

Does a Label Have a Taste? Available Information and their Effect on the Perceived Quality of Wine by Czech Students

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Abstract

This paper discusses information input and its influence on the consumer decision process. Authors conducted an experiment to determine, whether the information available to consumers have the potential to influence how they perceive product quality and as a result, influence the output of the consumer decision process as well. The assumption was verified by conducting qualitative research – a wine tasting experiment. The aim of this paper is to bring attention to the presence of irrational consumer behavior in a situation, where the authors deliberately seek to influence consumers' sensory evaluation of product quality by providing them with certain information.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, irrationality, quality perception, information, wine.

Introduction

Marketing experts are passing around a tale, a story, which actually happened (Mueller 2014). The events took place in New Jersey. Joe Lentini went out after work to have a steak with his colleagues. The four men also wanted to have some wine with their meal, so Joe asked a waitress to recommend him one of a good quality. She pointed to one bottle in the wine list. Joe asked about the price of the wine, and the waitress answered that the wine cost 37,50 \$, an amount, which Joe was willing to pay for a bottle of good quality wine.

After tasting the wine, Joe nodded in approval and let the waitress serve it to others as well. He said later that the wine tasted well. "It wasn't great, and it wasn't bad either, it

was OK," he said. The problem arose upon delivery of a bill, which was for more than 4,000 \$. The wine did cost 3,750 \$. It was Screaming Eagle from California, an exclusive cult wine, one of the most expensive wines in the world (Beverland 2004).

A consumer, who is aware of drinking expensive wine, can enjoy and appreciate it adequately (Ashenfelter 2008), (Capehart 2015). But what about a consumer, who is drinking expensive wine while thinking it is actually a common wine in the average price range? How much would this consumer appreciate the wine? And what will consumer behavior be like, if the consumer is strongly convinced that the cheap wine he or she is drinking is actually an exclusive one?

Authors conducted a small experiment-based study, the aim of which was to bring attention to the influence of marketing communication, or more precisely product information on consumer preferences or changes these preferences may undergo. Moreover, available product information is fundamental for a consumer (Lecocq and Visser 2006). Provided that consumer is regarded as an economic entity, the information is the basic foundation for rational behavior (Zavodný and Kozák 2013).

Rational behavior is then defined as personal opinions and behavior based on logical and objective analysis of all information available (Durlauf and Blume 2008). A human being, who behaves rationally is a presumption, which traditional economy is based upon (Simon 1955). This rationality does not manifest itself in the form of correctly chosen goals, but in the way, these goals are being reached (Koukolík 2010).

Herbert Simon (1982) disagreed with the traditional view on a rational individual. Instead, he proposed the theory of bounded rationality. According to this theory, people do not decide based on principles of rational choice theory, they rather seek a solution, which is satisfactory in the particular given situation.

Coming across irrational behavior is common. The thought process is considered irrational when it leads to conclusion or decision, which is not the best one according to evidence and with regard to time available for the thought process (Koukolík and Drtilová 2008). Possible causes of irrationality are numerous and can be divided into several groups: first-impression error, social reasons, stereotypes, organization reasons, traps, wrong usage of rewards and punishments, emotions and flaws in the thought process.

Some of the causes mentioned above of irrationality can play a major part in the case of poor judgment of a product. The factors, which can influence a consumer, are primarily as follows: availability error, emotional and social issues and cognitive thinking errors in thought process (Sutherland 1992). Authors conducted a small experiment-based study with a small group of volunteers. This study aimed to demonstrate, whether product information can influence the consumer's sensory perception of the product. The results of this study also refer to a possibility to influence consumer's rationality.

Methods and Data

Irrationality in consumer behavior was observed during an experiment – conducted a wine tasting. This experiment aimed to obtain data and based on the evaluation of these data either prove or disprove research assumption as follows:

a) Primary research assumption: Consumer's sensory evaluation of product quality is influenced by information provided. b) Secondary research assumption: Consumers, who prefer wine to other alcoholic beverages, are less likely to be influenced than those, who favor other alcoholic beverages.

Four different bottles of the same wine type were chosen for the experiment. The type was a dry white wine Chardonnay. The price range was the same for all bottles, from 100 CZK (4 €) to 130 CZK (5 €).

However, the information about wines given to research participants differed. All wines were poured to identical unmarked bottles. Two of them were presented as a standard, average wines and two of them were presented as exclusive wines.

