

Key factors influencing wine purchases among young consumers from the Republic of North Macedonia

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Abstract

The Republic of North Macedonia, while recognized for its substantial wine production, faces a unique challenge with low domestic consumption rates among its population. Despite a production capacity utilized at only 50%, the country produces significantly more wine than it consumes, with annual per capita consumption ranging between 7–10 liters. This surplus has led to a large portion of Macedonian wine being exported, underscoring the need for strategies to stimulate local demand.

This paper investigates the perceptions, preferences, and purchasing behaviors of young wine consumers in North Macedonia. Through a comprehensive survey, the study examines young people's attitudes towards wine consumption, focusing on factors such as taste preferences, purchasing decisions, and social influences on consumption. The goal is to identify potential drivers that could encourage greater wine consumption within this demographic.

The insights gained from this research are intended to assist wine producers and marketers in refining their strategies to appeal to young consumers. By understanding the needs, preferences, and consumption habits of this group, the industry can adapt product offerings, marketing communications, and distribution approaches to better align with young consumers' expectations. Ultimately, these efforts could enhance the competitive

positioning of Macedonian wine in the domestic market and foster a more vibrant culture of wine appreciation among young people.

Key words: key factors, wine purchases, young consumers.

Introduction

The wine industry in the Republic of North Macedonia holds significant economic and cultural importance, making the country a notable producer within the global market. However, domestic wine consumption remains low, with average consumption per capita ranging from 7 to 10 liters annually. This discrepancy between production and local consumption suggests that Macedonian wine is largely dependent on export markets, leaving substantial untapped potential within the domestic market, especially among younger consumers.

In recent years, a shift in consumer demographics and behavior has drawn attention to the importance of understanding young consumers' attitudes and preferences. Younger generations, characterized by unique consumption behaviors and preferences, often approach wine differently from older generations, influenced by factors such as lifestyle, cultural trends, and social media. Research on consumer behavior suggests that age-specific marketing strategies may be crucial for effectively reaching this demographic and enhancing domestic wine consumption.¹ This study aims to explore the factors influencing young people's wine consumption in North Macedonia, focusing on their attitudes, preferences, and purchasing behaviors.

Understanding consumer behavior, especially among young adults, requires a multidisciplinary approach drawing from marketing, psychology, and sociology. Consumer behavior theory emphasizes that purchasing decisions are influenced by a complex mix of individual preferences, cultural background, peer influences, and personal values.²

The Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior provides a useful framework for analyzing the factors that shape young people's consumption intentions in North Macedonia. According to TPB, consumer intention is determined by attitudes (positive or negative evaluations of wine), subjective norms (influence of family, peers, and society), and perceived behavioral control (the ease or difficulty of buying and consuming wine). Applying this model in North Macedonia reveals that while young people may develop a favorable attitude toward wine, social norms and cultural preferences for other alcoholic beverages may still influence their actual consumption behavior.³

Additionally, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory sheds light on how cultural factors affect consumer behavior in North Macedonia. As a collectivist society with strong social ties, young Macedonian consumers may make purchasing decisions that reflect group identity and align with peer expectations. Social influence is therefore critical in shaping

¹ Kotler, P. and Keller, K.L. (2012) *Marketing Management*. 14th Edition, Pearson Education.

² Schiffman, L. G., Kanuk, L. L., & Kumar, S. R. (2010). *Consumer Behavior* (10th ed.). New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall.

³ Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.

young consumers' attitudes toward products like wine, which can be seen as a lifestyle choice that resonates with values of social belonging, status, and cultural sophistication.⁴

In addition, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs suggests that consumption behaviors may be influenced by young people's desire for social belonging and self-actualization.⁵ In the context of wine, this can manifest in preferences for brands that align with personal identity, enhance social experiences, or represent a certain lifestyle. Contemporary wine marketing research also underscores the role of product attributes, such as taste, packaging, and branding, in appealing to young consumers who are more likely to prioritize novelty, aesthetic appeal, and authenticity in their purchasing decisions.⁶

Furthermore, studies have shown that younger consumers' wine preferences are significantly influenced by social media and digital marketing, with platforms like Instagram and Facebook serving as major touch points for brand engagement.⁷

Globalization and digital connectivity have introduced North Macedonian consumers to international wine brands, lifestyle trends, and diverse taste profiles. Younger consumers, particularly those who are digitally active, have developed broader exposure to the wine culture through platforms like Instagram and Facebook, where brands promote wine as a premium lifestyle product.⁸ Social media thus functions as a cultural bridge, connecting young Macedonian consumers to the global wine industry and making wine more than just a beverage—it becomes part of an aspirational lifestyle.

Social identity theory further supports the role of social media, suggesting that young consumers often choose products that help them express individuality while aligning with the values and norms of their social group.⁹ For young people in North Macedonia, wine consumption can symbolize modernity, refinement, and alignment with international lifestyles, positioning it as an attractive choice for those seeking to differentiate themselves within traditional drinking culture.

The wine industry in North Macedonia is rooted in centuries-old traditions, yet it has evolved over the past few decades as the country transitioned to a market economy. Today, North Macedonia is among the Balkan region's key wine producers, with vineyards covering approximately 28,000 hectares and wine production reaching around 100 million liters annually. Despite this, only half of the production capacity is utilized for winemaking, and a large portion of the wine is exported, particularly in bulk, rather than bottled, branded wines (International Organisation of Vine and Wine, 2021).¹⁰ This

⁴ Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2, 8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>

⁵ Maslow, A.H. (1943) A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50, 370-396.

⁶ Mueller, S., Lockshin, L., & Louviere, J. J. (2010). What you see may not be what you get: Asking consumers what matters may not reflect what they choose. *Marketing Letters*, 21(4), 335–350. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40959685>

⁷ Atkin, T. y Thach, L. (2012). Millennial wine consumers: Risk perception and information search. *Wine Economics and Policy*, 1, 54-62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wep.2012.08.002>.

⁸ Thach, Elizabeth, and Janeen Olsen, 2006. "Market Segment Analysis to Target Young Adult Wine Drinkers." *Agribusiness: An International Journal*.22:3: 307-22

⁹ Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin, & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-37). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

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https://www.oiv.int/sites/default/files/documents/OIV_Annual_Assessment_of_the_World_Vine_and_Wine_Sector_in_2021.pdf

reliance on exports suggests untapped potential within the domestic market, where consumer demand—particularly among younger consumers—remains underexplored and underdeveloped.

While interest in wine is growing, barriers persist. Wine pricing, accessibility, and lack of familiarity with wine culture may deter consumption among young people in North Macedonia, who are accustomed to more affordable options like beer and spirits. Furthermore, the North Macedonian wine industry has yet to establish strong brand identities domestically, with many local wines being sold in bulk rather than as branded, high-value products. To overcome these barriers, it is essential to understand young consumers' specific needs, such as preference for sweeter or lighter wine profiles, convenient packaging, and accessible pricing.

The *Diffusion of Innovations Theory* (Rogers, 2003)¹¹ can be applied here, suggesting that increasing the adoption of wine among young Macedonians will require innovative marketing approaches that introduce wine as a desirable, affordable, and accessible option. Strategies could include promoting wine tasting events, leveraging social media influencers, and introducing smaller or more budget-friendly packaging to encourage trial and lower the perceived risk of purchase.

