THE PERCEPTIONS OF WINE CONSUMERS REGARDING THE USE OF DIGITAL WINE LISTS IN DIGITALLY ORIENTED RESTAURANTS

Pero Labus[1], Jelena Lukić Nikolić[2]

Corresponding author E-mail: jelena.lukic@mbs.edu.rs

A B S T R A C T

The aim of this paper is to examine and analyze the perceptions of wine consumers regarding the use of digital wine lists in restaurants. The empirical research was conducted using a specially designed questionnaire, which was completed by 406 respondents from 2020 to 2021. The data analysis applied descriptive statistics, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Levene's test, and the Kruskal-Wallis H test. The results showed that restaurants with digital wine lists are preferred by consumers who are at the young age group (between the ages of 18 and 35), have no prior knowledge about wine, and visit restaurants frequently (a few times per month). These respondents are willing to recommend digitally oriented restaurants and their services to others. The results and conclusions presented in this research could serve as a foundation for decision-makers and managers in restaurants to consider the introduction of digital wine lists and to improve their restaurant's attractiveness.

Introduction

The use of digital technologies provides several benefits to restaurants, including faster service, higher quality of service, lower operational costs, increased productivity, heightened guest satisfaction, improved guest experience, the ability to personalize services, and increased market attractiveness of the restaurant (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005; Melian-Alzola et al., 2020). The restaurant business is evolving due to globalization and the rapid development of technological solutions. In the digital age, modern technology-driven concepts play a significant role in the operation and function of restaurants. According to Grewal et al. (2022), numerous opportunities exist for the hospitality industry to thrive by utilizing digital technologies and tools for online

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1   Pero Labus, PhD, Director of Food and Beverage/Consultant full time, hotel Ambasador; Retoi d.o.o., Split, Croatia, Phone: +385916255002, E-mail: peterlabus@hotmail.com, ORCID ID (https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8098-7711)

2   Jelena Lukić Nikolić, PhD, Associate Professor, Modern Business School, Terazije 27, Belgrade, Serbia, Phone: +381628506256, E-mail: jelena.lukic@mbs.edu.rs, ORCID ID (https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0632-8974)

ordering, online payment, social media presence, and providing various self-service tools for customers. Restaurant owners are transforming their previous business models and embracing modern technological solutions. That expands their business scope and enables them to stay ahead of the competition (Yim & Yoo, 2020). They are making substantial efforts to adopt new digital technologies that will increase their efficiency and enhance customer service (Martin-Martin et al., 2022).

Digital menus and wine lists have become integral components of the restaurant digitalization process. Digital menus provide more information, greater flexibility in product presentation, more current information, automatic translations into other languages, and various nutritional details (calorie count, salt, fat, saturated fat, sugar, and allergy information) (Labus & Jelovac, 2022). Because a digital interface can more easily incorporate a greater amount of information than a traditional paper format, digital menus can increase customer satisfaction and reduce customer uncertainty during the decision-making process (Beldona et al., 2014). Due to space constraints in traditional paper menus, restaurants have heavily relied on their personnel to provide all important information and detailed explanations of menu items to guests (Zulkifly et al., 2016). With the advancement and widespread use of modern digital technologies and tools, many restaurants are now focusing on digital menus and wine lists.

The aim of this paper is to examine and analyze the perceptions of wine consumers regarding the use of digital wine lists in restaurants. The paper is structured as follows: the first part focuses on the literature review and theoretical background, referring to the role and importance of digital wine lists in digitally oriented restaurants. The second part is dedicated to research methodology, hypotheses, research results, and discussion of research findings. The conclusion presents the key implications of the research, as well as the limitations of the conducted research, and proposes areas for future research on this topic.

