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Research Note

Wine Journalism—Marketing or
Consumers' Guide?

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This article explores some aspects of wine journalism in Norwegian newspapers. Two issues are discussed: First, are wine sales influenced by wine journalists' reviews? Second, do experts agree on what makes a good wine buy? The results show that wine sales are indeed significantly influenced by the judgements of wine critics; a 10% rise in newspapers' scores in Norway was accompanied by an average increase of 16%–18% in sales figures for table wines. The effect of wine reviews varied somewhat from newspaper to newspaper. It proved difficult to establish criteria for a good wine buy that are objective and independent of the person making the judgement. The journalists gave no unanimous recommendation of good wine buys to the consumers; the same wine could get good reviews in some papers and might well receive run-of-the-mill reviews in others. However, a majority of the reviewers seemed to agree in the ranking of most of the wines, even if the absolute value of the scores differed.

Key words: advertising; entertainment marketing; media

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1. Introduction

In 1975, Norway imposed a ban on advertisements for alcoholic beverages, making it illegal to display advertisements for any beverage containing more than 2.5% alcohol by volume. For a long time this meant having to look up professional journals or international publications to peruse ads for alcoholic beverages. In 1982, prompted by growing popular interest in wine, a major Norwegian newspaper started a wine column presenting reviews and comments on wines available to the public. The articles were written by people with no direct connection to the wine trade and the advertising ban did not affect editorial articles.

Soon, other papers and magazines followed suit, and some television channels started broadcasting programs focusing on wine. Nowadays, wine journalism is a permanent fixture of many publications and wine reviews take on the role of advertisements. Because the reviews are written by people with no direct connection to the wine industry, they have an air of objectivity about them that ordinary advertisements lack. The reviews are more akin to consumer-product tests or film, theater, and book reviews than to advertisements, and may have a great impact on demand for wine that can, in a sense (i.e., taste), be classified as an experiential good. *Experiential goods*

are products that have to be experienced by the consumer before he or she is able to evaluate them; they are products people choose solely to experience and enjoy (e.g., a meal at a restaurant, a novel, a holiday apartment) (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

By definition, one's very first feel of an experiential good cannot be based on subjective experience; it has to be based on other information. Product tests and critical reviews constitute such information. They transform qualities that have to be experienced by the consumer before he or she is able to evaluate them into search qualities, i.e., features and attributes (e.g., price, producer, written product information) that can be evaluated by the consumer without personally consuming a specific market offering. Critical reviews can be seen as both a subjective and an objective source of information. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001), developing a framework for factors determining the success of service innovations, define critical reviews as "quasi-search qualities." Quasi-search qualities may be of great importance to a successful market introduction of new wine brands, especially before word of mouth and the consumer's own experience come into play. To the extent that critical reviews play the part of quasi-search qualities in the above-mentioned sense, wine critics' reviews may reasonably be expected to influence sales, especially of wines introduced to a market.

Lynch and Ariely (2000) have used wine as an example when studying different consequences of lowering search costs through electronic channels, but to my knowledge, there have been no studies exploring the impact of wine reviews on sales. However, some scholarly works have focused on critical reviews and the success of movies and theater shows. Reddy et al. (1998) found that New York newspaper theater critics had a significant impact on the success of Broadway shows, but that the effect may differ between newspapers. Simonoff and Ma (2003), studying factors affecting the longevity of Broadway shows, found corresponding results. Eliashberg and Shugan (1997) found a correlation between film reviews and late and cumulative box office receipts, as did Basuroy et al. (2003). However, a study by Zufryden (2000) showed no significant influence on box office performance from a variable representing critic ratings, whereas Elberse and Eliashberg (2003), developing a dynamic relationship between revenues and showings, found that critical reviews had significant influence on revenues only in the opening week. From then on, the effect of reviews on revenues seemed to be mediated through their influence on the number of showings.

