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WHEN WINE LABELS SPEAK: SEGMENTATION OF YOUNG CONSUMERS BASED ON LABEL, BEHAVIOUR, AND TRUST

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ABSTRACT:

Wine consumption amongst younger generations is shifting towards occasion-based and selective patterns, positioning labels as critical communicative interfaces where quality, meaning, and trust are negotiated. This study examines how Generation Y and Z consumers interpret wine label attributes and how these perceptions define distinct consumer segments, specifically focusing on digital communication preferences and information trust. Data from an online survey of 364 young Slovak wine consumers were analysed using factor analysis and K-means clustering. The findings identify three approaches to wine label evaluation: information-oriented, narrative-oriented, and visually oriented. These interpretations are manifested in three distinct segments: narrative-driven traditionalists, quality-conscious wine seekers, and visually-oriented occasion drinkers. Each segment exhibits unique consumption habits, engagement levels with social media formats, and varying trust in information sources. The study contributes to communication research by conceptualising wine labels as meaning-making interfaces and shows how label designs and communication tactics might better reach younger wine consumers.

KEYWORDS:

communication, label, segmentation, social media, trust, wine

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the global wine sector has undergone significant structural shifts driven by changes in consumer preferences, climate change and sustainability concerns (Janšto et al., 2024; Morandi & Zinno, 2025). At the same time, there has been a gradual decline in global wine consumption, with European markets showing a shift towards lighter, varietal and non-alcoholic wines. This trend is being driven by Generation Z (Gen Z) and Generation Y (Gen Y), who prioritise health and wellbeing (Rui et al., 2025). Each generation develops under distinct social, cultural, and experiential conditions that influence their consumption (Henley et al., 2011). This tendency is evident amongst Gen Z, whose drinking habits are influenced by shifting societal attitudes towards alcohol. These attitudes have triggered a shift towards more moderate drinking and an appetite for casual, home-based social gatherings (Ohana-Levi & Netzer, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic also sped up the use of digital channels and changed how people socialise. This means that marketing for a region needs to be more flexible (Darázs & Šalgovičová, 2021). This phenomenon highlights the importance of online communication and interaction for wineries, as tech-savvy young consumers expect to discover and interact with wine brands via social media (SM), e-commerce, and other virtual platforms (Rui et al., 2025).

Wine labelling and packaging design play a key role in marketing communication, as they are the first point of contact between the product and the consumer. When making purchase decisions for untasted products, consumers primarily have to rely on available quality cues offered by the wine label and bottle (Chrea et al., 2011). Both extrinsic and intrinsic cues are involved in the formation of the perception of its quality (Verdú-Jover et al., 2004; Charters & Pettigrew, 2006). This perception has been evaluated in several studies, underlining the importance of visual communication in the wine industry and the need to highlight certain key elements in their communication strategies (Rupprecht et al., 2020).

On the one hand, there are factors associated with winemaking that are related to the production method or the type(s) of grape variety(ies) used (Charters & Pettigrew, 2006; Corduas et al., 2013), the vintage (Lockshin et al., 2000), the alcohol content (Parga-Dans et al., 2022) or the region of origin from which it comes (Sáenz-Navajas et al., 2014; Rodrigues et al., 2020). It is also important to indicate the awards or recommendations that the wines have received and indicate them on the labels, as they can help to improve the perception by certain consumer groups (Chrea et al., 2011). On the other hand, it has also been observed that consumers take into account the visual aesthetic appearance of the label when choosing one product or another (Danner et al., 2017). Emphasising the importance of the colours present on the labels can attract a specific consumer profile (Joshi et al., 2024), and is one of the factors that consumers consider the most (Lick et al., 2017). Similarly, the label style also influences certain segments of the population, increasing confidence in more classic designs as opposed to more modern or innovative alternatives (Sherman & Tuten, 2011). Even so, other studies have observed that more modern aesthetic designs are preferred by younger generations (Elliot & Barth, 2012). Other factors that also influence are the presence of pictures associated with winemaking (e.g., vineyards, landscapes of the region of origin) (Tempesta, 2010), storytelling to build trust and create emotional connections (Woldarsky, 2019), whether or not the label is eco-friendly (Orlowski et al., 2022), or the presence of QR codes that provide additional information about the wine, thereby creating added value for the product (Del Mastio et al., 2016). The presence of elements related to nutritional information and health-related aspects of wine has also attracted some interest (Annunziata et al., 2016); moreover, it may be useful to include physicochemical parameters or information on winemaking processes. In response to changing consumer expectations and competitive pressures many wineries have moved away from traditional, conservative label designs. Instead, they use more modern, trend-driven visual identities that include a wider range of communication elements (Lunardo & Rickard, 2020).