The role and importance of wine and digital wine lists

Wine is an essential product for both the hotel and tourism industries (Chen et al., 2016). Furthermore, wine has long been one of the most popular alcoholic beverages at restaurants, pubs, and clubs (Hall et al., 2004; Kelley, 2022). The earliest evidence of grape wine has been found in China (around 7000 BC), Georgia (around 6000 BC), Iran (around 5000 BC), Greece (around 4500 BC), and Sicily (around 4000 BC) (McIntyre & Gremov, 2018). Today, it is almost unthinkable to organize any event, be it festivities, entertainment, various life events, culinary concepts, or touristic trips without wine (Anđelić et al., 2019). Wine has begun to take up a more substantial role in many countries' tourism offerings, creating a distinct tourism product (Razović, 2015). It is crucial to note that the definition and concept of the *wine tourism* are not unified, with most definitions including the experiences and motivations of travelers or tourists. Johnson (1997) describes wine tourism as visits to vineyards, wine cellars, wine festivals, and showings organized for recreational purposes, while Hall et al. (2000) emphasize the appeal of a wine region's natural charms as the primary reason

for a visit. Visitors to wine regions constitute distinct types of specialized tourist, and according to some authors, these visitors differ from other tourists based on the type of wine and the winery they choose to visit (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2000).

There are many different types of wine, commonly classified by color (white, pink, and red wine), residual sugar content (still wine-dry, semi-dry wine, sweet wine, semi-sweet wine), and quality (table wines, premium wines, quality wines with a protected designation of origin, archival wines, sparkling wines, carbonated wines, pearl wines) (Ružić, 2011). Wine quality can be assessed from various perspectives, including the technical aspects of production, wine characteristics, consumer preferences, and purpose of consumption (Ilak Peršurić et al., 2023). The complexity of wine description is analyzed and presented by Croijmans et al. (2020) in their *Text-Based Wine Wheel*. These authors identified many unique terms used for wine description and classified them into three broad categories and twelve subcategories, as shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Categories and subcategories in Text-Based Wine Wheel

Categories	Subcategories
aromas	fruit; spices; food; non-food
taste/texture	technical tasting; taste proper; texture
technical vocabulary	grape varieties; modifiers; occasion; vinification; other

Source: adapted from Croijmans et al., 2020

Guests typically inform themselves about wines at restaurants through the wine list, an informational document that the buyer or guest uses to gain information about the wine offerings. It is essential for the wine list to include as many different types of wine as possible to help the end-consumers make the best decision (Labus, 2023). The wine list should include information such as the wine's name, type, quantity, price, vineyard, year of production, producer's name, alcohol content, acidity, tannin quantity, and taste (Barth, 2011). The wine label offers essential information that might assist consumers in making wine purchasing decisions, helping them assess information and make well-informed purchasing or consumption choices (Bernabeu et al., 2012).

The restaurant industry has recognized the role and significance of digital menus and their various interactive options. Studies suggest that since the advent of digitalization, most customers have placed their orders online via restaurant websites, while purchases have been made using mobile phone applications (Brewer & Sebby, 2021). The primary benefits of digital menus stem from the use of digital screens, such as computer screens or various touchscreens. Guests can use these screens to browse and select food products by using visuals and detailed descriptions. Furthermore, digital menus provide a wealth of information that can be frequently and inexpensively updated in real time. They provide vibrant photographs of food and meals, extensive explanations, an interactive customer experience, greater consumer involvement in the food decision-making process, more enjoyment, and improved sales (Yim & Yoo, 2020). Customers can readily access information about the products on the menu and select products that meet their interests and health needs (for example, allergies and

intolerances) (Şahin, 2020). They can view images of the available products and select their preferred language, which simplifies menu usage by eliminating any potential language barrier issues.

Research methodology, materials, and methods

The aim of this paper is to examine and analyze the perceptions of wine consumers on the usage of digital wine lists in restaurants. In the conducted research, three hypotheses were examined:

Hypothesis 1: Younger consumers prefer restaurants with a digital wine list.

Hypothesis 2: Consumers who frequently visit restaurants prefer those with a digital wine list.

Hypothesis 3: Consumers with no knowledge about wine prefer restaurants with a digital wine list.

The empirical research was conducted using a specially designed questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire included questions about respondents' gender, age, education, marital status, employment status, frequency of restaurant visits, and level of wine knowledge. After these profile questions, respondents were asked to answer statements regarding their perceptions about digital wine lists in restaurants. Eight statements were grouped into a Likert scale named "Consumer preferences towards a digital wine list in restaurants" and were measured on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 - strongly disagree, to 5 - strongly agree. The statements were based on the understanding that restaurant customers are becoming more engaged in the digital environment, which is changing the patterns of interaction between customers and restaurants (Kim et al., 2020). Additionally, restaurant operations are characterized by a highly competitive market and increasingly diverse offerings (Martin-Martin et al., 2022). These factors significantly impact a restaurant's strategy and its market attractiveness.

