

OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES OF WINE CONSUMERS UTILIZING FOCUS GROUP

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■ **ABSTRACT:** The objective of this work was to understand the opinions, attitudes and the perceptions of wine consumers using the focus group technique. 24 wine consumers were selected through a recruitment questionnaire to participate in the focus group. Three focus group sessions were carried out, with eight consumers in each. It was verified that the factors most observed by the consumers at the time of wine purchase were brand (71%), origin (75%) and price (75%). In relation to the type of wine, 50% of the participants prefer suave red wine. The factors that influence the purchase process and consumer preference are different in relation to the evaluation of consumers and specialists.

■ **KEYWORDS:** Market study; label; packaging.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays Brazil is a potential market to Latin American wines. Different from traditional producers like France, Italy, Argentina and Chile, where the wine consumption is decreasing, in Brazil exists a significant potential of growth. The annual Brazilian wine consumption “per capita” is approximately 2 liters. In some European countries this consumption can be up to thirty times higher.⁹

There are several factors involved in the purchase behavior and which affect consumer choice for certain products or brands. Cultural, social, family, economic and psychological factors act together in ways that make the identification of the preponderant factors in a purchase decision complex.^{8,17} The knowledge of these factors becomes primordial in the search for the competitive advantage so longed for by the organizations, being able to decisively contribute to the definition of marketing strategies and components.²⁰

For many years, consumer behavior has been investigated, basically, through studies on sensorial acceptance or preference for the product.¹¹ However, more recently, the importance of observing under which criteria the consumer bases his choice, purchase and consumption of certain products has been verified. It is in that context that the study of food packaging becomes extremely important, since it represents the consumer’s first contact with the product or the food. The package is the primary object for the definition of choice and purchase.⁴

The focus group is a qualitative research technique that can be used for the understanding of the perceptions and attitudes concerning facts, practices, products or services.¹⁴ Basically, the focus group can be considered as a type of group interview. The essence of that technique specifically consists of supporting the interaction among its participants to collect data, starting from topics that are supplied by the researcher (in this case the group moderator).¹⁵

According to Stewart & Shandasani²² for exploratory research, as is the case of the focus group technique, the simple descriptive narrative is quite appropriate for the analysis of the results. Therefore, statistical analyses are not employed due to the qualitative nature of the study.

The objective of this work was to understand the opinions, attitudes and the perceptions of wine consumers (non-specialists) of city of Lavras, MG using the focus group technique.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The wines used in this study were acquired in commercial establishments in the city of Lavras, MG and the focus group sessions were held in the Food Science Department of the Universidade Federal de Lavras – MG.

The focus groups were planned and held according to the stages described by Casey & Krueger.²

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A quantity of 70 recruitment questionnaires were distributed, among residents of Lavras, MG, and according to the answers obtained, 24 people, who consume wine at least once a month and frequent supermarkets to make purchases, were selected. The participants were divided into three groups with 8 people each, according to their individual availability.

The three groups were summoned, on distinct pre-determined dates and times, to appear in the Food Science Department of the Federal University of Lavras, where a moderator conducted the focus group sessions. All the participants were made comfortable in comfortable individual chairs distributed around a table that favored the interaction, visual contact and harmony of the discussion. The three sessions were recorded and lasted about 60 minutes each.

At the beginning of each session, the moderator presented the purpose of the technique, the role of the moderator and the objective of the study. The participants were assured that right or wrong answers for the treated subjects did not exist and were encouraged to express their opinions, even if they diverged from the answers of other group members.

The discussion was begun with questions regarding consumer opinion and attitudes in relation to the packaging, labels and types of wines. Soon afterwards, different, labeled packaging containing wines of four commercial brands were presented (Table 1). These were introduced

separately and, for each presentation, a previously elaborated list of questions was presented (Quadro 1). To favor the discussions on the consumer preference in relation to the packaging and labels, four wines were selected that presented different characteristics as to the format, color and size of the packaging, origin (different regions of Brazil and imported), grape type, price, closure, among others.