Aligning with the transformation in product presentation, the communication landscape of the wine industry has been dramatically reshaped by digitalisation. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have become central channels for wineries to engage with consumers. They offer cost-effective and far-reaching opportunities for interaction, brand storytelling, and community building (Dolan et al., 2016; Szolnoki et al., 2018). Unlike traditional one-way marketing, social media enable two-way communication. Wineries can share content

directly, and consumers in turn create user-generated content (UGC) like reviews, posts, or videos that influence their peers. UGC is a driving force behind how authentic and appealing a brand is, especially amongst Gen Z and Gen Y, who tend to trust what their friends think and their own experiences over traditional advertisements (Ali, 2025). In a similar vein, marketing by influencers is now an important part of the digital strategy of the wine industry. Social media influencers (from wine experts to lifestyle bloggers) often review or showcase wines to their followers, and the informational content of these endorsements can strongly shape consumer perceptions (Lou & Kim, 2019). The dynamic and visually rich nature of newer formats enables wine brands to present their story in a more engaging way. Davey (2021) explores how video-based social media tales can build community and emotional ties. However, communication in digital environments is also characterised by information abundance and varying levels of credibility, making trust a critical factor in consumer decision-making (Pasi & Viviani, 2020). Trust has been shown to influence consumers' willingness to engage with brands and products and is associated with perceptions of honesty, reliability, and care (Dessart et al., 2015). Rui et al. (2025) emphasise that wineries seeking to engage younger consumers must adapt communication strategies to digital environments while remaining sensitive to their heightened scepticism and trust concerns. Research indicates that trust perception in customers is related to factors such as attention, care, loyalty, honesty, and satisfaction (Glaveli, 2020). As Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) argue, the level of trust consumers place in the reliability of the information source is a crucial factor in determining its perceived usefulness. Filieri et al. (2015) provide a cogent analysis of the factors that underpin trust in consumer-generated media, asserting that perceptions of website quality and information credibility significantly influence the adoption of recommendations. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of Wei et al. (2022), which demonstrate how trust in brand communications on social media can influence brand loyalty.

To gain actionable insights into this evolving market, multidimensional segmentation is essential. Traditionally, wine consumer segmentation often relied on demographics (e.g., age groups, gender) or geographic location (Thach & Olsen, 2006). While those basic criteria remain useful, they do not capture the full complexity of consumer behaviour. Beyond these, lifestyle and psychographic segmentation methods have gained relevance, particularly in the wine sector. A notable example is the Wine-Related Lifestyle (WRL) methodology developed by Bruwer & Li (2007) to classify Australian wine consumers. Within behavioural segmentation approaches, domain-specific instruments have also been developed to capture more nuanced differences in wine consumption (Brunner & Siegrist, 2011). The development of the Fine Wine Instrument (FWI) as an alternative segmentation basis demonstrated that even within the wine domain, different instruments are capable of identifying meaningful consumer distinctions. The FWI focuses specifically on fine wine behaviour, providing a more targeted understanding of consumers whose preferences, involvement, and purchasing patterns are oriented towards premium and high-quality wines (Johnson & Bastian, 2015). Empirical evidence suggests that effective segmentation requires an integration of demographic data with behavioural refinement, particularly regarding wine labels (Johnson & Bruwer, 2003). Addressing a gap in the literature, this study employs a sophisticated segmentation approach for Gen Z and Y. It moves beyond basic categories by integrating label attributes, social media preferences, and trust in information sources to identify more nuanced consumer profiles.

2 Methodology

Data Collection and Research Sample

The data in the study was collected via an online survey during the autumn of 2025. The survey was distributed through social media platforms, which are commonly used by younger consumer groups. The respondents were selected by employing filter questions. The target population comprised Slovak residents aged 18 years and over who consume or purchase wine. A total of 410 participants completed the main survey, and the final sample size was 364. Table 1 summarises the profile of respondents:

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Category	Sub-category	% (n=364)
Gender	Man	49.2
	Woman	50.8
Age (Generation)	18 – 28 (Gen Z)	63.5
	29 – 44 (Gen Y)	36.5
Occupation	Rural	50.3
	Urban	49.7
	Employed	50.0
Economic Status	Entrepreneur/self-employed person	6.0
	Maternity leave	1.4
	Student	40.4
Education	Unemployed	2.2
	Secondary education	36.0
	University	64.0
Net Income Level	Up to €500	23.4
	€501 – 1,000	24.7
	€1,001 – 1,500	28.3
	€1,501 – 2,000	18.4
	€2,001 and more	5.2

Source: Own processing, 2025

The questionnaire was structured into four sections. The first section captured wine behaviour (WB) through seven variables: frequency of consumption (WB1) and purchase (WB6), average annual volume (WB2), typical consumption occasions (WB3), preferences for colour (WB4) and sweetness (WB5), and willingness to pay (WB7).

