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# Reaching an Underserved Wine Customer: Connecting with the African American Wine Consumer.

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# Reaching an Underserved Wine Customer: Connecting with the African American Wine Consumer

## **Abstract**

Marketing strategies addressing underserved African American wine customers' needs that also positively impact producers' and retailers' clientele was the impetus for this exploratory, qualitative paper. African Americans demonstrate a thirst to elevate their education about and be more involved in the wine industry as evidenced by the proliferation of African American wine-tasting groups designed to help educate and expose their membership to a variety of wines. Moreover, compared to the average adult, African-American wine drinkers are 241% more likely to have spent \$20 or more on a bottle of store bought wine (Arbitron, 2005). Despite African Americans' representation as one of the fastest growing ethnic minority segments in the U.S., wine industry strategies don't appear to connect with this market segment. Like Alice in Wonderland, we characterize this phenomenon by suggesting this market segment is 'peering through the looking glass'.

Three focus groups were conducted to specify possible targeted media strategies as well as to identify attitudes and opinions that influence this segment's wine purchasing and consumption behaviors. Industry strategies were suggested that would appear to benefit producers, retailers, and this customer segment. The results of the research will be used to inform a quantitative instrument in order to generalize findings beyond the context of the exploratory setting.

## **Keywords**

wine marketing, qualitative, underserved customers, African American wine consumer, marketing strategy

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Marketing strategies addressing underserved African American wine customers' needs that also positively impact producers' and retailers' clientele was the impetus for this exploratory, qualitative paper. African Americans demonstrate a thirst to elevate their education about and be more involved in the wine industry as evidenced by the proliferation of African American wine-tasting groups designed to help educate and expose their membership to a variety of wines. Moreover, compared to the average adult, African-American wine drinkers are 241% more likely to have spent \$20 or more on a bottle of store bought wine (Arbitron, 2005). Despite African Americans' representation as one of the fastest growing ethnic minority segments in the U.S., wine industry strategies don't appear to connect with this market segment. Like Alice in Wonderland, we characterize this phenomenon by suggesting this market segment is 'peering through the looking glass'. Three focus groups were conducted to specify possible targeted media strategies as well as to identify attitudes and opinions that influence this segment's wine purchasing and consumption behaviors. Industry strategies were suggested that would appear to benefit producers, retailers, and this customer segment. The results of the research will be used to inform a quantitative instrument in order to generalize findings beyond the context of the exploratory setting.

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## **Background and Significance**

The “typical” U.S. wine consumer has generally been identified as white, middle-aged, and well educated with a high income (Campbell, 2009). The problem is that the shift in U.S. demographics indicates this is no longer an accurate reflection of today’s wine consumer. Yet, wine marketing efforts seem to be targeting the “typical”, white U.S. wine consumer. However, the number of non-Hispanic whites is on the decline across the U.S. while minority groups continue to rise (Santa Cruz, 2010). Between 2000 and 2010 the African American population grew in every state (except the District of Columbia), and at a faster rate than the total population. African Americans number 42+ million, of which 38.9 million identify solely as African American and 3.1 million identify as African American in combination with one or more other races (U.S Census Bureau, 2011).

However, the literature is silent and empirical studies nearly non-existent, regarding minority wine marketing. Although Velikova, Wilkinson, and Sharp (unpublished manuscript), recently conducted a study focusing on the Hispanic wine consumer, this minority group may not share the same wants and needs as the African American wine consumer. Additionally, African American wine consumers have demonstrated a desire to heighten their participation as knowledgeable and active customers but industry strategies do not appear to connect with them. More knowledge is needed to connect this segment with industry and have industry connect with them. Therefore, the needs of the African American wine consumer should be identified to foster a better understanding of advertising and promotional efforts enabling wine marketers to better target this group while meeting this group's unaddressed needs (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997; Getz, 2000). This study's purpose was to begin to build a body of knowledge regarding African American wine consumers beginning with the process of identifying their salient needs and wants.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Potential of the African American Wine Consumer**

African Americans have demonstrated a growing interest in wine with wine consumption among African Americans increasing since 1998. According to Cole (2010), nearly 26 percent of domestic table wine sales were attributed to African Americans. African Americans typically spend in excess of \$4.4 million a year in off-premise retail wine sales (Cole, 2010). According to Forman and Buckley (2011), African Americans are 2.5 times more likely to spend \$20 or more on a bottle of wine compared to the \$9-12 price range of the mid-priced bottle (Tuttle, 2011). This increasing interest in wine by African Americans is further reflected in the development of organizations such as Divas Uncorked, the African American Wine Tasting Society (AAWTS), and Tasting Education and Networking Folks (TenFolks). These groups expose and educate minorities to fine wine though they only serve a small fraction of the potential this group represents in the marketplace (Cole, 2010). Additionally, African American consumers have the buying power to support their growing interest in wine. According to Target Market News, they ranked 17th among the world economies with a total of \$803 billion in earned income (2010). It would seem that a viable effort to build on this market's interest warrants the attention of mainstream marketing.

