture, marketing and information tools such as the wine contests and wine museums are regarded as natural and useful for regional wine promotion.

In Romania, wine contests appeared only after the collapse of communism in 1989, and were received very well by the public. A series of national and regional wine contests were organized since then, some of them

disappearing after a while due to lack of funding, some other appearing anew thanks to the enthusiasm of certain business oriented associations and groups. For example, in the 2011 Romania, two wine contests were organized in accordance to the rules of international wine contests [3], two national ones in Timisoara [13] and Alba Iulia [10] and another one, international, in Bucharest [8], under the auspices of the OIV [14]. Some other local and atypical contests were also organized, aside of some wine fairs, all meant to increase the interest of the consumers in correctly produced and priced wines. In this regard, many knowledgeable consumers are aware of the wine contests and some of them do follow with pleasure the results of the wines or the performance of the producers.

On the other hand, the wine museums are virtually unknown in Romania, although some very small wine museum exists, located in viticultural regions such as Dragasani [4], Harlau [7], Golesti [6] Teremia [12], Minis [5].

This work was performed to evaluate the importance the knowledgeable consumers attach to wine contests and wine museums, so that the use of these tools could be improved and their power as information communicators be increased. Moreover, the attitude of these consumers for other types of information communication or their training needs in the field of wine were also evaluated, by the use of a specially designed questionnaire [1].

The wine consumption and appreciation should be based on correct and targeted information and the training needs identified should be fulfilled efficiently.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

The questionnaire used for the evaluation included, in its second part, certain questions for the evaluation of the aspects to which the consumer attaches more importance (such as the price or brand, region, producer notoriety), direct questions regarding the opinion on wines awarded with a medal in a wine contest and the correctness of evaluations in wine contests, as well as questions on training information needs with indirect reference to the need for a wine museum. The survey included also questions regarding the self-evaluation of the wine knowledge and the general wine consumption.

The questionnaire was filled up by a number of 167 respondents who took part in the Good Wine Fair in 18-20 November 2011 in Bucharest. Most of respondents were assisted by the Good Wine Fair personnel, the questions being read to them by a survey assistant.

No biographical or demographical data were collected in this survey.

The answers to each question were quantified by allocating points to the answer given to single choice questions and fractions of numbers to the answers selected in multiple choice questions. In a question with multiple possible answers, in case 1 answer was selected it received 1 point, in case two answers were selected both answers received a fraction of 1/2 point, while in case of *m*

answers selected, each answer received 1/*m* points. The data collected were processed with the Excel software package.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The evaluation was based on a questionnaire with 10 questions [1]. However, the first 4 questions of the survey, dealing with the consumers' preferences for a certain type, style or provenance of wine, were left aside, being out of the scope of this analysis.

The first question (*QV*) taken into account for the purpose of this study investigated factors likely to influence the decision of buying a certain wine. This *QV* question included many possible apparently untargeted answers.

*QV. How do you select a wine to drink at home? In accordance with the:*

1. Price
2. Brand
3. Producer's notoriety
4. Region/country of provenance notoriety
5. Awards obtained in wine contests
6. Other criterion: .....

In fact, this question is meant especially to evaluate the importance the consumers attach to the awards obtained by a wine in contests, when confronted with other more powerful factors which usually influence the decision of buying.

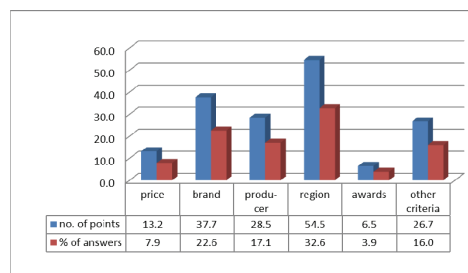


Fig. 1. Distribution of answers selected by the Romanian consumers in 2011 as being of importance when the decision to buy a wine is taken.

As expected, the awards obtained by a wine in a contest are not likely to weigh much as compared to the notoriety of wine brand, region of provenance, or of producer. Fig. 1 contains the distribution of the answers selected by the consumers as being important

for the decision to buy a wine to drink at home.