The following sections employed a 5-point Likert scale to evaluate the factors influencing choice and engagement:

- Wine label attributes (WL1): Respondents rated 14 items, including visual elements (graphics, typography, colour, material), informational cues (vintage, technical data, production method), and modern features (QR codes, storytelling, awards).
- Social media communication formats (WC1): This section assessed preferences for six digital formats, ranging from static posts and influencer content to dynamic video formats (Reels) and user-generated content (UGC).
- Trust in information sources (WT1): Nine sources were evaluated to determine levels of consumer trust, including personal recommendations (friends/family), professional sources (specialised articles, store staff), and digital channels (winery website, SM, online reviews).

To achieve the aims of the research study, the following research questions were defined:

RQ1: Which segments of wine consumers (if any) can be detected based on the label choice approach?

RQ2: Are there differences between segments based on demographic characteristics (gender, age, education, occupation, and income)?

RQ3: Are there differences between the segments based on wine consumer behaviour, preferred communication and trust?

Data Analysis

A principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was conducted to identify latent factors associated with wine label attributes. Data suitability was confirmed via the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were retained, and items with factor loadings below 0.40 were excluded. Internal consistency was validated using Cronbach's alpha (threshold $\alpha \geq 0.60$), and the resulting factor scores served as inputs for subsequent cluster analysis.

To identify distinct consumer segments, a K-means clustering procedure was applied. The optimal number of clusters was determined using hierarchical cluster analysis with Ward's method, supported by examination of the dendrogram. The resulting segments were characterised by socio-demographic variables, wine behaviour, preferred communication formats, and trust in information sources. Statistical differences between clusters were evaluated using Chi-square tests for categorical data and the Kruskal-Wallis test for continuous variables. All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

3 Results

PCA with varimax rotation identified three latent factors explaining 60.73% of the total variance. The KMO value of 0.800 indicates that the data is suitable for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's test ($\chi^2 = 2004.701$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that the correlations amongst variables are sufficiently strong to justify the application of PCA (Barlett, 1954). The reliability of the extracted factors was validated via Cronbach's alpha, with values ranging from 0.758 to 0.804, indicating high internal consistency. Detailed results are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Factor analysis with varimax rotation

Validation	Cronbach's α	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
		0.804	0.767	0.758
Intuitively Assigned Factor Names		Objective Quality and Production Attributes	Narrative and Emotional Communication Elements	Visual and Material Design Attributes
Items				
Production method (traditional, batonnage, spontaneous fermentation)		0.819	0.007	0.010
Technical data (pH, acids, sulphite content)		0.814	0.071	0.086
Awards, medals		0.692	-0.064	0.211
Reference to the vineyard map		0.635	0.342	0.122
QR code for additional information		0.561	0.173	0.311
Information about the wine (variety, vintage, alcohol content, residual sugar)		0.551	-0.439	0.311
Typography (font style)		0.126	0.765	0.218
Label colours		0.016	0.751	0.057
Story on the label		0.016	0.751	0.057
Food pairing		0.299	0.693	-0.257

Validation	Cronbach's α	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
		0.804	0.767	0.758
Intuitively Assigned Factor Names		Objective Quality and Production Attributes	Narrative and Emotional Communication Elements	Visual and Material Design Attributes
Items				
Attractive graphics (images, illustrations)		0.171	-0.132	0.777
Overall design		-0.030	0.287	0.723
Label style (minimalist, traditional, modern label)		0.373	0.069	0.708
Label shape and material (embossing, relief, gold foil)		0.424	0.218	0.601

Extraction method: PCA with varimax rotation; rotation converged in 5 iterations

Source: *Own processing, 2025*

Three distinct factors emerged, each representing a cluster of related wine label perceptions. Below, each factor is described in detail, along with its conceptual interpretation and key loadings:

Factor 1: Objective quality and production attributes (23.56% variance): This factor captures consumers' emphasis on factual, verifiable information communicated through the wine label. It reflects a strong orientation towards technical and authenticity-related cues that signal production quality and product credibility. The highest loadings (0.819) were observed for information describing the production method (traditional, batonnage, spontaneous fermentation), and technical data (0.814) such as pH, acidity, and sulphite content. It contains elements that reinforce the wine's origin and trustworthiness. Awards or medals (0.692) and references to vineyard maps (0.635) serve as external or visual confirmations of quality and terroir. Even the presence of a QR code showed a moderate loading (0.561), suggesting a supplementary interest in accessing additional information beyond the physical label.