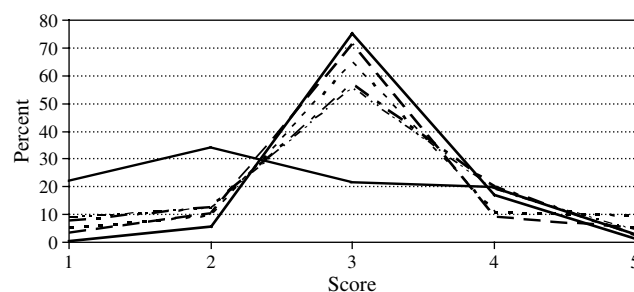
One difficulty in interpreting reviews as a search quality is that they may differ substantially from one paper and reviewer to the next (Boor 1990, 1992), or that expert judgements are based on criteria different from those that appeal to the public (Holbrook 1999, Guinard et al. 2000). If so, the result of the search procedure may be confusing or even disappointing. Fitzsimons and Lehmann (2004) even found that when recommendations by experts contradicted the consumer's initial impression of choice options, it may lead to the activation of a reactant state on the part of the decision maker. Hence, over time, the outcome of the search process may be that consumers, through their own experience, end up selecting the reviewers who accord with their own subjective values and taste (Basuroy et al. 2003). As a result some reviewers, i.e., those with the greatest popular appeal, may influence the market more than others (Reddy et al. 1998).

The issues explored in this article are first, the extent to which published reviews of wines introduced on the Norwegian market influence public demand and sales figures, and second, whether some wines are good buys irrespective of the person (i.e., wine critic) doing the sampling or whether the term "good" in fact depends on the reviewer's subjective opinion.

2. Data

Disregarding restaurants and the like, the only legal sales outlet for wine in Norway is the state-run Vinmonopolet. Vinmonopolet launches its latest

Figure 1 Distribution of the Newspapers' Scores—Five-Point Scale



brands, generally 40 to 50 in number, every second month. In 1987, Vinmonopolet started to invite wine journalists to sample the new brands. These wine sampling events were open; i.e., the reviewers and critics knew what brands they were sampling.

For this study, presentations of 500 table wines in the period 1995–1996 were examined. These cover virtually all table wines introduced on the Norwegian market in the under-\$25 price category in these two years. The reception given to each of these 500 wines in six Norwegian newspapers was studied.

When a reviewer contemplates the score appropriate to a particular wine, price is one of the factors he¹ will be taking into account. A high score indicates that the wine is an excellent buy; at the other end of the scale, a low score tells the reader to steer well clear of the wines in question. Hence, the score tells us the extent to which a particular wine represents a good purchase; it is not purely an assessment of quality. Wines with the same score are presumed to represent the same amount of quality per dollar, whatever their price in monetary terms.

The verdicts were expressed numerically along scales of varying extension. For the purpose of the study all the data were converted to a five-point scale, fitting the score to a Gaussian distribution, assuming that the universe of wine buys is normally distributed. This approach makes the scores independent of the fact that some reviewers may demand a lot of a wine to award a high score, while others demand much less. A Gaussian approximation was possible for all the newspapers except one. The paper in question seems to be more negative to the sampled wines than the other five, and its assessments were consistently more stringent than those of the other reviewers. The scores are shown in Figure 1.

In addition to the scores awarded by the six papers, data were collected on the wines' vintage, i.e., year of production, types of grape used in production, country and region of origin, the name of the producer and importer, month of release, and the prices and monthly sales figures of each of the brands for

¹ All six reviewers presented in this paper were male.

the years 1995–1998. Finally, because Vinmonopolet groups its wines into basic, batch, and test assortments that are unlikely to sell in the same quantities, the assortment to which the different wines belonged was known.²

3. The Impact of Reviews on Sales Figures

The relationship between sales of a particular brand and the variables that influence sales can be expressed as follows:

$$\text{Sales} = f(\text{sum of reviewers' score, price, type of wine, assortment, origin, month of release}) + \text{"noise"}. \quad (1)$$

