

# Traditional Wine Consumption: Millennials Perspective

## Abstract

This study identifies factors influencing the rapid market growth of wine consumption by Millennials in the USA. A total sample of 254 consumers subscribed to the Le Grand Noir newsletter was surveyed online. Previous findings are expanded as consumers seem to consider internal and external wine cues such as grapes varieties, country-of-origin, bottle design, and information on the label. Winery managers must focus on communicating the experience consumers get when purchasing and consuming their products. Millennials are more receptive to their friends' recommendations than their family's advice.

**Keywords** – Wine consumption, wine preference, wine, Millennials, purchasing decision, America

## INTRODUCTION

The American wine industry has established itself as one of the most competitive and the USA is a very challenging market. The US is the first per capita wine consumer in the world and the fourth wine producer (Li *et al.*, 2019). To cope with this phenomenon, wine specialists have highlighted the importance of finding new consumer segments (Chester *et al.*, 2010). Broadly speaking, the US wine industry is traditionally oriented to the 80 million Baby-Boomer generation mainly due to their higher purchasing power and brand loyalty. This generation is recognized as one of the most important consumer segments (Garibaldi *et al.*, 2017). However, the focus is moving into the Millennials generation due to their growing interest for wine (Iyer *et al.*, 2016). With 83 million members, it has the potential to fit with the upcoming industry's needs and challenges (Villanueva, 2015). They represent the biggest market segment in US history (Metha and Bhanja, 2017).

Defining a generation is tricky; Millennials are not the exception. The academic and business literature provide diverse insights (*e.g.* Gonzalez-Fuentes, 2019; Quevedo-Pérez and Pérez-Zurita, 2018; Tajeja, 2017). In our study, Millennials are those born between 1980 and 2000 with lifestyles defined by access to the Internet, smartphones and computing power. In their lifetime, information has always been available directly to them provoking distant perspectives from other generations. They seek balance with their personal and professional life and with social networking entertainment. Moreover, they are subject to influence by peers with whom they persistently share experiences shaping the way they engage with people and products, but also with their needs and expectations (Key Findings, 2004).

The wine literature is insufficient about Millennials behavior in a specific market and less on previous generations. This paper focus is on factors influencing Millennials wine purchasing decision, as choosing a bottle of wine can be a challenging decision (Barber *et al.*, 2008; Bruwer *et al.*, 2011; Ellis and Caruana, 2018; Kolyesnikova and Dodd, 2008). As the upcoming generations, wine producers can take advantage of Millennials wine consumption compared to other generations.

Nowadays, wine consumers have endless options of brands and grapes. In most buying situations, external cues (packing, label and similar) are the only ways to communicate and share information regarding the wine in the bottle (Hanby, 1999). In a way, a label is the limited space to assert a position statement differentiating wines on the shelf (Kidd, 1993). That limited space is recognized as the most important factor for wine purchasing decisions (Pelegrín *et al.*, 2019). It is so relevant, that information on wine labels should avoid functional, social, financial or physical risks (Tang *et al.*, 2015).

Consumers cope with risk by pursuing information on the wine label along with their entourage which comprises family, friends and peers. A wine purchasing-decision may include recommendations by sellers, specialists and influencers. Indeed, these are a fundamental part of Millennials having a primary impact on many of their purchasing decisions. Moreover, Millennials pay attention to other's point of view particularly when searching the Internet. They look for other consumers' reviews and ratings to gain confidence and elude risk. Unlike previous generations, the purchasing-process might generate social pressure that Millennials try to reduce by using their entourage advices (Barger *et al.*, 2016; Chang *et al.*, 2016).

This research primary objective is to determine the influence of label information and entourage on Millennials wine purchasing. Analyzing the decision-making process compared with previous generations, marketers might bolster adapt their methods. With this, the wine industry undertakes a better understanding of their shared needs and values during a purchasing decision.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Drinking wine is a social activity performed by Millennials with their entourage in mind (Thach and Olsen, 2006). In the USA, 34% of Baby-Boomers are occasional wine drinkers versus 36% of Millennials. Despite that, Baby-Boomers drink more frequently than Millennials, although the gap is narrowing (Wine Market Council, 2016). Considered as the workaholic generation, Baby-Boomers represent a segment with recognized characteristics due to its prolonged and accepted existence. That generation benefited from the Second

World War post economic growth that resulted in most of the credit creation and middle-class development. They were relationship-oriented using technology mainly as a productive tool.

