Lausanne 2024 Abstract Submission

Title
Expanding My (Wine) Horizons: An Investigation of Wine Influencer Guidance Regarding Wine Consumer Self-Construction

I want to submit an abstract for:
Conference Presentation

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Keywords
wine influencers, wine consumers, self-expansion, wine involvement

Research Question
How do consumers incorporate wine into their self-concepts?
What motivates consumers to incorporate wine into their self-concepts?

Methods
Qualitative data were obtained from wine influencer publications and analyzed in accordance with guidance from Charmaz (2006), including a reflexive process entailing initial, focused, and theoretical coding.

Results
Motivations, activities, experiences, and outcomes of self-expansion in the context of wine consumption and involvement, according to thought leaders in the wine sector, are identified and discussed.

Abstract
The growth of wine consumption in the US wine market has been slowing over the past decade, and 2023 marked the third consecutive year of negative growth for wine sales volume (McMillan, 2024). Industry experts have called for enticing young and diverse consumers into the wine category to expand the consumer base (Larson, 2023).
Wine involvement has been investigated as a key construct regarding wine consumer behavior and the development of the consumer self-concept (Roe & Bruwer, 2017). The present study explores how wine influencers guide consumers to incorporate wine into their lifestyles, and by extension their self-concept. One perspective regarding the addition to, or augmentation of, the cognitive content of the self-concept is presented by Self-Expansion Theory (Aron & Aron, 1986; Mattingly et al., 2020).

Self-Expansion Theory addresses the way in which the environment and experiences can be incorporated into the self-concept, including with respect to relationships and brands (Aron et al., 1992; Reimann & Aron, 2014). Self-expansion is posited to be possible by “(a) anticipating or directly obtaining new identities, perspectives, and resources, especially when experienced in a rapid or intense way; and (b) engaging in novel/interesting/challenging/exciting activities (provided they are not overly stressful or overwhelming)” (Aron et al., 2022). The two primary ways to self-expand are through the Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self (IOS) process (Aron et al., 1992), which entails the creation of overlapping mental representations between the self and other, or through individual self-expansion (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013). Without a clear “other” involved with an experience, individual self-expansion may still occur when novelty, interest, or excitement is involved.

To analyze the prevailing guidance regarding how to become and operate as a wine consumer, secondary qualitative data were obtained from wine influencer publications for analysis. The criteria to qualify wine influencers for the present study included (1) prominence or reach among the wine industry and consumers, (2) that the influencer has had this prominence or reach for at least five years, and (3) recognition as uniquely insightful by wine influencer peers. These criteria were imposed to ensure that the guidance for consumers came from a source which was both widely recognized and accepted. In this sense, the influencer guidance is posited as representative of key wine marketing themes and dynamics, which direct consumers regarding how to incorporate wine into their lives.

Preliminary findings indicate that elements of SET are important for how thought leaders in the wine sector (1) teach about wine and wine culture, and (2) discuss how their own experiences increased the inclusion of wine into their self-concept. The concept of one’s origin story as a wine consumer is highlighted and is associated with including wine for the first time, or including increasingly including wine, in the self-concept in a highly authentic sense. The IOS process was discussed in terms of becoming a wine consumer via romantic partners. Introducing others to wine, and the reactions to those introductions, increased the importance of wine and facilitated the development of wine preferences. Gaining new wine knowledge or perspectives is discussed as a prerequisite for obtaining benefits regarding (1) increasing prospects for further self-expansion with wine, (2) maximizing the hedonic benefits of wine, and (3) various social dynamics. In this sense, wine self-expansion serves as a motivator for further wine self-expansion predicated on prospects for self-enhancement, self-consistency or self-authentication, and hedonic benefits.

The hedonistic dynamics are influenced by concepts which have been identified as antecedents to flow experience, such as multi-sensory experiences, and flow experience has been associated with both individual self-expansion (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013) and the IOS process (Graham, 2008). Although both hedonic and social benefits are often discussed in in terms of their interactive dynamics, both benefits may occur independently, including the hedonic benefits of private consumption. The hedonic dynamics of wine marketing have been identified in previous research with respect to wine consumer preferences (Capitello et al., 2016) and wine tourism (Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2019). Taken together, the preliminary findings indicate that prominent wine influencers suggest that self-expansion with wine is a key element of (1) adding to or augmenting consumer self-concepts, and (2) obtaining beneficial resources regarding wine, such as perspectives, knowledge, social dynamics, and positive life experiences.

References


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