METHODOLOGY FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE PREFERENCES REGARDING WINE AND INFORMATION NEEDS OF CONSUMERS

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Abstract

The high competition on the national and international wine markets requires permanent adaptation to the consumers' preferences in order to present them with the most suitable offer. Also, it should be kept in mind that the recommendations of wine experts may not always or necessarily match the consumer preferences. Therefore the consumers should be kept informed, so that, by learning more about wine appreciation, they might choose to purchase more of the wines recommended by specialists. As such, providing targeted information training for both wine connaisseurs and novices is also an important goal. The present work aims to assess the nowadays consumers' preferences and their needs for information in order to improve the offer for training in the field of wine appreciation. The methodology proposed for this assessment is a survey based on a set of 10 carefully selected questions. The types of questions and the reasons for their inclusion in the survey are presented and explained. The method for the management of consumers' input in case of single answer and multiple answer questions is described and the expected types of results based on the data collected with this questionnaire are also presented.

Keywords: wine preferences, questionnaire design, evaluation methodology

INTRODUCTION

Knowing what consumers prefer and choose to buy is the key factor of success in any type of business which provides goods and services to the public. The attitude towards a product is also important, but not so often evaluated. The evaluation of consumer preferences and attitude for a product is often based on data collected with a questionnaire. The relevance of the data obtained and processed depends first of all on the selection of the appropriate number and type of questions. Several questionnaires were developed in time for the evaluation of the preferences for wines in various countries [10]. In Romania, the work of this kind was rather limited to certain surveys conducted by companies and not published. Some previous studies were also conducted by a group of researchers in cooperation with the Association of Authorized Winetasters of Romania in 2001-2003][1-7]. Although some trends are supposed to be stable and be transmitted to younger generations as traditional attitudes towards wines, most of the results of these surveys are no longer be valid, since the wine preferences should have greatly evolved in such a flexible market as that of wine. The changes in the offer of the national wine producers, the impact of imported wines on our market and the increasing range and amount of information continuously sent to wine consumers through various media channels are bound to have had a big impact on the attitude of consumers towards wines. Therefore, a new, more targeted evaluation is very much required. In this work not only the actual preference of the consumers for certain type of wines is under scrutiny, but also the information needs of these consumers about wine in general. Correct and targeted information is required for the consumers to form a preference and take an informed decision when buying. Based on the information needs identified, decisions regarding the type of information to be supplied to these consumers can be efficiently taken. Therefore, the questionnaire design is of utmost importance [9, 11-13].

In this work a new evaluation methodology regarding the preferences for wines and the

information impact and needs was proposed. As part of this study the design of a new questionnaire is presented and its expected results are explained.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The design of the new questionnaire took into consideration the following main aspects: the goal, the length of the questionnaire and number of questions, the type of questions (open or close), the possibility and opportunity of multiple answer questions, the target respondents and the method of reaching them.

Goal of the questionnaire

The final goal of this questionnaire was to evaluate the information and training needs of the wine consumers so that more targeted and improved information should be offered in order to influence their decisions related to wine consumption.

Special attention was given to the information regarding wine contests and their effects and also to the necessity of a wine museum where large amounts of general information about vine, wine and oenological tourism could be transmitted in a recreational and interactive way.

The length of the questionnaire and number of questions

The total number of questions was limited to 10. Only one personal question was asked and no demographic questions were included. The response choices for each question were sufficiently detailed, some questions having as many as 6 possible answers, but brevity was also taken into consideration, aiming not to exceed two A4 pages.

Type of the questions (open or close) and type of the expected answers

With one exception out of 10, the questions were formulated as closed questions. However, 2 of the closed questions had also an open component (an open response-option), which is a part where some other opinion could be expressed in the respondent's own words.

The possibility and opportunity of multiple answer questions

Out of the 10 questions, 9 are multiple choice items, because they are the most popular type of survey questions and are likely to increase the response rate. They are not only easiest for

a respondent to answer, but are also easiest to analyse.

In multiple answer questions the possibility of multiple answer selection was allowed. At the same time, for the purpose of data analysis, in this each answer selected by the respondent was awarded a fraction of one point, calculated as 1 divided by the number of answers selected – by similarity with the case of single-answer questions, where the answer selected by the respondent was given 1 point. This method of dealing with single-answer and multiple-answer questions was adopted after pre-testing the questionnaire, when it was found that few people are willing to select just the one answer which applies most to their behaviour, but usually they felt more comfortable by expressing several preferences.