Factor 2: Narrative and emotional communication elements (19.24% variance): The second factor relates to storytelling and the experiential dimension of wine label communication. It is primarily defined by items related to typography (0.765), colours (0.751) and presence of a story about the winery or the wine itself (0.751). Typography and colour scheme appear to communicate tone, personality, and individuality. The consumers who demonstrate a high level of engagement with the stories are likely to place a high value on the emotional and narrative aspects of wine marketing (heritage, lifestyle, serving suggestions). These consumers may perceive wine less as a purely functional product and more as a meaningful, experiential good.

Factor 3: Visual and material design attributes (17.93% variance): This factor reflects the extent to which consumers respond to the emotional impact created by the visual and tactile qualities of wine packaging. It is characterised by a strong emphasis on the aesthetic and design-related aspects of the label. High factor loadings were observed for visually appealing graphics or imagery (0.777) and for the overall layout of the label (0.723), indicating the importance of visual harmony and attractiveness. This factor was also influenced by the label's design orientation (0.708), encompassing minimalist, traditional, and modern aesthetics. Label form and material enhancements (0.604), including embossing, foil applications, and unconventional shapes, contributed markedly to this factor. Unique artwork, creative label designs, and enhanced packaging features boost wine value and influence purchasing decisions for those individuals.

A three-cluster solution was determined through a two-step clustering procedure. First, agglomerative hierarchical clustering (Ward's method) was applied, with the optimal number of segments identified via dendrogram.

This was followed by non-hierarchical k-means clustering ($k=3$), which refined the segment centres. After 17 iterations, all 364 respondents were assigned to one of three distinct categories (Figure 1).

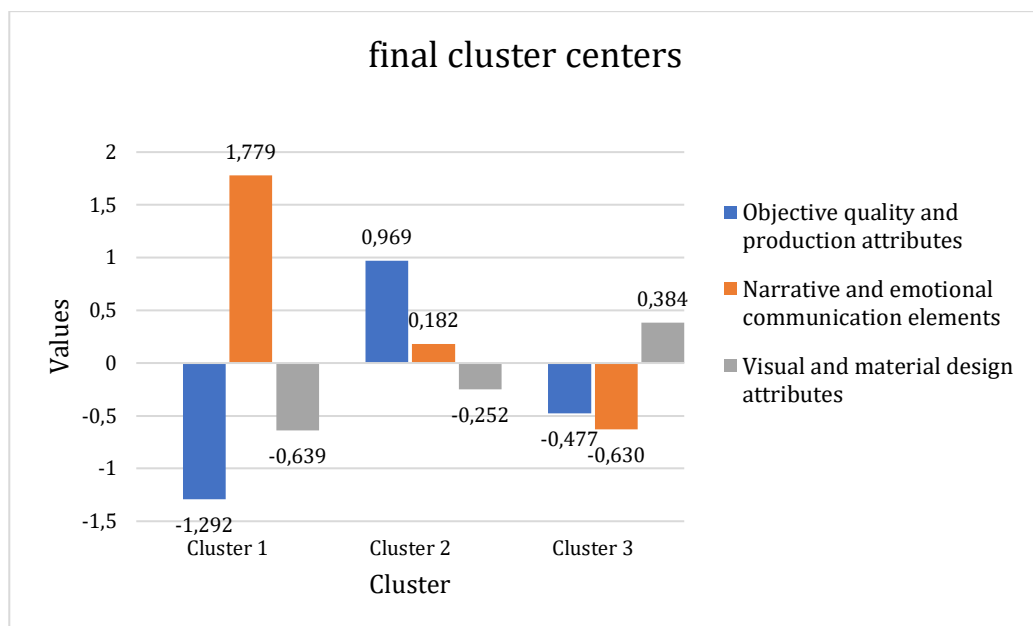


Figure 1: Cluster profiles based on factor scores of wine label attributes
Source: Own processing, 2025

Tables 3 – 6 present the behavioural and attitudinal profiles of the identified clusters, detailing consumer demographics, purchasing habits, and social media engagement. This data highlights significant differences in trust towards various information sources, revealing the distinct decision-making logic underlying each segment.