Assuming a logarithmic linear relationship between the variables and a noise term expectation of zero, expected sales can be written

$$X_i = A_0 * s_i^{a_1} * p_i^{a_2} * e^{\sum a_{ij} * c_{ij}}; \quad i = 1, 2, \dots, 350; j = 1, 2, 3, \quad (2)$$

or in logarithmic form:

$$\ln X_i = a_0 + a_1 * \ln s_i + a_2 * \ln p_i + \sum a_{ij} * c_{ij}. \quad (3)$$

Here, X_i is the expected sales of wine i ; a_0 , a_1 , a_2 , and a_{ij} are constants to be estimated; s_i is the sum score of wine i ; p_i is the price of wine i at the time the wine was reviewed; and c_{ij} is a dummy for, respectively, type of wine, assortment, origin, and month of release. Due to the log-linear formulation the coefficients, a_1 and a_2 may be interpreted as the elasticities of sum score and price, respectively. Even a_{ij} may be seen as a sort of elasticity.³

Type of wine, assortment, origin, and month of release were represented by categorical variables. Type of wine is included in the model because red wines tend to sell better than white wines in Norway, and month of release was included because there are seasonal fluctuations in wine sales. The coefficient pertaining to a particular qualitative variable gives the effect of this variable compared to a reference category.

² Wines in the basic assortment are kept on the shelves as long as demand exceeds a specified minimum, whereas wines in the batch assortment are bought in limited quantities and traded until stocks are sold out. The wines in the test assortment have a six-month selling period and are then transferred to the basic assortment if demand exceeds a given minimum rate. If not, they are taken out of Vinmonopolet's price list.

³ More correct will $(\exp(a_{ij}) - 1)100 = (\text{antiln}(a_{ij}) - 1)100$ give us the percentage change in sales while the dummy changes from zero to one (Halvorsen and Palmquist 1980).

Table 1 Regression Analysis—Sales and Sum Scores

Variable	First 2 months		Next 22 months	
	Coefficient	Std. error	Coefficient	Std. error
Constant	16.52**	0.89	19.67**	1.67
Lnsumscore	1.79**	0.23	1.41**	0.44
Lnprice	−3.47**	0.17	−3.62**	0.31
Type of wine	0.91**	0.10	0.76**	0.19
Basic assortment	1.02**	0.10	1.04**	0.19
Batch assortment	1.28**	0.13	−0.82**	0.25
Burgundy	0.04	0.22	−0.22	0.40
Bordeaux	0.13	0.17	−0.18	0.33
Rest of France	−0.04	0.15	0.01	0.29
Rioja	0.58**	0.20	0.95**	0.37
Rest of Spain	0.10	0.18	0.01	0.34
Portugal	0.15	0.22	−0.16	0.42
Italy	0.06	0.16	0.07	0.30
Australia	0.43	0.23	0.39	0.44
United States	0.02	0.24	−0.18	0.46
South America	0.20	0.19	0.16	0.36
Rhine	−0.41	0.22	−0.11	0.42
Mosel	−0.02	0.20	0.70	0.38
January	−0.33*	0.15	−0.07	0.29
March	−0.05	0.18	0.39	0.34
May	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.24
July	−0.08	0.13	−0.10	0.23
September	−0.38**	0.13	−0.09	0.24
Adjusted R^2	0.79		0.51	

*Significant at the 5% level.

**Significant at the 1% level.

The reference group comprised white wines, the test assortment, wines released in November, and origin countries that were not explicitly included in the model.

The Vinmonopolet releases new wines every second month. Hence the release of new wines may reduce the effect of the reviews given two months earlier. If so, the reviews will have their greatest impact on sales in the two months following the release. Sales therefore were analysed during the two first months after the release and during the following 22 months.

The analysis is based on 336 wines reviewed by all six papers and where total sales exceeded 100 litres. The results are shown in Table 1.

