

NORTHERN VIRGINIA WINERIES: UNDERSTANDING VISITOR MOTIVATIONS FOR MARKET SEGMENTATION

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Abstract.—The wine industry is a rapidly growing sector of Virginia's economy, yet little research has been done on this topic. The purpose of this study was to obtain a better understanding of northern Virginia winery visitors' motivations to help winery operators better focus their marketing efforts. This exploratory research project collected basic information about the preferences, needs, and demographics of winery visitors. Almost two-thirds of the respondents were from Virginia and about 88 percent were Caucasian. Their average age was 40, average education level was an undergraduate degree, and most had an above average annual household income. Most popular motivations for visiting the winery included to enjoy the surrounding scenery and to be with people who shared similar interests. They were most likely to buy a new variety of wine if it was recommended by a friend or if they saw it featured in a wine magazine article. Possible marketing strategies based on the findings are discussed.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is an important part of Virginia's economy, particularly the wine tourism sector, which attracts more than 300,000 visitors a year (Lewis

2003). This unique sector's growth includes an increasing number of wineries and the expansion of related products, events, and press attention. In 2002, Virginia wineries contributed \$95.7 million to the State's economy through wine production, sales, and tourism-related expenditures (Wine Business Insider 2002). Although the number of wineries and visitors increased in recent years, limited research is available to help winery owners understand current and potential visitors.

Existing information on wineries is varied. Studies targeting wine regions such as New Zealand (Treloar et al. 2004), for example, have found that many younger people prefer other alcoholic beverages to wine. Alant and Bruwer's (2004) research explored a motivational framework based on visitor characteristics, winery profiles, and visit dynamics. They found that repeat winery visitors' primary purpose for visiting was to relax while first-time visitors were seeking a short getaway or leisure activity. There is little available information about the characteristics and motivations of visitors to wine regions in the eastern United States. Therefore, this study was designed to systematically assess those variables.

2.0 RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The purpose of this research was to identify what motivated people to visit northern Virginia wineries. Winery operators who participated in this study were mostly small business owners who have a limited ability to systematically assess visitor characteristics and motivations. This limitation in turn hampers their ability to meet consumer needs and to market effectively. Previously tested measures from Driver's (1983) Recreation Experience Preference (REP) scale were adapted and used in the assessment process.

Because northern Virginia wineries had limited visitor data available, this study was designed to be

exploratory in nature, focusing on three primary goals: (1) identifying visitor demographics, (2) analyzing differing characteristics of current northern Virginia winery visitors, and (3) identifying the motivations of visitors to northern Virginia wineries. These three focal points guided the research, with the ultimate goal of providing winery operators with information about their customers' preferences, needs, and demographics.

3.0 METHODS

Thirty-nine wineries, identified as northern Virginia wineries by the Virginia Wine Association, were invited by email to participate in the study. During October and November 2007, nine of those wineries participated in a half-day study of winery visitors. Researchers spent approximately 4 hours at each winery on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday during anticipated high visitation times. Each visitor was asked to complete a four-page written questionnaire and to return it to the researchers before leaving the winery. A total of 283 people returned completed and usable questionnaires. Nonresponse data were not collected as part of this study.

4.0 FINDINGS

While 62 percent of study participants resided in Virginia ($n = 176$), the wineries also received visitors from as far away as Florida ($n = 2$), Texas ($n = 1$), Colorado ($n = 1$), and Washington State ($n = 1$) (Fig. 1). Respondents were predominantly female (59.9 percent), ranged in age from 21 to 79 (mean = 40.1, standard deviation = 12.3), and had a mean education level of 16.1 years (s.d. = 1.3 years). The majority of respondents identified themselves as white or Caucasian (87.8 percent), 4.4 percent were Black or African American, 3.7 percent were Asian, 0.7 percent were First Nation or Alaskan, and 0.4 percent were Pacific Islander. About 10 percent of the sample did not answer the question about income; of the 90 percent that did, 41.3 percent indicated that their annual income was over \$125,000, 35.5 percent had income between \$75,001 and \$125,000, and 23.2 percent had income of less than \$75,000. Just over 7 percent of respondents were from rural areas, 20.1 percent were from small towns, 12.3 percent were from large towns/small cities, 21.6 percent were from

