

Winery Word of Mouth: The Role of Brand Prestige, Brand Credibility and Wine Experience

Sara Santos¹; Fábio Caldas², Pedro Manuel do Espírito Santo², Luísa Augusto¹ and Adriana Oliveira³

¹CISED - Centro de Investigação em Serviços Digitais - Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Portugal

²Instituto Politécnico de Coimbra, ESTGOH, Oliveira do Hospital, Portugal

³CEOS.PP ISCAP, Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Portugal

ssantos@esev.ipv.pt

fabio.caldas95@gmail.com

pedro.santo@estgoh.ipc.pt

laugusto@esev.ipv.pt

aoliveira@iscap.ipp.pt

Abstract: Although tourism has been heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, its potential as an economic activity that enables the economic and social development of the regions is recognized. As a result of concerns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist agents seek to diversify their offers. In this situation, whether because of the knowledge and interest of tourists in the wine sector or because of the credibility and prestige of some brands with greater notoriety in the sector, wine tourism can be an essential stimulus for the attractiveness of tourists and international investors. Wine is a product of a highly differentiated experience, and tourists who visit wineries that produce wine seek to know the wine production process and have a unique experience with wine brands. These tourists who visit wine cellars seek information through specialized websites, blogs or magazines and highlight the role of word-of-mouth recommendations. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the influence of brand prestige, brand credibility, and brand experience on wine and wineries' word of mouth (WOM). It was carried out a cross-sectional study using a quantitative methodology. Data collected from a sample of 207 individuals were analyzed using PLS structural equation modeling using SMART PLS software. The main results obtained confirm that the credibility and prestige of the brands have a crucial role in the word of mouth of wine cellars.

Keywords: wineries, brand prestige, brand credibility, wine experience, tourism

1. Introduction

Wine experience has a positive influence on brand trust and satisfaction (Drennan, Bianchi, Cacho-Elizondo, Louriero, Guibert, and Proud, 2015), positively influencing the brand image (Madeira, Correia, and Filipe, 2019) and brand loyalty (Bruwer, Coode, Saliba, and Herbst, 2013). Santos, Ramos, Almeida, and Santos-Pavón (2019) add that wine tourism experiences are memorable, enriching, and stimulating experiences with a profound meaning, which is why they are crucial for wine tourism.

"A winery experience is considered to occur at the tasting room typically; however, in this article, a model is designed to address the issue that the experience starts from the initial perception when visitors arrive at the winery and finishes when they leave" (Bruwer, Coode, Saliba, and Herbst, 2013, p.400).

The wine experience has gained a crucial role in tourism activity related to wine tourism (Ribeiro Dos Santos, 2021; Santos, Ramos, Almeida, and Santos-Pavón, 2019), as it allows to experience the destination itself (Ngan, 2019).

Wine tourism is classified as a form of special interest tourism and is a growing tourism activity, contributing to the economic development of wine regions (Vo Thanh and Kirova, 2018). With most goods and services, the general assumption is that price is the factor that influences the perceived quality of a wine (Augusto, Santos, and Santo, 2020). Consequently, the subjective experience of wine consumers is enhanced (Werner et al., 2021).

Our study, however, presents a different view. Thus, our study aims to research brand prestige and brand credibility as variables influencing wine consumer experience. Additionally, this study aims to research the influence of brand prestige, brand credibility, and brand experience on wine and wineries' word of mouth (WOM).

2. Literature review

2.1 Word of Mouth Communication (WOM)

Word of mouth (WOM) is a form of communication to advise and recommend visiting a specific winery very strongly (Bruwer and Reilly, 2006); it promotes the destination (Yen and Wang, 2020). For Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), WOM brings significant competitive advantages over other techniques and forms of communication in organizations because it is seen as independent from the company. WOM has a significant moderating effect on the relationships between brand image and brand attitude, driving brand equity (Ansary and Hashim, 2018).

Interpersonal communication or word of mouth (WOM) includes any information about a destination or destination object passed from one person to one or more people, either in person or through some means of communication (Bruwer and Reilly, 2006).

WOM gains even more strength when used in online media, as the "internet induces new ways of capturing, analyzing, interpreting, and managing the influence that one consumer may have on another" (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012, p. 591). The study by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) concludes that eWOM among tourists has significant, positive, and direct impacts on the attitude and behavioral intention of the other, creating a favorable image of the destination reducing promotional expenses.