As the next wine consumer relevant generation, Millennials tend to see themselves as a group that shares core values such as tolerance for diversity, environmental stewardship, personal freedom, and global perspective (Chow *et al.*, 2012). Major characteristics are the technology and internet use in everyday life. US Millennials spent 53 hours online daily (Kraus, 2016) consuming and sharing content on diverse social networks, becoming their biggest and highest frequency users on a regular basis (Statista, 2017). They share, consume, interact, comment, and purchase through digital social networks (Moriarty, 2004).

Millennials socialize while consuming products and services with a tendency to shop in groups, discussing with friends before taking a major decision. (Henley *et al.*, 2011). This generation has been exposed to groups since they began school; remaining in groups gives them a sense of unity and a way to limit risks (Alsop, 2008). Millennials see brands boundless, starting mostly at the retailer and finishing at the consumers. Moreover, they feel passionate about values, ethics, uniqueness and meaningful work, finding it in what they purchase (Bucic *et al.*, 2012). As a social group, Millennials Represent a particularly consumer segment (González-Fuentes, 2019) pursuing to make a difference returning something to the environment (Chow *et al.*, 2012).

Millennials are one of the largest consumer buying segments in the USA. Most of them are the Baby-Boomers' children performing family shopping. A significant part has received credit cards younger than their parents have, becoming quickly potential consumers (Neuborne and Kerwin, 1999). Despite numerous similarities between Millennials, there is no uniform global culture (Bhosale and Gupta, 2006). As they are not a perfectly homogeneous group, millennial's decision making and purchasing behavior is linked to different situations and factors (Bucic *et al.*, 2012).

Determining Millennials wine consumer patterns can be difficult. To discover potential generalizations across cultures, Thach and Olsen (2006) performed a study on wine with Millennials from Canada, France, Germany, UK and USA. They studied personal values, wine involvement, and wine consumption patterns with domestic versus imported wine. Their findings assert that preferences are not generalizable for Millennials despite a recognized link between wine preferences and similar cultural backgrounds (cf. Robinson and Harding, 2015).

For some consumers, buying wine may produce an insecurity feeling. Choosing a wrong wine could end in a peers negative social perception (Thach and Olsen, 2006).

Lowering risk perception seems an important factor for Millennials purchasing behavior (Lockshin *et al.*, 2006). Thus, providing adequate information –labels, point of sales, advice and recommendations–can counterbalance insecurity (Gluckman, 1990). The more information is exchanged between brand and purchasers, the more value in the relationship is created (Ferguson and Hlavinka, 2009). Loyalty is price and quality driven with a positive impact on purchasing preference. As part of Millennials behavior, they exchange knowledge and products as lifestyle to their social media networks (Ferguson and Hlavinka, 2009; Saffer and Dave, 2002).

Wine label is a key cue of communication between marketers and consumers. Front labels catch wine consumers interest (Spawton, 1991). When first introduced, labels were austere, rectangular, one or two-color with mostly simple illustrations (Cutler, 2006). Nowadays, wine labels include information such as food pairings, taste descriptors and the winery history which seem to be relevant for Millennials purchasing decision. Most Millennials tend to consider eye-catching labels as the top aspect for selecting a wine bottle (Spawton, 1991).

Millennials show preference for New World wines reputed for their styles and innovations (Atkin and Thach, 2012), new grape varieties and new types of wines (e.g., Rosé Champagne or natural wines). As one-third of Millennials is non-white, wine marketers display diversity in their adverts (Thach and Olsen, 2006). The optimistic view of Millennials results in a tendency for optimistic, as a “can do” and entrepreneurial spirit (Thach and Olsen, 2006). They are attracted to idealistic companies delivering positive messages, promoting quality brands at affordable prices. Creative labels along with good, fun and trendy wine increase their purchase intentions (Vins de Provence, 2015).