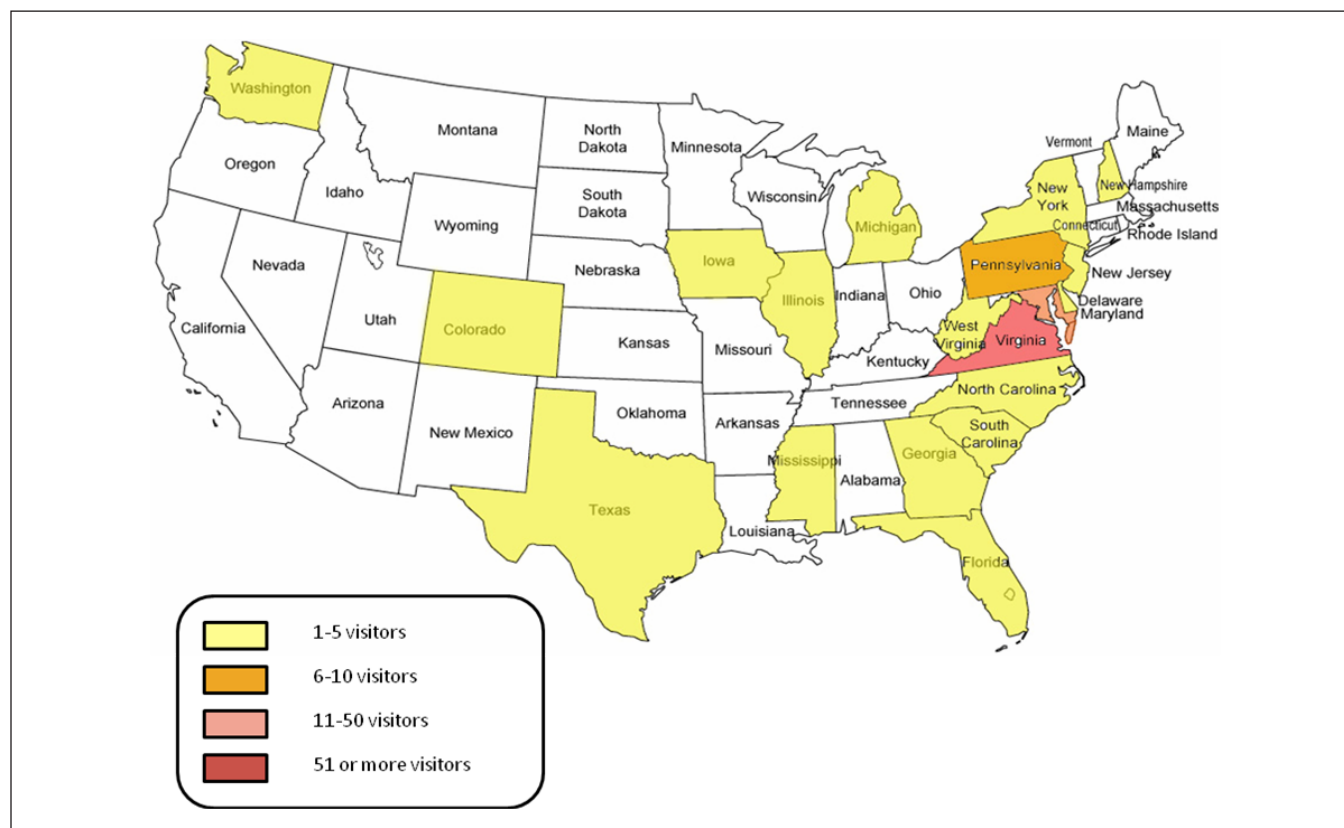


Figure 1.—Study participants' home states.

medium-sized cities, and 39.0 percent were from large cities or accompanying suburbs. Data were examined for demographic differences between visitors to different wineries and no significant differences were found in age distribution, sex, race, income, education, or residence. On the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate the importance of 12 items adapted from Driver's (1983) REP scale in planning their trip to the winery. Four dimensions were measured and all had acceptable levels of reliability: 1) enjoyment of nature; 2) being with similar people; 3) escape from pressures; and 4) learning about wine (Table 1).