Bruwer and Reilly (2006) point out that negative WOM will influence many more people than positive WOM. The study results by Xiong, Wang, and Yen (2021) reveal that visitor engagement have a significant and positive impact on satisfaction and word of mouth. This involvement implies that visitors understand the meanings and importance of wine culture, so managers must promote actions that increase the awareness and image of wine culture.

In their study of WOM and the cultural event of wine, Yen and Wang (2020) find that new experiences (novelty) influence perceived value, which influences satisfaction, which in turn influences WOM. The authors suggest that managers can foster more diverse, new experiences to improve tourists' perception and increase participants' willingness to recommend via WOM.

2.2 Brand prestige

The market is increasingly global, with prestige being a relevant indicator in terms of brand positioning; in this context, there is an opening for a brand positioned globally to achieve a strong level of prestige (Kapferer, 1994; Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden, 2003).

According to the literature, consumers tend to attribute quality and a more positive evaluation to brands when they associate prestige. This scenario also improves purchase intention increases trust, social status, and brand valuation. Thus, it becomes pertinent to work on brand prestige because the higher it is, the more impact it has on consumers (Baek, Kim, and Yu, 2010; Kazmi and Khaliq, 2019; Kim, Styliadis, and Oh, 2019).

It should be noted that consumers who are more concerned with being valued by others in society are more likely to purchase prestige brands (Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss, 1975; Lichtenstein, Ridgway, and Netemeyer, 1993; Truong, McColl, and Kitchen, 2009). Another pertinent fact is that consumers themselves prefer to buy a product or service that is identified as being of a prestigious brand, namely because they feel more valued in society because they associate it with a sign of social status, wealth, or power (Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra, 1999; Steenkamp et al., 2003).

Brand prestige is associated with the product's high status associated with a brand (Santo and Cardoso, 2021).

In this context, the relevance of quality and the consumer's involvement with the product is evident, as the consumer shows evidence of satisfaction when revealing a high level of involvement (Mittal, 1989; Suh and Youjjae, 2006; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). In tourism, it is essential to pay attention to the tourist destination and that the product carries tangible and intangible attributes. This product brings features such as price, design, image, brand, prestige. So, the tourist perception of quality, prestige, and brand image is significant (Dias and Cardoso, 2017).

Therefore, it will be tested the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand Prestige has positive impacts on word of mouth of wine and winery

2.3 Brand credibility

Consumers or tourists see the winery experience as something intangible and difficult to assess before the purchase, so it is influenced by the recommendation of others (Chocarro and Cortiñas, 2013) and brand credibility.

Increasingly wineries integrate "sustainability into their communication strategy to reinforce their brand and market positioning" (Sellers-Rubio and Nicolau-Gonzalbez, 2016, p. 96).

The notion of brand credibility was inspired by Erdem and Swait (1998), who examined consumer-based brand equity based on signaling theory. Brand credibility is defined as the trustworthiness of the information expressed by a brand; it means the way consumers perceive the brand and the value promises through the products it represents (Erdem and Swait, 2004; Erdem *et al.*, 2006, Santo and Cardoso, 2021).

This concept consists of two main components: 1) trustworthiness – consumer trust in what is promised and 2) expertise - ability in providing information about the company (Erdem and Swait, 1998, 2004; Nayeem, Murshed, and Dwivedi, 2019). Thus, brand credibility refers to the brand information that consumers evaluate through expertise or ability, which makes them trust or not trust it (Vidyanata, Sunaryo, and Hadiwidjojo, 2018). It has resulted from consumers' perceptions of the brand's services, experiences, and marketing strategies (website, events, advertising, etc.) (Dwivedi, Johnson, Wilkie, and Araujo-Gil, 2019). For building brand credibility, it is essential to spread information through marketing strategies (Erdem and Swait, 1998) because this credibility affects consumer choice of a brand (Erdem and Swait, 2004).

When credibility is high, consumers trust the brand more, generating a more positive attitude (Chin, Isa, and Alodin, 2019).