Target respondents and the method of reaching them

The questionnaire was replied to by 168 respondents who took part in the Good Wine Fair between 18 and 20 November 2011 in Bucharest. The selected sample population accurately reflects only the relevant sub-group of wine lovers who deliberately chose to visit a wine fair. This can be regarded as a biased sample, but even so, the findings form this survey are considered useful for taking some decisions valid for the entire population, especially where specific needs are identified.

Survey location and pre-testing

Most of the survey work was assisted by Good Wine Fair personnel, the questions being read to the consumers by a survey assistant who made sure that respondents understood the questions and replied to all of them.

A pre-testing of the questionnaire was performed in a previous wine fair, Vintest, held in the same city one month before the full-scale survey was conducted. No corrections were considered necessary in the questionnaire content as a result of pre-testing, as the respondents showed good understanding of the questions. However, as explained before, after pre-testing the questionnaire it was decided that in the case of multiple choice questions multiple responses should be permitted.

The collected answers were introduced into an Excel database and analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

During our previous similar work, where a survey of 30 questions was performed [1], we observed that most of the respondents lose patience after the first several questions.

This was the reason why, this time, we limited our questionnaire to 10 questions, covering a maximum of 2 pages of text, under the form of a recto-verso A4 page which was printed and distributed. The most important questions were asked first, to benefit from the full attention of the subject.

Multiple choice questions are usually easier to analyse, especially when a single possible answer is supposed to be selected. In our case, for all multiple choice questions multiple choice answers were allowed.

For the analysis, the selected answers to a certain question were all allotted one point in total. If out of the 3 possible answers, only one was selected, that answer received 1 point. If out of the 3 possible answers 2 were selected, then each of the answers received 1/2 points. If of the 3 possible answers all 3 were selected, each answer received 1/3 points. The same calculation was applied in the case of 4-7 possible answers.

Irrespective of the selected answers for a certain question, the sum of the fraction points allotted for the selected answers accounted for a total of 1. Then, the points accumulated for the same answers were summed up, allowing in this way for a quantitative analysis.

The questionnaire started with the general questions and finished with some personal questions. No biographical or demographical data were included in this survey.

The questions related to wine contests were placed in the middle of the survey, while the questions regarding the information that should be provided to increase the knowledge and desirability of wine were left in the end.

Only one question deals with the wine museum as an alternative to provide wine information. In Table 1 the structure of the questionnaire is briefly described.

Table 1. Structure of the questions included in the questionnaire

Question	Type	Multiple choice	General	Personal	Wine contest related	Wine Museum related
QI	close	yes	yes	no	no	no
QII	close	yes	yes	no	no	no
QIII	close	yes	yes	no	no	no
QIV	close	yes	yes	no	no	no
QV	close /open	yes	yes	no	yes	no
QVI	close /open	yes	no	no	yes	no
QVII	close	yes	no	no	yes	no
QVIII	close	no	no	yes	no	no
QIX	open	no	no	yes	no	no
QX	close	yes	no	yes	no	yes

Hereafter, the questions included and their goal are presented and discussed.

QI. What kind of wines do you consume usually?
1. White wines
2. Rosé wines
3. Red wines
This question is a general one, meant to establish a preference for a certain kind of wine, the correlation with the wine offer on the market and the evolution of preference as compared to previous surveys conducted in similar circumstances. It is also an easy question meant to encourage the respondent to accept to complete this survey.

QII. What sugar level do you prefer in the wines you consume?
1. Dry wines (0-4 g/l sugar)
2. Half-dry wines (4-12 g/l sugar)
3. Half-sweet wines (12-45 g/l sugar)
4. Sweet wines (over 45 g/l sugar)
The second question is already a difficult one for a normal consumer. Many people do not know the ranges defined by legislation to separate the categories of wines in accordance to their sugar concentration. Many consumers prefer wines with some sugar, but cannot necessarily make the difference between the half-dry and half-sweet categories. The dry and sweet categories are easier identified. For this reason, the sugar concentrations for each category were included in the answer choices, although this aspect is already too technical for many respondents, who will still select in accordance with the description and not with the sugar concentration range.

QIII. On shop shelves you find wines with various labels. You select the wine which has written on its label:
1. Table wine
2. Controlled Denomination of Origin wine
3. Geographical indication wine
4. I select in accordance with the general label design
5. I select in accordance with the price.