## **Theoretical Background**

Velikova et al. (unpublished manuscript) recently founded their research regarding Hispanic wine consumers on assimilation and acculturation concepts focused on situational ethnicity, a concept based in acculturation (Okamura, 1981). There are a number of factors that influence consumer purchase intentions. Building on situational ethnicity, Zmud and Arce (1992) found that purchase behavior is a function of felt ethnicity, cultural identity, social surroundings, and product type. Members of minority groups and/or those who identify as mixed race/ethnicity may perceive and respond to situations differently especially compared to those identified as mono-cultural; in turn, these perceptions influence consumer behavior (Stayman & Deshpande, 1989; Zmud & Arce, 1992).

As market segments are based on groups with common wants and needs, it stands to reason that wants and needs may not be the same across all groups. Segmentation provides a clearer understanding of what motivates consumers (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997; Yuan, So, & Chakravarty, 2005). Based on situational ethnicity, this proposed research will begin to identify attitudes, opinions, and purchase motivators of the African American wine consumer. This study addressed the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the attitudes and opinions of African American wine consumers related to purchasing and consumption behavior?

**RQ2:** What factors influence wine purchases by African American wine consumers?

**RQ3:** What specific strategies could be implemented by the industry with which the African American wine consumer could bond?

## **Methodology**

Conducting focus groups continues to be the preferred methodology for exploratory topics with little literature to guide the investigators (Belgrave, Zablotzky, & Guadagno, 2002). Such was the case for this project. According to Triandis (1972), focus groups provided the appropriate forum to elicit new

themes and issues that are pertinent among group members allowing the researcher to examine the group's subjective culture (i.e., the perception of rules and the group's norms, roles, and values). This supported the strategy to determine if aspects of consumer behavior are culture-specific and supported the aim to develop a culturally appropriate protocol for future research.

Three focus group sessions were conducted with African American participants in March 2013. A topical approach was used in the development of the discussion guide. This approach ensured a practical structure for the discussion sequence and facilitated the comparison of the groups in the data analysis (Kruger & Casey, 2009). The discussion guide was structured to address the following research questions: 1) What are the attitudes and opinions of African American wine consumers related to purchasing and consumption behavior?, 2) What factors influence wine purchases of African American wine consumers?, and 3) What specific strategies could be implemented by the industry with which the African American wine consumer could bond?



## **Participants**

The population of interest was African American wine customers. The size of each focus group was six to twelve participants, with the following composition: all male (n=6); mixed gender (n =12), all female (n=11), for a total of 29 participants. A purposive sampling approach was employed to garner participants that were representative of the population of interest (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

Additional contacts were elicited from initial recruits, a method known as snowball sampling. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics of the sample.

Participants fulfilled the following requirements in order to be included in the study: a) must be at least 21 years of age (legal drinking age); b) self-identify as Black or African American; c) have wine consumption/purchase experience; and d) provide informed consent. It is customary to provide a stipend to focus group participants to compensate for their time and travel expenses, which also helped insure participant attendance. A stipend of \$75 was given to each participant.

## **Conceptual Framework / Design**

To pilot the logical and sequential flow of questions, the discussion guide was reviewed by experts (wine industry professionals and educators knowledgeable in the content area) and by selected representatives having similar demographic characteristics as the target population. However, no representatives in the discussion guide pretest were included in the formal focus groups. Based on the feedback from the pilot testing, the discussion guide required minor adjustments before implementation.

The discussion guide was divided into three sections based on the objectives of the study. The first section focused on gaining insights to the participants' attitudes, opinions, and interests related to wine consumption. The second section obtained information on factors that influence wine consumption and purchases. The third section identified strategies that can be implemented by the industry to reach African American wine consumers. Additionally, a brief questionnaire was completed by the participants

regarding their demographic information and wine consumption preferences and behaviors in order to compute a thorough profile of the sampled population.

