

Exploring Wine Tourism Experience Constructs: A Qualitative Approach

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ABSTRACT

Wine tourism is getting popular in market throughout the world and wine tourism experience keep arousing tourism scholars' attention. However, for what constructs a wine tourism experience still remains debated. This study aims to identify the underpinning constructs of wine tourism experience using a qualitative approach. Systematic literature review and participative observation methods were employed to explore the seemingly amorphous features of wine tourism experience. Research findings suggest that wine tourism experience is a multi-dimensional construct with six dimensions, namely, escape, esthetic, education, entertainment, novelty and hedonism. The results of study provide with practical implications for wine tourism operations with respect to experiential product development and marketing initiatives.

Keywords: *Wine tourism experience, experience economy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has far reaching impacts on tourism and hospitality [1]. It has seriously affected the access and use of cultural attractions, especially indoor activities [2]. However, the COVID-19 epidemic creates the opportunities for the development of rural tourism [3]. According to Zurab Poloikashvili, the Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization, wine tourism is one of important pillars of rural tourism development [4]. It has been facing challenges and opportunities since the beginning of COVID-19 epidemic. As cities have higher infection rates, tourists tend to isolate in the rural areas in order to live in a safer environment [5]. Wineries become popular tourism destinations as they are usually located in suburb or countryside. In addition to more safety guarantee, it can also provide many natural, gastronomic, historical and cultural attractions [3]. Psychologically, tourists have many negative emotions related to COVID-19 epidemics, such as fear, anxiety and restrictions on their freedom. This makes tourists yearn for escapism experience and natural outdoor destinations [2].

Wineries are regarded as places where grapes are grown and wine is traditionally fermented. Wine tourism is defined as a kind of consumer behaviour relies on

people's attraction to wine, wine-producing regions and wine-related experiences [6]. Although wine tourism experience has been widely studied from a variety of perspectives such as service experience quality [7], experience economy [8], experiential marketing [9], wine involvement [10], and winescape [11], scholars are still not in consensus on what are the underpinning dimensions of wine tourism experience. This study attempts to explore the key constructs of wine tourism experience using qualitative approach.

2. METHODOLOGY

The systematic literature review method was employed to identify the existing themes or constructs in the past literature that writing about wine tourism experience. SciVerse Scopus was chosen as the search engine to find the appropriate articles as it is considered as one of the most comprehensive and multi-functional database of peer-reviewed literature. "wine tourism experience" were placed in the section of title, abstract and keywords of search fields to screen the targeted paper. Total 100 papers published in last two decades surface related to wine tourism experience and 30 papers were final selected as they are directly linked to and centered on wine tourism experience. The selected papers were carefully reviewed by authors with attempt

to identify the underpinning structures of wine tourism experience. As the supplement to literature review, participant observation was adopted to conceptualize wine tourism experience in a real situation as it often generates new insights and knowledge for scholars [12]. Researchers conducted a comprehensive observation from the perspective of tourists, and pay attention to tourists' behaviors related to wine experience as well as recorded them in time with notebooks. Casual chats with tourists also provide researchers with opportunities to explore visitors' wine tourism experience and each talk was completed in about ten minutes.

3. FINDINGS

Under the scrutiny of systematic literature review and participative observation, six dimensions surface, namely, escape, esthetic, education, entertainment, novelty and hedonism. Entertainment is considered a rather significant part of tourism products and services [13]. It is further defined as an act of providing or being provided with recreation or pleasure [14]. Entertainment functions as a factor that helps to build up personal experience with arguably the most extended history in the dimensions of experience [15]. Entertainment is reflected in passive participation and absorption [8] since it can be generated only when consumers passively participate in recreational activities and have fun [16]. Tourists eager to see a variety of performance while they visiting winery [8]. Wine stands for a luxury lifestyle as it is often connected with art and culture [17]. In addition, special events in wine destinations are rather attractive to tourists [18]. In China, weddings in wineries are popular with young couples. Tasting grapes or wine is also a good entertainment experience. Numerous wine shops in wine destinations are excellent entertainment elements [10]. It is popular when processing wines, making souvenirs or wine labels in the winery. Entertainment can also be well integrated with music, art, as well as cultural heritage in wine destinations [17]. All of them will upgrade the entertainment experience for tourists.

Educational experience is often described to acquire new knowledge or learn something which is not familiar with [8]. Scholars are agreed that education is one the pivotal motivating factors of tourist visiting wineries [19][20]. Tourists who come for food and wine are interested in learning some new things [21]. For the tourists who look for emotional pleasure in journeys, acquiring wine-related knowledge is also an attraction of tourists with great importance [22]. Sparks (2007) [23] pointed out that personal development is considered by wine visitors a determinant attribute that they are looking for. Actually, educational experiences are proven to be the antecedent of memory creation and satisfaction [24]. Wine tasting creates the opportunities for visitors to obtain updated knowledge of wine and winery, and

wineries tend to organize a variety of workshops, meetings, and learning sessions to deliver educational experience to their guests [18].

Esthetic experience met when tourists tend to be immersed in the attractiveness of the destination and take a passive attitude when appreciating and being touched by the glammers, however, it has little relationship with the activities they participate in [16]. Esthetic experience means to immerse in a sensual environment [24]. It plays a dominant role in creating positive memory and destination loyalty in wine tourism [18]. Winescape was proved to be essential in the organization of wine tourism [25]. Studies have shown that non-wine-related features such as the atmosphere and landscape of traveling destinations have become the most critical attributes of experience [26]. Landscape and heritage are some of the reasons to attract tourists to the winery [27]. Wine roads and viticulture landscapes are fascinating for tourists [28]. The scenery of the wine regions is usually the theme of countless pictorials [18]. Picturesque wine landscape, vineyards, streets and classic buildings present a superb esthetic experience to visitors [29]. In wine destinations, it is an esthetic experience to enjoy wine in accommodation, restaurants, cafes and other exotic places with wine-related features [30]. Hiking and driving on country lanes alongside vineyards and orchards are also common esthetic activities [31]. Williams (2001) [32] denoted that the focus of wine regional advertising has shifted to the aesthetic aspect of rural landscape. Moreover, some scholars believe that wine itself is an aesthetic preference that is similar to music and art. Hence enjoying and appreciating wine is also an aesthetic experience [33].

