



Larry Lockshin

**A**n old Eric Burdon song came into my head while writing this article. His song had to do with the purpose of war, which he concluded had no use whatsoever. I started thinking about wine and why people choose to buy and drink it.

I think we sometimes forget that the product we grow, ferment, age and love is pretty much non-essential in the bigger scheme of things. However sobering that thought, people around the world do buy and drink wine, but a useful question to ask is: why?

All of us in the wine sector get caught up in our everyday jobs of making sales calls, tending the vineyards, cellar activities, running tastings, answering emails, etc. that we forget to consider why people choose to buy our product. What are the deeper motivations that draw some people to wine, rather than other beverages, or even to no

commercial beverage at all? This column puts forward some ideas without regard to price range, brand, region and other attributes, even though these aspects drive the choice of a specific wine over another one. My question here is, why wine?

Most of my research is quantitative and most recently has focused on predicting the choice of one wine over another by generating the partial probabilities linked to individual attributes. A different stream of marketing focuses on the underlying motivations for product choice. This type of research looks at the desired benefits a consumer gains from using the product. Academics have divided the desired benefits into different categories, though I am not sure these matter much for understanding product usage: functional benefits, social benefits, hedonistic or pleasure benefits, and variety seeking benefits. I am sure you can already see that

wine could and does fit into each of these categories for some people. Much of what I write below has come from workshops and seminars with postgraduate students, and also from my own thinking. Currently, I have a new PhD student who will be researching how different benefits are linked to consumption situations, and whether they are also linked to age, gender and wine experience. If you have any ideas for additional benefits, please email me.

What are the functional benefits we can find in wine? Most basically wine is an alcoholic drink and provides the benefits or outcomes of consuming alcohol (use your imagination). It relaxes people. Wine can be a refreshment; it can be a condiment which enhances food; it can quench thirst. It can provide health benefits in various ways. Here wine competes with most alcoholic beverages and for some of these benefits, any beverage.

Wine is perhaps more specialised when fulfilling social benefits. Wine can be used to convey social status. High prices and hard to find labels can act the same way a high-priced watch or car can to enhance personal status. It can signal different kinds of personal characteristics to other people: sophisticated, environmentally conscious, hip, urbane, well-read, knowledgeable (and the list goes on). Wine is used to make people more sociable; to grease the wheels of interaction and conversation. In this guise wine is common at parties, BBQs and other social occasions. Wine is used to celebrate special occasions or people. It can also be used to bind people together in a common pursuit or group.

Perhaps wine's most unique characteristics come from its hedonistic or pleasure producing benefits. The range of tastes and flavours appeal differently to different people. The range of tastes and flavours can be enjoyed on their own or matched with food. Wine can make us feel good. It can help us relax and enjoy the situation

and the people in it. Beyond this wine can give pleasure to some people just by learning and studying about it. It gives pleasure to others by virtue of collecting and cataloguing it, and therefore reading and talking about it with others who share the same interests.

It is a fact of modern living that we often crave diversity in experience. We get bored with the same items, whether they are food or TV shows. Wine can cater to the need for diversity, or variety seeking due to its wide range of styles, origins and grape varieties. In this sense wine is a product category unlike most others. However, it is easy to see that this feature of wine can lead to lack of repeat purchase and loyalty.

I admit this list just provides the obvious benefits of wine, and that in many cases people choose to drink wine for more than one desired benefit at a time. However, it is worth considering that different motivations are behind the choices we see in the market. The fact that you are looking for a food accompaniment for the

wine you choose tonight does not mean every person who buys your wine has the same benefit in mind. We often assume the benefits we desire are the same for all of our customers, and forget their circumstances, their backgrounds, their cultures may lead them to use very different criteria for their choices. We then end up communicating to our customers a narrow range of reasons to buy our wine, which may not include the benefits they or their customers desire. In fact, the trade usually has similar ideas to our own, even if they are from different cultures, but the end consumers could differ greatly in the benefits they desire in different countries.

Please let me know if you can add to my list of desired benefits. And we will let all of you know what we find from our project.

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