Each wine was introduced and subsequently tasted. At the end, after having tasted the last wine, research participants were asked to fill in a short questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part focused on wines the participants tasted: overall impression, flavor, and bouquet, whether they would purchase it or not, and how much they would be willing to spend on it. The second part focused on the participants themselves: whether they consider themselves wine experts, how often they drink wine, what alcoholic beverage they prefer and additional questions about age and sex.

During the experiment, all wines were served in same unmarked generic wine bottles. Nevertheless, two bottles were introduced as if they contained better wine than the other two. The main aim was to observe, whether provided product information will influence the final evaluation of products. All wines were poured from the same, unmarked bottle in order for participants not to create an opinion based on the appearance of the bottle or label and, above all, in order to prevent any participants from recognizing the presented product and therefore reveal the truth about the falsity of provided information.

Then, the wine tasting was replicated with the same wines but different participants in order to verify the results. The difference was that this time, the wines were not only poured from unmarked bottles but also, none of them was introduced with any information.

Results

The experiment was conducted in February 2016. The final number of participants was 23,11 of them were men and 12 were women. Their age ranged from 19 to 24 years. Only university students were chosen in order to ensure the homogeneity of the group. Some of them were invited personally to participate; some of them answered an invitation posted on the social network website Facebook.

Questionnaires consisted of two parts. In the first part, respondents evaluated the wines they tasted. The second part was more general and asked for information about the participants themselves especially on their attitude towards wine and its consumption. As the results showed, no one considered itself as a wine expert. On the other hand, 43,5% of respondents reported consumption of a glass of wine more than once a week.

After having tasted the samples, the participants evaluated each wine individually. First, they evaluated the overall impression and then separately flavor and bouquet. A scale of 1 to 5 was used for the evaluation, where rating 1 represented the best possible evaluation and rating 5 represented the worst possible evaluation.

The following question inquired, whether the respondent would or would not purchase a bottle of the wine they had just tasted, either for themselves or for someone else (this addition was intended for those who normally do not drink wine and thus would not probably purchase a whole bottle for themselves). The last question of the first part of the questionnaire regarded the amount, which would the respondent be willing to pay for a bottle of wine he or she had evaluated.

Wine n. 1

The wine tasting was initiated with a bottle of wine from Vínno Valtice, a dry white 2014 Chardonnay with an alcohol content of 12,5 %. The wine was introduced as one of average quality, made in the Czech Republic (while according to label, the wine was made in Republic of South Africa). Further description of this wine matched the one on its original label. This bottle was purchased in a chain store Albert and cost 129,90 CZK (5 €) on the day of purchase. However during its introduction, the wine was introduced as being cheaper, its price being 89 CZK (3,30 €).

This wine took third place in all categories (i.e. overall impression, flavor, and bouquet) in the scale evaluation. On average, its bouquet received rating 3,04, and the flavor was perceived more favorably with rating 2,61, while the overall impression received rating 2,74.

Out of 23 respondents, 17 would purchase the wine (all positive answers like “yes”, “probably” and “definitely” were taken into account) and they would be willing to pay 97 CZK (3,60 €) on average for it. This price is higher by 8 CZK (0,30 €) than the one which was stated during the introduction of the wine (one person of the aforementioned 17 did not state any price; therefore the answer was not included in the average price). Nine respondents stated that they would pay a higher price than the one stated during the introduction, their answers ranged from 100 CZK (3,70 €) to 150 CZK (5,55 €). This wine was the only case when respondents state they would be willing to pay more than the actual price, or more precisely more, than the price stated during the introduction of the wine.

Wine n. 2

The second dry white Chardonnay was a Czech wine from Velké Bílovice, the year 2015, with an alcohol content of 11 %. This bottle was purchased in a chain store Billa and cost 119,90 CZK (4,40 €) on the day of purchase. During its introduction, the wine was introduced as being slightly cheaper, its price being 105 CZK (3,90 €).

This Chardonnay was evaluated as the worst wine among those presented during the experiment. It took the last place in all categories; however, it cannot be labeled as complete “garbage”, since its overall impression received average rating 3, which is exactly in the middle of the evaluation scale. Average rating of its flavor was 3,13 and average rating of its bouquet was 3,26.

Out of 23 participants, 14 would buy a bottle of the wine n. 2, including those who answered “yes” but also those who answered “maybe”. Only 13 respondents stated a price, for which they would be willing to purchase the wine. On average, this price was 86 CZK (3,18 €). That is the lowest price participants were willing to pay for any of wines they tasted, and it is 19 CZK (0,70 €) below the price, which was mentioned during the introduction of this wine.