As active participants in home related recycling activities (Nielsen, 2017), Millennials believe can fight climate change by green thinking and sharing social and environmental values among them (Lewandowska *et al.*, 2017). As a result, organic wines (made from organically grown grapes) appear to be popular (Linnhoff *et al.*, 2017; Thach and Olsen, 2006) perceived healthier than other wines (Romero *et al.*, 2019). A wine certified as organic would have better opportunities with such expressed lifestyle and thinking (Lunardo and Rickard, 2019).

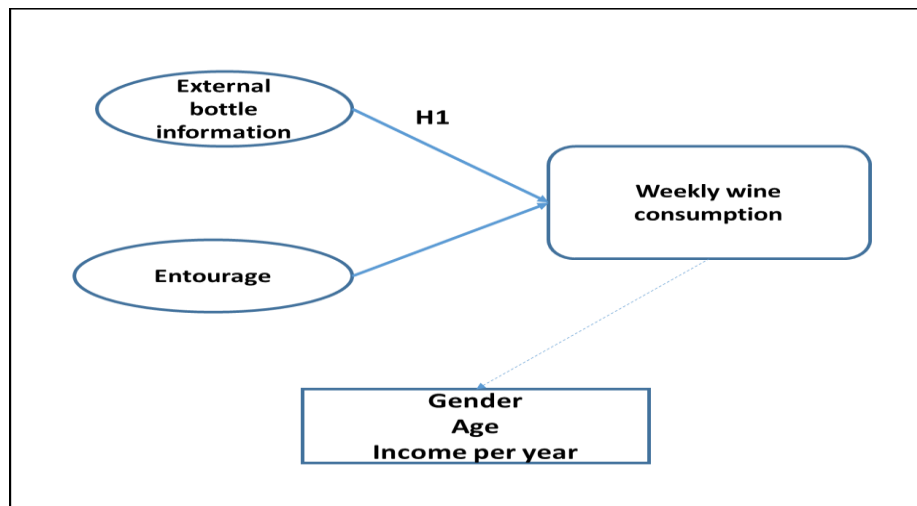
Technology and the Internet are greatly used by Millennials as part of their lifestyle, influencing the way they purchase, consume and look for information. The Internet helps wine consumers to get advice thanks to easy access to reviews (Krustos *et al.*, 2019). Wine preferences and purchasing behaviors seem to differ between Baby-Boomers and Millennials.

They grew up in the digital age that offers them, in addition to a wider selection, better pricing and quality comparisons, as well as ease of purchase. In most cases, a wine buyer first contact is with the front label which communicates the brand and wine values. Despite the back and other labels attached to the wine bottle also contain additional information. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed (Figure 1):

Hypothesis 1: External bottle information is a very important cue for consumers and has a positive impact on wine-purchasing decision.

The Internet amplifies the possibilities for product selection and comparison. A strong social media engagement allows Millennials to retrieve wine content. The adequate wine selection seems meaningful to Millennials, thus selecting the wrong wine could result in a negative social perception creating an unwanted feeling of insecurity. Advice and recommendations mainly are from their “entourage”. In addition to friends, family, peers, salespersons, specialists, influencers and applications, entourage includes the customer’s previous experiences that defines preferences and tastes affecting purchasing decisions. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis (Figure 1):

Hypothesis 2: Entourage influence is very important for customers and have a positive impact on wine-purchasing decision.



**Fig. 1. Theoretical model for the research**

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

An online survey was created asking respondents about their own characteristics, their wine consumption and the influence of specific factors on their wine purchasing decision. The survey includes fourteen items to observe wine consumption and purchasing behavior. The first items ask respondents their initial reasons for drinking wine, revealing consumption

decisions along with purchasing decisions. Items selected from Nissen (2012) included external bottle cues. Entourage items include price, previous experiences, family recommendations, friends' recommendations, salesperson advice, internet reviews, wine magazine reviews, social media and wine apps. Participants answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 "not influencing" to 5 "strongly influencing".) Also, the most and least influencing factors were selected along with basic demographics. The survey was distributed through Le Grand Noir digital newsletter with a presence in the US market for over a decade which includes diverse wine consumers' profiles. The survey was delivered to 717 subscribers with a usable sample of 254 (response rate 35.42%).