Although respondents indicated that learning about wines was slightly less important to them than the other three motivational dimensions, all dimensions

were moderately important to very important in their decision to visit a particular winery. In addition to their planning for this particular visit, respondents were further asked to indicate their reasons for visiting their favorite Virginia wineries in general. About 56 percent of the respondents (n = 158) identified a favorite winery and identified 10 particular reasons for visiting that winery (Table 2). The top three reasons were "I enjoy the surrounding scenery", "The wines are a high quality", and "There is an enjoyable place to drink a glass or bottle of wine after tasting." This information may be of special interest to winery operators.

Participants were also asked to indicate how much they enjoyed 11 different wine varieties using a 5-point scale, where 1 = "strongly dislike" and 5 = "strongly

Table 1.—Means and reliability analyses for winery visitation preference items and indices

Theorized construct and individual statement	Dimension and Item Means	s.d.	Item-total correlation	α if item removed	Index α
Enjoy nature	2.86				.841
To view the scenery	2.82	.87	.726	*	
To view the scenic beauty around the winery	2.91	.86	.726	*	
Similar people	2.64				.732
To be with people who enjoy the same things I do	2.82	1.07	.552	.657	
To be with members of my group	2.69	1.19	.562	.649	
To be with people having similar values	2.01	1.20	.375	.762	
To be with friends	3.05	1.01	.633	.615	
Escape personal-social pressures	2.62				.819
To have a change from my daily routine	2.58	1.04	.694	*	
To have a change from my everyday life	2.64	.99	.694	*	
Learning	2.24				.851
To become better at wine tasting	1.92	1.12	.782	.770	
To develop my skills and abilities in wine tasting	1.95	1.11	.737	.791	
To experience new and different things	2.57	1.03	.691	.812	
To discover something new	2.51	1.08	.564	.862	

Note that items were measured on a 5-point scale with 4 = extremely important and 0 = not at all important

*Reliability unavailable for a single item

Table 2.—Reasons that a particular Virginia winery is respondent's favorite

It's my favorite Virginia winery because...	Item Means	s.d.
I enjoy the surrounding scenery.	4.65	.75
The wines are a high quality.	4.59	.76
There is an enjoyable place to drink a glass or bottle of wine after tasting.	4.56	.93
It's a relaxing place to visit.	4.53	.79
It's a fun place to visit.	4.41	.83
The tasting room staff is knowledgeable.	4.38	.93
There are many choices of different wines to taste.	4.30	.95
There are additional wineries to visit nearby.	4.10	.96
It's easy to get there.	4.01	1.01
The tasting room is attractively decorated.	3.87	1.03

Note that items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree

like.” The varieties listed may or may not have been available at each of the wineries. All of the varieties received positive average scores (i.e., scores above 3, “neutral”). Average scores for the Rosés tended to be near neutral and the Cabernet Sauvignons received the highest average scores (Fig. 2).

When the research project was being designed, winery operators expressed interest in finding out whether there were differences in wine preferences, purchasing characteristics, and/or motivations between men and women or between visitors of different ages. In the data analysis, respondents were grouped into four age categories: 21-30 years old (n=87); 31-40 years old (n=61); 41-50 years old (n=60); and older

than 50 (n=63). Visitors in all age groups reported an approximately equal number of visits to *Virginia* wineries in the past 12 months. However, 21- to 30-year-old visitors reported fewer visits to *any* winery than visitors 41-50 years old. No differences were found between men and women (Table 3).