Some authors demonstrated that brand credibility impacts positive word-of-mouth (An *et al.*, 2018), consumers' price sensitivity (Erdem, Swait, and Louviere, 2002), and it is an element of quality (Wu and Cheng, 2013).

Martín-Consuegra *et al.* (2018) consider that brand credibility contributes to overall corporate image and is also a predictor of customer loyalty (Folkvord *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, it will be tested the following hypothesis:

H2: Brand credibility has positive impacts on word of mouth of wine and winery

2.4 Wine Experience and WOM

Madeira, Correia, and Filipe (2019) explain the wine experience by four dimensions: the staff, interaction with the cellar door, education, and aesthetics. Santos, Ramos, Almeida, and Santos-Pavón (2019) and Ribeiro Dos Santos (2021) add to the dimension of the place the dimension of the landscape as an influencer of the wine experience and consider that the wine experience can be measured by the following dimensions: cultural experience, exciting experience, sensory appeal/experience, winescape, wine storytelling, and wine product/activity involvement.

Santos, Ramos, Almeida, and Santos-Pavón (2020) developed a scale to measure wine tourism experiences, considering four main dimensions: wine narrative, enthusiasm for wine tasting, involvement with wine, and the wine landscape and concluded that the winery narrative is one of the most relevant dimensions. "Wine storytelling appears as a most significant dimension because it visits the wine cellars begin and ends with the wine tour guide/winemaker/wine producer, where there are authentic stories related to wine and wine tourism, which wine tourists much appreciate." (Santos, Ramos, Almeida, and Santos-Pavón, 2020, p. 12).

In his study, in a holistic approach, Ribeiro Dos Santos (2021) argues that the winemaking experience comprises four main dimensions: the wine narrative, sensory emotion of wine, and involvement with wine and wine landscape.

For Santos, Caldeira, Santos, Oliveira, and Ramos (2019), the wine tourism experience influences the visitors' experience and recommendation intentions. Winery knowledge is closely related to the wine experience (Bianchi, 2015; Drennan, Bianchi, Cacho-Elizondo, Louriero, Guibert, and Proud, 2015). Leri and Theodoridis (2020) add that visitors with previous winery experience have a better perception of the experience, with positive emotions, generating greater satisfaction with the experience and willingness to recommend the experience.

A personal recommendation through the Word of Mouth (WOM) carries more weight than a declaration made by the winery (Bruwer and Reilly, 2006).

Thus, it will be tested the following:

H3: Wine brand experience has positive impacts on word of mouth of wine and winery

H4: Brand prestige has positive effects on wine Brand Experience

H5: Brand credibility has positive effects on wine Brand Experience

3. Methodology

The validation of the proposed model follows a survey conducted among wine consumers. This investigation was cross-sectional research with these consumers as a unit of analysis who answered a self-administered questionnaire. Their participation was selected by non-probabilistic sampling by convenience. The data was analyzed through the valid answers of 207 wine consumers, primarily male (66.3%), with ages between 21 and 40 years old in most cases (64.0%). Mostly of wine consumers has higher education qualifications (70.4%).

Data was collected through a self-administered survey, and we measured the constructs with items modified from previous studies, as we show in table 1. Hence, we used two items for brand credibility from Baek et al. (2010) to measure the constructs' items. We used three items from Baek et al. (2010) to measure brand prestige. The brand experience was measured with three items proposed by Pomarici et al. (2017). Wine and winery word of mouth was measured with four items from Quintal et al. (2015).

All the items used in this study were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

4. Results

For data analysis, Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was chosen to estimate the conceptual model because it enables the researchers to assess causal relationships. The PLS-SEM is appropriate for exploratory research and does not require normality of data (Hair Jr et al., 2016). Additionally, PLS-SEM is executed in two steps. First, we analyzed the reliability and validity of the measurement model and analyzed the relations between constructs as suggested by Hair Jr et al. (2016). The PLS-Algorithm was executed on SMART PLS v3.3.2 (Ringle et al., 2015).

4.1 Common method bias

We collected responses from the same respondents, and common method bias was possible. Thus, we performed Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003), with factor one representing 19.97% of the variance. Furthermore, we carry out a preliminary data analysis to validate VIF - Variance Inflation Factor. VIF values are ranged between 1,523 and 4,451, which is below the threshold value (VIF <5). Therefore, there is no multicollinearity. Accordingly, common method bias would not be a concern. Moreover, we analyzed the Skewness (Sk) and Kurtosis (Ku), and we saw that the items do not diverge from normality (Sk <3; Ku <7) (Hair et al., 2018).