As the survey was conducted on knowledgeable consumers, most of them appreciated more and based their decision of buying more on the notoriety of the provenance region (32.6%), followed by the brand notoriety (22.6%) and producer's notoriety (17.1%), as well as other relevant criteria related to quality (16.0%). Because this was question was partially open, the relevant criteria were also detailed, but the responses are not discussed here.

Less importance was attached by this category of wine consumers on price (7.9%), meaning that they prefer quality and are not looking for the lowest price in the market.

Although we interviewed mostly informed consumers of wines, we noticed, even from this first question, that an alarming low level of importance (3.9%) was attached to awards obtained by wines in national or international competitions.

Unless corrected soon, this fact may lead to a decrease in the participation of the wine producers in competitions and in investing in this type of advertising.

Therefore, a deeper investigation was conducted, to evaluate the level of understanding of the wine contest result by the consumers (question *QVI*), to which direct answers or comments or expected.

*QVI. In your opinion a wine awarded with a medal in a wine contest is:*

1. The best wine obtained in that vintage year
2. A distinct wine, worth buying and keeping
3. A wine recommended by some experts
4. A better wine than others in the same category
5. A proper wine, which was sent and evaluated in a wine contest; many other 1000 wine out there can be better, but were not sent for the evaluation in that wine contest.
6. I do not trust the awards and evaluations in wine contest
7. Other comments:

This specific question was meant to assess directly the knowledge of consumers regarding wine contests and the importance they attach to wine contests as a warranty for wine quality. The points obtained by each

answer selected and the distribution of these answers (quantified in %) are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Quantitative evaluation of the importance given by consumers to various aspects related to wine contest awards.

Aspects related to wine contest awards	Points (no. of selected answers)	% of selected answers
1. Wine for keeping	11	7
2. Best wine of the year	19	11
3. Wine recommended by experts	65	39
4. One of the best wines in its category of quality	33	20
5. Indifferent reaction: normal drinkable wine evaluated in a contest	29	17
6. Do not trust contest results	8	5
7. Other comments	2	1
Total	167	100

The first two answers in Table 1, which account for a total of 18% of the selected answers, represent an overestimation of the importance of an award obtained in a wine contest; a wine which obtains a medal is not necessarily a wine for keeping in a collection and is definitely not the best wine of a year. At the other extreme, in the last 3 answers (no. 5, 6 and 7) of Table 1, we can see that a sum of 23% of the consumers have an indifferent reaction to wine contests, with 5% among them not trusting the results).

The answers no. 3 and 4, accounting for 59% of responses, demonstrate that many knowledgeable consumers have a good image regarding what an award won in a wine contest really signifies. Still, as already shown in Fig. 1, they do not pay too much attention to this aspect when they select their wines, probably due to a lack of trust in the accuracy of the evaluations or even in the correctness of the wine contests.

For several reasons, we expected this reaction towards some wine contests, therefore in question *QVIII* we assessed the trust of consumers in wine contests organized in Romania and abroad.

*QVII. Do you believe the Romanian wines are more appropriately judged in:*

1. International wine contests organized abroad

2. International wine contests organized in Romania
3. National or local wine contests organized in Romania.
4. In all wine contests the evaluation is the same, the experts in the jury being specialized and trained to constantly evaluate the samples.
5. I have no idea about the procedure of wine evaluation in a wine contest.

Table 2. Quantitative evaluation of the consumers' trust into the judgement of wines in several types of wine contests

Consumers' trust into the judgement of wines in:	Points (no. of selected answers)	% of selected answers
1. Contests abroad	47	28
2. Romanian contests with international judges	29.5	18
3. Romanian contests with Romanian judges	21.5	13
4. All types of contests are similar	35	21
5. Know nothing about wine evaluation in contests	34	20
Total	167	100

The degree of trust in the Romanian wine contests is reflected in the conviction that Romanian wines are better judged in contests organized abroad. The degree of trust in wine contests is divided among contests organized abroad (28%, answer no. 1) and Romanian wine contests (31%, answers no. 2 and 3), with another group of 21% of respondents considering all the wine contests alike and of the same performance (answer no. 4).