The interpretations of the coefficients are as follows:

Lnsumscore: The coefficient may be interpreted as "quality elasticity"; i.e., it indicates the percentage increase in sales when the sum score increases by 1%, and the possible effects of price, type of wine, assortment, month of release, and origin are controlled for.

Lnprice: The value of price elasticity when the possible effects of quality, type of wine, assortment, month of release, and origin are controlled for.

Type of wine, assortment, origin, month of release: The coefficient-1 multiplied by 100 indicates the percentage increase in average sales if a wine is moved from the reference group to the group in question and the possible effects of the other variables are controlled for.

Looking at the score coefficient, both for the first two months after the release and for the following 22 months, we see that the verdicts of the reviewers clearly affect the sales of a particular brand of table wine. When the sum score increases by 10%, sales in the first two months after the release on average tend to increase by 18%, and for the following 22 months they increase by 14%.⁴ Thus the reviews have a considerable impact on sales, an impact apparently only surpassed by that of prices.

We see that the demand for a particular brand of table wine was highly price elastic. Compared to studies based on demand for table wine in a wide range of countries (Österberg 1995), the effect of a price change at the level of an individual brand is amplified three to four times the effect at the general level of table wine.

Red wines sell significantly better than white wines, and wines in the basic and batch assortment—which are selected by the Vinmonopolet's own wine experts—sell better than wines in the test assortment, which are chosen by the importer of the actual brand. However, sales of wines in the batch assortment fall below sales of test wines after a couple of months. This is due to the fact that wines in the batch assortment are available in relatively small quantities. Hence wines from the batch assortment with high scores are often sold out some weeks after release.

To see if the effect on sales differed from one newspaper critic to the next—as Reddy et al. (1998) and Simonoff and Ma (2003) found in their study of theater critics and the success of Broadway shows—regression coefficients were estimated for each of the critics based on sales during the first two months. Results showed that one reviewer had a significantly larger impact on sales than his counterparts in other newspapers ($p < 0.05$), while there were only minor differences among the latter reviewers.⁵ The reviewer with the greatest impact was the one who initiated this type of journalism in the Norwegian press. His paper had a monopoly on wine reviews in Norwegian dailies for some time.

With a reference to literature indicating that positive and negative information may have differential impact on consumer behaviour (Skowronski and Carlston 1989), Basuroy et al. (2003) tested a hypothesis that negative film reviews had a tendency to hurt box office performance more than positive reviews helped box office performance. In their study they found a significant negative bias for the box office revenue of the first two weeks: when the number of negative reviews increased, box office revenue was

reduced relatively more than the change in box office performance in relation to a proportionate increase in number of good reviews.

For wines, bias will tend to be in favour of positive reviews because people do not read reviews of all wines. Most consumers find little of interest in bad wine reviews; they are content to read the top of the ranking list to ensure good wine buys. Lower ranking wines are of no interest at all—whether a wine receives a score of 1 or 2 is immaterial. The main point is that the wine got a bad score, not *how* bad. For positive scores it may be a different story. People want to pick out the best buy and the exact value of the score therefore matters to them.

To test the hypothesis that consumers are more interested in good reviews than bad ones, a dummy was introduced in Equation (3). For the first two months after release a positive and significant value was found for a dummy representing wines receiving 20 points or more ($b = 0.35$; $t = 2.77$). However, this result may be spurious because a lot of the best buys from the batch assortment were sold out during the same period. For the following 22 months there were no significant differences between the effects of good and bad reviews.

4. Do the Critics Agree?

For a few wines the reviewers' judgements may be devastating. A unanimously unenthusiastic reception may be disastrous for sales, irrespective of the price of the wine. A wine that is given the thumbs-down by all reviewers will have little chance of being sold in any appreciable quantity. However, the reviewers do not always agree on the quality of a wine, and very few wines get the lowest scores from a majority of the reviewers. In our sample of 336 wines that were reviewed by all papers, only 8% of the wines received sum scores of 12 or lower. On the other hand, 50% of the reviewed wines received sum scores of 18 or better. The same tendency to slight disagreement and a broadly positive attitude to the reviewed objects is observed in the case of theater and film critics (Reddy et al. 1998, Eliashberg and Shugan 1997) and beer critics (Guinard et al. 2000).