The answers of the focus group session participants were logged and recorded by an assistant. Starting from the annotations and recordings, the answers of the 24 participants in relation to their preferences, attitudes and perceptions of wine were obtained.

The data obtained through the recruitment questionnaire and from the focus group sessions were submitted to frequency analysis to facilitate the understanding of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Table 2 the profile description of the participants in the three focus group sessions obtained through the recruitment questionnaire can be observed. Most of the participants were female, with a monthly family income from 1 to 10 minimum wages and were between 20 and 29 years of age. A study carried out by Galduroz & Caetano¹⁰ affirms that individuals begin to ingest alcoholic drinks at a constantly earlier age. That can be related to the easy

Table 1 – Description of the wine packaging and labels presented in focus group sessions.

Identification/ brand	Type of wine	Type of bottle	Label description
Package 1	Fine dry white national	Greenish glass bottle, Burgundy bottle shape (conical superior part, without accented shoulder between the body and the finish), 750ml capacity, cork closure.	Aged label, absence of flashy colors, indication of origin – Vale dos Vinhedos, brand, liquid content – 750ml, grape type – Chardonnay, alcohol level – 13% harvest – 2008, illustration – Illustration of a vineyard.
Package 2	Suave red table wine national	Darker green glass bottle, Burgundy bottle shape (conical superior part, without accented shoulder between the body and the finish), 750ml capacity, external threaded screw cap closure, (PET soft drink bottle kind).	Colored label (red, wine, golden), indication of origin in small letters – São Paulo, liquid content – 750ml, alcohol level – 10%, illustration: grape image.
Package 3	Imported red	Dark green bottle, Bordeaux bottle shape (straight and cylindrical), 750ml capacity, cork closure.	White and purple label, indication of origin – region of Alentejo (Portugal), brand, liquid content – 750mL, alcohol level – 12.5%, illustration: church image and Portuguese tiles.
Package 4	Fine suave white national	Green glass bottle, Burgundy bottle shape (conical superior part, without accented shoulder between the body and the finish), 375ml capacity, cork closure.	Aged label, absence of flashy colors, indication of origin – Vale dos Vinhedos, brand, liquid content – 375ml, grape type – Chardonnay, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, alcohol level – 12%, harvest-2007, illustration – barrel and wine glass design.

access, outside influences and to the low cost offered to the consumers.

In Figure 1 the consumption frequency and the factors most observed on the wine labels by the participants of the focus groups can be verified. Fifty percent (50%) consuming wine once a month.

The brand, origin and price are the factors that most influence the research participants in the purchase of wine. In relation to the brand, some of the participants related that this item is important because it can cause a positive or negative previous expectation in relation to the wine and that expectation, many times, it is related to the consumers' personal characteristics such as social class and culture, among others. Considering cultural aspects, Guerreiro et al.¹¹ verified that for consumers in the northeast of Spain, who were familiar with olive oil, the brand was the factor that had the most influence on the purchase intention of those consumers. According to Jaeger¹² the brand is considered very useful when the consumers are choosing among competitive products. During the purchase process, the consumers look for information in their memory and in

the external environment and process and store the results of their purchase in their memory, to be used in other similar purchases. The presence of a well-established brand in the market therefore, is a strong influence on the formulation of consumer sensorial expectations, as well as on their choosing and purchase behavior and on their acceptance.^{3,6}

During the study, product origin was mentioned as synonymous with quality and authenticity. Therefore, the relationship is provided by a multidimensional construction that, according to Van Ittersuma et al.²³ becomes a cognitive association between product and the image of the place, forming a sensorial identity of the product. Within that context, studies already exist concerned with making information available to the consumers regarding the history of a bottle of wine, from the planting of the grapes to the moment of its consumption, like the system of tracability applied to the wine production chain that was developed by Porto et al.¹⁸

According to most of the consumers (75%), the price is important, although the maximum value to pay depends on the occasion, consumption place and the category of

Quadro 1 – Script of questions for the focus group sessions.