Segment 1 (n = 46) – Narrative-driven Traditionalists

This segment represents the smallest group of respondents. It is overwhelmingly male (95.7%), with most individuals residing in rural areas and having secondary education. Unlike the remaining segments, this group is almost entirely composed of Gen Y (93.5%). Most members are employed (69.6%) or entrepreneur/self-employed person (21.7%) and exhibit comparatively higher income levels.

Segment 1 primarily interpret wine labels (Figure 1) through emotional meaning and storytelling (cluster centre = +1.779), while simultaneously showing low sensitivity to both technical quality cues (-1.292) and visual/material aesthetics (-0.639). The perception of value is influenced by factors such as typography, colour scheme and the presence of a narrative about the wine or winery. Wine is regarded as a meaningful and experiential product, where emotional resonance is prioritised over informational density or visual novelty.

Table 3: Socio-demographic profile of wine consumer segments

		Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3	χ^2
		%	%	%	
Gender	Man	95.7	44.5	40.7	<.001
	Woman	4.3	55.5	59.3	
Generation	18 – 28 (Gen Z)	6.5	72.6	70.9	<.001
	29 – 44 (Gen Y)	93.5	27.4	29.1	
Occupation	Rural	71.7	50.0	44.8	0.005
	Urban	28.3	50.0	55.2	
	Employed	69.6	48.6	45.9	

Economic status	Entrepreneur/ self-employed person	21.7	4.8	2.9	
	Maternity leave	0.0	1.4	1.7	
	Student	0.0	43.8	48.3	
	Unemployed	8.7	1.4	1.2	
Education	Secondary education	78.3	28.1	31.4	<.001
	University	21.7	71.9	68.6	
Net income	Up to €500	0.0	19.2	33.1	<.001
	€501 – 1,000	28.3	26.7	22.1	
	€1,001 – 1,500	26.1	32.9	25.0	
	€1,501 – 2,000	37.0	17.8	14.0	
	€2,001 and more	8.7	3.4	5.8	

Source: Own processing, 2025

Market research indicates that consumption of wine is most frequent amongst two segments: 34.8% of respondents drink wine once a week, versus 30.4% who drink it only once a month. They have a tendency to dislike red wine and have a strong preference for white dry or semi-dry wines. Members of this group have the lowest WTP for wine, which is consumed mainly during meals at home (39.1%), and in restaurants/bars (17.5%). More than half of the groups drink less than 3 litres per year, which confirmed that they drink wine during food pairing.

Segment 1 consumers use digital communication selectively. Instead of actively engaging with a variety of online content, consumers choose short-form narratives for brief, easily consumable information. This demographic is less interested in traditional social media posts, community-based forms, and user-generated content. Instead of active participation or social connection, these consumers choose quick, non-intrusive communication formats that fit easily into their routines and enhance current knowledge. This group value interpersonal interactions over mediated communication. In the context of wine purchasing decisions, friends and family recommendations are the most trusted source of information, highlighting the importance of tight social networks in such decisions. Results of the study revealed that electronic and institutional sources including newsletters, winery websites, social media channels, specialised publications, and online reviews are viewed with mistrust.

Table 4: Behavioural profile of wine consumer segments

Variables	Segment 1 %		Segment 2 %		Segment 3 %		χ^2	
	C	P	C	P	C	P	C	P
Frequency of Consumption (C)/Purchase (P)								
Every day	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	<.001	<0.001
Several times a week	10.9	4.3	9.6	3.4	5.2	3.5		
Once a week	34.8	13.0	10.2	6.8	12.8	8.1		
Several times a month	19.6	43.5	26.7	21.9	23.8	16.3		
Once a month	30.4	26.2	13.0	10.4	14.0	10.5		
Several times a year	4.3	13.0	38.4	57.5	44.2	61.6		
Willingness to Pay	Segment 1 %		Segment 2 %		Segment 3 %		χ^2	
Until €3	54.3		3.4		4.6		<.001	
€4 – 6	23.9		24.0		45.9			
€7 – 10	17.5		52.1		35.5			
Over €10	4.3		20.5		14.0			
Preference based on colour	Cluster 1 %		Cluster 2 %		Cluster 3 %		χ^2	
Red	10.9		27.4		13.4		<.014	
Rosé	19.6		17.1		26.2			
White	54.3		40.4		48.8			

I have no preference	15.2	15.1	11.6	
Preference Based on Sweetness	Segment 1 %	Segment 2 %	Segment 3 %	χ^2
Dry	43.5	13.0	25.0	<.001
Semi-dry	32.6	26.7	20.9	
Semi-sweet	21.7	31.5	29.7	
Sweet	2.2	13.7	18.6	
I have no preference	0.0	15.1	5.8	

Source: Own processing, 2025

Segment 2 (n = 146) – Quality-conscious Wine Seekers

This segment is slightly dominated by women, mostly Gen Z (72.6%), with lower and average net incomes (€501 – 1,500) than other groups. Members are predominantly well educated (71.9%) and equally represented in both rural and urban areas. The economic status of students and employees is balanced.