Data collected were exported to SPSS for analysis. As one of the objectives of this study is to compare Millennials and previous US generations, relevant frequencies are cross-tabled based on age following Olsen *et al.* (2007) generation group's analyses. Descriptive analysis along with factors considered for purchasing wine are included. Hypotheses tests are performed using correlation analysis after testing for reliability of the variables. Linear regression analysis helps to see the relation and the impact of the variables. Income range uses the US Census Bureau (2020) report.

## RESULTS

### *Frequencies*

Results look coherent to the US population: 50.74% of male and 49.26% of female (Statista, 2017) versus 50.4% and 49.6%. In our sample (Table 1), Millennials are overrepresented as the actual population is 24.8%. The other two generations included, Gen-X and Baby Boomers differ somehow to the actual population distribution, 19.7% and 21.7% correspondently.

Table 1  
Sample Generations

<b>US Generation</b>	<b>Age Range Years</b>	<b>N=254 Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Cumulative (%)</b>
Millennials	21-36	119	46.8	46.8
Gen-X	37-50	76	29.9	76.7
Baby Boomers	>51	59	23.3	100
Average	33			
Standard deviation	1.166			

Regarding income (Table 2), the sample shows a concentration in the two ranges from \$25,000 to \$45,000. The sample income distribution is different from previous studies (*c.f.* de Bassa Scheresberg *et al.*, 2014). However, Le Grand Noir's newsletter subscribers show that distribution which differs greatly from the real income distribution in the USA.

Table 2  
Sample income

<b>Income US\$</b>	<b>N=252</b>		<b>Cumulative</b>
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Less than 25 000	29	11.5	11.5
From 25 000 to 35 000	77	30.6	42.1
From 35 000 to 45 000	101	40.1	82.1
From 45 000 to 55 000	30	11.9	94
from 55 000 to 65 000	12	4.8	98.9
More than 65 000	3	1.2	100
Average \$	32 100		
Standard deviation	1 051		

We asked for weekly wine consumption; respondents were informed that a 75cl bottle contains up to 6 glasses of 12.5cl each. The weekly consumption concentrates from one to one-and-a-half bottle of wine (Table 3). Such concentration could be expected from subscribers to a wine newsletter suggesting that the wine consumption level leads to a likely higher wine knowledge. The sample includes individuals with apparent high knowledge on wine and likely experience on wine bottles and labels. Correspondingly, males and females report similar wine consumption behavior (*c.f.* Forbes, 2012), without any significant correlation between gender and weekly wine consumption ( $R^2 = -0.83$ ,  $p = 0.086$ ).

Table 3  
Weekly Wine Consumption

<b>Glasses</b>			<b>Cumulative</b>	<b>Male (%)</b>	<b>Female (%)</b>
<b>N=254</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>N=128</b>	<b>N=126</b>
0 to 3	26	10.3	10.3	11.72	8.73
3 to 6	92	36.5	46.8	28.13	45.24
6 to 9	101	40.1	86.9	44.53	34.92
9 to 12	29	11.5	98.4	13.28	9.52
More than 12	4	1.6	100	2.34	1.59
Total	252	100		100	100
Average	4.74 glasses				
Standard deviation	0.883				

The wine consumption by generation and income are also reported (Table 4). The most populated generation in the sample is Millennials followed by Gen-Xs and Baby-Boomers. Despite each generation has a different weekly wine consumption behavior, the most frequent consumption reported in all cases is between three and nine glasses. Still, the sample denotes a significant negative correlation between age and wine consumption ( $R^2 = -0.23$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). A similar consumption correlation is found by income the three lower levels (up to \$45,000); greater income levels report to increase weekly consumption. Still, results have no correlation between wine consumption and income ( $R^2 = 0.12$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ).