An assessment of quality will always be coloured by the subjective discernment of the taster (d'Astous and Touil 1999). Norwegian critics themselves emphasise from time to time the fact that their estimation of wines is a highly individual matter and that the reader's own judgements may differ from the journalist's. This is in line with the view of a leading wine journalist, Hugh Johnston, who asserts that "wine tasting is an intrinsically subjective process" (Robinson 1998, p. 707). On the other hand, Robert Parker, who developed the prevailing 100-point rating system, argues that "wine is no different from

⁴ The difference between the regression coefficients of the two periods is not significant ($t = 0.77$; $df = 670$).

⁵ The value of the different regression coefficients were 0.38, 0.51, 0.68, 0.72, 0.75, and 1.33.

any other consumer product. There are specific standards of quality that full-time wine professionals recognise" (Robinson 1998, p. 707). If he is right, we should expect the critics—who are presumptively wine specialists—to show a large degree of concurrence in their pronouncements.

The important issue in this connection is not differences in absolute scores but differences in the rankings of the wines. Even if absolute scores differ, one reviewer's ranking of the wines may nevertheless be similar to the next. Ranking similarities were tested by means of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, and a significant coefficient for all pairs of reviewers ($p \leq 0.01$) was found.⁶ The size of the coefficient varied, however, from 0.16 to 0.61. The five lowest values were attached to the same reviewer. For the rest of the critics, the correlation coefficient varied from 0.39 to 0.61. This strengthened the notion that there may be characteristics in connection with a wine buy that make it a good buy, independent of the person who judges it. It may be the case that the large majority of reviewers attach importance to the same qualities of a wine, whereas some demand more from a wine to give it a higher score than others do.

5. Variables Affecting the Assessment of a Wine Buy

Even if full-time wine professionals agree on what qualities are essential to a good wine, the term *good* will always have a subjective dimension to it. In contrast to the sugar content of a wine, its alcohol volume, price, and sales figures, all of which are factors that can be translated into data most people will agree about, the quality we term "good" is impossible to quantify in the same way. Hence, good cannot be considered simply as an attribute of a wine or its properties; it carries with it the impressions of the person that happens to be drinking and evaluating the wine.

In the following, each reviewer is assumed to have a particular individual taste profile, and elements of this profile are related to certain objective properties of a wine. A reviewer's estimation of a wine's quality will thus be influenced by a range of attributes possessed or not possessed by the wine. Examples of such attributes are type of wine, vintage, grape, and origin.

Alongside these objective factors, one's judgement of a particular wine will be affected by a "personal feeling." One's feeling for a wine is quite subjective and independent of any objective qualities. It is difficult to incorporate personal feeling when building a statistical model to describe the relationship

between the judgment of a wine's taste and factors that are crucial to that judgement. Such factors are usually represented by a traditional noise term in the hope that expectations of the influence of this factor for large numbers of observations fall to zero.

Because the critics were reviewing the quality of different wine buys and not the quality of different wines, price had to be considered in the analysis, in addition to more qualitative factors. The reviewers will try to neutralize the effect of price on score, in the sense that the same score indicates the same amount of quality per dollar.

This scenario can be described as follows:

The expectation of a reviewer's ranking

$$= F(\text{price; grape, origin, vintage, type of wine}). \quad (4)$$

High correlations were found between some of the origins and grapes, making it difficult to determine whether the effect derived from one attribute or the other. In view of this, and because there were relatively few observations for some of the grapes, all grapes except Cabernet Sauvignon (for clarets) and Chardonnay and Riesling (for white wines) were omitted from the model.

Because reviewers may prefer wines of special origins, the same countries and regions were included in this part of the study as in the analysis of sales volumes.