1- Do you observe the labels of the wine you consume?
2- What do you observe?
3- What else calls your attention?
4- What did you think of this packaging?
5- What do you consider important in this packaging?
6- Would you like to see some other additional information on the label?
7- Are the brand and origin of the wine influential characteristics at time of purchase?
8- Do you buy imported wine? From what country and why?
9- Does the wine production region influence your buying process?
10- Are characteristics such as bottle shape, volume and alcohol level influential at the time of purchase?
11- Does the grape variety influence your choice of wine?
12- What is your preference in relation to dry and suave/red and white wine?

Table 2 – Profile of the participants in the wine focus group sessions.

Demographic Variables	Classes	%
Sex	Female	58
	Male	42
Age range (years)	20-29	63
	30-39	17
	40-49	8
	50-59	12
	60-69	0
	over 70	0
Educational level	Primary	0
	Secondary	4
	Incomplete Higher Education	30
	Complete Higher Education	33
	Post Graduate	33
Monthly family income	1 to 5 minimum wages	42
	5 to 10 minimum wages	42
	10 to 20 minimum wages	12
	More than 20 minimum wages	4

the wine. That reinforces the verification that the price of the wines can, in certain cases, work as a signal, a quality inductor or a factor that makes the product an exclusivity or rarity. Many consumers, so as not to err in the purchase, try to determine their choices betting on more expensive wines or on recognized brands, as Delvecchio & Smith⁵ point out, to reduce the risks in the purchase decision.

In the focus group sessions the participants related their preferences in relation to the type of wine, verifying that 50% prefer suave red wines (Figure 2). The highest acceptance for the suave wines was justified by the characteristic of their higher sweetness. According to Ferreira⁹ although there are personal preferences for a flavor type (suave or dry), the wine can be consumed by all, depending on the situation. In research done to analyze the wine consumption in the fourth colony of Italian immigration to Rio Grande do Sul a relevant statistic was that 93% of the participants prefer to consume wine of the

dry red type. ¹ Being a traditional wine producing area, the preference for the dry wines can be justified by the higher consumption habit and knowledge of these consumers.

According to statute 229 of October 25, 1988 of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Provisioning, the limit of ethyl alcohol in degrees (GL) at 20°C for table wines is, at most, 13 and at least 10. Among the participants, 67% said they do not observe that information, also justifying that they did not even know that the alcohol content presented variations. The 33% of the participants who said they observed the alcohol content affirmed that a lower level is less prejudicial to health, besides being less caloric.

Among the factors that interfere in the composition and quality of the wine, the harvest and the choice of grape variety stand out.^{20,21} However, 70% of the interviewees revealed that the harvest and the grape type are not observed at the time of the wine purchase. That data is important,