Visitors purchased an average of two to three bottles of wine ($\mu = 2.79$, $s = 3.16$) at each winery they visited and there were no differences between people in different age groups. Respondents between 21 and 30 years old, however, reported that they were more likely than individuals over 30 to try a new wine based on a friend’s recommendation (Table 4). Women were significantly more likely than men to try

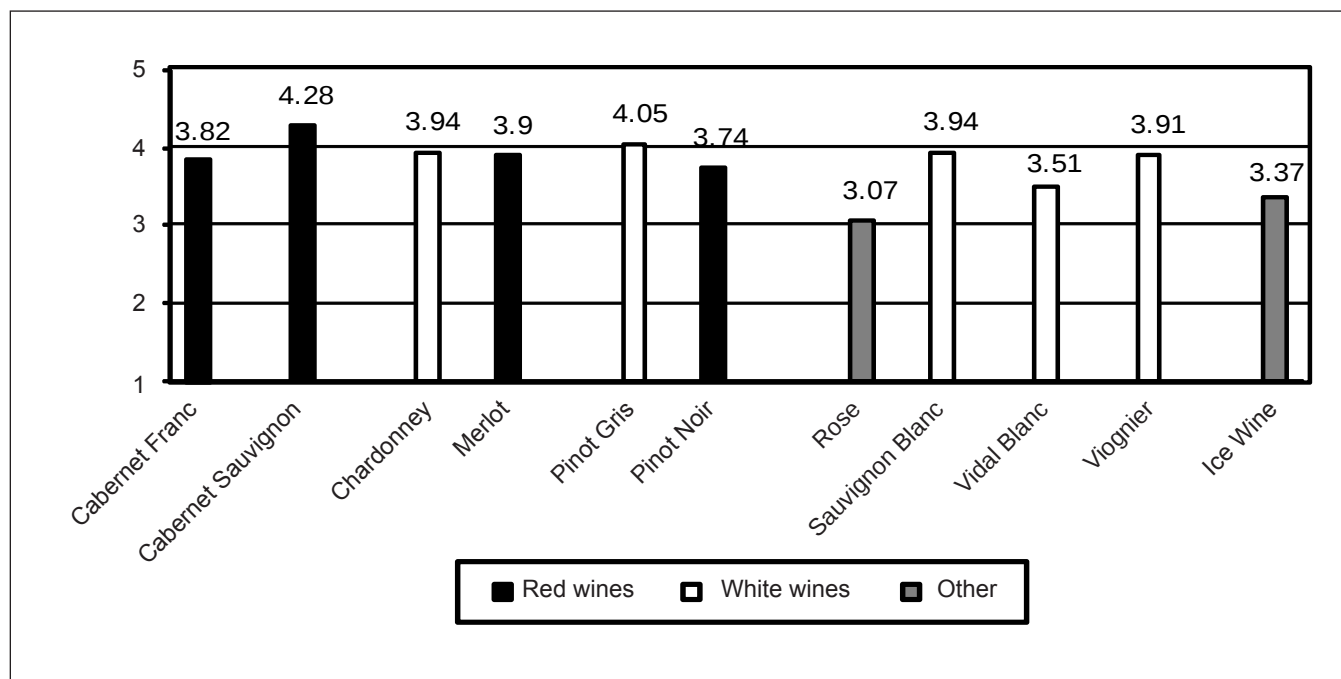


Figure 2.—Average scores for different wine varieties. Note that items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 = strongly dislike, 3 = neutral, and 5 = strongly like.

Table 3.—Respondents’ number of winery visits in the past 12 months by age and gender

Item	Means							Test Value
	Overall	Men	Women	Ages 21-31	Ages 31-40	Ages 41-50	Ages 51+	
Visits to Virginia wineries in past 12 months	5.45							
Visits to any winery in past 12 months	6.95			4.65*	6.52	10.30*	7.04	F = 2.778 p = .006

* Denotes significant differences between groups
Blank cell denotes no significant difference between groups

a new wine based on the attractiveness of the label. Among all identified influences, visitors were most likely to be affected by a friend's recommendation or a wine feature story and least likely to be affected by a salesperson's recommendations.

When asked about their interest in different types of winery-associated clubs, respondents over 50 years old

were significantly less likely ($F=3.156$, $p=.025$) than younger respondents to be interested in a dinner club and less likely ($F=5.339$, $p=.001$) to be interested in winery day tours (Table 5). Women were more likely than men to participate in wine dinner clubs ($t=2.60$, $p=.010$) and more likely to take a chauffeured day tour of a winery ($t=2.72$, $p=.007$). Among all club types, respondents were least interested in cork clubs.