Wine n. 3

By introducing the third wine, an imaginary line of relatively cheap wines was crossed towards the exclusive ones. In reality, wine n. 3 was a dry white 2014 Chardonnay from Habánské sklepy in the Czech Republic. Its alcohol content was 11,5 % and the bottle cost 109,90 CZK (4 €) in a chain store Albert on the day of purchase. This bottle was presented as a French wine from a wine-producing region Bourgogne under a sumptuous name Mercurey „Clos Rochette“ Domaine Faiveley, the year 2013. The participants were told, that a bottle of this wine (0,75 liters) cost 519 CZK (19,2 €). During the introduction, some information was following the original label of the bottle (like color), but it was also combined with information about Mercurey „Clos Rochette,“ to make the wine more interesting and attractive.

The third wine sample took better place on the evaluation scale than the previous two, and overall it took the second place out of all wines presented. Its flavor received average rating 2,48, and its bouquet received slightly better rating 2,39 and an average rating of the overall impression was 2,30.

This wine received a better rating than the previous two. Also, the price participants would be willing to pay for it grew significantly. An average acceptable price for a bottle of Mercurey „Clos Rochette“ was 185 CZK (6,85 €) and 20 participants would be willing to buy it, including one response “probably” and one “maybe”. One respondent did not state any price and therefore was not included in the calculation of the average price. Despite the fact, that the acceptable price rose significantly with this wine, it was still much lower than the price we claimed this wine to have during the introduction.

Wine n. 4

The fourth bottle was purchased in a chain store Albert for 129,90 CZK (4,8 €). This wine was a dry white Chardonnay from the Czech Republic as well, this time from Chateau Bzenec. Its alcohol content was 11,5 %. However, at the wine tasting, it was presented as a very exclusive Italian wine 2013 Kreuth Chardonnay Riserva from Kellerei Terlan winery, which usually costs around 579 CZK (21,40 €). The description of the wine was adjusted to make it more attractive to the audience.

The wine tasting culminated with this wine, which took the best place out of all four. It was the only one to receive a better average rating than 2 on the evaluation scale. On average, its overall impression received rating 1,91 and its flavor received rating 1,87. The bouquet of this wine received a slightly less favorable rating - 2,17 on average.

Out of all participants, 20 would be willing to buy this “exclusive” wine, the same amount as in the case of wine n. 3. Out of these 20, only one hesitated and answered “probably.” Once again, one participant did not state any price; the rest would be willing to pay 224 CZK (8,30 €) on average for it. Consequently, this wine is the one evaluated best, concerning how much participants would be willing to pay for it.

Tab. 1: Wine tasting results summary – The experimental group

Wine number	Real price in CZK (€)	Price introduced at wine tasting	Price perceived by participants	Average rating on evaluation scale	N. of participants who would buy (max 23)
1	129,90 (5 €)	89 (3,30 €)	100-150 (3,70-5,55 €)	2,8	17
2	119,90 (4,40 €)	105 (3,90 €)	86 (3,18 €)	3,13	14
3	109,90 (4 €)	519 (19,2 €)	185 (6,85 €)	2,39	20
4	129,90 (4,8 €)	579 (21,4 €)	224 (8,30 €)	1,99	20

Source: Authors

Primary research assumption was as follows: „consumer’s sensory evaluation of product quality is influenced by information provided.” Wines which were claimed to be exclusive during the wine tasting received better average rating than those introduced as ordinary. Samples of wine n.3 and wine n.4 were evaluated more favorably than the previous two. For example, the rating “1” was given four times to wine n. 1 and not at all to wine n. 2, whereas the wine n. 3 received the rating “1” thirteen times and the wine n. 4 twenty-four times.

The number of participants who would be willing to buy a bottle did not vary significantly for each particular wine; nevertheless, it was higher with wines n. 3 and n. 4 than with the previous two. The difference was much more significant concerning price, which would

be the participants willing to pay. For wine n. 1 and 2, the perceived price was quite low - 97 (3,60 €) and 86 CZK (3,18 €) respectively and did not differ much from prices stated during the introduction of these wines - 89 CZK (3,30 €) and 105 CZK (3,90 €) respectively. Moreover the perceived price of wine n. 1 and wine n. 2 did not reach their actual price, which was 130 CZK (5 €) for wine n.1 and 120 CZK (4,40 €) for wine n.2.