This group drinks less wine than the national average. Many respondents drink wine rarely, with 38.4% drinking several times a year and 63.7% consuming less than 9 litres. White wine (40.4%) and semi-sweet and semi-dry styles are preferred. Nevertheless, red wine (27.4%) is not excluded from consideration, indicating a degree of openness to different wine types rather than strict taste boundaries. Wine consumption in this segment is occasion-oriented. Most respondents associate wine with celebrations and special events (39.7%), such as birthdays or holidays, or with socialising with friends (31.5%). This pattern suggests that wine plays a social and symbolic role.

Despite their low purchase frequency, this segment has a rather strong willingness to pay. Although 57.5% only buy wine a few times a year, up to 72.6% are willing to pay more than €7 per bottle for regular consumption. This obvious conflict suggests that, while wine is not purchased frequently, purchasing decisions are more thoughtful and quality-oriented, showing a preference for higher-quality wines chosen for certain occasions rather than routine use.

This interpretation is further supported by the results of the cluster analysis, which show that this segment achieved a positive factor score for Factor 1 (+0.969). This finding indicates that these consumers place strong emphasis on the credibility and verifiability of information communicated through the wine label. For this group, labels primarily fulfil a functional role, serving as a key instrument for reducing uncertainty and supporting informed purchase decisions.

Table 5: Wine consumption volume and occasions across segments

Average Annual Wine Consumption (Liters)	Segment 1 %	Segment 2 %	Segment 3 %	χ^2
Less than 3 litres per year	56.5	33.6	37.8	<0.010
3 – 9 litres per year	17.5	30.1	31.4	
9 – 18 litres per year	8.7	22.6	21.5	
18 – 30 litres per year	4.3	9.6	5.8	
30 litres per year and more	13.0	4.1	3.5	
Consumption Occasion	Segment 1 %	Segment 2 %	Segment 3 %	χ^2
At celebrations and special occasions (weddings, birthdays, New Year's Eve)	19.6	39.7	36.0	<.001
At home with meals	39.1	8.2	2.9	
At tastings/events/winery visits	6.5	6.9	1.7	
In restaurants/bars	17.5	4.1	4.7	
When relaxing at home (e.g., watching a movie, reading a book)	13.0	9.6	14.0	
When socialising with friends (parties, visits)	4.3	31.5	40.7	

Source: Own processing, 2025

Segment 2 is the most digitally active and socially engaged. Consumers prefer community-based formats and user-generated material, showing a high desire for engagement, shared experiences, and peer involvement. Stories are moderately preferred, while social media posts and short-form video content are also popular. In comparison, influencer-generated material does not heavily influence engagement.

This group places the most trust in institutional and expert knowledge. Wineries’ websites and social media sources are trustworthy, and internet reviews and ratings impact their choices. The highest faith in expert wine books and periodicals across all clusters reflects this segment’s emphasis on professional knowledge and structured information. Friends and family recommendations remain significant, but less so than in Segment 1. Meanwhile, advertising is perceived as less trustworthy. According to these results, a combination of expert authority and peer-generated feedback is used in Segment 2 to make wine purchase choices, which are information-rich and multi-source.

Table 6: Communication preferences and trust in information sources across segments

Preferred Communication on Social Media	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3	p-value
Community groups – winery fan groups	2.52 ^a	3.53 ^b	2.67 ^a	<.001 *
User-generated content (UGC) – photos from customers	2.37 ^a	3.60 ^b	2.97 ^a	<.001 *
Reels/Shorts/TikTok videos	3.28 ^{ab}	3.43 ^b	3.01 ^a	0.036 *
Posts from influencers	2.76	2.82	2.69	0.507
Stories (short stories)	4.17 ^a	3.75 ^b	3.39 ^b	<.001 *
Posts on social media	2.30 ^a	3.63 ^b	3.33 ^b	<.001 *
Trust in Sources	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3	p-value
Advertisements	2.98 ^a	2.55 ^b	2.49 ^b	0.018 *
Newsletter	1.35 ^a	2.70 ^b	2.39 ^b	<.001 *
Winery website	2.20 ^a	3.65 ^b	3.40 ^b	<.001 *
Store staff	3.59	3.69	3.56	0.740
Specialised articles and magazines about wine	2.59 ^a	3.97 ^b	3.43 ^c	<.001 *
Influencers’ social media	2.24	2.49	2.43	0.209
Recommendations from friends and family	4.63 ^a	4.49 ^b	4.43 ^b	0.015 *
Online reviews and ratings	2.93 ^a	3.75 ^b	3.54 ^{ab}	0.003 *
Wineries’ SM	2.70 ^a	3.51 ^b	3.60 ^b	<.001 *

* – Significant differences between types of preferred communication according to Kruskal-Wallis test ($p < 0.05$). Means in the same row with different superscript are statistically different according to Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner pairwise comparisons ($p < 0.05$).

