

ROMANIAN CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR OENOTOURISM IN 2021

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Abstract

With 190,000 ha of vineyards and ranking 13th in the world for wine production and 14th for wine consumption, Romania has a high potential for oenotourism, which has been underexploited for years. In order to find solutions to encourage oenotourism, Romanian consumers were questioned regarding their preferences for winery visit experience such as: the distance which they would have to travel, the number of days and the amount of money they would be willing to spend and their expectations from a visit to a winery. To improve the offer and to make the information easily available to the interested wine tourists the survey included also questions regarding the approaches for obtaining information and recommendations, as well as the frequency of social media usage. The main results pointed out that Romanian wine consumers would prefer to go on trips to wineries recommended by friends rather than travel agencies, with a group of friends, for 2 or 3 days, especially in autumn, expecting to pay between 750-1,200 RON. Romanians would mostly go anywhere in Romania rather than abroad, men especially preferring to go to places reachable within 3 hours drive from their residence. The second most important information source, after the recommendation from friends, is the social media, showing the importance of advertising more on such media.

Key words: Romanian wine consumers, tourism and oenotourism preferences, consumption behaviour, wine events

INTRODUCTION

Wine is not only a great companion to food, but it is also part of culture and life style [6, 12].

Refined and diverse food and wine experiences are sought by growing numbers of tourists [11], thus it is no surprise that going out to visit wineries developed into a special type of tourism. In Romania too, oenotourism emerged as a niche within the tourism market [3].

In turn, this type of tourism can generate important incomes not only for the tour organizers, but also for small wineries, who get to promote and sell their products. Wineries which understood the benefits started to attract their clients, by offering immersive experiences, with educational and entertainment activities centered around the wine.

Wine consumers are more and more inclined to practice oenotourism, but the decision to travel depends highly on their previous experiences and information received from

advertisements or from other wine tourists [12].

To make oenotourism a successful business wine producers and tour organizers should align their offers with their clients' expectations [10].

Moreover, in the digital era, the use of various tools of internet is indispensable [7], especially considering that the funding is not always sufficient [5].

Lacking an efficient organized oenotourism Romania offers many possibilities for smaller companies to take initiative and propose services and information in this field.

Some challenges exist, of course, as many Romanian wineries are not prepared to receive guests, especially for overnight stays, an estimation of 2009 showing that only 10% of the wine producers could offer accommodation [14].

To help find appropriate solutions to boost wine tourism among Romanian nationals, consumers were questioned regarding their preferences for a winery visit experience such as the activities expected, the distance to

travel, the number of days and the amount of money they would be willing to spend. To offer oenotourism information through most appropriate communication channels, consumers were also asked about their preferred sources of information and the frequency of social media usage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was performed by using a questionnaire containing questions regarding wine consumption, wine preferences, consumer behaviour and attitudinal aspects, most of which were specific to wine tourism. Several demographic data [2] were collected as well and used in analysis.

The questionnaire contained several sections designed to cover a range of topics relevant for oenotourism and the responses were analysed by taking into account the gender differences, and, where appropriate, the age groups and/or the income groups.

The responses were collected by means of www.questionpro.com™ platform in April-May 2021, from 263 persons (response rate 39.1%).

The survey contained 34 questions, but only those relevant for wine tourism were processed, using Microsoft Excel Professional Plus 2019 and OriginLab 2018 applying Mann-Whitney test (U-statistics), ANOVA and pairwise comparisons by Tukey tests to determine significant differences at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Previous visits to a winery

To evaluate the interest for oenotourism, firstly, it was checked whether the respondents had previous wine tourism experiences (Figure 1).

According to the Mann Whitney test, at the level of 0.05 the two-gender distributions are not significantly different (asymptotic p -value = 0.721, $U=5658$).

In accordance to the age, the most interested groups in wine tourism, based on the fact that they participated in previous wine tourism experiences (Figure 2), are the men aged 30-49 years old (35.5% of the men) and women aged 30-49 years old (35.1% of the women).

