Restaurants and BYOB: what do Consumers expect and who are they?
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Abstract

While the understanding of, and demand for, wine has been growing, it continues to be a difficult product to market and sell to consumers. Restaurants continually develop new ways to compete for customers, both old and new. With growing consumer wine knowledge and demand, comes more pressure on restaurants to have creative wine lists and knowledgeable staff to present their cellared wines. Given the time and effort restaurant owners put into their wine programs (e.g. wine lists, staff training, investment in wines, etc.), it is understandable why many restaurants are not willing to allow consumers to bringing their own wine, especially when consumers just want to bring a “common” bottle of wine, or one that is already represented on the wine list. On the consumer side, not only are customers more versed than they once were, but they have instant access to information on wine, including prices, on their phones or other devices while dining.

That said, to accommodate customer demands, some restaurants allow this practice and charge a fee to open the bottle, provide stemware, ice buckets to chill white and sparkling wines, and to recover some of the income lost when customers do not purchase from the wine list. This fee, commonly known as the “corkage fee”, may be sizable in part to discourage the practice or a lower to merely recover the costs associated with providing stemware. In either case, corkage is generally meant as a courtesy for customers.

A complicated situation has been developing in the U.S. market with the growing wine knowledge of consumers and wine offerings of restaurants. One scenario is consumers who desire to bring their own wines to restaurants and some restaurants allow this but charge a corkage fee. Previous research that addresses consumers and their understanding and acceptance of corkage fees is very limited. This study used a U.S. cross-national online survey to attempt to fill the gap in understanding consumer acceptance (or not) of corkage fees. Additionally it offers insights to wine professionals to ascertain what consumers expect and what they will tolerate in making decisions about restaurant choice and how corkage fees could affect that choice.

This study suggests there are differences in attitudes toward BYOB and corkage fees, and there are differences in attitudes toward acceptable reasons to bring your own wine to a restaurant. Further, different attitude “levels” have different expectations for service when it comes to BYOB as well as what consumers are willing to pay. Next, the corkage fee, itself seems to have an influence on consumers’ dining experience, depending on their attitudinal level. Lastly, demographic factors had a significant effect on all areas addressed in the study.

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