An important characteristic that is often mentioned in connection with wine quality is vintage. However, the quality of different vintages may vary from region to region, making it futile to explicitly include vintage in the analysis without distinguishing between regions. Unfortunately, the data set was too small to include vintage in the regression analysis.

Type of wine was taken into the equation to remove the possibility that differing "taste profiles" may attach to red and white wine, or the possibility of preferring one type of wine to the other.

Grapes, country/region, and type of wine were represented by categorical variables. The reference groups consisted of the grapes and countries/regions that were not explicitly included in the model, and of white wine.

To see which attributes may distinguish between good and bad wines, an ordered logit model was used. The ordered logit model is adequate for our problem because it takes the rank ordering of the outcomes into account (Hosmer and Lemeshow 2000).⁷

⁶ Because some of the newspapers used more than one reviewer, the rank correlation is based on a sample of 236 wines all judged by the same six reviewers.

⁷ The estimation was performed by the statistical package SPSS 12.0. Different link functions were tried during the estimation. The estimates and their significance level were, however, stable independent of link function.

Table 2 Coefficients All Wine (Standard Error in Parentheses)

	Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2	Reviewer 3	Reviewer 4	Reviewer 5	Reviewer 6
Price	0.011** (0.004)	0.010** (0.004)	0.005 (0.003)	−0.006 (0.004)	0.003 (0.003)	−0.001 (0.004)
Red wine	0.983** (0.305)	1.053** (0.310)	0.487* (0.240)	0.895** (0.312)	0.806** (0.235)	0.868** (0.273)
Cabernet Sauvignon	0.768* (0.376)	0.586 (0.370)	0.332 (0.310)	0.388 (0.373)	0.303 (0.301)	0.607 (0.343)
Chardonnay	0.636 (0.480)	0.903 (0.492)	−0.346 (0.384)	0.328 (0.497)	0.127 (0.376)	0.003 (0.410)
Riesling	1.331** (0.522)	0.394 (0.554)	0.317 (0.457)	0.501 (0.598)	−0.447 (0.448)	1.158* (0.477)
Burgundy	−0.975 (0.583)	−1.868** (0.607)	−0.466 (0.475)	−0.823 (0.610)	−1.185* (0.467)	−1.730** (0.506)
Bordeaux	−0.282 (0.458)	0.643 (0.451)	0.559 (0.372)	0.012 (0.461)	−0.306 (0.366)	−0.131 (0.404)
Rest of France	0.079 (0.431)	−0.070 (0.444)	0.241 (0.343)	−0.181 (0.440)	−0.175 (0.322)	−0.629 (0.379)
Rioja	−0.046 (0.547)	−0.487 (0.551)	−0.843* (0.425)	−1.016 (0.561)	−1.195** (0.414)	−1.330** (0.502)
Rest of Spain	1.384** (0.505)	0.041 (0.491)	0.445 (0.401)	0.319 (0.490)	−0.625 (0.382)	−0.239 (0.490)
Italy	0.041 (0.450)	0.121 (0.446)	0.356 (0.361)	0.031 (0.452)	−0.172 (0.340)	0.131 (0.415)
Portugal	1.287* (0.641)	0.093 (0.639)	0.624 (0.506)	0.319 (0.592)	0.189 (0.480)	−0.748 (0.596)
United States	1.155* (0.593)	−0.024 (0.699)	0.687 (0.535)	0.278 (0.637)	−0.253 (0.514)	−0.166 (0.548)
South America	0.716 (0.541)	0.616 (0.496)	0.356 (0.435)	0.262 (0.518)	−0.464 (0.443)	0.077 (0.505)
Australia	1.895** (0.567)	1.113* (0.571)	0.609 (0.480)	−0.529 (0.636)	0.454 (0.497)	0.382 (0.543)
Mosel	−1.007 (0.626)	−0.576 (0.637)	0.159 (0.569)	0.450 (0.732)	−0.192 (0.530)	−2.098** (0.595)
Rhein	−0.515 (0.567)	−0.173 (0.595)	−0.318 (0.487)	0.592 (0.630)	−1.251** (0.486)	−1.105* (0.537)
N	458	369	478	480	453	388

*Significant at the 5% level.