Table 4.—Effectiveness of wine marketing strategies by age and gender

Marketing influence	Means							Test Value
	Overall	Men	Women	Ages 21-31	Ages 31-40	Ages 41-50	Ages 51+	
A friend's recommendation	2.97			3.15*	2.81*	2.93	2.90	$F = 2.859$ $p = .038$
A salesperson's recommendation	2.17							
An attractive display of the new wine	1.54							
An attractive label on the new wine bottle	1.67	1.52*	1.78*					$t = 2.07$ $p = .039$
A feature story on the new wine in a wine-related magazine	2.44							

Note that items were measured on a 5-point scale, where 0 = "Not at all effective" and 5 = "Extremely effective."

* Denotes significant differences between groups

Blank cell denotes no significant difference between groups

Table 5.—Interest in wine-related activities by age and gender

Activity	Means							Test Value
	Overall	Men	Women	Ages 21-31	Ages 31-40	Ages 41-50	Ages 51+	
A wine dinner club	1.95	1.81	2.04	1.89	2.03	2.15*	1.77*	$t = 2.60$ $p = .010$ $F = 3.156$ $p = .025$
A cork club (members collect corks and receive gifts when returned)	1.40							
A case club (members receive discounts on purchases based on annual purchase)	1.90							
Wine-of-the-month club	1.98							
A wine trail (includes collecting stamps for prizes upon completion of trail)	2.05							
A day tour via chauffeured driver	2.18	2.02	2.29	2.26	2.26	2.36	1.84	$T = 2.72$ $P = .007$ $F = 5.339$ $P = .001$

Note that items were measured on a 5-point scale, where 0 = "Not at all interested" and 5 = "Extremely interested"

* Denotes significant differences between groups

Blank cell denotes no significant difference between groups

5.0 CONCLUSION

Almost two-thirds of the survey participants were from Virginia and neighboring states. However, as Virginia wines gain stature within the industry, owners and operators should be prepared to address possible demographic shifts among winery visitors. Study participants' annual incomes were moderate to high, suggesting an availability of discretionary income and, in fact, respondents purchased an average of 2.79 (s.d. = 3.16) bottles of wine during their visits. Although data were not collected regarding other items purchased, it seems clear that visitors generally spent beyond the initial tasting fees.

This research also found that marketing influences did not vary dramatically across visitors of different ages and genders. Women were slightly more likely than men to try a new wine based on the appearance of the label, while women and men 21-30 years old were slightly more likely than all other age groups to try a new wine if a friend recommended it. No differences were found between men and women or by age group in other influential items suggesting that broad marketing strategies for encouraging patrons to try a new wine need not be segmented in order to be effective. One item that was not expected to be strongly influential was magazine feature stories on a new wine. However, results suggest this medium could be as influential as a friend's recommendation. Further, this finding suggests developing a press kit that includes high-resolution photographs and core winery information and pursuing other avenues to connect with the media may be worthwhile marketing strategies.

In terms of wine preferences, respondents tended to prefer Cabernet Sauvignons and were most ambivalent about Rosé wines. This preference does not mean, however, that wineries should limit their production of least preferred wine types; each winery needs to consider the base knowledge of its own visitors and consumers. Rosé wines are often considered an entry level wine (i.e., a wine more enjoyed by a first-time or inexperienced consumer).

Finally, when reviewing overall motivations for visiting a Virginia winery, owners expected to find that visitors were most likely to choose a winery based on the quality of the wine. However, this research found that visitors were most likely to choose a winery based on the surrounding scenery and tended to prefer settings described as natural, scenic, and peaceful. Additionally, it was important for them to be able to spend time with their social groups and to be in a place where they could relax. These preferences were true for respondents from both urban and rural areas and is important for winery owners and operators to consider as they plan for development of their operations.

Suggestions for future studies include broadening the scope of data collection to include the remainder of Virginia as well as other states representing the eastern region of the United States. Sub-regional differences may exist based on wine preferences of consumers and varieties of wine most successfully produced within each sub-region. Further, data collected during peak spring and summer seasons may also reveal differences not captured by limiting data collection to autumn visitors. Future research may also consider tapping into non-winery visiting individuals who consume wine purchased from places other than their local region.

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7.0 CITATIONS

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