Table 4  
Wine Consumption per Generation and Income

Glasses	Generation (%)			Income \$ '000 (%)					
	Millennials N=117	Gen-Xs N=76	Baby-Boomers N=59	< 25 N=29	25-35 N=76	35-45 N=109	45-55 N=25	55-65 N=11	> 65 N=3
0 to 3	5.2	11.4	18.6	14.0	7.0	8.0	24.0	18.0	0.0
3 to 6	31.0	40.5	42.4	55.0	26.0	40.0	40.0	18.0	0.0
6 to 9	44.8	46.8	23.7	28.0	57.0	43.0	12.0	0.0	67.0
9 to 12	17.2	1.3	13.6	3.0	9.0	6.0	24.0	55.0	33.0
> 12	1.7	0.0	1.7	0.0	1.0	2.0	0.0	9.0	0.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5  
Factor Influencing Wine Purchasing

	Sample N=254	Millennials N=119	Gen-Xs N=76	Baby-Boomers N=59
<i>% of Mentions</i>				
Bottle Design/Colors	<b>26</b>	<b>47</b>	13	<b>31</b>
Brand/Producer name	+	+	+	8
Country-of-origin	23	24	20	25
Food pairings	24	18	<b>29</b>	
Friend's recommendations	8	15		<b>78</b>
Grapes variety	<b>59</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>66</b>	
Internet reviews	+	8	+	17
Medals/Awards	13	7	21	
Organic production	10	12	13	12
Previous experiences	9	8	8	25
Price	<b>44</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>34</b>
Region	22	13	28	22
Salesperson advices	14	+	18	+
Social medias	9	17		14
Vintage	7	+	11	+
Wine apps	+	8	+	+
Wine magazine reviews	+	+	+	8

+n/a

Each respondent selected three factors which consider mostly influence when purchasing wine (Table 5). Grape variety is the most influencing factor when purchasing wine (59%), followed by price (44%) and the bottle design/color (26%). Despite some noted coincidences, each generation reports some differences. Millennials mention price (52%) as the most influencing factor followed by bottle design/color (47%) and grape variety (45%). Gen-Xers most ranked factor is grape variety (66%) followed by price (45%) and food pairings (29%). Grape variety (78%) highly influence Baby-Boomers; region (34%) and food pairings (31%) are next. In general, price is a common factor for all generations. Millennials and Baby-Boomers report bottle design/color as a relevant factor. However, grape variety influences



Millennials whereas friends' recommendations influence highly Baby-Boomers. In general, other factors are highly ranked with 20% or more of the mentions: Country-of-origin (23%), Food pairings (24%) and region (22%). Similarly, Millennials and Baby-Boomers share country-of-origin (24% and 25%).

*Hypotheses Test*

Hypotheses are tested using correlation analysis (Table 6). All the variables are correlated at  $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed). Weekly wine consumption is significantly correlated to external bottle information (H1) and to entourage (H2) giving support for both hypotheses, however a linear regression analysis provides a more robust result (see below). Both independent variables are significantly correlated providing new insights to the analysis.

Table 6  
Correlation Analysis

	External bottle information	Entourage
External bottle information	-	
Entourage	.513**	-
Weekly wine consumption	.677**	.612**

*Reliability*

To test the reliability of the data collected, we tested every variable using Cronbach's Alpha (Table 7). In this case, the Cronbach's Alpha for all the variables is above 0.6, meaning the questions are likely to gather similar results when executed again (Flynn *et al.*, 1994).

Table 7  
Reliability

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
External bottle information	0.798
Entourage	0.721
Weekly wine consumption	0.694

*Linear regression*

The linear regression analysis includes two models (Table 8). Model 1 displays the relationship between external bottle information and weekly wine consumption (H1). Model 2 shows the relationship between entourage and weekly wine consumption (H2). In both cases, the dependent variables show high significant influence ( $p < 0.01$ ) to the dependent variable proving support for the two purposed hypotheses. Similarly, the high values of R2 and adjusted R2 in both models provides more support for the hypotheses test. Control

variables (gender, age and income) fail to display a distinct influence on the dependent variable (weekly wine consumption).