Studies of wine consumption in post-socialist countries highlight that consumer behavior can be shaped by historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors unique to these markets.¹²

Young consumers' preferences toward wine in the Republic of North Macedonia, focusing on factors such as taste preferences, occasions for wine consumption, and the influence of brand and price on purchasing decisions. Research in this area often emphasizes young consumers' growing interest in wine as a social beverage, especially for occasions like gatherings with friends, special events, and casual dining.¹³

In North Macedonia, traditional preferences for spirits or beer have influenced the development of local drinking culture, which historically did not emphasize wine as a primary beverage of choice. However, recent years have seen growing interest in wine among young adults, driven by exposure to global trends, the influence of social media, and the accessibility of a wider range of products. Young Macedonian consumers are increasingly interested in lifestyle products that convey sophistication and social status, with wine emerging as one such symbol.

Research objectives

This study aims to bridge the gap in literature by investigating the specific attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of young wine consumers in North Macedonia. Through survey-based research, this paper will analyze the motivations and deterrents affecting

¹¹ Rogers, E. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovations*. Fifth edition. Free Press: New York.

¹² Ristic, R., Johnson, T. E., Meiselman, H. L., Hoek, A. C., Bastian, S. E. P., 2016. Towards development of a Wine Neophobia Scale (WNS): Measuring consumer wine neophobia using an adaptation of The Food Neophobia Scale (FNS). *Food Quality and Preference*, 49, 161-167

¹³ Nacka M. et. al. "Young Consumers' Preferences for Macedonian Wine," published in *Agriculture & Forestry*, Vol. 62 Issue 2: 103-110, 2016.

young people's consumption of wine, seeking to identify key drivers that could potentially increase domestic consumption in this demographic. By providing wine producers and marketers with actionable insights into young consumers' preferences, this research aims to support the development of targeted marketing strategies that resonate with the values, needs, and lifestyles of young Macedonian consumers.

Wine consumption among young people in North Macedonia can be understood through the lenses of consumer behavior theories and cultural influences. By analyzing attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control, this research aims to clarify the motivations and barriers that influence wine consumption among young adults. Understanding these dynamics can provide valuable insights to help local wine producers, marketers, and distributors tailor their approaches, ultimately driving increased engagement with wine in the North Macedonian market.

Research objectives are:

1. To identify key factors influencing wine purchases;
2. To analyze consumption patterns and preferences;
3. To examine the impact of social influence and lifestyle on wine choices;
4. To assess brand awareness and attitudes toward local vs. imported wines;
5. To investigate the role of digital and social media in purchase decisions;
6. To identify barriers to wine consumption among young people;
7. To provide insights for targeted marketing strategies.

Research methodology

In order to assess the purchasing behavior and consumption of wine among young people in the Republic of North Macedonia, for the purposes of this paper, a quantitative methodological approach will be used with the help of Google Forms questionnaires. The research will focus on collecting answers from young people aged 18 to 35 living in North Macedonia who will have to answer questions related to the perception and consumption of wine as a drink.

The sample consisted of 150 participants, young people from North Macedonia to achieve statistical validity and generalize the findings. The data collection process involved electronic distribution of the Google Forms questionnaire to young people from the Republic of North Macedonia to reach a larger audience quickly and economically. Participants were contacted by e-mail or other electronic communication channels and invited to voluntarily answer the questionnaire.

After completing the data collection, the collected responses were systematically analyzed. Quantitative analysis techniques, such as descriptive statistics and data visualization, are used to identify patterns, trends, and correlations in data. The findings were interpreted to draw conclusions regarding the perception and consumption of wine among young people in the Republic of North Macedonia. The results of this research will provide a good basis for the marketing of wine among the young population in the domestic market.

Research results and discussion

Demographic information show that 150 respondents participated in the research conducted in this paper, of which 55% were female and 45% male. 60% of respondents were aged 18-24, 30% aged 25-29 and 10% aged 30-35. In terms of education 50% of the respondents were undergraduate, 35% graduate and 15% with high school diploma. Employment Status show that 45% of the respondents were employed, 35% students and 20% unemployed.

Identifying the key factors influencing wine purchases determine the primary factors that influence young Macedonian consumers' decisions to purchase wine, including taste preferences, price sensitivity, brand perception, packaging appeal, and social or cultural influences.

