

**THE APPLICATION OF MARKET SEGMENTATION FOR THE WINE TOURISM INDUSTRY:
AN EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTION**

Abstract submitted for consideration at the American Association of Wine Economists 3rd Annual Meeting

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ABSTRACT

The complexity of the wine market supply stems mostly from the variety of grape types, brands, producers, regions and countries. Similarly, the tourism industry is extremely multifaceted, however, niche markets stand out from mass markets. However, there exist various research gaps recognizing the absence of conceptual framework in the context of wine tourism research (Carlsen, 2004) and shortcomings in consumer research in the wine tourism industry are dominant (Mithell, Hall and McIntosh, 2000; Alant and Bruwer, 2004). In order to understand the demand structure of wine tourism, market segmentation is understood to be the most effective tool. In this relatively young industry research efforts ought to be conducted to reduce the exploratory gap.

However, there is no uniformly accepted approach to segment the wine tourism market partly due to the scarcity of research on the demand side (Mitchell et al., 2000). Yet, traditional segmentation approaches are considered out of date (Clarke and Middleton, 2001) and not always applicable to the wine tourism market (Bruwer and Li, 2007). Consequently the development of a hybrid segmentation method, where several segmentation variables are combined to provide a richer and more accurately-defined consumer segments, seems to be appropriate. The segmentation approach developed in this particular research combines demographic and psychographic, respectively lifestyle segmentation. By definition, both add up to each other, hence are complimentary in nature and provide valuable information in finding out who should be targeted (Shiffman and Kanuk, 2007).

The aim of this research paper is to build a tourist profile based on segmentation approaches using the German wine-growing region of Rheinhessen. To meet the goal of the study, the current research deployed a series of surveys with study questionnaires including the measurement of demographic traits, motivation to travel to a wine region and lifestyle assessment, including the wine purchasing behavior and the attitude towards wine and tourism. The draft questionnaire was developed through two qualitative methods entailing focus group surveys and an expert panel. A pilot study was then conducted to examine the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. In the final survey stage, the questionnaires were completed and collected from 119 respondents (N=119). Based on the frequency distribution, general assumptions about the wine tourist profile can be confirmed. The wine tourist is located in the 30-60 years old group and earns above average. Based on the Eight Enhancement Factors (Roberts and Sparks, 2006) that influence the wine tourism experience, the survey results illustrate that while enjoying the region Rheinhessen, the predominant focus is to enjoy wine-related activities over non-wine related pursuit. While educational motive related to wine appear to be secondary motivators to the wine tourist, tasting and culinary events, where authenticity and atmosphere of the local setting, are highly valued by the tourists. A clear majority of the respondents perceived wine to be central to their lifestyle, hence a clear prerequisite for conducting lifestyle segmentation. Since wine tourism emerges from two distinct industries, it is inevitable to understand as many related aspects as possible in order to draw strategies to better understand, reach and service the wine tourism customer.

Key Words: Wine Tourism Segmentation Consumer