Among the contests with international judges, the wine contests organised abroad (answer no. 1) are considered more trustworthy than our contests with international judges (answer no. 2), with 28% of the expressed preferences as opposed to 18%.

This question goes deeper into the wine contest issue, forcing the respondents to share their trust or distrust in contests organized in Romania with Romanian judges. Only 13% expressed their trust in Romanian wine contests with Romanian judges.

For those consumers who do not pay attention to awards in contests there was the option to express no opinion by selecting answer no. 5. Consequently, 20% of the interviewed

persons admitted that they have little understanding regarding the evaluation performed in a wine contest.

Therefore, more transparency regarding the organisation, evaluation and award allocation is necessary, to make consumers trust the results of a wine contest and buy an award-winning wine, knowing exactly what to expect from that wine. For the producers too, the improvement in the eyes of the consumers of the image of these wine contests is imperative, if they are to use the awards obtained as marketing tools. At present, many producers participate with samples in wine contests to compare themselves with the competition, but not to influence the decision of the consumer.

Regarding the necessity of a wine museum, considering that museums of all kinds seem out of fashion and are shunned by younger generations, we did not want to ask a direct answer and get distorted (false positive) results. People are reluctant to admit they would not go and spend their free time in a museum and they might have selected the answer supporting the necessity of a wine museum, even though their intention of visiting such an institution was null. Accordingly, we included only a single answer (no. 5) concerning the wine museum into a larger question (*QX*) regarding all kind of information needs about wine.

*QX. In order to improve your knowledge about wine, what kind of information delivering or training method would you prefer?*

1. Basic informative classes organized by wine specialists
2. Informal wine-tastings, without too much technical information about wine
3. Speciality counselling at the sale point
4. Dedicated literature (written or posted on the internet)
5. Visits to Museums dedicated to wine.

This combined question is aiming to assess the information needs of the wine consumers and their preferred methods of getting this information, in the same time trying to indirectly establish the impact of founding a wine museum. The quantitative results

obtained from the multi-choice answer selections are included in Table 3.

Table 3. Quantitative evaluation of the consumers' instruction needs about wine and preferred methods for training (analysis based on multiple choice answers)

Types of instruction methods in wine field	Points (no. of selected answers)	% of selected answers
1. Organized by experts	55.01	32.9
2. Casual winetasting	47.43	28.4
3. Counseling at the point of sell	27.77	16.6
4. Written materials, including internet	21.94	13.1
5. Visits to a wine museum	14.85	8.9
Total	167	100

Many of the respondents attach importance to learning from the experts (32.9%, answer no. 1) and not by themselves from written materials or internet (13.1%, answer no. 4). In addition, they also expect to practice in class what they learn theoretically, preferring to participate in winetasting sessions, fact partly expressed in answer no. 2. This answer also includes the preferences of a group who would like to taste wines only for pleasure and do not want/need to be taught too many things about wines. This practical winetasting, both for pleasure and for learning purposes, accounts for a total of 28.4% of the selected training methods.

As predicted, the idea of wine museum is not very appealing, only 8.9% (answer no. 5) of the responses pointing to the necessity of such an institution. The consumers do not see the museum as a place where wine can be experienced, but rather as another written source of information. The fact that 32.9% (answer no. 1) are willing to learn more about wine from the experts is a starting point toward founding an interactive wine museum, designed for the transfer of knowledge rather than just presenting facts in a static way.

In order to establish the preferred training needs in the field of wine, the responses to the question QX were re-evaluated, by taking into account only the single option responses, to which 1 point was granted. All the other multiple-choice responses were grouped separately under the title "many types of instruction". This group includes the

respondents who actually do not have a preferred training option. The quantitative results obtained as single option answer are included in Table 4.

Table 4. Quantitative evaluation of the consumers' instruction needs about wine and preferred methods for training (analysis based on single choice answers)

Types of instruction methods in wine field	Points (no. of selected answers)	% of selected answers
1. Organized by experts	40	24.0
2. Casual winetasting	40	24.0
3. Counseling at the point of sell	18	10.8
4. Written materials, including internet	19	11.4
5. Visits to a wine museum	10	6.0
6. Many types of instruction	40	24.0
Total	167	100

By excluding the respondents who actually do not have a preferred training option (those grouped in category no. 6, "many types of instruction"), the respondents who expressed a clear interest for wine museum is even less, reaching only 6%. The difference of 2.9% (up to 8.9% of selected answers shown in Table 3) represents the percentage of respondents who would choose to go to a wine museum among others.