On the other hand, the wines presented as exclusive were more valuable for participants. The real price of wines n. 3 and 4 was 110 CZK (4 €) and 130 CZK (4,8 €) respectively, but participants would be willing to pay 185 CZK (6,85 €) and 224 CZK (8,30 €) for them. These amounts did not by far reach the prices stated during the introduction - 519 CZK (19,2 €) and 579 CZK (21,40 €), however, this could have been caused by the fact, that all of the participants were students, whose budget is often limited and probably would not allow them to buy such an expensive bottle of wine. Only one of the participants claimed to be willing to pay 500 CZK (18,52 €) for each of the wines presented as exclusive. The same amount did not appear in any of the other questionnaires, no matter how positive was their overall evaluation of each particular wine.

The findings mentioned above show that consumers (participant of the experiment), who perceived and evaluated the certain product (wine) were influenced by provided information. The wines introduced as exclusive were perceived better than the other two, despite the fact, that the real price range and wine type was the same for every wine at the tasting. *The primary research assumption (a) can be marked as proved.*

The secondary research assumption (b) was more specific and said: "Consumers, who prefer wine to other alcoholic beverages, are less likely to be influenced than those, who favor other alcoholic beverages." Out of twenty-three participants, nine stated to prefer wine to other alcoholic beverages.

Overall, the wines were evaluated as follows: wine n.4, wine n.3, wine n. 1 and wine n. 2 (ordered from the one evaluated as the best to the one evaluated as the worst). If we take into consideration only those participants, who stated to prefer wine, the order remains the same; the only change is in category "flavor", where the third and the fourth place are switched. The wine n.2 received better evaluation than wine n.1 on the evaluation scale, but their ratings differed only by 0,11.

Concerning the average amounts participants would be willing to pay for each wine, the difference between the results of all participants and of those who prefer wine, is not very significant either. The results were 97 CZK (3,60 €), 86 CZK (3,18 €), 185 CZK (6,85 €) and 224 CZK (8,30 €) when considering all participants and 96 CZK (3,55 €), 80 CZK (2,96 €), 207 CZK (7,66 €) and 247 CZK (9,14 €), when considering only those who prefer wine. Participants who prefer wine to other alcoholic beverages evaluated the "ordinary" wines with lower amounts than the "exclusive" ones. They would be even willing to pay more money for the "exclusive" wines when compared to all participants on average.

The participants who prefer wine did not almost influence the order, in which were the wines placed in, and the amount they would be willing to pay did not differ significantly

with “ordinary” wines while being even higher with the “exclusive” ones. *Therefore, the secondary research assumption (b) must be marked as disproved.*

Control group

As mentioned above, the wine tasting was replicated in order to verify its results. The control group also consisted of 23 participants. Unlike the experimental group, these participants were not provided with any information about the wines they tasted. The aim was to find out, whether the control group would perceive and evaluate the wines differently, then the experimental group.

Wine n. 1

Wine n.1 took the third place in all categories (overall impression, flavor and bouquet) when evaluated by the experimental group. The control group evaluated it much better, and it took the first place. However, unlike the winner of experimental wine tasting (wine n. 4), the winner of the control wine tasting (wine n. 1) did not surpass rating 2 on the evaluation scale. The average rating of its overall impression and flavor was 2 and its bouquet received rating 2,29. The majority of participants (22 out of 23) would purchase this wine, the amount they would be willing to pay for a bottle ranged from 70 CZK (2,59 €) to 200 CZK (7,40 €). The average amount was 105 CZK (3,89 €).

Wine n. 2

The wine n. 2 took the last place when evaluated by the experimental group, and it remained in this position when evaluated by the control group. Moreover, its rating worsened in categories of overall impression and flavor. The former received rating 3 with the experimental group and 3,73 with the control group, the latter received rating 3,13 with the experimental group and 3,67 with the control group. The bouquet received better rating 2,43 with the control group and took second place in this category.

Only five participants would purchase a bottle of the wine n. 2 and would be willing to spend 95 CZK (3,52 €) on it. This amount is similar to the other wines.

Wine n. 3

This wine was introduced as exclusive during the experimental wine tasting and took second place in all categories. The control group, who did not receive any information about it, evaluated it worse. The overall impression and flavor of this wine received average rating 2,73 and 2,60 respectively and this wine took the third place in those categories. Concerning a bouquet, it took the last place with average rating 2,87.

