A Perception of Champagne and Champagne drinking people in the Netherlands between 18-35 years old and also what can be done to stimulate the buying of Champagne within this group.

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Abstract

When this research began, in early 2021, we were in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. The hospitality industry went into shutdown which caused a huge impact on the wine trade and particularly Champagne, as the hospitality industry is an important channel for Champagne. People tried to entertain themselves in the comfort of their own homes, by buying take-a-way dinners accompanied by a wine that was normally too expensive for them in the on-trade. This is how people discovered the "better" wines and, of course, Champagne. In the Champagne books there is a lot of information given on Champagne itself but not about the selling of Champagne. The Customer journey[1], a potential "Champagne buyer" makes is interesting: How will this person come into contact with the product? What will lead this person to buy the product? What is needed after he has bought the product? A research paper about Brand Heritage was found and how it is communicated on Instagram by 8 different Champagne Brands and a research about blind tasting of sparkling wines. Several interviews were done (see the transcripts below) and a survey was set out at the target audience. This survey was distributed in different wine groups in the Netherlands on social media and through an advertisement on social media a total of 24,115 people were reached. They were asked to respond only if they drank Champagne. A barrier was also created by requiring people to log in with their Google account, so that only serious responses could be received. The response rate was n=94.
A survey on the Champagne industry from 2020 has been used describing the position of Champagne in relation to other sparkling wines. The survey also shows how the production of Champagne is structured/organized, what challenges there are and the significance of the Champagne region. The survey also discusses other types of sparkling wines and wine tourism in the Champagne region. This research gives an impression of the perception of Champagne and of Champagne drinking Dutch people up to 35 years of age. The result of n=94 is a small group of Champagne drinkers but it does indicate what they know about Champagne. The results show that the respondents have a good idea of what Champagne is and what they like about Champagne. Some think an attractive label is appealing but the majority in this example think that an attractive label means that the wine will not taste good and it will also be more expensive. Something to keep in mind for people selling Champagne. In all the interviews and in the survey it is clear that the consumer wants to know more about the story of the Champagne and the producer. By doing so and letting people taste different Champagnes with different styles that they will become more enthusiastic about Champagne and will be willing to buy and drink Champagne on a more regular basis.

Strengths

Champagne is one of the strongest brands in the world. Champagne has focus on sustainability and there are more and more smaller importers telling the story about Champagne in the Netherlands. My research shows that a substantial part of the 'young' Champagne drinkers wants to know the story behind Champagne.

[1] How to map a customer journey: see link to the website below

Weaknesses
The Netherlands is not a Champagne drinking country compared to Belgium and France. ,
Real sales figures are hard to come by for the Netherlands. Much of the Champagne imported into the Netherlands is then further exported to other countries and 12.8% of the participants in the survey buy their Champagne at the Cellar Door.
Although there is certainly a target group that is very sensitive to the appearance of the bottle and other external features (also which is apparent from the survey), it also seems that the advertisements are very focused on (party) people, glamour and a bit on history. A little more attention could be paid to sustainability, the production process of Champagne and the story behind the producers.

Opportunities
The time is now right to take action into gaining loyalty from these new customers and people who are now drinking more Champagne. People bought more Champagne than ever in The Netherlands and now we are in the phase of creating loyalty (last phase of the customer journey). The successful model of 'Bubbels & Bruis' can be used where you organize tastings where the whole story is told: History, sustainability, production process, and the producers. These tastings should be organized for bartenders from nightclubs and beach clubs, and also sommeliers working in fine dining restaurants, so that they too can tell the story to their customers. This can be done at wine events, wine parties, luxury department stores such as the Bijenkorf in Amsterdam, tennis, field hockey and horse tournaments, casinos, and car races (Formula 1). Wouldn’t it be great if there was a branch of the 'Cité du Champagne'; a Champagne Museum in Amsterdam or maybe in one of the fortresses of the Unesco World Heritage sites, the Dutch water lines where we can tell the story behind Champagne and do tastings. Also organizing short accessible trips to the Champagne region and visiting some of the producers, or a trip in a hot-balloon ride concluding with a champagne tasting. Or last, but not least, lunch with food pairing and Champagne.

Threats
Global climate change is a huge threat to Champagne production. The question is, what will happen if no action is taken to gain the loyalty of these new customers? Nobody knows and wouldn't it be a shame if sales in the Netherlands should return to pre-Covid-19 levels? A German study a significant drop in alcohol consumption among younger respondents during the lock-down. Will this recover? Government campaigns in the Netherlands aiming to reduce alcohol consumption and restricting the advertising of alcohol combined with a growing group of people interested in non-alcoholic wine and 'dry January' is not helping sales. War in the Ukraine, increasing inflation rates, high oil and gas prices are all factors leading to economic uncertainty which is never good for the luxury market.

Conclusions and recommendations
The interviews and survey clearly indicate that Champagne consumers are triggered by storytelling and producer profiles. My recommendation is to use these triggers to educate Champagne consumers about various Champagne styles in order to increase their willingness to drink Champagne more regularly and on more occasions.
You can read all my recommendations in 'opportunities'.