In fact, *taste preferences* are rated as the most critical factor by 72% of respondents. For the *price sensitivity* 60% reported that price plays a major role, with students particularly noting that they look for wines under €10. In accordance with *brand perception*: 40% valued well-known brands, with Macedonian brands having higher familiarity. About *packaging appeal*: 55% noted that visually appealing packaging increases their likelihood of purchase, especially among participants aged 18-24. For the *social and cultural influences* 35% of the respondents cited that they choose wine based on family or friend recommendations, but social influence was more prominent among respondents with frequent social gatherings (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Key factors influencing the purchase of wine among young people in the Republic of North Macedonia



Source: Author's results

Cross-Factor analyses show that 72% of respondents rated taste as the most important factor younger consumers (aged 18-24) prioritize taste but also rank packaging appeal as a secondary factor. This suggests a link between taste preference and the appeal of product presentation for this age group.

Higher-income participants tend to be more experimental with wine, prioritizing taste over price. In contrast, lower-income groups (particularly students) also prioritize taste but are more constrained by price sensitivity. Targeted marketing could emphasize distinct flavor profiles or tasting notes for specific age groups, with additional emphasis on packaging for younger consumers.

60% of respondents consider price a major purchasing factor. Students and younger respondents are particularly price-sensitive, with 70% of students preferring wines priced under €10. This segment shows less concern for brand but high concern for taste and packaging. Consumers with lower brand awareness show higher price sensitivity, suggesting that unfamiliarity with premium brands may lead them to focus on affordable options. Brands could create affordable entry-level wines for younger or budget-conscious consumers, using accessible pricing to build brand familiarity and loyalty.

40% value well-known brands, especially local Macedonian brands, due to high brand familiarity. Younger respondents (ages 18-24) show a stronger preference for Macedonian brands, valuing local quality and authenticity over imported labels. Among this group, price is less of a deciding factor than local brand loyalty. Those who consume wine more frequently (weekly or monthly) are more brand-loyal and more likely to recognize and purchase well-known brands. Occasional wine consumers are less brand-sensitive and more driven by social and cultural factors (e.g., recommendations). Local Macedonian brands could further leverage their authenticity by targeting frequent wine consumers with loyalty campaigns, particularly for local consumers interested in premium local wines.

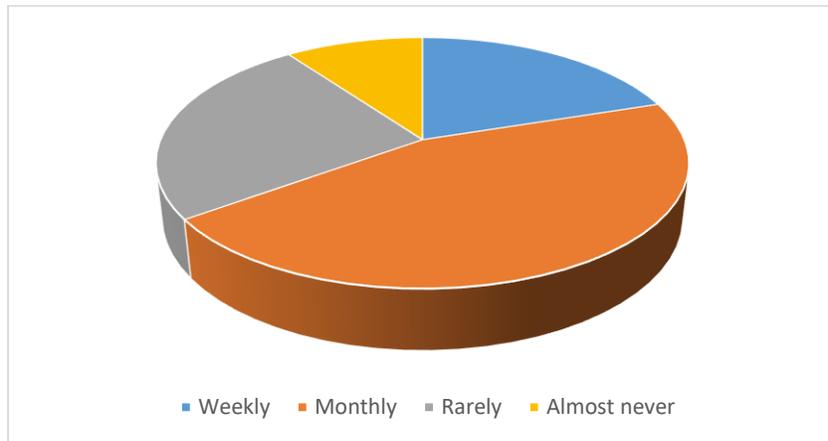
55% of respondents, particularly in the 18-24 age group, rated packaging appeal as influential in their purchase decisions. Younger consumers are particularly influenced by visually appealing packaging, especially when exposed to social media wine promotions. Attractive packaging can act as an initial hook for this segment, often leading to purchases when taste and price also align. Those who buy wine for social gatherings value packaging as it relates to social image. For example, respondents in this group are more likely to purchase wines with unique or aesthetically pleasing designs, enhancing the wine's social appeal. Wine brands targeting young consumers or social wine customers could invest in trendy, modern packaging designs, especially for wines promoted on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