Three focus groups were conducted to facilitate inquiry across robust sets of themes (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Focus groups were conducted in Columbus, Ohio, a.k.a. Middle America or Crossroads of America, because it is representative of the broader trends of the nation and American demographics (Brandau, 2011). To capture participants' answers in their own words, the focus group sessions were audio recorded with the respondents' expressed and written consent. Recordings were transcribed verbatim. Focus groups were conducted in a modern and professional focus group facility outfitted with audio and visual recording capability. One of the researchers, a trained moderator, skilled in group dynamics and facilitating focus group discussions, conducted the discussions and debriefing sessions. The moderator ensured that each member of the group participated. The moderator also assisted with analysis (Kruger & Casey, 2009).

### **Data Analyses**

The topical discussion guide provided the tactical structure to facilitate comparison of the groups in the data analysis stage. Data collection and analysis began during the pre-session small talk before the formal start of the focus group. The researchers observed levels of possible familiarity between participants, which may need to be considered in the final analysis. A formal debriefing between the researcher and the moderator was conducted immediately after each session where summary comments and observations were recorded and a review of participant responses to key questions was discussed. There were no disagreements in points of view found between the two.

The focus groups were audio taped and data were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. The data were analyzed following a systematic and verifiable approach described by Krueger and Casey (2009). During the analysis, the researchers 1) reviewed summaries of focus group

sessions, and 2) read all transcripts concentrating on one issue/question at a time, while considering the purpose of the project.

During analysis, the researchers gave consideration to: a) words used and the meaning of the words; b) the context; c) internal consistency to check for shifts in opinion; and d) the specificity of responses. Responses based on experience were given more weight (Kruger & Casey, 2009); frequency and the number of participants expressing agreement or disagreement to identify transcendent themes (Templeton, 1994) were also noted, but in accordance with Kruger et al., not necessarily afforded more significance. Themes were then identified. Afterwards, the assistant and the moderator independently coded the transcribed responses using the identified themes. This is when saturation of themes had been reached and there were no new ideas or information shared (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Inter-rater reliability (Kappa) was measured to examine the strength of agreement between the researcher and the moderator on the assignment of categories of the categorical variables to determine the efficacy of the coding.

Inter-rater reliability. Using the Kappa statistic, an inter-rater reliability analysis was performed to determine consistency among raters. As a rule of thumb, values of Kappa from .40 to .59 are considered moderate, .60 to .79 substantial, and .80 outstanding (Landis & Koch, 1977). Most statisticians prefer Kappa values to be at least .60 and most often higher than .70 before claiming a good level of agreement (Pallant, 2007). Inter-rater reliability was analyzed for each of the groups. For the first group, consisting of all males, the inter-rater reliability for the raters was found to be  $Kappa = 0.669$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), 95% CI (0.852, 0.1.02). For the mixed gender group,  $Kappa = 0.936$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), 95% CI (0.707, 0.985) and the group of all females was  $Kappa = 0.969$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), 95% CI (0.908, 1.03).

## **Results**

### **Sample Profile**

Descriptive statistics were conducted to quantify representation of the sampled population. The sample was split between 14 males and 15 females. The average age of the participants was 43 years, ranging from 23 to 65 years old. Compared to the “typical” U.S. wine consumer which has been identified as white, middle aged, and well educated with a high income (Campbell, 2009), this sample differs little except by racial identity. Participants had higher than average levels of education, 93% of the sample had earned either an undergraduate, graduate or professional degree. Participants’ income levels were also high, with over 41% reporting an annual household income exceeding \$100,000 and only 20% of the sample earning \$40,000 or less.

Given the choice of beer, wine or liquor, 57% of the sample that responded (n=26) indicated that the alcoholic beverage they most consumed was wine, with 34% indicating that liquor was their preferred alcoholic beverage. The remaining respondents articulated a preference for beer. Regarding wine consumption frequency, 86% (n=29) indicated they drink wine at least once a week or more often. Only two indicated they drink wine for special occasions only.

Preferred wine varietals were split between red and white with red being preferred by the majority at 51% (n=26) while white was indicated by 42%. Wine style preference was indicated as follows: dry wine at 53% (n=28), sweet wine at 25% and 21% indicating an equal preference. This supports previous research that indicates consumers who prefer red wines also tend to prefer dry styles (Dodd, Kolyesnikova, & Wilcox, 2010; Zeithaml, 1988). A detailed description of the sample can be viewed in Table 1.