People usually feel exhausted after a day's duty at the workplace, so they are eager for a sense of escape from reality and experiences with exciting and interesting items, so as to promote physical and mental relaxation [34]. The travel industry can provide guests with immersive environments so that they are able to escape from the stressful daily routine in the journey [8]. Research targeted to motivations of wine tourists supports the escapist principle in the 4Es model [24]. The dimension of escapism refers to the experience different from tourists' daily experience. In other words, tourists spend time in the wine destination so as to escape the reality of everyday life via participatory and immersive activities [24]. Compared with other dimensions, escapism experience requires more attention on immersion and participation [16]. Tourism is the process of spatial transfer of tourists, who leave their usual living environment. Such location difference attracts tourists to wine producing areas [35]. When visitors are engrossed in the winery activities, they often forget where they are, and tend to lose track of time [18].

Travel experience is a pluralistic concept, yet with shared features such as excitement, community, actual

or perceived danger, the achievement of new ideas, aesthetics, novelty and exotic [36]. Novelty, derived from 'Novus for new' in the Latin language, which is a new, remarkable, original, or unusual quality [37]. Novelty refers to newness or uniqueness [38], and is defined as the degree of the contrast between current perception and experience [39]. When people come to evaluate whether a stimulus is novel or not, they invariably compare it with another catalyst of the past [40]. According to Crouch, Huybers and Oppewal (2014) 's [41] research on exploring future vacation experiences and preferences, seeking new places, cultural attractions, and other novelties is one of the main motivations in the tourism industry. It is deemed by consumers a successful and pleasant experience if they fully participate in more novel and sensory activities [42], which indicates the demand for novelty experiences in wine tourism [43]. Tourists are keen on novelty experiences and surprises, and the more unusual an activity is, the more enjoyable and unforgettable a trip is [44]. For example, children enjoy the miniature train experience in the vineyard, and adults could taste the ice wine produced in winter. Wine tourism experience can be associated with local culture and brings about the novel experiences [45]. Looking for a unique flavor of the wine is one of the five motivations of wine tourists [46]. Some Chinese wineries can provide visitors more choice of tasting different wine. Some precious local or imported wine can only be bought here rather than the market. In addition, tourists may also collect memorabilia and souvenirs in different sites of wineries out of a sense of novelty [47]. Wine tourists will experience the "wow" element when they find out the above attributes of the winery [48].

Wine tourism is regarded as a hedonism experience [49]. Unlike hospitality, wine tourism is characterized by more service-oriented and interactive marketing channels. In this context, wine consumption and purchase are in a significant relationship with experience, hedonism and social motivation [50]. In view of the hedonic and sensual nature of wine, wine tourism is theoretically one of the most suitable one to provide experience services for tourists in the industry. However, there remains little research on the field in an empirical perspective [51]. Most wine tourists can be viewed as potential or actual wine consumers. They are looking for a wine-related hedonism experience [52]. In this sense, wine tourism is a journey during which visitors seek the hedonic experiences provided by wine [52]. Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró (2020) [38] analyzed the internal components of wine tourism products, which helps to meet the needs of consumers. For instance, tourists think highly about walking around the vineyard as it combines a multiple of multisensory, emotional and pleasure. Even though in hot weather, participants denote that it is a pleasant activity that provides an intangible experience. They stressed that the whole tourism offers plenty of enjoyable elements:

walking exercises, natural landscape, tasting moments, learning of wine culture, and architectural heritage. In short, visitors hold a positive attitude toward the hedonism of the wine experience.

4. CONCLUSION

Wine tourism is getting prevalent world widely and particularly in China as a form of rural tourism. Few studies have explored the underline dimensions of wine tourism experience especially using qualitative method. This research serves an initial attempt to inquire into the unformed features of wine tourism experience and demonstrate six dimensions of wine tourism experience: entertainment, education, esthetic, escapism, novelty and hedonism. Wine tourism operators can develop experiential products accordingly based on the dimensions identified in this study and deliver them to the targeted markets. For example, a packaged tour may be organized to have wine tasting party, grape growing demonstration, appreciating winescapes, hiking along winery trails, co-designing some wine-related products and indulging guests with spa and facial activities. Wine tourism experiences can also be offered through a variety of events which are often held yearly at wineries. For instance, at the night of Chinese Moon-cake festival, winery operators may organize a special gathering in their beautiful gardens. Tourists are invited to taste wine, drink Chinese tea while appreciate the moon and surroundings. By combing the six types of wine tourism experiences together, wineries are able to provide their guests with a memorable and holistic experience. With clear and deep understanding of what are the experiences wine tourists looking for, wine tourism operators are able to succeed in the increasing competitive market and ultimately satisfy their customer needs.

Due to the qualitative approach of this study, the bias of researchers' judgment may not be completely avoided. However, a detailed double check and revision work have been performed by two researchers at the stages of literature review and participative observation to make sure the required information are well searched, sorted and recorded. Future studies may want to further explore the sub-dimensions of each wine tourism experience and examine the relationships of wine tourism experiences with wine destination images, wine destination brands, wine purchase intention and other related tourism behaviors.

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