4.2 Measurement model

The validity, reliability, and standardized loadings (λ) were analyzed. Therefore, table 1 shows that standardized item loadings are above the minimum threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2013), which were acceptable for further analysis.

Table 1: Items

Item	Code	λ	t values
<i>Brand Credibility</i> ($\alpha = 0.936$; $\rho A = 0.939$; $CR = 0.969$; $AVE = 0.940$)			
This brand is reliable.	CRD1	0,971**	134,747
This brand has a name you can trust.	CRD2	0,967**	106,652
<i>Brand Prestige</i> ($\alpha = 0.839$; $\rho A = 0.862$; $CR = 0.902$; $AVE = 0.754$)			
This brand of wine is prestigious.	PRT1	0,897**	60,372
This brand of wine is highly regarded by the population	PRT2	0,822**	21,266
This brand of wine is very sophisticated	PRT3	0,885**	50,747
<i>Brand Experience</i> ($\alpha = 0.915$; $\rho A = 0.923$; $CR = 0.946$; $AVE = 0.854$)			
I am interested in this wine.	EXP1	0,937**	71,689
Knowing this wine is very important to me	EXP2	0,909**	44,754
The experience with this wine is something important to me	EXP3	0,926**	67,842
<i>Word of mouth</i> ($\alpha = 0.915$; $\rho A = 0.915$; $CR = 0.946$; $AVE = 0.854$)			
I will suggest this wine to buy	WOM1	0,923**	71,247
I am happy to encourage family and friends to buy this wine	WOM2	0,935**	63,902
If you ask my advice, this wine and this winery are one of my recommendations for friends and family.	WOM3	0,915**	36,128

λ - Standardized Loadings; ** $p < 0.01$; α = Cronbach's Alpha; AVE - Average Variance Extracted; CR - Composite Reliability

In addition, table 1 shows that Cronbach’s alpha (α)(ranging from 0.839 to 0.936), average Variance extracted (AVE) (ranging from 0.754 to 0.940) and composite reliability (CR) (ranging from 0.902 to 0.969) are above the threshold values ($AVE > 0.5$; $CR > 0.7$) (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988, Bagozzi et al., 1991). These values showed convergent validity and reliability for all constructs.

To access the discriminant validity, first, we examine the Fornell and Larcker criteria (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), and we verified that the correlations between constructs are below than square root values in diagonals of the AVE (table 2).

Table 2: Discriminant validity - criteria from (Fornell and Larcker, 1981)

	CARD	EXP	PRINT	WOM
Brand Credibility (CRD)	0,969			
Brand Experience (EXP)	0,317	0,924		
Brand Prestige (PRT)	0,659	0,262	0,869	
Word of Mouth (WOM)	0,682	0,396	0,632	0,924

CRD = Brand Credibility; EXP = Brand Experience; PRT = Brand Prestige; WOM = Word of Mouth;

Second, we examined the discriminant validity through the cross-loadings criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 3 shows a comparison of the column loadings, and each indicator exhibits that the indicator's loadings on its construct are higher in all cases compared to all its cross-loadings with other constructs.

Table 3: Cross loadings

	CRD	EXP	PRT	WOM
CRD1	0,971	0,315	0,658	0,683
CRD2	0,967	0,300	0,618	0,638
PRT1	0,725	0,248	0,897	0,606
PRT2	0,478	0,116	0,822	0,453
PRT3	0,491	0,290	0,885	0,567
EXP1	0,274	0,937	0,181	0,347
EXP2	0,297	0,909	0,274	0,325
EXP3	0,305	0,926	0,265	0,418
WOM1	0,654	0,313	0,596	0,923

	CRD	EXP	PRT	WOM
WOM2	0,602	0,433	0,592	0,935
WOM3	0,636	0,353	0,564	0,915

CRD = Brand Credibility; EXP = Brand Experience; PRT = Brand Prestige; WOM = Word of Mouth;

Finally, as the third step, the discriminant validity was examined through the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations and, as can be seen in the Table, the HTMT values are below 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, discriminant has been established between variables.