### **Findings: Responses to Research Questions**

The moderator opened the session by welcoming participants to the focus group, thanking them for their participation, and previewing the major discussion topics (constructs) for the evening, which began with their attitudes and opinions about wine. This was followed by the second (2) construct,

purchase and consumption influencers, and the third (3) construct, recommended marketing strategies for producers and distributors.

For each of the three major constructs, the researchers first identified global themes and then, important themes. Global themes were ideas that emerged and occurred in all three groups while commenting on the same construct; important themes were instances in which at least two participants in each group echoed similar feelings or all groups mentioned the same idea under different constructs/themes. We report here on the constructs in the order they were discussed, beginning with attitudes and opinions.

**Attitudes and opinions related to purchasing and consumption behavior (global theme).** All three groups echoed similar if not identical themes while discussing their attitudes and opinions about wines. After categorizing these comments individually, the researchers collaborated and reached inter-rater reliability on the following categories: wine's price points; the socialness of wine; parental and familial influences; the ways in which wine is associated with relaxation; the role of race in how participants think about wine; wine's social acceptability (as distinguished from wine's socialness); and females' influence on wine as a pleasing beverage.

**Price point.** As an entry-level adult beverage, the lower end of wines' price points appeared to be a catalyst for wine consumption with all three groups as one participant explained:

*“But that’s what we drank in college. MD 20/20 and Manischewitz and Boone’s Farm. That’s what we could afford.”*

**Socialness of wine.** The ways in which many and various social occasions include wine as a beverage that most people find, at minimum, acceptable was echoed by all three groups. The researchers captured this sentiment by the word socialness. This was summed up by:

*“...it just seemed like wine – true, it was inexpensive, but also, uh, it just seemed to be a more social...”*

*Social acceptability.* This was distinguished by another sentiment that used the word ‘social’ by many participants as a way to express the sentiment of wine’s acceptability that spans race, class, age, and occasion. Wine then, becomes a common denominator, the beverage that brings people together. This was echoed in the following participant comments:

*“It’s a conversation starter.”*

*“...wine is non-intimidating... especially in a mixed group of company.”*

*“...when you’re drinking wine, you’re just drinking social.”*

*Parental and familial influences.* When participants were asked about their introduction and first influences of drinking wine, all groups mentioned a parent, family member, or family gathering as their initial exposure to wine consumption. This extended to comments about how to think about drinking wine, which included both positive and negative triggers.

*“...like the high school bad boys and the, um, winos in the street [sic] gave me my first negative impression of wine.”*

*“My mother used to allow us to taste wine when we were younger and when I got older, it just made me more curious about it...”*

*my palate kind of got used to having wine.”*

*Relaxation.* Likely related to wines’ socialness, an association with relaxation was also made by all groups when considering their attitudes and opinions about wine. This was very different than associations with other adult beverages, such as liquor, which was more associated with getting ready for a weekend night out and ‘going hard’; spending a night in with the girls and accepting the possible ill effects of imbibing liquor; and making a conscious decision to ‘man-up’.

*Racial identifier.* The concept of race and racial identity was retold amongst all three groups. Observations ranged from wine being initially associated as a predominantly white, adult beverage consumed with dinner or entertaining clients to wines’ association with white friends.

*“...I only drank wine with white people. My college friends... not with black friends until many, many...years later...by my trade I had to know white from red and, zinfandels and...you know which was dry and which was sweeter. But, I just drank white people wine.”*

*“I have a lot of white friends too and they’re a lot more into wine than my black friends...I’ll go over there for dinner, and they’ll be like let’s have a bottle of wine. Exactly...”*

*Females’ influence.* Males universally noted being influenced by females and the role it plays regarding dating and setting an appropriate tone. Women repeated this refrain by recalling early wine drinking experiences when ‘going out’.

*“Wine to me is like, it’s a more intellectual buzz. It’s sexy. It’s something that I’d be more inclined to drink with a lady...”*

*“...knowing that they (women) like to drink wine, it became...a big interest of mine because I wanted...a good thing to share with them, a very good thing to share.”*

**Attitudes and opinions related to purchasing and consumption behavior (important themes).** To reiterate, important themes were instances in which at least two of the three groups echoed similar feelings or all groups mentioned the same idea under different constructs/themes. Three ideas emerged under the important theme grouping; market pricing as a signal of value; wine as behaviorally cool; and the health benefits of wine.