35% cited family or friend recommendations as a deciding factor, with social influence more prominent among respondents who frequently attend social gatherings. Those attending frequent social gatherings are significantly influenced by social and cultural factors, often choosing wines that are popular or recommended within their peer groups. This segment shows higher flexibility with brand and packaging preferences, adapting their choices based on what's socially accepted or encouraged. Respondents with higher social lifestyles (e.g., frequenting social events) are more likely to select wines based on social approval rather than personal taste, brand, or price preferences. Wine marketers could benefit from influencer or social marketing campaigns that emphasize wine as a "social drink," encouraging peer recommendations, user-generated content, and testimonials to attract socially active young consumers.

The research results show that 20% of the respondents consume wine weekly, 45% monthly, 25% rarely, and 10% almost never (Figure 2).

40% of them preferred red wine, 30% preferred white, 15% preferred rosé, and 10% preferred sparkling. 60% of the respondents drink wine primarily during social gatherings, 25% during dining out, and 10% for special occasions (e.g., holidays, celebrations).

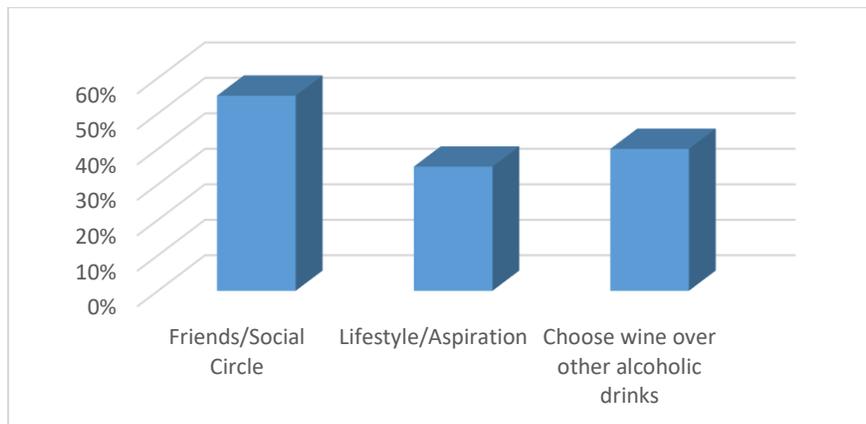
Figure 2 Frequency of wine consumption by the young population in North Macedonia



Source: Author's results

By examining the influence of social influence and lifestyle on wine choice, it enables an understanding of how social interactions, lifestyle aspirations and peer influences shape young people's attitudes towards wine and their likelihood of choosing it over other alcoholic beverages. 55% of the respondents said that friends or social circles influenced their choice of alcoholic drinks, with wine seen as a "social" or "sophisticated" drink. 35% of them felt that drinking wine was part of a lifestyle or aspiration associated with sophistication or maturity. When given a choice, 40% of the respondents would choose wine over other alcoholic drinks in social settings, especially when dining (Figure 3).

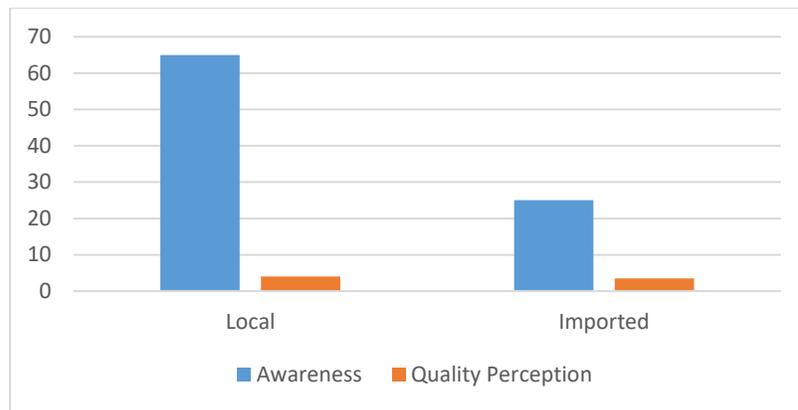
Figure 3 Impact of social influence and lifestyle on wine choices