During the period 2020-2021, the questionnaire was distributed in hotel restaurants in two locations: Split-Dalmatia Country (Croatia), and Belgrade (Serbia). During that period, 406 respondents who used digital wine lists in restaurants completed the questionnaire. All responses were analyzed using the Statistical Software for Social Sciences, SPSS, version 21.0.

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the measurement scale "Consumer preferences towards a digital wine list in restaurants" was 0.823, indicating high reliability for the scale (DeVellis, 2003). The normality of the data distribution was examined using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, as well as histograms, skewness, kurtosis, the normal probability curve, and the boxplot. The results for the scale "Consumer preferences towards a digital wine list in restaurants", Sig. = 0.000, indicated that the assumption of normal data distribution was not met. As a result, non-parametric statistical techniques were used for statistical analysis within the measurement scales. The Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to compare differences between three or more groups

with a 95% confidence interval. Levene's test for equality of variances was used in all tests comparing differences between groups, meeting the assumption of variance homogeneity in all cases ($p > 0.05$).

Research results

Table 2 presents the respondents' answers to the profile questions. The research included 224 (55.2%) males and 182 (44.8%) females. The majority of respondents, 177 (43.6%), were between the ages of 18 and 35, while 161 (39.7%) were between the ages of 36 and 55. Only 68 (16.7%) of those surveyed were aged 56 or older. Out of the total number of respondents, 336 (82.8%) were employed, while 210 (51.7%) were married. In terms of education, the majority of respondents, 312 (76.8%) had completed university, bachelor's or master's studies. There were 70 (17.2%) respondents who had completed high school, and a smaller group, 24 (5.9%), who had finished doctoral studies.

In terms of frequency of restaurant visits, most respondents (65.8%) could be classified as frequent visitors. 135 (33.3%) respondents visited restaurants several times a month (no more than three times), while 132 (32.5%) respondents visited restaurants once a week. Respondents also rated their level of wine knowledge. Most respondents, 144 (35.5%) reported having solid knowledge about wine, followed by those with only basic knowledge about wine, 139 (34.2%). It is worth noting that there were 48 (11.8%) respondents who considered themselves wine experts, but also 75 (18.5%) respondents who reported having no knowledge about wine at all.

Table 2. Basic information about respondents

Category	N	%
Gender		
Male	224	55.2
Female	182	44.8
Age		
18-35	177	43.6
36-55	161	39.7
Over 55	68	16.7
Education		
High school	70	17.2
Bachelor's and master's degree	312	76.8
Doctoral degree	24	5.9
Marital status		
Married	210	51.7
Single (unmarried, divorced/widowed)	196	48.3
Employment status		
Employed	336	82.8
Unemployed (student, retired)	70	17.2
The frequency of restaurants visits		
Almost every week in a month	132	32.5
Few times a month, but not more than three times	135	33.3

Category	N	%
Once or twice a month	68	16.7
Once in three months	41	10.1
I rarely visit restaurants	30	7.4
Wine knowledge		
None	75	18.5
Basic	139	34.2
Solid	144	35.5
Expert	48	11.8

Source: Authors' calculations

The mean and standard deviation for answers on the scale "Consumer preferences towards a digital wine list in restaurants" are presented in *Table 3*, while the frequencies and percentages are presented in *Table 4*.

Table 3. Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for answers on the scale "Consumer preferences towards a digital wine list in restaurants."

Statements	M	SD
I prefer restaurants that offer a digital wine list.	3.90	1.311
I had a very positive feeling after using the digital wine list.	3.21	1.241
I'm glad that I had the chance to learn more about the restaurant's digital wine list.	3.23	1.314
All my expectations were met when I used the digital wine list.	3.63	1.250
If someone asks me for a recommendation, I will mention this restaurant, particularly because of the digital service.	3.82	1.196
I will enthusiastically recommend this restaurant's digital service to others.	3.52	1.262
For hygiene reasons, I prefer the digital wine list.	3.40	1.411
Because of the digital wine list, I will visit this restaurant again.	2.10	1.311

Source: Authors' calculations

The statement that respondents prefer restaurants offering a digital wine list had the highest mean value (M=3.90). This was followed by the statement that respondents would recommend restaurants with digital services (M=3.82). The third highest mean value (M=3.63) was associated with the statement that respondents were satisfied with the digital wine list they used and that their expectations were met.