While value was a recurring theme with all groups, both men and women expressed an attitude of uncertainty relative to a wine’s price signaling its quality and spoke of it as a purchase and consumption influencers. Additionally, the mixed gender group approached wine as being priced at an accessible ‘easy to get’ cost, mentioning it in the purchase and consumption influencers as well as the attitude and opinion section.

*“Yeah, but you think that wine, in the context of all these hundreds of wine makers, that there are people out there who say, they don’t know. I’ll put twenty-five dollars on it, and sell it. That’s right. And people think the higher the price, and they don’t know. I agree. So, that’s what I’m afraid of.”*

Regarding the notion of wine as cool, all three groups mentioned its importance, albeit during different parts of the conversation: men cited cool as a factor of attitudes and opinions as well as a purchase and consumption influencer; the mixed gender group and women cited a cool image and thought of ‘cool’ through aesthetics such as the image of a beautiful woman, beautiful stemware, beautiful clothes, in a beautiful setting being a purchase and consumption influencer. The mixed gender group recommended making wine look cool in their recommendations for industry marketing strategies.

*“You can be with friends, and have a nice little, mellow setting with a glass of wine. You can’t do that with Ciroc and just be like, so how was your day? ...Like a shot glass vs. a wine glass. ...Exactly.”*

*“Add a bottle of that wine in a sexy glass and poured for the pretty lady in the picture.”*

Lastly, both the mixed gender group and women’s group mentioned the health benefits of wine in their construction of attitudes and opinions. Men suggested touting the health benefits of wine for promotional purposes.

*“And another ad that maybe talks to the health benefits of wine. Mhmmm.*

*I mean, a lot of people find it very, very easy and more morally conscionable to drink wine because they think, oh, its medicine. I think the health benefit is a big perk.”*

*“...life is short and with that comes taking care of your body, and I don’t think wine is as taxing on your health. You can still work out. You can still eat well and do certain things and won’t tap that, it won’t age you the same...if it’s in moderation”.*

**Influential purchase factors (global themes).** Again, universal or global themes under the category of influencers of consumption and purchasing reverberated throughout the discussion on what motivated participants to consume and purchase wine. Global themes included the following influencers: price points and a wine’s perceived value; wine pairings with food; wine’s influence as a mature, appropriate,



and aspirational beverage; women being key drivers of wine consumption and purchases; and the influence of information sources on wine consumption and purchasing.

The price of a wine and its perceived price value (associated with its cost benefit analysis) was a theme shared by all focus group participants. As an entry-level adult beverage, the lower end of wine price points appeared to be a catalyst for wine consumption with all three groups. More specifically, wine's lower price point positively influenced purchases by the mixed gender group; men had price tiers (everyday 'sipping wine' at \$9-12/ bottle; \$12-25/bottle); and women and the mixed gender group both appeared to prefer wine's physical impact (over liquor).

*"I can drink wine casually just to get like a buzz or to relax. But if I'm drinking liquor, like, you [can] get drunk. ...kind of numbs you."*

*"So, sometimes I'll look for wine that's nine to twelve dollars hoping I can find a real value but I don't want to spend a lot of money...everyday wine..., and it's called sipping' wine."*

Price versus perceived value and food pairing. Conversations regarding a wine's price and its value as a purchase driver were complex. Though an important theme was indicated in participants' attitude and opinions that a higher priced wine did not necessarily result in a higher quality wine or a wine that tasted better than a medium-priced wine, many if not all participants commented on the difficulty of interpreting price as a signal for quality. However, it was interesting to hear that expenditures would be higher for wine purchases intended as a gift. Further, if the recipient had a preference for a certain varietal, the gift giver might purchase a more expensive bottle for the recipient, especially if the gift giver might be invited to join in its consumption. Participants all spoke to the pairing of wine with food as an influential factor in buying wine while dining out and in social groupings with friends.

*"...you can actually pair wine very well with meals to affect what you're eating. And I think that's something that is also why you drink wine."*

*Wine's influence as a mature, post-college transition beverage.* Wine is a beverage that is appropriate and sets a 'common ground' in multiple settings; Wine being an aspirational beverage was another universal theme.

