



SAUVIGNON BLANC FROM A CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE. A TRUE BRAND?

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"...with more people consuming Sauvignon blanc over the years, people know the product ... so, they know what it tastes like, they know what to expect so that's a safe bet..."

– Gauteng wine consumer

INTRODUCTION

In one of the largest wine market research inquiries to date, 71% of consumers agreed to buy Sauvignon blanc when uncertain about choosing white wine. More than 2000 South African wine drinkers participated in this study where consumers' buyer behaviour of white wine was investigated. Using data from the aforementioned study, this article provides insight into consumers' perspective of the bottled white wine category, reflecting the status of Sauvignon blanc.

CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF SAUVIGNON BLANC

When compared to Chenin blanc, Chardonnay and white blends, Sauvignon blanc was rated significantly higher in terms of:

- purchase frequency;
- quality perception;
- consumers' subjective knowledge;
- goodness of fit for various purchase occasions (special occasion, gift, own consumption and consumption with friends/family).

When buying bottled white wine, 49% of the consumers indicated to always buy Sauvignon blanc compared to Chenin blanc (28%), Chardonnay (27%) and white blends (19%) (Figure 1).

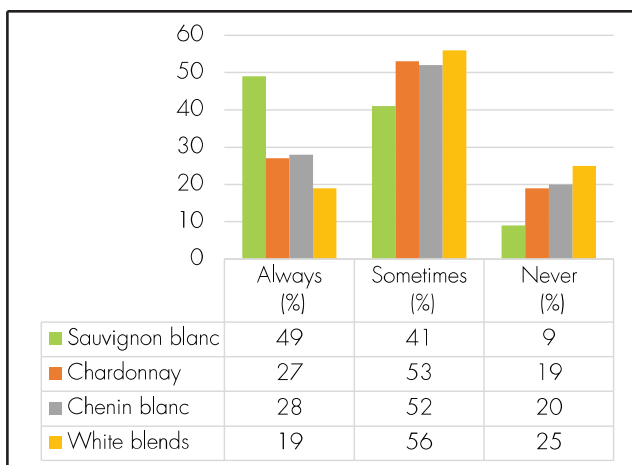


Figure 1

SAUVIGNON BLANC: AN IMPORTANT QUALITY CUE

The majority of South African wine consumers buy wine from supermarkets and are often time pressed. With plenty of wine options, consumers don't necessarily have the time to evaluate unfamiliar wines and buy what they know – including Sauvignon blanc! When buying bottled white wine, consumers in this study rated Sauvignon blanc as being a significantly more important quality cue when compared to:

- an expert review;
- medal stickers;
- label aesthetics;
- *price.

**Most consumers buy bottled white wine in a price range R50 - R100.*

Sauvignon blanc were only rated as a lesser important quality cue when compared to:

- wine tasted before;
- buying from a trusted store;
- favourite brands.

WHY THE SAUVIGNON BLANC FOLLOWING?

In a qualitative phase, consumers were interviewed and perceptions of the different white wine varieties were explored. Compared to Chenin blanc and Chardonnay, an overall positive image was observed and consumers portrayed confidence when speaking about Sauvignon blanc. Major themes identified for Sauvignon blanc include:

- **Sensory consistency:**
"... Sauvignon blanc you can get a flavour and you can get a taste and there is some consistency in it ..."
- **Socially a "safe" wine:**
"... In my opinion, Sauvignon blanc is just a crowd pleaser to serve it as white wine ..."
"... everyone I know loves Sauvignon blanc ..."
- **Resistance to other white wine varieties:**
"... We always go for the Sauvignon blanc, we don't drink the Chardonnay or Chenin blanc or any of the others ..."

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR SAUVIGNON BLANC

From the results of this study, it appears as if consumers attach brand status to Sauvignon blanc – an important quality cue.

- The key to the success of Sauvignon blanc seems to be in its sensory consistency that shaped consumer expectations over the years.
- When consumers know what to expect from a wine in terms of taste, it reduces their uncertainty, resulting in a "socially safe wine" and an easy choice for time-pressed wine shoppers.
- If innovation is considered, it is recommended to rather focus on extrinsic attributes such as packaging than changing flavour profiles of Sauvignon blanc.
- At present, wooded Sauvignon blanc is perhaps only for a niche of South African wine connoisseurs.