**Significant at the 1% level.

Table 2 shows estimates for the marginal effects of all variables on the expected ranking along with significant levels of the marginal effects. Positive estimates of the regression coefficients indicate increased likelihood of higher scores on the dependent variable.

Table 2 tells us that two of the reviewers had a slight tendency to give better marks to expensive wines, whereas the rest of the reviewers had succeeded in almost totally eliminating the effect of price on quality. Second, all reviewers gave significantly better scores to red wines than white wines. The reason for this may be that Norway imports a lot German white wines, which sell large volumes on the Norwegian market. However, what might be deemed good in the eyes of the goose may not appeal to the gander. This is underlined by the fact that a majority of the reviewers finds it more difficult to give white wines originating from Rhein or Mosel good scores than to white wines originating from other areas.

As for grapes, red wines made from Cabernet Sauvignon seem to score better than red wines made from other grapes. Results were similar for Chardonnay and Riesling and white wines.

In regard to origin, neither Burgundy nor Rioja seem to have a positive influence on the reviewers' judgements. This may signify that both burgundies and Rioja wines, in general, tend to be too-highly priced in relation to their quality.⁸ This conclusion is in accordance with a study by Landon and Smith (1998), who found that the price premium associated with the reputation of Bordeaux wines far exceeded that associated with improvement in quality.

Two of the reviewers significantly preferred wines from Australia, and originating from Australia had a positive influence of the score among five of the six reviewers. Also originating from South America seemed to have a positive influence on most reviewers' judgments. Red wines from Chile and Argentina increased their market share from 4.0% to 21.6% during the 1990s, and may have benefited from the positive reception of professional wine tasters.

6. Discussion

Norwegian newspapers regularly publish reviews of new wines introduced on the Norwegian market. The reviews are more akin to tests of consumer products or reviews from film and theater critics than to advertisements, and may—particularly in a market devoid of alcohol advertising such as in Norway—exert a great impact on product demand.

The research shows that a 10% rise in newspapers' scores in Norway was accompanied by an average increase of 16%–18% in sales figures for table wines. Only the price differences had greater influence on sales. The effect of wine reviews varied somewhat from newspaper to newspaper.

The journalists gave no unanimous recommendation of good wine buys to the consumers; the same wine could get good reviews in some papers and might well receive run-of-the-mill reviews in others. Only a few brands received good scores from all reviewers, and very few, if any, received top marks in all newspapers. However, the reviewers seemed to agree in the ranking of most of the wines, even if the absolute value of the scores differed.

Not very surprisingly, the wine journalists' scores mainly seemed to signal their own subjective tastes—making any objective and impartial check of the wine critics impossible. This increases the potential for corruption. Wine journalists need to be highly conscientious and objective, and the likelihood of their influencing one another is obvious.

⁸ On average, a bottle of Burgundy from our sample was priced at \$17 and a bottle of Rioja at \$14. Wines from other regions cost an average of \$12.50.

Today, journalists judge wines introduced by Vinmonopolet on the Norwegian market on a blind testing basis; i.e., the reviewers and critics do not know what brands they are sampling. The reason for this is obvious. However, many wine journalists run weekly wine columns in their papers. In these columns, the journalists themselves pick out the wines they wish to review or they may review wines sent to them by an importer or producer. This opens up a dangerous arena for professional misconduct. To see if there is a real basis for this notion requires a study of a sample of wines that have been judged by wine journalists in their columns.

Finally, to make the most of published reviews, the consumer needs to compare his or her own experiences with those of a number of opinion makers or critics in the field, and to settle for the critic with whom he or she agrees most. The opinions of this critic may then be used as a guide to one's future selection of wines. This is how many of us turn reviews of books, movies, theater, and music to good account, and in doing, so we spare ourselves much effort, money, and disappointment.

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