*"...I want to be the person that doesn't lose himself because we are African American, okay. At the same time, we know where the money is. ...The money is, shall we say, with the man, okay, and in order for us to get our foot in the door - You have to know your stuff...you have to play their game. Now, it just happens that I also like their game. – So, starting out in a professional career, a lot of these business luncheons are tests."*

*"I've been out with clients...and they were impressed you know when I knew what to order for the wine, and it actually just built rapport with them ...they're like, oh wow, ...this guy knows what he's doing. ...that's in the business world. It's an assumption of a higher circle."*

*"So if you're out with a group, I mean, it's always safe to say 'I'd like a glass of wine'."*

*Female influence.* The influence of women as being a key driver of wine consumption and purchases was clear with all three groups. Men drink and buy wine in the presence of women as a nod to what they consider women's preferred adult beverage. Several women commented on their influence on their husband regarding consumption.

*"And I basically bought different wines depending on what her taste was at the time...she kind of drove what kind of wine we had in the house..."*

*Information sources.* Previous research suggests various sources are sought out for information in the wine purchase stage (Hammond, Velikova, & Dodd, 2013; Tach, 2008; Dodd, Laverie, Wilcox, & Duhan, 2005). These participants relied on friends, sommeliers, previous tastings, and retailers with whom they have experience as information sources for consuming and buying wine. This sample indicated that trust of the source was the key. Additionally, song lyrics, music, and movies were identified as significant information sources and influences on drinking and buying motivators.

*"...there was this song, ...and when that song came out...there's a part in the song where he says, 'I'm a sip Moscato', you know, ...and I really feel like, in my opinion, that song put Moscato specifically on the*

*map and there were a lot of people that were just starting to drink Moscato because of that...that is what encouraged me.”*

*“See, I think what you end up doing is you end up, you know, going places where you can rely on, you trust the advice you get.”*

*Influential purchase factors (important themes).* Four ideas emerged during the discussion about consumption and purchasing influences including 1) health benefits of wine; 2) socialness of wine; 3) appropriateness of wine as a gift; and 4) non-local winery visitation.

Both the mixed gender group and women mentioned the health benefits of wine as influential regarding their consumption and purchasing behaviors. Wine was mentioned by male and female groups as having more socialness than other adult beverages with phrases such as socializing, socially acceptable, getting together with friends used as exemplars. Men and women mentioned wine as the most appropriate and versatile beverage to gift and to serve. Both women and men indicated they had visited non-local wineries (international and domestic); women’s purchases appeared to be motivated by winery visits while sampling influenced consumption and purchasing by both women and men. However, discussion about visiting local wineries suggested that more persuasive marketing is called for as participants, particularly in the women’s group, indicated they were aware of the presence of local wineries, but never thought about visiting them and did not know where they were.

**Potential industry marketing strategies (global themes).** The final topic discussed in all three groups concerned recommendations to the industry regarding communicating with and marketing to audiences of color, particularly African Americans. Two clear, global themes surfaced from this part of the discussion: the desire for African American ‘models’ in all media and messaging vehicles and the need for education.

*Image of me.* The phrase, wanting to see an ‘image of me’ was offered by all three groups; possible media vehicles included music, movies, commercials, print ads. Women noted that promotional images

did not need to confine themselves to African Americans only, rather images should be representative of everyday lives of the panorama of American life. Men also suggested piggyback marketing strategies to leverage suppliers of different products that perhaps target the same audience. The resonant subtheme here was the distinction of this community not being monolithic and that a tiered segmentation approach would be appropriate and effective.

*“The other thing you don’t see enough in wines [retailing] if you think about all the wine tastings you’ve been to over the years, it’s a very white industry. You don’t have that many black representatives that many black people pouring wine. Definitely not many wineries owned.”*

“Image of me” extended to establishments serving wine. Trust might be garnered by establishing a comfortable environment, based on the theory of phenotyping whereby individuals identify more with people whose visual appearances are similar to their own. This is particularly applicable to African Americans according to Ting-Toomey, Yee-Jung, Shapiro, Garcia, Wright, and Oetzel (2000) who found that African Americans have a stronger ethnic identity (i.e., identifying with their ethnic memberships) more so than other ethnic groups.

*“If they want to increase African American wine consumption, have something that is a national ad that talks to, you know, ... maybe there’s a professional kind of get together ad where you have couples that are drinking wine, enjoying themselves...”*

*Education.* The desire for wine familiarity, knowledge, and understanding also ran across all three groups. Recommendations for achieving this ranged from supporting wine sampling/tastings to merchandising wine flavors and pairings.

Potential industry marketing strategies (important themes). Again, important themes were instances in which at least two of the three groups echoed similar feelings or all groups mentioned the same idea under different constructs/themes. Three ideas emerged under the important theme grouping: celebrity endorsements, music, and health marketing.