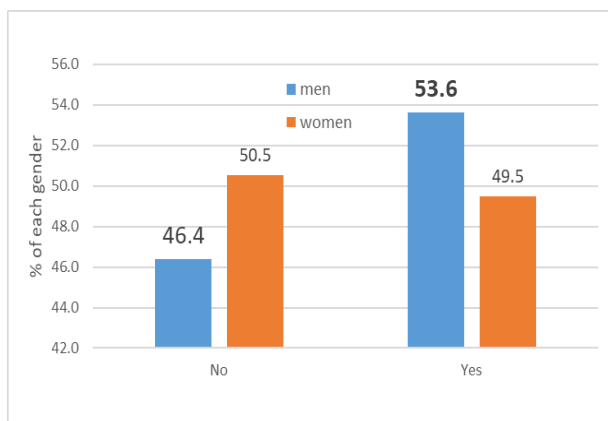


Fig. 1. Previous experience of visiting a winery – gender differences.

Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents.

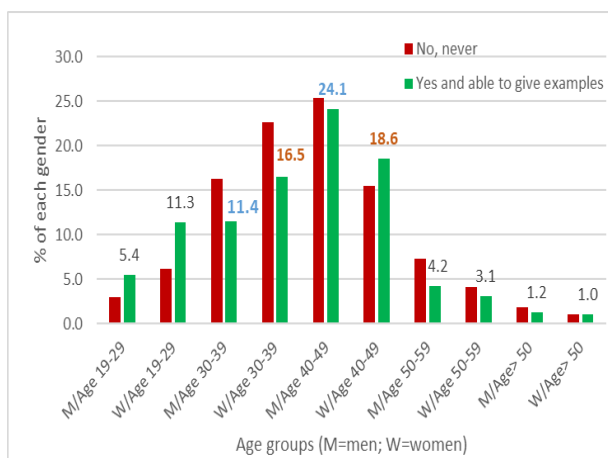


Fig. 2. Previous winery visits in accordance to the age groups. Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents.

Regarding the influence of income (Figure 3), a very good direct correlation is observed between winery visits and monthly income ($R^2=0.895$, green bars).

In case of no previous visits the income is not part of the decision (there is no statistical correlation, $R^2=0.398$).

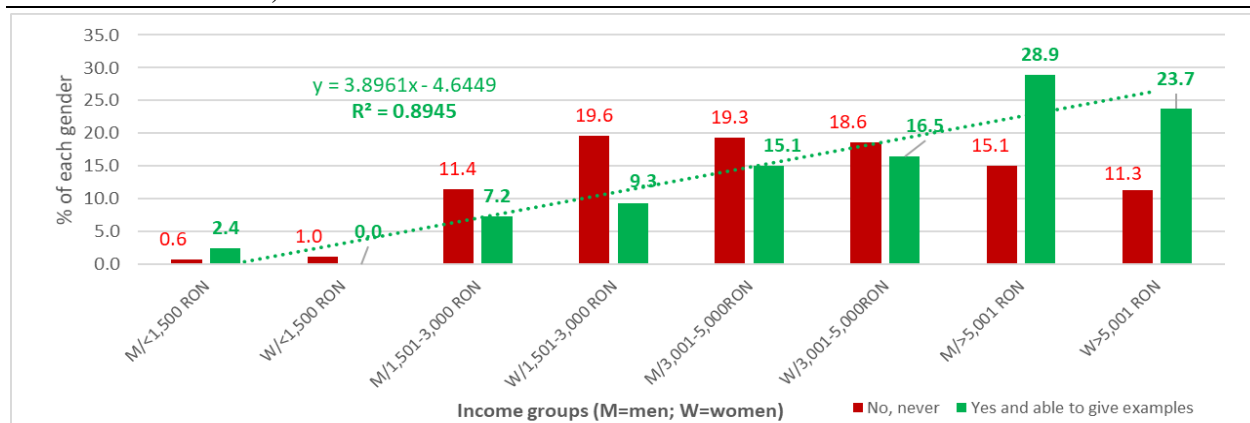


Fig. 3. Previous winery visits in accordance to income
 Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents

Preferred distance for travelling to a winery

The distance of travelling is an important factor for the comfort of the tourist, but also

for the financial implications. Figure 4 shows that generally there is a preference for short trips or within the country, irrespective of the respondent's gender.