This question does not respect the general principle of one dimension answer, combining answers regarding the category of wine (table, DOC and IG wine) with answers regarding the label design and even the price. With this type of question we want to test the preference for a certain quality category or the selection of the first-price wine irrespective of quality category. The answer regarding the label design tests the importance for a consumer of a quality category written on the label or the general aspect of the label. The level of understanding of quality category meaning is also implied in this multi-dimensional question, but it is not easy to assess only from this.

Although this question has a higher level of difficulty than the previous one, it is assumed that the respondent would find it easier to answer, due to the multi-dimensional multiple-choices available.

QIV. Considering the wine provenance what kind of wines do you prefer?
1. Romanian wines
2. European wines (France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Portugal etc.)
3. From outside of Europe (Chile, Argentine, New Zeeland, Australia etc.)

QIV is also an easy question, by which we may find out not only the preference for a certain origin of the wine, but also get clues on the impact that the import wines have on nowadays local consumers.

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: ....

This is also a multi-dimensional question meant especially to find out the importance of the awards obtained by a wine in contests. This is the first question that introduces the issue of the wine contest.

This question will also allow us to understand to what aspect the consumer attaches more importance: on price or on the notoriety related to that wine (brand, region, producer). Other possible important aspects may be reported by the consumer in this open question.

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 wine better 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 is a specific question meant to assess the knowledge of consumers regarding wine contests and the importance they may attach to wine contests as a warranty for wine quality.

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 do not know since I have no idea about the procedure of wine evaluation in a wine contest.

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. For those consumers who do not pay attention to awards in the contest there is still the option to express no opinion by selecting answer no. 5.

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.

Question VIII is included not to quantitatively assess 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 actually includes two answers, that is the "I do not consume wine" and "I rarely try wine". Both these answers indicate little implication in wine consumption and wine culture and this is why they are included together in just one answer. It is the only non-multiple choice answer question, as one answer excludes another.

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

This is the only question that can be sensitive for the respondents, asking them to self-rate their competence as regards to wine. It is also the one from which we obtain the most unreliable information, as the consumers would probably tend to exaggerate their knowledge about wines for their self-esteem or simply will not know where to place their level of knowledge on a scale. Even though self-ratings are often criticised for their lack of validity [8], we need this information even so, later on, when we evaluate the information needs of the population about wine. It is the only open question of the survey.

QX. In order to improve your knowledge about wine, what kind of method for information delivery or training 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 is a combined question assessing the information needs of the wine consumers and their preferred methods, trying to establish at the same time the impact of founding a wine museum. A direct question regarding the necessity and expectations from a wine museum was not included in the survey, as the wine museum is considered by many in Romania as an obsolete concept. A direct question might have triggered more misleading reactions and a higher rate of falsely positive answers regarding the necessity of a wine museum. Moreover, due to the length limitations of this survey, a complete approach regarding the creation of a new type of wine museum rather than a classical museum was not possible.

The distribution within the structure of questionnaire of the questions related to the main topics of the survey, wine contests and wine museums as marketing and information tools, is presented in Fig. 1. In the same figure the relationships with the rest of questions are included.
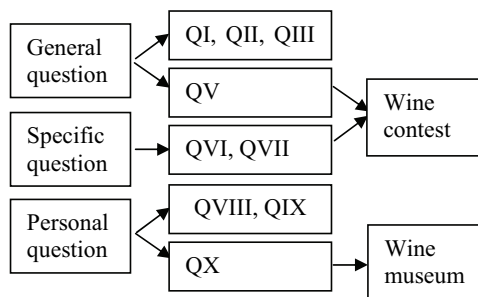

Fig. 1. Type of questions and their relationship with the wine contest knowledge assessments and the necessity of a wine museum as a source of information about wine

CONCLUSIONS

Surveys using questionnaires facilitate the acquisition of data regarding the knowledge, behaviour, attitudes, perceptions and even information needs of a population for a certain product.

The sample population selected in this study is not representative for Romania in general, but only for the category of wine connaisseurs, who deliberately chose to visit a wine fair and then answered a questionnaire. However, the lack of

information about wine identified in this sample population is certainly applicable, at least to the same extent, to the entire population of the country.

The formulation of some questions may not obey some of the most stated recommendations for the design of a questionnaire, but the reasons for this are explained.

As multiple answer choices were permitted for many questions, the quantitative analysis of answers required the weighting of the answers so the total points for a question would be equal to one, irrespective of the number of selected answers.

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