Repeating the ‘image of me’ theme, celebrity advocates, were mentioned by both men (Beyoncé) and the mixed gender group (Oprah). But, women want authentic portrayals, not assimilation. And men don’t want to be ‘sold out’.

*“I don’t like being shown as [if] I’ve assimilated into that culture.”*

*“My mom said to me you know, nobody wants to be pimped.”*

Both men and the mixed gender group talked extensively about music being a key strategy to increase the ‘cool’ factor of wine consumption. The mixed gender group paralleled wine bottle service typically confined to a bottle of liquor being sold and brought to a table in a nightclub as a reference to ‘cool’.

Men suggested the health advantages red wine conveys making health marketing a sound strategy. Women and the mixed gender group spoke of the health benefits as consumption and purchasing influence.

*“...and another ad that maybe talks to the health benefits of wine.”*

*“And I do buy red wine because of my health.”*

*“A glass of wine is, is healthy for you.”*

## **Implications**

Wine marketing, to date, has been directed to those with demographic characteristics associated with the “typical” U.S. wine consumer (white, middle-aged, and well educated). However, this is no longer an accurate reflection of today’s wine consumer. Interestingly, this sample differs little in demographic characteristics except by racial identity. The findings of this study yielded several notions that indicate a variety of ways the wine industry could better resonate with African American wine consumers. The following discusses the emergent beliefs.

Wine is associated as feminine. There was a clear, unanimous message from participants that wine's 'gender' was decidedly feminine. All indications pointed to wine purchases and consumption being influenced by females. Men were more open to considering wine, based on female acceptance even if it was not their beverage of choice, a point not lost on the female participants in the groups

Wine is a social beverage. Participants identified the inclusion of wine, sometimes to the exclusion of other alcoholic beverages, in work and leisure sectors, classifying it as a non-intimidating adult beverage and the most socially acceptable of all adult beverages. This universal response persisted, even while some identified beer or spirits as a favorite beverage.

Wine is viewed as the most socially acceptable beverage. This sample identified wine as the beverage that transcended race, class, and context for its appropriateness and social acceptability. For example drinking several glasses of wine over the course of an evening left a more positive impression than imbibing several liquor-based cocktails, in spite of the realization for potentially identical amounts of alcohol being consumed. The consensus was that drinking wine, even too much wine, was less harmful and more socially acceptable than over-imbibing in other alcoholic beverages.

More education about wine is desired. All participants indicated a desire for wine education, highlighted by discussions of the mixed signals of price points and perceived value. Participants appeared to be eager to learn more about the tenets of wine consumption (pairings for example).

Wine may be an inadvertent segregating beverage. Lack of wine knowledge may put African Americans at a disadvantage. It was expressed that a fairly sophisticated familiarity about wine and pairings seemed to impress and surprise white colleagues and clients. Wine knowledge, particularly in dining situations, was identified as a way of leveling the playing field in professional circles and serving as a means for acceptance in the business world. Being able to confidently demonstrate wine knowledge was likened to the benefits of playing golf for career advancement and making professional connections.

Trust is key in choosing information sources used for wine purchasing decisions. Some indicated relying only on friends with significant wine knowledge while others indicated they shopped at particular outlets that have proven to be knowledgeable. This seems logical in that more education about wine was strongly desired and more wine knowledge was viewed as potential career leverage. Thus, the lack of knowledge would indicate the need to be able to trust information sources.

Music lyrics and movie placements are motivators for purchasing wine. Music's prominence in settings that may involve wine (entertainment venues as well as home-based entertaining) and strategic product placements (music videos, movies, etc.) appeared to generate a connection and relevancy that motivates purchasing. From the staging of one's home atmosphere, to its use in popular media such as song lyrics and movie placements, wine and music were frequently cited as companion mood elevators. Every group vocalized the notion of music and its affinity with wine and mainstream settings in which wine may be provided (e.g. gourmet grocers' tastings, plays, and receptions).

Wine is associated with specific music genres. Participants indicated specific music genres associated with drinking wine compared to music associated with drinking other beverages, such that wine was easily paired with the relaxation jazz and blues music evokes while liquor and beer consumption was connected to other genres (e.g. rap, rock, pop).