Source: Author's results

The assessing brand awareness and attitudes toward local vs. imported wines enable to explore young consumers' awareness of Macedonian wine brands compared to imported wines, and assess their preferences and perceptions of quality, authenticity, and value in relation to both. 65% of participants were more familiar with local Macedonian wine brands, while 25% recognized imported brands (primarily Italian, French, and Serbian). In the context of quality perception Local wines received an average quality rating of 4 out of 5, while imported wines averaged 3.5. 60% of respondents felt that supporting local Macedonian wines was important, with many associating local wines with authenticity and tradition (Figure 4).

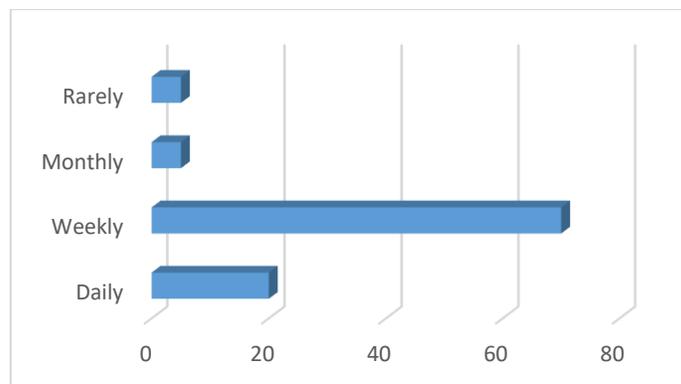
Figure 4 Awareness and Quality Perception of Local vs. Imported Wines



Source: Author's results

Investigation the role of digital and social media in purchase decisions evaluate how digital channels and social media platforms influence young consumers' exposure to wine brands, their engagement with wine content, and their purchasing decisions. 70% of the respondents encountered wine-related content on social media at least weekly (Figure 5). 50% said social media had a moderate to strong influence on their wine purchase decisions, especially Instagram and TikTok. Respondents mentioned that influencer recommendations and advertisements by brands increased their likelihood of purchasing.

Figure 5 Frequency of encountering wine content on social media



Source: Author's results

60% of the respondents mentioned Instagram as the most influential platform, followed by Facebook (30%) and TikTok (20%).

Identifying the barriers to wine consumption among young people makes it possible to perceive barriers such as: price, accessibility, lack of knowledge or cultural factors - which may discourage young consumers from buying and regularly consuming wine. 40% of the respondents found wine to be too expensive for regular consumption, especially younger respondents and students, 30% expressed feeling intimidated or unsure about which wines to choose, 15% mentioned that certain wines were difficult to find or not available in local stores and 10% felt that wine was not as culturally embedded in daily life as other beverages, like rakija or beer.

Based on survey results, the following recommendations can be made for Macedonian wine producers and marketers, aiming to develop targeted strategies that align with young consumers' values, preferences, and consumption styles:

1. **Highlight Taste and Affordable Price Points:** Since taste and price are top priorities, consider marketing wines with diverse flavor profiles and creating budget-friendly options targeted at students and young professionals.
2. **Leverage Social Media and Influencers:** Collaborate with local influencers on Instagram and TikTok to promote wines, showcasing the social and lifestyle appeal of wine.
3. **Emphasize Local Quality and Authenticity:** Develop campaigns that promote the quality, tradition, and uniqueness of Macedonian wines, appealing to national pride and authenticity.
4. **Offer Wine Education and Tasting Events:** Since a lack of knowledge was a barrier, organize tasting events or online tutorials that can educate young consumers on wine types, tasting techniques, and food pairings, making wine more approachable.
5. **Enhance Packaging and Brand Image:** Attractive packaging is important for younger consumers. Invest in modern, eye-catching designs that appeal to a younger demographic and convey the brand's quality.
6. **Targeted Promotions for Special Occasions:** As young people associate wine with social gatherings and special occasions, consider promotions or event-themed packaging during popular times for celebrations (e.g., holidays, festivals).