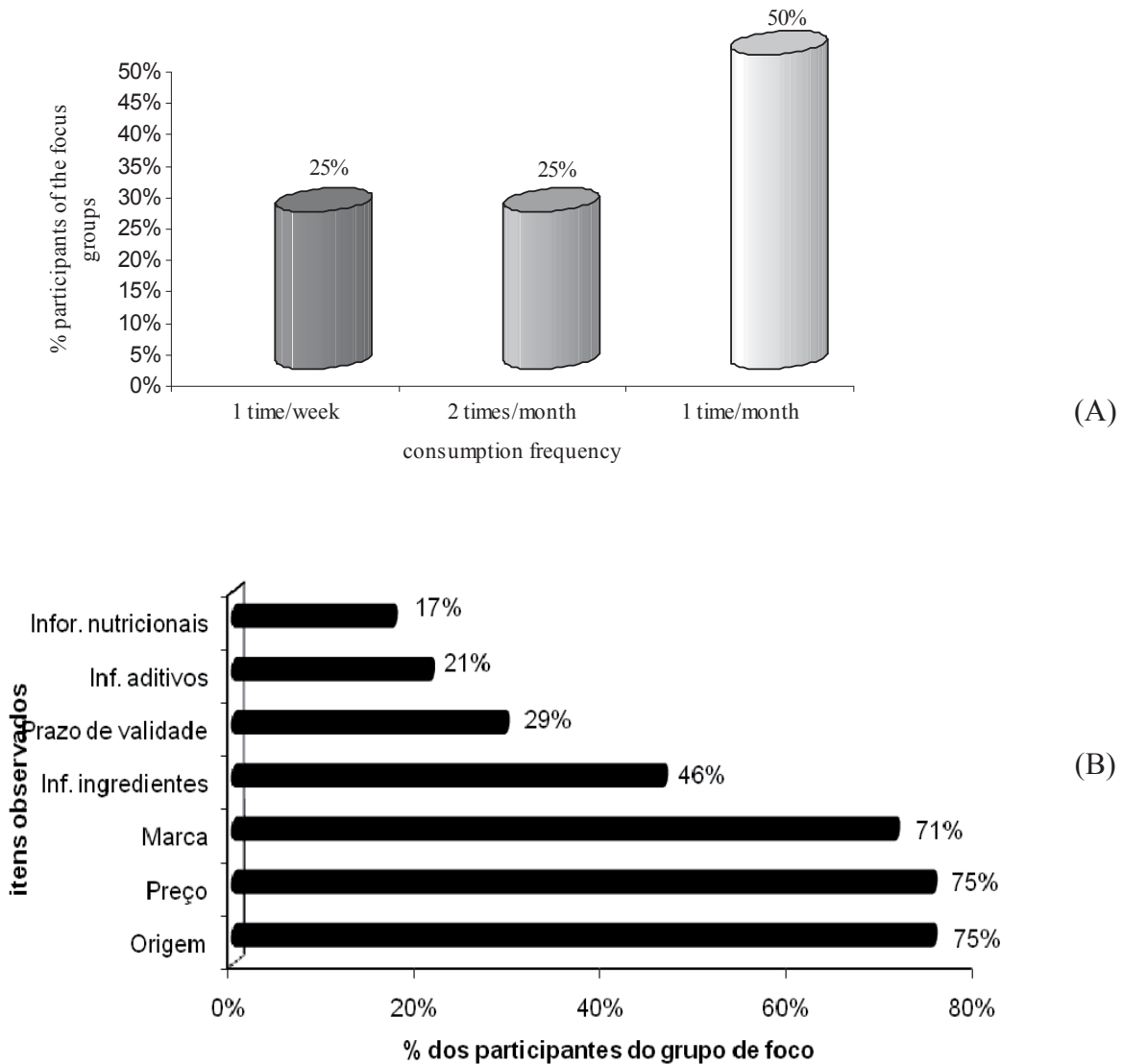


FIGURE 1 - Consumption frequency (A) and factors most observed on the wine labels (B) by the focus group participants.

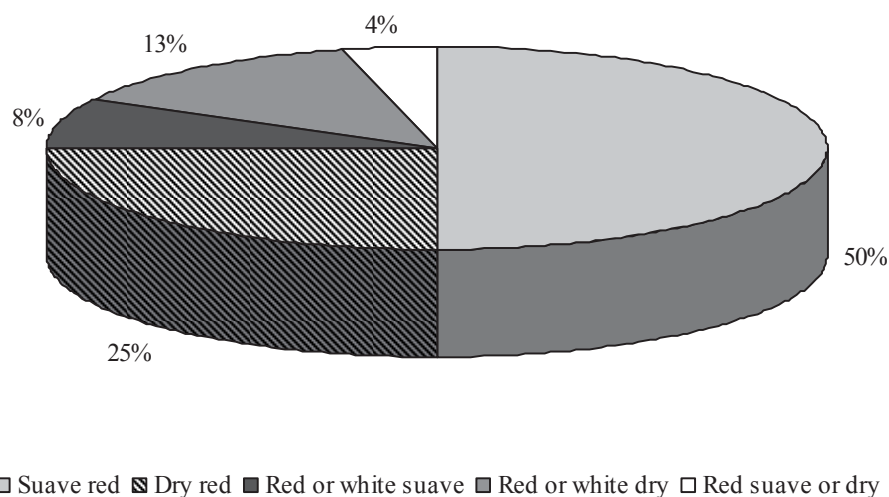


FIGURE 2 – Preference of participants for types of wine.

because it reinforces the idea that the recognition of the importance of the quality of the harvest and the grape type (variety) is usually made by consultants and specialists in wine. This is in spite of, according to Munõz¹⁶ criteria used by specialists to judge the quality of a wine which are based on international specifications and rarely involve parameters defined starting from consumer consultation. On the other hand, modern product quality control concepts propose that quality parameters be specified through consultations of real consumers of the product.