Wine is perceived as a drink for Caucasians. This sample observed that wine marketing efforts have primarily been aimed at white consumers. Even on the service and sales side of the industry, no one could recall a time when they had been served wine by an African American sommelier, distributor, sales rep, wine tasting room employee, wine maker etc. The conscious notion is the desire to 'see people who look like me'. The knowledge that African Americans have a stronger ethnic identity than other ethnic groups (Ting-Toomey, et al., 2000) may help wine marketers better appreciate the positive response likely to accrue from African American consumers when confronting media images representing the tapestry of racial and ethnic groups across America. Similarly, positive behavioral responses are more likely to be realized with higher representation of African Americans in the wine system such as wine distributors,

producers, and industry employees. This sample echoed they associated wine as a white, adult beverage making it apparent that marketing strategies must be implemented to attract African American wine consumers to make them feel that wine is meant for them too.

## **Conclusions**

With the growth of the African American demographic expecting to reach sixty-two million by the year 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) combined with the purchasing power and growing wine interest of this population, it stands to reason that the marketing needs of this segment warrants attention.

This study was exploratory in nature with a purpose to begin building a body of knowledge regarding African American wine consumers. The purpose was to identify the attitudes and opinions of African American wine consumers related to purchasing and consumption behavior; determine what factors influence wine purchases and identify specific strategies that could be implemented by the industry with which the African American wine consumer could bond. This study yielded several emergent themes that require further investigation some of which were particularly interesting, despite some limitations to the study.

The implication that wine is perceived as a social beverage that is also considered the most sociably acceptable was not a surprise. Though it was interesting to hear this from a group who, in turn, identified wine as a drink for Caucasians and one in which they had never experienced a familiar representation (as in an “image of me”) at any level of distribution. It appears that as much as market segments differ, between and within segments, all are fundamentally the same in our need to “belong”. However, based on this study, this sample seems to be on the outside longingly ‘peering through the looking glass’. Findings also indicate the need to determine if the African American population perceives wine as a beverage for Caucasians only. Investigating this further may provide direction in how to better market wine inclusively.



The desire for more education should also be investigated further to determine what type of knowledge (wine/food pairings, varietal characteristics, growing regions) and what type of delivery methods (on-line, classes, books) are preferred. Additionally, it would be beneficial to determine if there are any differences across gender and among generational segments.

Building on the desire for knowledge, identifying information sources preferred by African Americans upon which to base wine purchases would be beneficial to those in the wine industry. Further research should be done to determine if level of knowledge and type of knowledge (objective versus subjective) affects information sources used by African American wine consumers.

The indication that song lyrics and movie placements influenced this sample's purchase motivations directs the need to determine if this is the same for the population. Additionally, further research is needed to investigate wine's association with specific music genres. These implications could be addressed in a variety of methods including experimental designs.

As one study is insufficient upon which to build a marketing program, it is the researchers' intention to launch a quantitative investigation based on the findings of this qualitative study. In order to generalize findings to a larger population, the development of a quantitative instrument is fitting. A limitation of this study exists in that all the study participants were from the same geographical region. Additionally, members from the Generation X (beginning birth dates from 1965 to 1976) demographic may be underrepresented. Also, given the exploratory, qualitative nature of this research it is not generalizable to any population, nor was that its purpose. The results of this study do however, provide a foundation to build a body of knowledge about African American wine consumers. Additionally, industry strategies have been suggested which need to be investigated further. The ultimate goal would be to both invite this segment in while enlarging the clientele of producers and retailers.

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**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (n=29)**

Characteristic	Percent
<b>Which alcoholic beverage do you consume most? n=26</b>	
Beer	7.7
Wine	57.7
Spirits	34.6
<b>How often do you consume wine? n=29</b>	
Several time a week	48.3
Once a week	37.9
About once a month	6.9
Less than once a month	0.0
Special occasions only	6.9
<b>What is your favorite type of wine? n=26</b>	
Red wine	57.7
White wine	42.3
Rose / Blush wine	0
Sparkling wine	0
Fortified wine	0
<b>Gender n=29</b>	
Female	51.7
Male	48.3
<b>Highest education level completed n=29</b>	
High School Diploma / GED	0
Some College	6.9
Bachelor's Degree	58.6
Master's Degree	27.6
Doctoral Degree	0
Professional Degree (JD, MD)	6.9
<b>Marital Status n=28</b>	
Married	57.1
Single	35.7
Other	7.1
<b>Total annual household income n = 29</b>	
Less than \$20,000	0
\$20,001 - \$40,000	20.7
\$40,001 – \$60,000	17.2
\$60,001 – \$80,000	6.9
\$80,001 – \$100,000	13.8
\$100,001 -\$120,000	6.9
\$120,001 – \$140,000	3.4
Over \$140,000	31.0