	CARD	EXP	PRINT	WOM
Brand Credibility (CRD)				
Brand Experience (EXP)	0,341			
Brand Prestige (PRT)	0,732	0,284		
Word of Mouth (WOM)	0,736	0,429	0,711	

CRD = Brand Credibility; EXP = Brand Experience; PRT = Brand Prestige; WOM = Word of Mouth;

4.3 Structural model

To analyze the structural model, we examined the adjusted R² of the endogenous variables in our model, which are 0.554 for word of mouth. In addition, we obtained R²= 0.106 for brand experience.

Following, we examined the results of the hypotheses tests by evaluating the significance of the path coefficients through bootstrapping procedure with 5000 subsamples. We display in Table 4 the results of hypotheses testing.

Table 4: Hypothesis test

Hyp.	Path	Std β	t value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval		f ²	Result
					Lower	Upper		
H1	PRT → WOM	0,305	3,597	0,000	0,132	0,466	0.118	Supported
H2	CRD → WOM	0,423	5,157	0,000	0,268	0,588	0.218	Supported
H3	EXP → WOM	0,182	3,243	0,001	0,070	0,292	0.067	Supported
H4	PRT → EXP	0,093	0,923	0,356	-0,096	0,300	0.005	Not Supported
H5	CRED → EXP	0,256	2,651	0,008	0,054	0,430	0.041	Supported

β = Standardized path coefficients; CRD = Brand Credibility; EXP = Brand Experience; PRT = Brand Prestige; WOM = Word of Mouth;

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Discussion

The main goal of this study is analysing the role of brand credibility, prestige and wine experience in word of mouth of wine and winery. This research tested five hypotheses, and the results supported the research hypothesis framework.

H1 hypothesis verified that wine brand prestige influences word of mouth. According to Hair et al. (2016), *f two* values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for the significant independent variables represent weak, moderate, and substantial effects, respectively.

Therefore, we consider that brand prestige has positive and moderate effects on word of mouth of wine and wineries. This conclusion is also suggested by Dias and Cardoso (2017), who state that brand prestige influences word of mouth through brand value. Therefore, H1 was confirmed by our research.

Hypothesis H2 confirms that brand credibility has positive effects on word of mouth of wine and winery, and these effects are moderate. This confirmation of the hypothesis is related to the literature since positive

attitudes towards the brand depend on brand credibility (Chin, Isa, and Aldoin, 2019) and impacts positively on word of mouth (An et al., 2018).

The wine tourism experience influences the recommendation intentions, and Hypothesis H3 also verifies that the effects of wine experience on word of mouth of wine and winery are positive, although weak.

Brand prestige is related to brand value, satisfaction, and brand experience (Santos, Caldeira, Oliveira, and Ramos, 2019). This research revealed no evidence confirming that brand prestige influences the wine experience. We considered that our research did not support H4 because the results did not reveal a high wine experience.

Although brand prestige does not influence wine experience, brand credibility has positive effects; however, these effects are considered weak. Even so, we consider our study supported hypothesis H5, and we consider that credibility is related to consumer choice and experience (Erdem and Swait, 2004).

5.2 Conclusions

Our research investigated the antecedents of wine and winery word of mouth and identified that brand prestige, credibility, and experience positively influence wine and winery word of mouth. Thus, we consider that the contributions of this study are relevant both theoretical and business.

We consider that this study reveals that brand perceptions influence the wine and winery word of mouth at a theoretical level. In this sense, our research found that brand prestige and brand credibility positively influence word of mouth.

Our research is relevant for wine tourism companies and wine producers as it identifies that brand marketing actions are relevant to enhance the prestige of wine brands and wine tourism company brands with the aim of wine consumers recommending the brands.

5.3 Limitations

In summary, we consider that our study is relevant; however, we present some research limitations. Thus, we observed that the sample is mainly young consumers. In addition, consumers claimed to have higher education qualifications. In this sense, we propose to conduct new studies with different samples that include older consumers.

Our study did not investigate subjective knowledge about wine. This variable may be relevant if included as a moderator in the present model. Thus, we suggest a research model that includes subjective knowledge about wine.

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