To better understand the needs of the knowledgeable consumers in terms of training, we tried to correlate the actual wine drinking habits of our respondents with their self-evaluated knowledge about wine. Question *QVIII* and *QIX* ask the respondents to evaluate their wine consumption and to rate their knowledge about wine, respectively.

*QVIII. What is your approximate wine consumption?*

1. I do not consume wine or I rarely try wine.
2. I consume one bottle of 0.75l /week
3. I consume 2 bottles of 0.75l /week
4. I consume more than 2 bottles of 0.75l /week

*QIX. On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your knowledge about wine?*

Question *QVIII* does not intend to determine the wine consumption of our respondents, but to correlate their preference for wine with the knowledge about wine and the willingness to receive more specific information about wine. For this reason, the answer no. 1 includes

both “I do not consume wine” and “I rarely try wine” options, because both show little implication in wine consumption and wine culture. With the rest of the answers groups of wine consumption level were established.

Question *QIX* is the only question that can be sensitive for the respondent, who is placed in the position to self-evaluate his/her competencies as regards to wine. The responses should be interpreted with caution, since some of the respondents tend to overrate their competencies out of self-esteem, while others may simply not know where to place their level of knowledge on a scale. Even though such self-evaluations are often criticised for their lack of reliability [2], we decided to use this information even so, in order to better evaluate the information needs of the population about wine.

Table 5. Wine consumption groups and their average self-rating regarding knowledge about wine

Wine consumption (in bottles of 0.75 l)	Points (no. of selected answers)	% of selected answers	Average and standard deviation for self-rating of knowledge about wine
Rarely (under one bottle a week)	28	17	5 ± 2.1
One bottle a week	76	46	6 ± 1.7
2 bottles a week	35	21	7 ± 1.8
More than 2 bottles a week	28	17	7 ± 1.5
Total	167	100	

We gathered the information from both *QVIII* and *QIX* questions in a common database, for each group with a certain level of wine consumption collecting the marks granted by those respondents to self-evaluate their competencies in wine. Then, the average mark for self-evaluated competencies was determined for each group of wine consumption level. The results are presented in Table 5.

We can see that 17% of the respondents rarely consume wine, but they have shown interest in wine culture by coming to a wine fair – an encouraging result. Among the knowledgeable consumers participating in the survey 46% enjoy wine in moderate quantities and only 17% declare a consumption of more than 2 bottle/week (which represents more

than 72 l/year, hence more than double the wine consumption per capita in Romania in 2008, which was officially 25.30 [9]).

The self-evaluation of wine competencies is very well correlated with the number of bottles consumed per week (Fig. 2). In order to quantify the categories of wine consumption entitled “rare consumption” and “more than 2 bottles a week”, to the first category 0.1 bottles/week and to the last category 3 bottles/week were allocated, respectively.

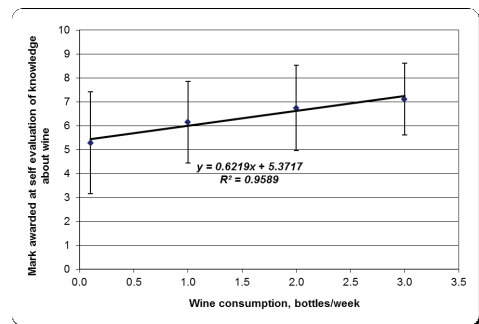


Fig. 2. Correlation of the wine consumed per week and the self-evaluation of the knowledge about wines.

Most statisticians say that one cannot use correlations with rating scales [11], because the mathematics of this technique assumes the differences between numbers in the scale are exactly equal, while in fact that may not be the case. As we can also observe with our data, many respondents avoided the extremes of the 1 to 10 scale, placing themselves in a “safer” position, somewhere in the middle of the scale. Therefore, the true difference between marks 3 and 4 may not be equal to the difference between marks 6 and 7, although arithmetically the difference appears equal to 1 in both cases. However, many survey researchers do use correlations with rating scales, because they found out that the results usually reflect the real world in a satisfactory fashion [11].