Source: Own processing, 2025

Segment 3 (n = 172) – Visually Oriented Occasion Drinkers

This is the largest and youngest segment, representing 70.9% of Gen Z. It is predominantly female and more likely to live in urban areas (55.2%), reflecting a distinctly city-oriented lifestyle. Most members are well-educated students (48.3%), which corresponds with their early life stage. Despite their relatively high educational attainment, they report the lowest income levels amongst all identified segments, highlighting their limited purchasing power.

This group drinks the lowest amount of wine per year (44.2% – several times per year) – but if they do, they prefer rosé and white with a preference for semi-sweet and sweet styles. Despite their limited purchase frequency, they are prepared to pay a modest price (€4 – 10, 81.4%). Similar to Segment 2, opportunities for wine consumption arise when people want to socialise with friends (40.7%) or celebrate (36%).

This profile indicates that wine choice in this segment is driven primarily by what the bottle looks and feels like (visual and material attributes, +0.384), rather than by technical information (-0.477) or storytelling/narrative content (-0.630). Visually attractive graphics, overall label design, and material enhancements function as instant decision shortcuts, allowing consumers to select wine intuitively and with minimal cognitive effort.

Consumers in this group show a moderate preference for standard social media posts and short stories, while displaying limited interest in more interactive or participatory formats such as community groups, user-generated

content, and short-form videos. Trust patterns in Segment 3 reflect a digitally pragmatic approach to information use. The highest levels of trust are placed in wineries' social media channels and winery websites, which provide easily accessible and recognisable cues of credibility. Online reviews and ratings play a secondary role, while advertising is met with relatively low trust. Recommendations from friends and family remain relevant, but their influence is less pronounced than in Segment 1.

To highlight certain differences between the segments. Compared to the other two, Segment 1 is most strongly oriented towards emotions and storytelling, which stands in sharp contrast to the rational Segment 2. Segment 3, in turn, is characterised by a high degree of visual pragmatism, which differs from the informational focus of Segment 2. As mentioned above, technical parameters and expert recommendations are key for Segment 2, whereas Segment 1 tends to view them negatively. Their willingness to pay for a bottle of wine is significantly higher than that of Segment 1, suggesting that while wine is a common commodity for the first segment, for Segment 2 it represents an investment in quality. An interesting difference compared to Segments 1 and 3 is their relationship to technology. Although they reject technical details on the label (unlike S2), they express high trust in the winery's official digital channels. The website and social media serve as a guarantee of the brand's modernity and credibility for them, which we do not observe in the more conservative Segment 1. We observe a significant difference between the segments in terms of building trust. While Segments 2 and 3 rely heavily on digital ecosystems, Segment 1 remains loyal to interpersonal connections and recommendations from family and friends. However, the difference between Segments 2 and 3 is that Segment 3 uses the internet more pragmatically to verify credibility, while Segment 2 actively engages with professional communities and studies specialised articles.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Results shows that Gen Y and Gen Z wine label perception is multidimensional and cannot be described by one cue. Our research has found three hidden factors that go against the idea that younger customers always look at the price and how products look (Nacka et al., 2019).

The first factor "Objective Quality and Production Attributes", represents a logical viewpoint, where extrinsic cues imply intrinsic quality (Charters & Pettigrew, 2006; Chrea et al., 2011). It is interesting to note that this factor challenges the common idea that Gen Z does not care about or are not interested in detailed wine information (Henley et al., 2011; Thach et al., 2021). Our results show that clear communication is still very important, even for people who follow trends (Verdú-Jover et al., 2004; Sáenz-Navajas et al., 2014). QR codes are also a major change from past study where digital extensions were minimal (Del Mastio et al., 2016), proving that youngsters increasingly look for wine information to be available online. In our view, this points to the evolution and transformation of the very function of wine labels. The label can be considered a gateway that connects the physical product to the broader digital environment. Therefore, the static source of information represented by the label is becoming a communication bridge between the offline and online environments. This allows consumers to seamlessly transition from visual cues to more detailed, interactive, and personalised content.