Table 8  
Linear Regression

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
External bottle information	0.518** (0.097)	
Entourage		0.427** (0.072)
R2	0.453	0.381
Adjusted R2	0.448	0.369
Change in R2	0.453	0.357

## DISCUSSION

Testing of both hypotheses provides new insights on wine consumption for Millennials and other consumers. The sample represents subscribers to a wine electronic newsletter including a combination of other two generations, Gen-X and Baby-Boomers. As subscribing to this type of electronic newsletter is more appealing to digital savvy consumers (Barger *et al.*, 2016), thus the composition of the sample (Iyer *et al.*, 2016). The difference of the sample to the actual population arguments for an interest in wine of the sample. Similarly, the sample provides a snapshot of wine consumers with particular characteristics of income and wine consumption. Seemingly, wine consumption is not significantly related to income and other variables like gender. Nevertheless, wine consumption by glasses happens to concentrate for the sample between three and nine glasses weekly (Kerr *et al.*, 2004). Something that is slightly different as income increases perhaps due to mostly larger income is generally obtained over the years.

External bottle information is a very important cue for consumers and has a positive impact on weekly wine consumption. It confirms consumers rate both front and back labels as strongly influencing in assisting their decision on which wine to purchase (Thomas and Pickering, 2003). The more consumers positively ponder external bottle information, the more wine they purchase and consequently drink. These factors can also influence the post-purchase evaluation in a positive or negative way (Barber and Almanza, 2007). This study demonstrates that consumers when purchasing wine consider external bottle information as considerable value. In general, wine consumers seem to consider grape variety, price and bottle design as very influencing external information cue when purchasing wine. External bottle information enables customers to test their knowledge on wine. Thus, it's possible to

claim that there is a positive correlation between bottle external cues and volume of wine consumed (Hussain *et al.*, 2007).

Similarly, wine consumers seemly prone to purchase wine base on advices and recommendations, their entourage. The evidence from this study shows that entourage influence positively the wine-purchasing decision. Promoting wine consumption to consumers' peers and friends would result in a likely influence for the wine purchase decision. Likewise, other potential influencers such as sellers, specialists, applications and Internet would have similar impact on wine consumers. However, the level of influence of each of these elements by generation or other psychographic variable is still to be further tested.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study contributes to previous research made by specialists or observers. The findings focused on various subjects linked to wine thinking mainly on the millennial generation. This research defines millennial generation and their behavior as wine consumers following the work by other researchers. Many studies have been conducted in the United States about these generations, but few on their wine consumption behavior (Thomas, 2013). For this study, Millennials and other generations are characterized by sharing within common values and needs. They are key-drivers of the wine industry and further potential industry changers. The sample denotes looking for a preference for information and recommendations when purchase wine. It represents a valuable finding for future research on the wine industry.

This study demonstrates a positive influence of two factors on wine consumption: external bottle information and entourage. First, it provides a list of factors that compose external bottle information and entourage. The results show that as wine customers consider external bottle information and entourage as influencing their purchasing decision, the more they consume wine. It proves external bottle information is relevant to consumers, and that entourage impact on wine consumption is considerable. Producers and marketers might consider these factor to commercialize wine. Entourage positive influence would increase as technology allows to communicate extensively to wine consumers' friends, family, peers, salespeople. The free access to other wine consumers' reviews and advices is potentially a game-changer for the industry.

### *Practical implications, limitations and future research recommendations*

This study shows a few limitations that should be taken into consideration. The results and analysis used for this study are limited to the responses on the online survey distributed through an electronic newsletter in the USA. Results and conclusions are based on the

answers received preventive a generalization. However, the study findings represent a potential indication to analyze in detail influence for wine purchase and consumption. may not be a perfect representation of the United States wine consumption. Nevertheless, the results and findings demonstrate the positive influence of external bottle information and entourage on wine consumption in line with previous findings.

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