In our case too, the linear regression (Fig. 2) shows a very good correlation, the equation derived ( $y=0.62x+5.35$ ) having a correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.98, meaning that these two variables (wine consumption and self-evaluation of wine knowledge) are strongly directly related. The square of the coefficient



(or  $r^2$ ) is 0.96, meaning that 96% of the variation in one variable is related to the variation in the other.

Therefore, we can safely assume that the more wine a consumer drinks per week, the more knowledgeable he/she thinks is in the field of wine.

However, the marks awarded for self-evaluation of knowledge are not significantly different from one group of level of wine consumption to another. The test ANOVA on ranks (Table 6), performed for the marks awarded to self-evaluation shows, however, that significant differences appear only among non-drinkers and heavy drinkers (zero bottles versus 3 bottles a week).

Table 6. ANOVA on ranks performed for the marks awarded to self-evaluation (Kruskal-Wallis One Way Analysis of Variance on Ranks)

Consumption Bottles/week	Group	N	Missing	Median	25%	75%
0	Col 1	28	0	6	3	7
1	Col 2	76	0	6	5	7
2	Col 3	35	0	7	6	8
3	Col 4	28	0	7	6	8

H = 14.155 with 3 degrees of freedom. (P = 0.003)

The results in Table 6 show that differences in the median values among the treatment groups are greater than would be expected by chance and that there is a statistically significant difference (P=0.003) among some groups. In Table 7, by Dunn's Method (an all pairwise multiple comparison procedure) we determined that significant differences exist only among Col 1 and Col 4, that is among the self-ratings of non-drinkers and heavy drinkers groups.

Table 7. Comparison on pairs for the groups of average marks awarded to self-evaluation

Comparison	Diff of Ranks	Q	P<0.05
Col 4 vs Col 1	43.25	3.347	Yes
Col 4 vs Col 2	27.485	2.571	No
Col 4 vs Col 3	11.968	0.976	Do Not Test
Col 3 vs Col 1	31.282	2.552	No
Col 3 vs Col 2	15.517	1.571	Do Not Test
Col 2 vs Col 1	15.765	1.475	Do Not Test

Overall, the opinion of the wine fair visitors about their own knowledge of wine is rather good, the average mark for their knowledge being  $7 \pm 1.7$ ,

irrespective of the amount of wine consumed, with the exception of the group with no wine consumption) with an average of  $5 \pm 2.1$ .

These average marks obtained for self-evaluation show the need for more training of consumers in the field of wine.

## CONCLUSIONS

The survey shows that there is a need for more correct and readily available information about wines.

The knowledgeable consumers generally have a good impression about their own knowledge and understanding about wines, 51% of them granting themselves marks equal or above 7.

However, the wine consumers still lack the correct perception of the meaning of a wine contest and the significance of a medal obtained in a wine contest. For these consumers a campaign of information and promotion of wine contests seems necessary, with more transparent procedures and clear messages. Such a campaign will also help producers, who do not have enough incentives to send their wines to evaluation in wine contests, thus missing the opportunity to compare their wines with those of competitors, re-adjust the technologies when necessary and promote more efficiently their wines.

The organizations involved in wine business or in promoting wine culture should be more motivated to organise courses and practical sessions of wine appreciation to increase the attraction of this field for the general population. This survey was conducted on knowledgeable consumers and many deficiencies were identified. The sample population that participated in this survey is not representative for Romania in general, but only for the wine connoisseurs, who deliberately chose to visit a wine fair. However, there is reason to believe that the lack of information about wine identified in this sample population is, at least to the same extent, applicable to the entire population of the country. It is logical to assume that the general population is even in more need for training in the field of wine.

For the institution of wine museum, more evaluations should be hereafter performed to

identify the directions for the development of such a project. Before reassessing the reaction of people towards a wine museum, it should be explained to them that the intention is to establish a modern-type institution, where large general information about vine, wine and oenological tourism would be transmitted in a recreational and interactive way.

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