The design of the label is, for 38% of the consumers, the most important item in the choice of a wine at the time of purchase. However, their preferences diverges in relation to the different types of “design styles”, because 54% of them consider the label of Package 2 very colorful, dark and with little information, 17% prefer more rustic labels as is the case of Package 1, 46% like models of traditional labels and 29% consider that neutral and classic packaging add value to the wine, on the other hand, 17% found the rustic design (Package 1) ugly and uncharming. Kotler¹³ affirms that currently, the packaging not only fulfills its principal function of protecting the product, but it is also a powerful marketing tool, with various sales tasks, from attracting consumer attention to describing the product and “making” the sale.

In spite of the divergent personal opinions of the participants, most of them agreed that the quality of the packaging design is directly linked to the target public that the marketing project of an industry longs to reach. Such a consensus is in agreement with the definition of Engel et al.⁸ who establishes that market segmentation is the process of projecting or characterizing a product or service that will exercise an especially strong attraction for some identifiable part of the total market. As such, segmentation is an important tool to increase company profitability.

In relation to the shape of the bottle, only 21% of the participants do not consider this item important at the time of purchase. Most of them (54%) prefer the “Bordeaux” shape wine bottles, that come in a straight and cylindrical form, because they associate that type with better quality wines.

The volume is an important factor for all the participants, and 63% prefer the larger bottle (750ml) due to the fact the participants do not have the habit of consuming wine alone. However, 37% consider that the bottle volume preference depends on the occasion of consumption. According to the participants, the wines with 375ml are ideal for those who consume alone, because it avoids the wine being stored after its opening, besides being a good gift option, as complement in gift baskets and a good option for tasting, sampling the wine, in case the product is not known.

The cork is the oldest process used for long term wine conservation. All the participants consider that the presence of the cork is an essential factor at the time of choosing a certain type of wine. In spite of that important technological function, 88% are unaware of that function of the cork and consider that its value is related to aesthetics and, mainly, with the ritual when opening a bottle of wine. As for the closure, in according to EMBRAPA Uva e Vinho⁷ the sealing of the bottle with the cork, has as a main function, to protect the wine from microbial contamination and oxidation.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The most influential factors in the wine purchase decision of the participants are origin, brand and price.
2. Most of the participants prefer suave red wine.
3. The factors that influence in the general consumer purchase process and preference are distinct in relation to consumer and specialist evaluations.

MENEZES, C. C.; CÂNDIDO, B. D. V.; ANGÉLICO, C. L.; RODRIGUES, E. C.; CARNEIRO, J. D. S. Opiniões e atitudes dos consumidores de vinho utilizando grupo de foco. *Alim. Nutr.*, Araraquara, v. 21, n. 4, p. 503-508, out./dez. 2010.

■RESUMO: O objetivo desse trabalho foi conhecer as opiniões, atitudes e percepções dos consumidores de vinho utilizando a técnica de grupo de foco. Foram selecionados 24 consumidores de vinho por meio de questionário de recrutamento para participarem do grupo de foco. Foram realizadas três sessões de grupo de foco com oito consumidores em cada uma delas. Verificou-se que os fatores mais observados pelos consumidores na hora da compra de vinho são marca (71%), origem (75%) e preço (75%). Em relação ao tipo de vinho, 50% dos participantes preferem vinho tinto suave. Os fatores que influenciam no processo de compra e na preferência dos consumidores em geral são distintos em relação à avaliação de consumidores e especialistas.

■PALAVRAS CHAVE: Estudo de mercado; rótulo, embalagem.

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