The wine industry has long been interested in understanding what drives consumer behavior regarding wine purchases. And while the marketing literature emphasizes the more obvious external purchasing prompts such as price (Thomas & Pickering, 2003; Mueller et al., 2010), packaging and labeling (Batt & Dean, 2000), brand name (Thomas, 2000), and bottle closure (Barber, Almanza and Donovan, 2006), the consumer behavior literature suggests that this is too complex an issue to be fully captured by these familiar factors (e.g., Barber, Taylor, & Strick, 2009). It should not be surprising, then, that the extant literature suggests that internal drivers also play an important role. For example, Dodd et al. (2005) found that outside sources such as friends, family, and wine reviews prompted customers to select specific wines; Carmichael (2005) found that a wine tourism experience also has a causal relationship to purchasing intentions. Finally, factors unique to the customer may also drive wine selection. For example,
Charters and Pettigrew (2008) found effects associated with situational factors while Olsen et al. (2003) found that self-confidence serves as an antecedent to purchasing intentions.

The purpose of this research is to investigate holistically the causal effects of external factors, internal factors, and personal involvement. To conduct our study we therefore used a push-pull approach (Crompton, 1979) wherein push factors are internal or inner motivations that influence—or push—the consumer regarding a purchasing decision (Heitmann et al., 2007) and pull factors are product-specific attributes that draw—or pull—the consumer toward a specific product (Dieke, 2000). We also integrated personal involvement, which includes consumer attributes such as experience, lifestyle, health concerns, and product involvement (Charters & Pettigrew, 2008). Finally, we used an analytical hierarchy process as a confirmatory measure.

The convenience sample of 232 respondents drawn from attendees at the 2012 National Restaurant Association Show in Chicago was 52% male; the average income was US$72,000 and the mean age was 49. In terms of wine experience, 22% reported 1–4 years of experience, 28% reported 5–9 years, 33% reported 10–14 years, and the remaining 17% reported over 15 years. The majority of respondents indicated that they consumed wine at least once a week and when drinking wine averaged 2.3 glasses per occasion. (Respondents were screened to include only those who purchased wine within the previous 6 months.)

Results regarding external drivers were consistent with findings in prior research (e.g., Celhay & Passebois, 2011) suggesting that product labeling in concert with price was the leading factor leading to purchasing intentions for those with less than 4 years of wine drinking experience. For those with more experience, brand, varietal, and region collectively formed the primary driver. Among internal drivers, the finding suggests that supplementary information such as ratings is
significant but only for less-experienced wine drinkers. Factors related to consumer involvement, particularly what Zaichkowsky (1985) termed personal attributes, such as inherent interests, values, and needs, were the most significant drivers associated with personal involvement. In particular, personal involvement was linked to purchasing intentions when respondents perceived an alignment with their sense of identity, attitudes, and personal values.

These results were supported by the analytical hierarchy process. For example, for more experienced wine consumers, brand had the highest weight, 0.372, followed by region (0.256). Ratings and similar external information had a weight of 0.188 for the entire sample, the highest for the internal drivers. Inherent interests were the most influential by weight (.214) relative to personal involvement and purchasing intention. Collectively, the weights indicated that external drivers—again, those associated with the product—play the leading causal role in purchasing decisions. Contrary to earlier findings (e.g., Jaeger et al., 2009), internal drivers exhibited the weakest effects. Finally, the results of the analytical hierarchy process show that personal involvement had a significantly greater effect on purchasing intentions than internal drivers but not as strong an effect as external drivers.

The primary contribution of this research, then, is the finding that all three categories of factors—external drivers, internal drivers, and personal involvement—affect the purchasing decision. When viewed holistically, however, external drivers are the most important factors. For researchers, these findings paint a richer picture to inform our understanding of consumer wine-purchasing behavior; the findings also provide insight into the purchaser’s cognitive processes. For those in the wine industry, the findings suggest that marketers should focus more resources on leveraging external factors, particularly to reach those with more wine-drinking experience.
While these findings are provocative, the study was subject to several limitations. For example, the sample respondents may not represent the entire wine-drinking population given that all were connected in some way to the hospitality industry and therefore may be more sophisticated wine consumers than those outside the industry. Since the sample was not collected randomly it may be subject to other forms of bias as well. Nonetheless, this research adds to our understanding of wine-related consumer behavior and suggests that still more research is necessary to help us predict purchasing intent.
References