These results provide a well-rounded understanding of young Macedonian consumers' wine consumption behavior, preferences, and barriers, enabling wine producers and marketers to develop targeted strategies.

• **Conclusions**

The analysis reveals that **taste preferences** and **price sensitivity** are the most critical factors influencing young Macedonian consumers' wine purchasing decisions. Approximately 72% of respondents prioritized taste, indicating a strong inclination toward wines with specific flavor profiles that align with their personal preferences. Meanwhile, 60% of participants, particularly students and lower-income respondents, indicated that **price** plays a substantial role, with many preferring wines priced below €10. This suggests that taste-driven marketing efforts should also consider the affordability requirements of

younger consumers, making high-quality, affordable wines a strategic focus for local producers.

The data indicates that **packaging appeal** is particularly influential among younger consumers aged 18-24, with 55% noting that visually appealing packaging increases their likelihood of purchasing a wine. This demographic often associates packaging with product quality and social status, making it a critical factor in their decision-making process. For wine brands targeting this group, investing in modern and aesthetically pleasing packaging designs that resonate with younger, social-media-influenced consumers is likely to boost purchase rates.

While only 40% of respondents emphasized **brand perception** as a primary factor, there is a notable preference for Macedonian wine brands over imported wines, especially among frequent wine drinkers. This preference indicates a sense of loyalty and a favorable perception of local wines' authenticity and quality. Local brands can leverage this loyalty by positioning Macedonian wines as authentic, high-quality options and by emphasizing national pride in their marketing messages.

Social and cultural influences were important to 35% of respondents, with frequent social gatherings often prompting wine purchases based on family or friend recommendations. The effect of social interactions suggests that wine drinking is associated with social occasions for many young Macedonians, making wine a "socially approved" choice in group settings. Marketing campaigns that highlight wine as an ideal choice for social and celebratory occasions could further enhance this trend, especially by emphasizing peer endorsements and testimonials. Younger consumers, especially those influenced by social media, showed that **digital channels** play a vital role in shaping brand awareness and product selection. Nearly half of the respondents reported that social media content impacts their wine purchase decisions. Wine producers should therefore invest in targeted social media marketing, collaborations with local influencers, and visually engaging online content to connect with young consumers who rely on digital recommendations. To cater to young Macedonian consumers, wine producers should consider the following strategies:

- **Affordable, Taste-Driven Selections:** Emphasize flavor profiles while offering affordable options, particularly for budget-sensitive consumers.
- **Appealing Packaging:** Use attractive, contemporary packaging to capture the interest of younger consumers, especially those active on social media.
- **Promote Local Authenticity:** Reinforce the quality, authenticity, and national pride associated with Macedonian wines to strengthen brand loyalty.
- **Leverage Social Influence:** Encourage user-generated content, peer recommendations, and testimonials to enhance the social aspect of wine drinking.
- **Enhance Digital Engagement:** Increase visibility on social media platforms, focusing on influencer partnerships and content that resonates with young, tech-savvy audiences.

This study provides valuable insights into the wine purchasing behaviors of young Macedonian consumers, highlighting how factors such as taste, price, brand, packaging, and social influences interact with demographic characteristics. These findings offer actionable guidance for Macedonian wine producers and marketers seeking to align their strategies with the preferences and behaviors of younger audiences, ensuring that marketing efforts resonate with this key consumer segment.

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