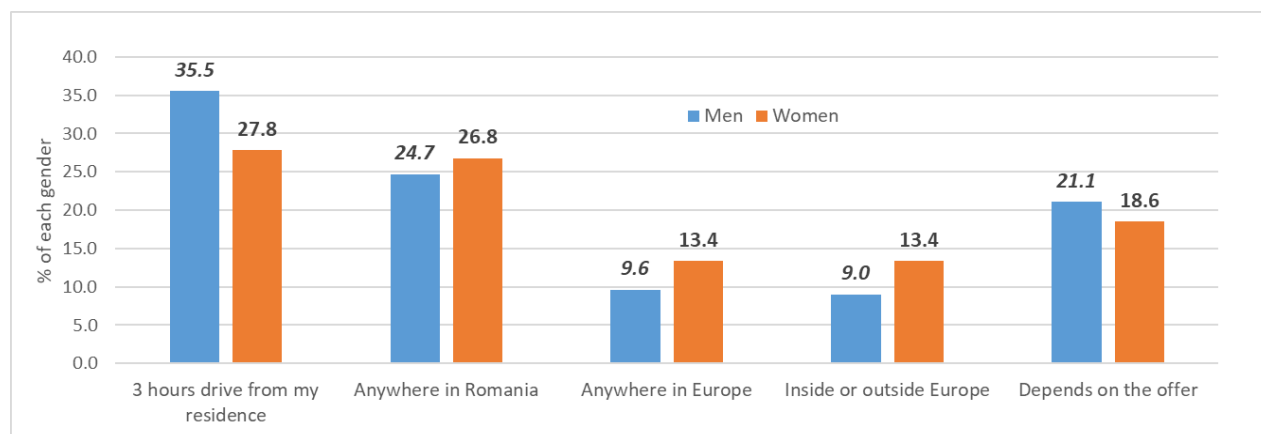


Fig. 4. Preferred distance for travelling to a winery – gender differences
 Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents.

The income is clearly influencing the decision to travel (Figure 5), but the higher income (light and dark green bars) is not correlated with a higher willingness to travel further.

Women with higher incomes (above 3,000 RON) prefer to go anywhere in Romania (20.6% of women), but those earning above 5,000 RON would go as well anywhere in Europe or outside Europe (Figure 5a).

Men with high incomes, however, (Figure 5b), would mainly prefer to go for short distances of 3-hour drive (27.7% of men), but would also go anywhere in Romania (20.4% of men).

Preferred means for travelling to a winery

The decision to take a trip to some wineries requires a bit of documentation, to find out what it is available and is also worth visiting. Figure 6 shows that respondents preferred to obtain their information first of all from friends.

There is no significant difference at the level of 0.05 (asymptotic p-value = 0.9998; U=5,001) between the two-gender distributions in their way of travelling to a winery. However, there is clear difference when it comes to choosing the means for taking a decision to travel, confirmed by ANOVA, Tukey test.