Table 4. Frequency (N) and percentage (%) of answers for the statements on the scale "Consumer preferences towards a digital wine list in restaurants"

Statements	Answers	N	%
I prefer restaurants that offer a digital wine list.	Agree	280	68.96
	Neutral	58	14.29
	Disagree	68	16.75
I had a very positive feeling after using the digital wine list.	Agree	188	46.30
	Neutral	130	32.02
	Disagree	88	21.68
I'm glad that I had the chance to learn more about the restaurant's digital wine list	Agree	184	45.32
	Neutral	112	27.59
	Disagree	110	27.09
All my expectations were met when I used the digital wine list.	Agree	260	64.04
	Neutral	60	14.78
	Disagree	86	21.18
If someone asks me for a recommendation, I will mention this restaurant, particularly because of the digital service.	Agree	272	67.00
	Neutral	74	18.23
	Disagree	60	14.78
I will enthusiastically recommend this restaurant's digital service to others.	Agree	252	62.07
	Neutral	64	15.76
	Disagree	90	22.17
For hygiene reasons, I prefer the digital wine list.	Agree	218	53.69
	Neutral	92	22.66
	Disagree	96	23.65
Because of the digital wine list, I will visit this restaurant again.	Agree	68	16.75
	Neutral	58	14.29
	Disagree	280	68.96

Source: Authors' calculations

The results presented in *Table 4* show that the majority of respondents prefer and recommend restaurants with a digital wine list due to their preferences towards digital service (68.96%), positive impressions about this kind of service (67%), fulfilled expectations (64.04%), and hygienic reasons (53.69%). However, it is important to note that the digital wine list does not influence respondents' decision to revisit a restaurant. Almost 70% of respondents disagreed with the statement that they would revisit a restaurant because of the digital wine list. If respondents are dissatisfied with the overall service at the restaurant, the digital wine list will not be a compelling reason for them to return. Moreover, nearly a third of respondents (32.02%) held a neutral stance on the statement that, after using the digital wine list, they had a very positive feeling. While more than half of respondents agreed with this statement, 21.68% disagreed. This implies that the digital wine list should be reorganized and improved to foster better customer feelings and easier navigation.

To examine the proposed hypotheses, the Kruskal-Wallis H-test was conducted. The results obtained are presented in *Table 5*.

Table 5. The results of Kruskal-Wallis H-test

	Answers	N	Mean	Md	χ2	df	p
Age	18-35	177	225.53	3.75	18.851	2	0.000*
	36-55	161	200.47	3.63			
	Over 55	68	153.32	3.38			
Frequency of visits	Almost every week	132	197.01	3.63	51.880	4	0.000*
	Few times a month	135	248.79	3.88			
	Once or twice a month	68	187.07	3.50			
	Once in three months	41	186.99	3.38			
	I rarely visit restaurants	30	88.07	2.06			
Wine knowledge	None	75	248.49	3.88	14.549	3	0.002*
	Basic	139	186.17	3.38			
	Solid	144	199.92	3.50			
	Expert	48	194.13	3.56			

Source: Authors' calculations

The Kruskal-Wallis H test results showed that there are statistically significant differences in respondents' answers based on age structure. χ2(df=2, n=406) =18.851, p=0.000. When compared to the other two age groups, respondents aged 18 to 35 had the greatest median of results (Md=3.75). These results confirm *hypothesis 1*, which states that younger consumers prefer restaurants with a digital wine list.

Further, the Kruskal-Wallis H test results revealed statistically significant differences in responses based on the frequency of restaurant visits. The data, χ2(df=4, n=406) =51.880, p=0.000, indicated that respondents who visit restaurants a few times per month had the highest median of results (Md=3.88) compared to others. Those who visit restaurants on a weekly basis had the next highest median (Md=3.63). These results confirm *hypothesis 2*, which states that frequent restaurant visitors prefer establishments with a digital wine list.

Finally, the Kruskal-Wallis H test results revealed statistically significant differences in responses based on respondents' knowledge of wine, χ2(df=3, n=406) =14.549, p=0.002. Respondents with no knowledge of wine had the highest median of results (Md=3.88), thereby confirming *hypothesis 3*, which states that consumers with no knowledge of wine prefer restaurants with a digital wine list.