Wine n.3 did not; however, fare badly concerning the other part of the evaluation. Fourteen out of twenty-three respondents would purchase it and would be willing to pay 94 CZK (3,48 €) on average for it.

Wine n. 4

This wine was also introduced as an exclusive during the experimental wine tasting and took the first place, based on its rating on evaluation scale (it received ratings 1,91; 1,87

and 2,17). While evaluated by the control group, the ratings it received were much worse. Its overall impression received rating 2,40 and its flavor received rating 2,47 and wine n.4 took the second place in those categories – only one place below the previous tasting, but the ratings are significantly worse. Wine n. 4 received even worse rating 2,73 concerning its bouquet and took the third place in this category.

Seventeen participants would purchase a bottle of this wine and on average would be willing to spend 93 CZK (3,44 €) on it.

Tab. 2: Wine tasting results summary – control group

Wine number	Price perceived by participants	Place in evaluation	Average rating on evaluation scale	N. of participants who would buy (max 23)
1	105 (389 €)	1	2,09	22
2	95 (3,52 €)	4	3,27	5
3	94 (3,48 €)	3	2,73	14
4	93 (3,44 €)	2	2,53	17

Source: Authors

Discussion

The wine n. 3 and the wine n. 4 were introduced as exclusive at the first wine tasting. As mentioned above, the wine n. 4 received rating “1” the most with the experimental group. It received this rating twenty-four times. This amount represents 34,78 % of all ratings this wine received.

The participants of the second wine tasting were much more restrained when rating these two wines. The wine n. 4 received rating “1” only three times, which is 4,44% of all ratings this wine received.

There was almost no difference between the amounts participants would be willing to spend on individual wines at the control wine tasting. It is important to note, that only five participants would be willing to buy the wine n. 2. This does not, however, change the fact that the participants would be willing to pay relatively similar amounts for individual wines when having no information about them. The situation was completely different at the first wine tasting. The experimental group was willing to pay larger amounts for wines they believed to be exclusive and expensive.

Tab. 3: Wine tasting results – comparison of experimental and control groups

	Wine n. 1		Wine n. 2		Wine n. 3		Wine n. 4	
	Experi- mental	Control	Experi- mental	Control	Experi- mental	Control	Experi- mental	Control
Flavor	2,61	2	3,13	3,67	2,48	2,60	1,87	2,47
Bouquet	3,04	2,29	3,26	2,43	2,39	2,87	2,17	2,73
Overall impression	2,74	2	3	3,73	2,30	2,73	1,91	2,40
Average rating from all three categories	2,8	2,09	3,13	3,27	2,39	2,73	1,99	2,53

Source: Authors

In order to answer the question given in the paper title, we measured the differences between the results related to the overall quality of the wine. We needed to verify our assumption that the given information could change the perceived quality of the wine. In this respect, the data related to the taste of each wine had to be measured for both the primary and control group. It was necessary to identify whether there were significant differences between the two groups of respondents. For statistical evaluation of this question, it was necessary to define two hypotheses. One zero hypothesis - H_0 : "There are no differences between the perception of the taste of the wines examined in both groups of respondents." and the alternative hypothesis - H_A : "There are differences between the perception of the taste of the examined wines in both groups of respondents." Hypotheses were tested by using unpaired two-sample t-tests for each of the four wines separately. The results are presented in the table below.