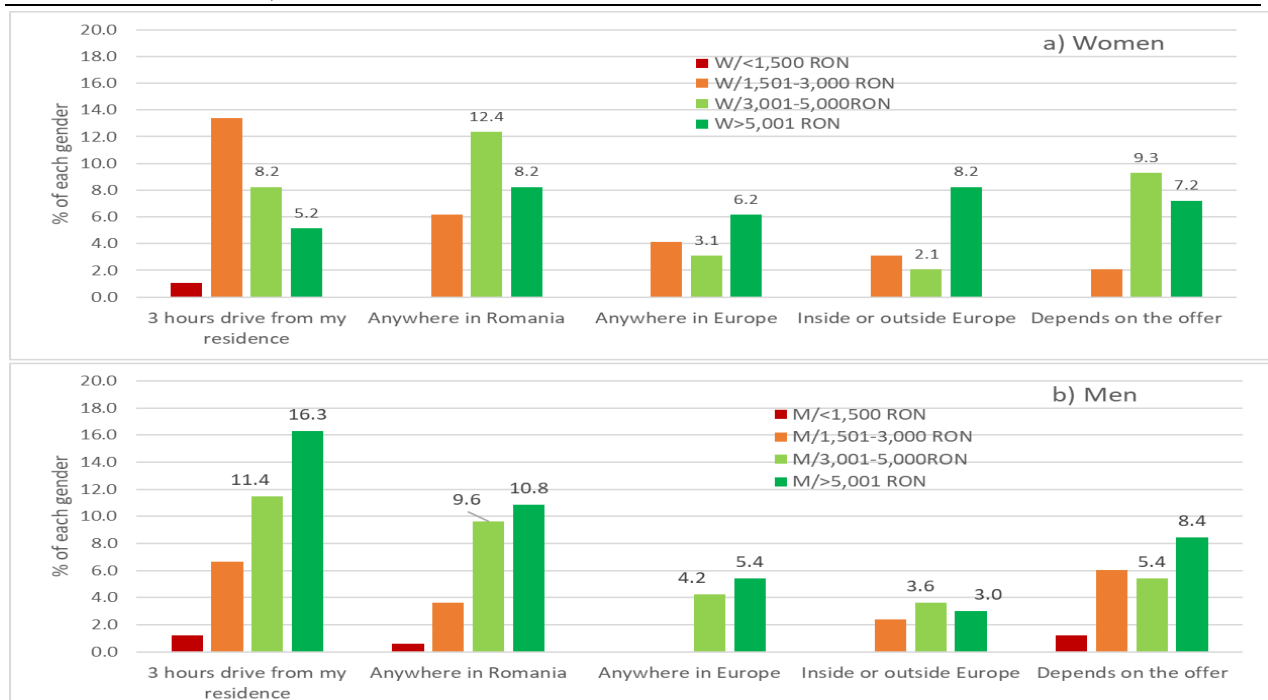


Fig. 5. Income influence on the preferred distance for travelling to a winery: a) Women; b) Men
 Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents

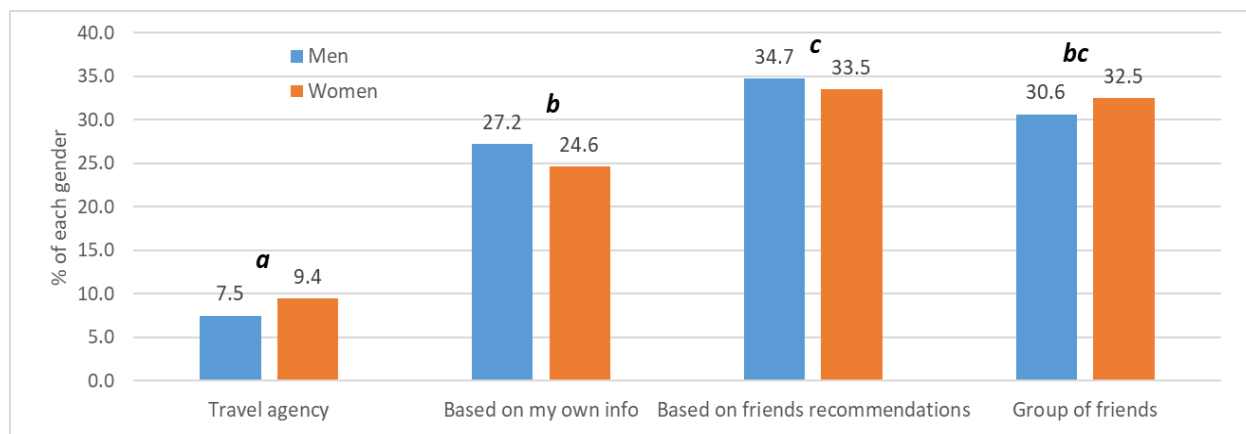


Fig. 6. Preferred means for travelling to a winery (different letters show significant differences among groups of travelling ways at p=0.05, ANOVA, Tukey test)
 Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents.

It is obvious that the influence of friends is major, while travel agencies are avoided for this type of tourism or the tour operators simply do not organize enough winery visits to be taken into account as sources of information.

Men with higher incomes (over 5,000 RON) are more confident than women with similar incomes to obtain reliable information by their own documentation (Figure 7b). Otherwise, they prefer as well to consult and to travel with friends in a larger proportion than women. For women (Figure 7a), belonging to

a certain income group does not seem to make a big difference when looking for wine trip information.

Particularities regarding winery visits

To evaluate the interest for specific activities, a multiple-choice question was formulated, with 9 different answers, which were grouped in accordance to the 4Es model of the experience economy defined by [8] and adapted by [9] for wine tourist activities into Entertainment, Educational, Esthetical or Escapist.



Fig. 7. Income influence on the preferred means for travelling to a winery: a) Women; b) Men
 Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents

Table 1 is summarizing the specific preferences of respondents, by gender, showing where significant differences are observed for certain activities.