Discussion of research findings

According to the findings of this study, restaurants with digital wine list are preferred by consumers who belong to a younger age group (between the ages of 18 and 35), have no prior knowledge about wine, and visit restaurants frequently (a few times per month). These results are consistent with many other studies showing that individual attributes such as age, gender, financial resources, and habits often influence the type of wine ordered in a restaurant (Brata et al., 2022).

Digital technologies are becoming increasingly prevalent in our lives, altering the way guests and consumers interact with restaurant offerings (Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2013). In practice, there has been a rising interest in the use of digital technologies with the aim of improving the consumer's experience of food and drink (Spence, 2023). Younger generations show a particular interest in digital technology, not only in business but also in everyday life (Lukić & Lazarević, 2022). Members of Generation Z, who have had access to the internet and digital devices since birth, are often referred to as the digital generation (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017). Their innate familiarity with digital services leads them to expect such amenities in diverse settings, including restaurants. Many respondents in this research fall into this digital-native category.

Respondents who stated that they had no prior knowledge of wine preferred restaurants with a digital wine list. In traditional paper-based menus, restaurants have limited space for descriptions of menu items, and they rely on personnel to provide information and explanations to guests (Zulkifly et al., 2016). One of the factors that contribute to guest enjoyment and experience is the menu description. Marketers believe that "content is king" which can be applied to menu design and content (IP & Chark, 2023). According to Ellies and Thompson (2018), wine is a complex and information-intensive product, making it critical to accurately describe it on the wine list. What consumers know or can learn about a product influences their decision-making process and final decision (Ellis & Caruana, 2018). Because more informational content can be provided more easily in a digital menu interface than in a traditional paper format, digital menus can increase customer satisfaction and reduce customer uncertainty throughout the decision-making process (Beldona et al., 2014). Furthermore, image rotations, enlargements, 3D views, and virtual reality are examples of modern technical advances that enable a high level of customer engagement and influence their overall satisfaction with their choices (Yim & Yoo, 2020). This is why respondents with no prior knowledge about wine prefer digital wine lists.

A digital wine list is a unique communication method and tool with the ability to influence guests' choices of wine. The results showed that those respondents who frequently visit restaurants and drink wine prefer digital wine lists. One explanation for this could be that respondents prefer quick service and do not want to wait for the waiter to bring them a paper menu and wine list. Instead, they can effortlessly explore and navigate a digital list to make their selections. Another explanation is that these customers occasionally want to try something new and different. The digital wine list allows them to make informed decisions.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine and analyze wine consumers' perceptions of the use of digital wine lists in restaurants. Research results in which 406 respondents from Serbia and Croatia participated confirmed all hypotheses. According to the results, young consumers (hypothesis 1), those who frequently visit restaurants (hypothesis 2), and those without prior knowledge of wine (hypothesis 3), prefer restaurants with

a digital wine list. Furthermore, the majority of respondents were satisfied with the digital wine list they used and felt that their expectations were met.

The results presented in this paper constitute a significant contribution to the existing literature by presenting important findings that address the consumer preferences for digital wine list. The practical implications of conducted research are also evident for restaurants that do not yet offer a digital wine list. The results and conclusions presented in this research could be used as the basis for decision-makers and managers in restaurants to consider introducing digital wine lists and improving restaurant attractiveness in the market. This is especially important in the digital age, as customers are more oriented toward current digital solutions and want to take advantage of all their benefits.

While this research provides significant insights, it does have certain limitations. With 406 respondents from two countries, Croatia and Serbia, the extent of the participant pool was limited. As a result, the findings may not be applicable to all countries or demographics. Furthermore, the questionnaire used as a research technique in this study included a limited number of closed-ended questions, which prevented respondents from expressing their unique feelings and experiences regarding digital wine lists. Furthermore, the study relied on self-reported data from a questionnaire, which could bring subjectivity of respondents into the results.

These limitations provide useful recommendations for future research on this topic. By including more participants from a wider range of countries, researchers can gather more comprehensive and diverse data. Using other research methodologies, such as open-ended questions or interviews, could provide a broader understanding of consumer experiences and perspectives regarding digital wine lists. Addressing these limitations in future studies would contribute to a better understanding of customer attitudes about digital wine lists and their use in restaurants.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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