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Wine tourism and the senior market spending behaviors: A qualitative approach

ABSTRACT

Wine tourism has increased in popularity in the United States. Nevertheless, many wineries located in rural areas are not well known and have been understudied. On the other hand, the senior market has demonstrated to have great potential for tourism. However, studies regarding senior tourism behaviors including spending, are scant. This research aims to reduce this research gap by analyzing spending habits of senior population who visit rural wineries. By using a qualitative approach this study will be able to: a) Identify the characteristics and profile of senior travelers; b) Determine the underlying reasons of senior visitors' expenditure patterns; c) Provide theoretical and practical implications related to rural wine tourism. Those implications will help business owners and policy makers develop strategies that promote the development of wine tourism in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Wine tourism is an industry that keeps growing. Different countries have created wine routes to promote the development of rural areas (Cambourne et al., 2000; Tanase et al., 2022). Wine tourism in United States has gained popularity since the 90s and there is high potential for growth (Getz et al., 1999; Wargenau & Che, 2016). In order to take advantage of this potential, it is necessary to understand visitors' behaviors and the state of the market. Taking that in consideration, it is logic to analyze growing markets in a deep manner, more particular this research will study one of the most prolific and fastest-growing markets: the elderly (Huber al., 2017).

According to Patterson & Balderas (2020), one out of five people around the world is elderly, in fact, senior population represent 22% of the world's total. Moreover, previous research states that in United States, the senior segment controls more than half of consumer spending (Hudson, 2010). There are studies that have contributed to the understanding of this market (Chen & Shoemaker, 2014). However, those studies have failed to address some specific behavior of senior tourists such as spending.

On the other hand, there is plenty of research regarding tourism spending in the United States. Previous studies regarding travelers expenditure have used income and socio-demographic variables to determine spending behavior, and determined that age of the household is one of the most influencing factors (Dardis, Soberon-Ferrer, & Patro, 1994; Dardis, Derrick, Lehfeld, & Wolfe, 1981). Nevertheless, even though this is a very important factor, not much attention is given to analyze the expenditure behaviors on different ages markets, particularly the senior market.

Moreover, as Hall et al. (2000) states there is a need for consumer-based research related to the wine industry. As the senior market is growing, it is necessary to keep constant and updated research regarding this group's consumer behavior. Research about seniors' characteristics, preferences, expectations, and more particular spending habits in wine tourism is distinctively essential in the industry. For that reason, this study aims to fill the research gap existent in the wine tourism industry and more particularly in the senior market spending behavior in the United States. In order to achieve this goal, the research will collect information regarding the senior profile, preferences and will identify spending patterns using statements that participants will provide and coding them to recognize common themes.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to examine the expenditure patters seen in senior tourists visiting wineries. More specific objectives include a) Identify the characteristics and profile of senior travelers who travel to wineries in rural areas; b) Determine the underlying reasons of senior visitors expenditure patterns; c) Provide theoretical and practical implications related to rural wine tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Wine tourism in United States

The wine industry represents one of the main components of the food and beverage sector (Garibaldi, et al., 2017). According to Hall and Macionis (1998) wine tourism consists of: visiting vineyards or wineries, assist to wine festivals and shows, participate in wine tasting demonstrations and performing other activities within the region. Previous research has highlighted the variety of activities and experiences that visitors look for when traveling to wineries. Some of the main motivations why people visit wineries are to taste the wine, to make a purchase, to experience the open landscapes and enjoy the rural settings as well as to learn more about wine.

Some of the most popular wine destinations in United States are Napa and Sonoma, and thanks to the popularity of those places, many other were created around the country including in rural areas (Getz et al., 1999). Unfortunately, many people are not aware of the multiple wineries that can be found in these areas, same areas that are usually small towns with beautiful landscapes and a lot more to offer to both wine connoisseurs, and people who are experiencing this type of tourism for the first time.

Winery challenges

Even though there are multiple wine facilities around the country, not many of them are widely recognized and most visitors are either locals or visitors from the same region (Getz, et al, 1999). In addition, most wineries are located in rural areas, where complementary services still need development. For instance, Getz et al. (1999) mentions that wine museums, visitor

information centers, shopping centers, accessible roads and other facilities are important for wine-tourism development.

Another common challenge is the lack of collaboration among wineries. Research has demonstrated that wine destinations are more successful when multiple facilities work together to attract demand and motivate travel (Wargenau & Che, 2016; Getz, et al, 1999). In addition, reputation regarding quality of wine takes time to obtain in new destinations as the market is saturated with national and international products. Finally, like many other tourism destinations, wineries are sensitive to seasons, not only regarding the time where tourist travel, but also the growing and harvesting process.

Seniors spending in tourism.



Figure 1. Spending categories in tourism

Research on tourism spending has established that the elderly market is very important for the industry and that there are variables that are significant for senior travelers including high levels of after-tax income, liquid assets, and non-liquid assets, which increase the likelihood of

traveling by the elderly (Jang, et al., 2004). Moreover, previous studies claim that weather is a factor that can influence spending in tourism (Wilkins et al., 2018). Specifically, this study claims that fall and summer tend to be the seasons where spending is higher, on the other hand winter has a negative impact on spending.

Likewise, Wilkins et al. (2018) states that weather, monthly taxable restaurant, lodging, retail sales and overall conditions are variables that allow us to measure tourism spending. In addition, Jang, et al. (2004) include cultural values related to travel behavior and socio-demographic variables to measure spending behaviors; some of the socio variables consist of the age of household head, education, and occupation. Additionally, characteristics inherently to tourism such as travel party size, number of children on the trip, and number of visits also influence spending.

Other studies have suggested that external factors such as influence in groups of friends, neighbors and even institutions can also impact spending behaviors (Nguyen. 2021; Gu, 2022). However, even though there have been studies that analyze expenditure in the United States (Wilkins et al., 2018); those studies have failed to address the senior market and the winery industry together, which can be limiting to develop effective strategies to best suit their needs.

METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study will use a qualitative approach to determine senior travelers spending behavior while visiting rural wineries. Qualitative inquiry will capture people's perspectives and experiences in order to understand how systems function and the consequences of it (Patton, 2015). In addition, this approach will allow us to understand spending behaviors better and identify patterns of thought and actions from the senior tourist perspective (Glesne, 2011). To ensure trustworthiness, this study will implement strategies such as thick descriptions, member checking and peer review process.

Method

Researchers will conduct in depth interviews. Those interviews will be recorded and stored properly without participants identifiers to protect their privacy.

Sample

This research will use a purposefully sample of senior tourists who visit wine-tourism businesses in rural areas. The number of interviews will be determined depending on when the information reaches a point of saturation plus five.

Data analysis

Results will be presented in a narrative manner including direct quotes from the participants. Once the interviews are performed, researchers will use codes to analyze senior population spending trends by finding patters and assigning common themes seen in the spending behavior of the senior visitors.

EXPECTED RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS.

The first expected results will be demographic information regarding the profile of senior winery-visitors. Then the study will analyze the amounts that the senior tourists spent in lodging, food and beverages, transportation, recreation and shopping related to wine tourism in rural areas and propose strategies for the efficient management of wine destinations in rural areas. The main finding for this research is expected to shed light on the importance of qualitative data collection, that has been underused in the field. This type of data will allow business owner and policy makers to understand the tourist profile better and create more efficient strategies that motivate travel intention and consumer satisfaction. It will also allow stakeholders to understand better what needs to improve and how to reach the target market and learn what products and services are the most important for the type of tourist that is visiting those regions.

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