Table 1. Expectations from a visit to a winery

Specific preference		% of total Women	% of total Men	Sig *
Entertainment				
1	Winetasting	11.8	14.6	a
2	Winetasting and some food	13.0	13.4	a
3	Have a wine shop	15.7	13.8	ac
Esthetical				
4	Visits to other local cultural, historical or natural sites	13.2	10.0	a
Escapist				
5	Visits in the vineyard by bicycle	9.2	8.0	a
6	Horseback riding/ coach ride	8.4	5.5	ab
Educational				
7	Detailed presentation of viticulture	10.4	13.1	a
8	Detailed presentation of winemaking	7.1	11.4	a
9	Classes of gastronomy/ wine and food pairing	11.2	10.3	a

*Significance at p=0.05 (different letters show significant differences among groups of travelling ways at p=0.05, ANOVA, Tukey test)

Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents.

Different letters in the column Sig* show significant differences among groups of travelling ways at p=0.05, ANOVA, Tukey test.

It turns out that the highest expectations from a winery is to have a wine shop and the lowest to organise escapists activities such as horseback riding or coach rides. All the other activities proposed do not show significant differences.

The activities most preferred by both genders are those included in the Entertainment group, followed by the Educational group (Table 1, Figure 8 a and b).

Similar results are also obtained in international studies. For instance, regarding the motivations that determine the wine tourists from the Rioja and Bordeaux wine regions to repeat visits to a wine region, the results show that entertainment and education, such as participation in wine events need to be combined to promote the intention to return [1].