Tab. 4: t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

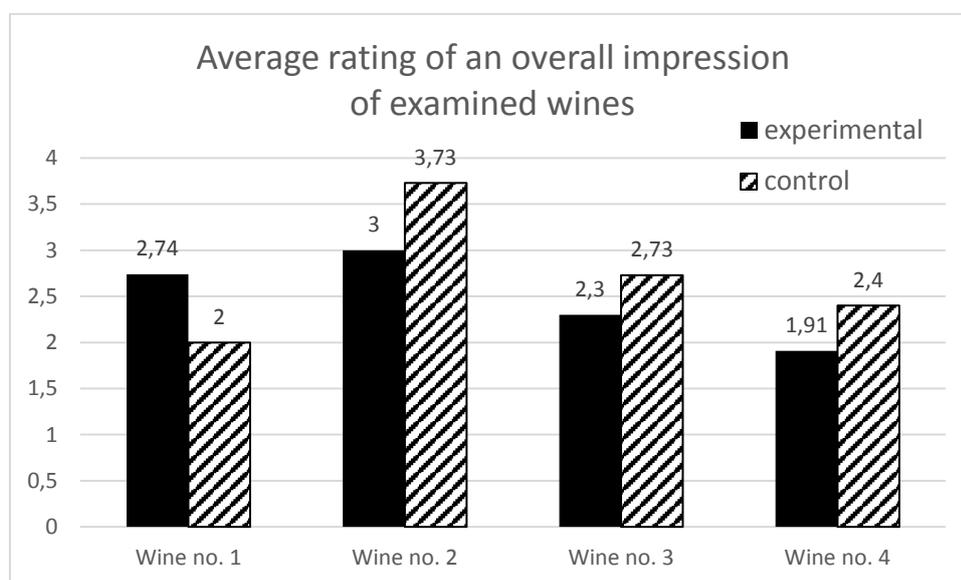
	Wine no. 1		Wine no. 2		Wine no. 3		Wine no. 4	
	Variable 1	Variable 2	Variable 2	Variable 1	Variable 2	Variable 1	Variable 1	Variable 2
Mean	2,79710	2,02899	3,50725	3,13044	3,05797	2,39130	1,98551	2,52174
Variance	0,57312	0,29205	0,65525	0,32060	0,85507	0,78437	0,56039	0,24067
Observations	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23
Hyp. Mean Diff.	0		0		0		0	
df	40		39		44		38	
t Stat	3,96040		1,82935		2,49704		-2,8733	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0,00015		0,03750		0,00817		0,00331	
t Critical one-tail	1,68385		1,68488		1,68023		1,68595	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0,00030		0,07500		0,01634		0,00661	
t Critical two-tail	2,02108		2,02269		2,01537		2,02439	
Decision	p < 0.05							
	Reject H_0		Reject H_0		Reject H_0		Reject H_0	

Source: Authors

However, firstly it was necessary to determine whether the data has a normal distribution. For this purpose, the F-test of the equality of two variances has been used. Its results showed unequal variances of measured data for each type of examined wines. In this regards, the two-sample t-Test assuming unequal variances has been used.

Since the $P < 0.05$ in all four cases, it was possible to reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_A). Thus, it can be stated, that there were statistically significant differences in wine quality perception between the group of respondents influenced by given information and the group tasting wine without any related product information. In other words, the given product information has changed the way how the respondents perceived the quality of the tested wines.

Figure 1: Average rating of an overall impression of examined wines



Source: Authors

The results of the control group show that the evaluation is given by participants who were provided with information about the wines, whether true or not (experimental group) differs significantly from the evaluation given by participants, who were not provided with any information about the wines and rated them solely on the basis of their sensory perception (control group). Therefore, *the primary research assumption (a) „Consumer’s sensory evaluation of product quality is influenced by information provided.”* remains proved.

Observed results are at least interesting. However, it is necessary to draw attention to the limits of the experiment. The main limitation is given by the structure of the research sample. Since the students are often used in research mostly because of the sample homogeneity (Peterson, 2001), as well as because of the practical considerations such as time and cost efficiency (Beltramini 1983), their answers can vary tremendously from "non-student" population. What's more, effect sizes derived from college student subjects frequently differ from those derived from nonstudent subjects both directionally and in magnitude (Peterson 2001). As there must be exercised increased caution when

attempting to extend any relationship found using college student subjects to a "non-student" population, a generalization of our results would be inappropriate.

Also, another limitation is given by the way how the product information were distributed. The information about individual wines was presented verbally to the participants. The personality of a presenter has a significant impact on the face-to-face part of marketing communication, and this impact must be taken into consideration concerning this experiment as well. Further research would show, whether a written text would influence the participants in the same way. Furthermore, it would be desirable to repeat the experiment on different types of respondent groups to be able to make reliable general conclusions.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations as mentioned above, this research is an interesting insight into the impact information has on the wine market. The extent of the impact of marketing communication on consumer preferences is a topic, which has been discussed on a long-term basis. The research results can help to form a better marketing communication mix in relation to both integrated marketing communications (Reid et al. 2001) and wine selling.

From the scientific point of view, the research results, regardless of the need of replication, expand and specify the existing theoretical knowledge in the fields of consumer behavior rationality and impact of information on consumer preferences. It can be assumed, that to recognize a good wine could be difficult for an average consumer and the research results would be thus applicable to a narrow group of product types. However, parallels are easy to find, for example with common products like coffee or tea. A parallel situation could also be a case, when a new product enters the market or when consumers are just familiarizing with some product. It is safe to assume, that in this case, the information input would have a significant impact on the consumer as well.

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