The second factor, "Narrative and Emotional Communication Elements", gives more weight to symbolic meaning than to verified quality. This aligns with the concept that storytelling can support the building of trust (Woldarsky, 2019; Lunardo & Rickard, 2020). However, our findings show that narrative elements might be the main basis for evaluation instead of merely helpful hints. Rössel and Beckert's (2013) findings support the claim that wine quality is often judged through social negotiation rather than objective evaluation.

The third factor, "Visual and Material Design Attributes", appears to work independently as a technique to make decisions more quickly. This supports the notion that visual appeals are linked (Jaud & Melnyk, 2020), implying a more heuristic decision-making process amongst younger demographics.

These factors show up in three groups of consumers. The first segment, "Narrative-Driven Traditionalists", consists primarily of rural Gen Y males with a significant preference for emotive label features over technical or visual clues. This aligns with findings that traditional consumers associate quality with heritage and symbolic meaning

(Tempesta, 2010; Sherman & Tuten, 2011). As stated in the research by Kollmuss & Agyeman (2002), people tend to trust recommendations from friends and family the most. The lack of trust in digital and institutional sources is similar to what Pasi and Viviani (2020) found, which is that people are becoming more worried about the reliability of information in online environments. Our findings suggest that the limited importance placed on technical information in this segment is a deliberate choice. These characteristics are typical of story-oriented consumers, for whom it is precisely the elements of the story or narrative that serve as indicators of quality and value. In this context, technical attributes may therefore be considered unnecessary. For this segment, emotionally grounded and social cues are a more effective and trustworthy basis for decision-making, thereby reinforcing the preference for narrative communication over technical communication.

“Quality-conscious Wine Seekers” are mostly well-educated Gen Z consumers. Despite drinking less wine, these customers spend more on it. Gallenti et al. (2019) argue that Gen Z’s selective, occasion-driven behaviour contradicts the idea that they are motivated by low pricing or novelty. In the current climate, younger, smarter customers are looking to minimise risk by sourcing information from reliable sources. A lot of them trust professional sources and winery websites because they want objective quality (Charters & Pettigrew, 2006). They also use online reviews to show how important peer approval is in digital communication (Szolnoki et al.; 2018; Ali, 2025). Interestingly, Segments 2 and 3 adopt different strategies for managing uncertainty. Quality-conscious wine seekers rely on a form of “triangulation”, combining expert knowledge with content created by other consumers. In this way, they minimise the perceived risk of the purchase. In contrast, visually oriented occasion drinkers follow a fundamentally different logic. Rather than seeking out information, they rely on visual design as a cognitive shortcut. They act more quickly and intuitively.

Finally, “Visually Oriented Occasion Drinkers”, is dominated by Gen Z females living in urban areas. Their focus on visual and material design confirms that younger consumers respond well to modern, appealing labels (Elliot & Barth, 2012; Lunardo & Rickard, 2020). Their preference for rosé and sweeter wines aligns with broader trends identified by Rui et al. (2025). Additionally, their faith in winery-controlled social media over advertising implies digital communication is relevant. This suggests the existence of a specific paradox in Segment 3, where the lack of interest in technical parameters directly on the label does not correlate with an overall distrust of information from the wine producers. In fact, this segment exhibits a high level of trust in the official websites of wineries, which it perceives as the primary pillar of brand credibility. It can therefore be concluded that while the physical label primarily serves an aesthetic and communicative function for younger consumers, the brand assumes the role of a guarantor of expertise and transparency.

This study shows that wine labels act as meaningful communication interfaces for younger consumers rather than merely informational tools. Amongst Gen Z and Gen Y consumers in Slovakia, labels are interpreted through different logics of meaning, trust, and attention. Three hidden factors were identified, influencing how wine consumers choose wine: by objective quality to reduce uncertainty, by using narrative and emotional cues, or through visual design as an intuitive decision shortcut. These differences are reflected in three distinct consumer segments. Authenticity and relational clues help narrative-driven traditionalists highlight personal meaning and social trust. Quality-conscious wine seekers prioritise credibility and transparency, proving that expert framing remains important. Visually oriented occasion drinkers, the largest and youngest segment, highlight the growing relevance of visual communication and contextual appeal. These elements imply wine communication efforts should not aim for a single dominant message. Recognising these differences helps producers to communicate more effectively with younger audiences without age-based biases. While the research is limited because it focuses on Gen Z and Gen Y in the Slovak market, it provides a basis for future studies to look at other cultures and communication contexts.

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