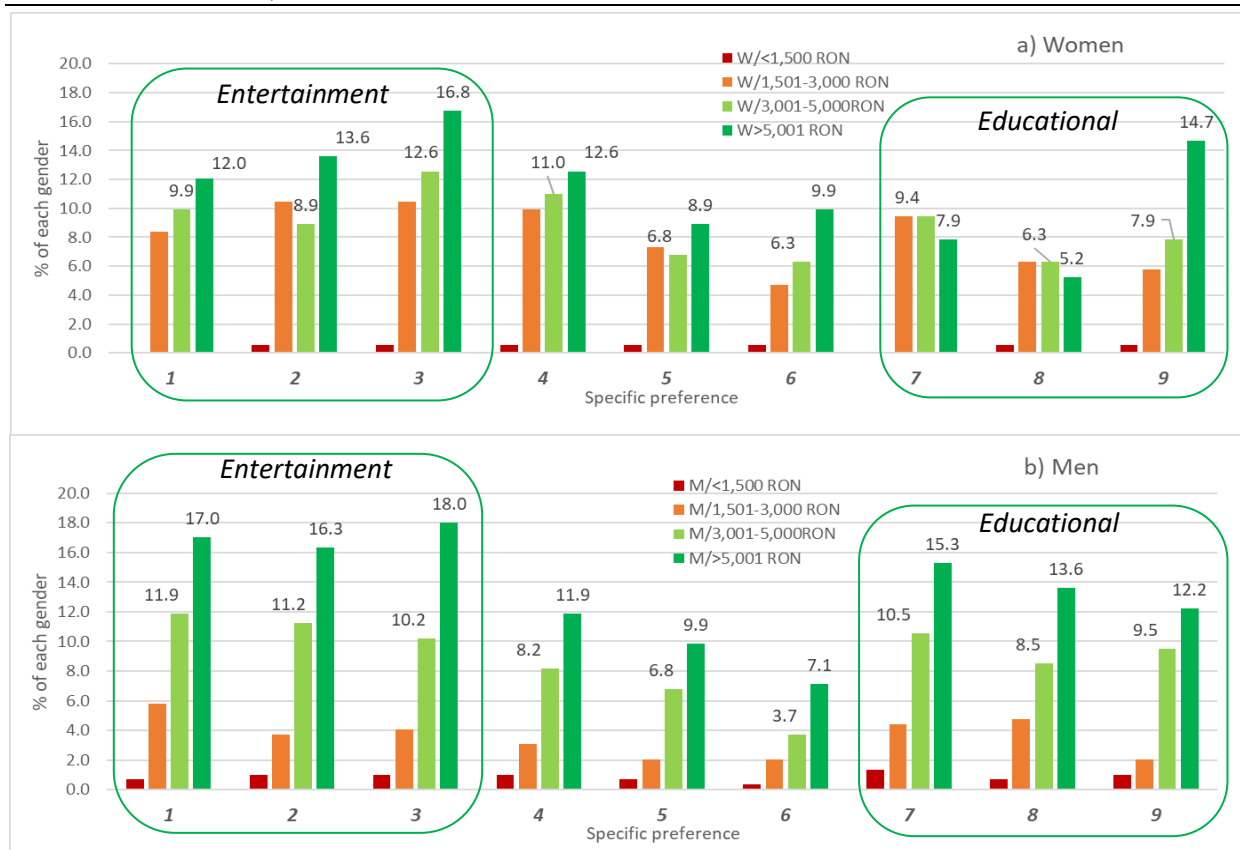


Fig. 8. Income influence on the expectations from a visit to a winery: a) Women; b) Men (Each specific preference is described in Table 1)

Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents.

Table 2. Specific oenotourism preferences

Specific preference		Women %	Men %
Preferred visit frequency	Several times a year	45.4	43.0
	Once a year	46.4	46.7
	Once in a lifetime	6.2	8.5
	Never	2.1	1.8
Preferred season for winery visit	Spring	24.2	23.9
	Summer	21.1	28.7
	Autumn	53.1	45.7
	Winter	1.6	1.6
Preferred length for a winery trip	1 day	24.7	18.7
	2 days	39.2	36.7
	3 days	33.0	36.1
	More than 3 days	3.1	8.4
Type of entourage for trips to wineries	Alone	7.0	7.0
	With another person	21.9	21.9
	With family members	17.5	17.5
	With a group of friends	50.9	50.9
	In a group organized by a travel agency	2.6	2.6

Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents.

The income (Figure 8) does not seem very important when it comes to the activities expected to be organized at the winery. Therefore, for all types of visitors, Entertainment and Educational activities should absolutely be included in the offer.

Other specific preferences to be taken in consideration when preparing tourism offers are included in Table 2.

Thus, it should be noted that almost 50% of men and women would be willing to visit a winery at least once, if not several times a year; the preferred season is autumn, probably expecting inclusive activities related to harvest; and they would definitely like to go with a group of friends.

The length of the trip is mostly 2-3 days, surely no more than 3 days. To this type of customer, it should be highlighted the accommodation and dining facilities of the destination.

Information sources for planning winery visits

To enhance oenotourism, placing the advertisement in the right information media and with the appropriate tools is crucial. Taking into account that the wine tourists are usually 30-49 years old and well educated, they are expected to also have a good knowledge and usage of internet tools.

Figure 9 confirms that the information to plan a wine tour is taken from friends, followed by online sources and social media. Ads on TV or radio have little impact and this is an aspect which wine trip organizers and wineries should take into account.

A previous study showed that Romanian consumers, especially marginal drinkers, use their smartphones mostly to find information about products online or to seek advice from their friends when they cannot decide what to buy [4] and here we also find that the most preferred source of information for wine tourism is also the internet or word-of-mouth from friends.

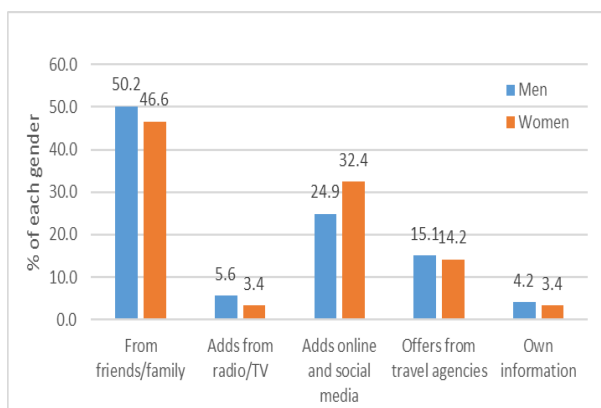


Fig. 9. Information source used to plan trips to wineries
 Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents.

Regarding social media used to gather information to plan a trip it is clear that it has an impact (Figure 10).

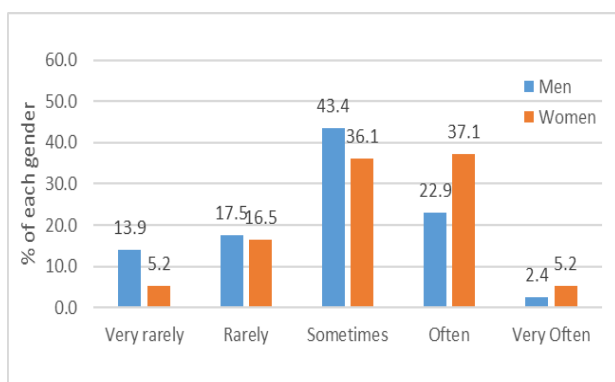


Fig. 10. Frequency of social media use to gather information for trips to wineries
 Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents

66.3% of men and 73.2% of women would use social media from “sometimes” to

“often”, in order to find information regarding wineries to visit.

Financial resources to spend for winery visits

Finally, to provide a meaningful offer, the financial aspects should be carefully assessed. As the respondents considered that the most appropriate length for a trip to wineries is 1 day (short distance) or 2-3 days, they were also questioned about the amount of money they would be willing to spend for such a trip for 2 persons.

Table 3. Amount of money willing to spend for a tip to wineries

Amount to spend for 2 persons	Income (RON*)	Women %	Men %	
One day-trip with a meal included	250-400 RON	<1,500	0.0	1.8
		1,501-3,000	10.3	9.0
		3,001-5,000	16.5	15.7
		>5,001	10.3	12.7
	All	37.1	39.2	
	401-600 RON	<1,500	1.0	0.0
		1,501-3,000	8.2	6.6
		3,001-5,000	11.3	16.3
		>5,001	7.2	13.3
	All	27.8	36.1	
	601-800 RON	<1,500	0.0	1.2
		1,501-3,000	6.2	3.0
		3,001-5,000	4.1	1.8
		>5,001	11.3	12.0
	All	21.6	18.1	
	801-1,000 RON	<1,500	0.0	0.0
1,501-3,000		2.1	0.0	
3,001-5,000		1.0	0.0	
>5,001		3.1	1.8	
All	6.2	1.8		
over 1,000 RON	<1,500	0.0	0.0	
	1,501-3,000	2.1	0.0	
	3,001-5,000	2.1	0.6	
	>5,001	3.1	4.2	
All	7.2	4.8		
3-day trip with 2 hotel night and meals included	750-1,200 RON	<1,500	0.0	1.2
		1,501-3,000	13.0	10.9
		3,001-5,000	17.0	15.8
		>5,001	10.0	13.9
	All	40.0	41.8	
	1,201-1,500 RON	<1,500	1.0	0.6
		1,501-3,000	7.0	3.6
		3,001-5,000	9.0	13.3
		>5,001	4.0	10.9
	All	21.0	28.5	
	1,501-2,000 RON	<1,500	0.0	1.2
		1,501-3,000	8.0	3.0
		3,001-5,000	4.0	3.6
		>5,001	16.0	12.7
	All	28.0	20.6	
	2,001-2,500 RON	<1,500	0.0	0.0
1,501-3,000		0.0	1.2	
3,001-5,000		3.0	1.2	
>5,001		4.0	4.2	
All	7.0	6.7		
over 2,500 RON	<1,500	0.0	0.0	
	1,501-3,000	0.0	0.0	
	3,001-5,000	1.0	0.0	
	>5,001	3.0	2.4	
All	4.0	2.4		

* Prices are in Romanian currency RON; 2021 average exchange rate was 1 EUR = 4.9204 RON.

Source: Own results based on the answers of the respondents.

The results, also fragmented for gender and income groups, are included in Table 3.

As expected, even the customers with higher incomes prefer the lower-priced offers. For a one day-trip with a meal included, the amount comfortable for most clients would be between 250-600 RON for two persons, women tending to be more willing to go to the upper end of this range.

For a 3-day trip, where also accommodation is required, the customers are willing to pay between 750-1,500 RON, but those having incomes of more than 5,000 RON can go higher to 1,501-2,000 RON.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed the necessity to develop communication strategies that increase the use of internet and social media, targeting the segments of people 30-49 years of age, which also have higher income and education.

Entertainment and educational activities available at the winery should be diversified and emphasized, while keeping in mind that some esthetical and escapist experiences could be a plus.

Also, the travel packages for two persons should be kept around average prices of a maximum 600 RON (120 EUR) for 1 day and 2,000 RON (400 EUR) for 3 days.

The promotion should include more advertisements in social media, but providing good experiences is also a must, as positive 'word of mouth' is also very important for the Romanian tourists.

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