



POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE



POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE is a series of short articles that offer a provocative view of India's future. While granting that the future is inherently unknowable, it attempts to show how the future may play out at the micro level, based on data and using the systematic and established approaches of the discipline of futures studies.



WINE MARKETING: THE JOURNEY TO 2017

PART II: EXPLORING THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

The previous postcard pointed to the distance that wine has to traverse to enter the mainstream and the need for wine marketers to be intuitive and imaginative in marketing for India. This piece will explore the enabling forces, the critical uncertainties and the potential speed breakers along the journey that wine marketers need to take into account while devising their strategies.

The driving forces enabling the growth of wine drinking in the past five-seven years are several and known. These include:

- Globalization ... specifically, increased contact of upper middle class Indians with western lifestyles through travel and business interactions
- Upward mobility ... rising incomes with new lifestyles and habits being acquired as a result of moving up the class ladder
- Growth of business and entrepreneurship among the professional class ... greater business networking over lunch, dinner and drinks whether in home or out-of-home



- Greater gender equality ... greater acceptance of women drinking alcoholic drinks, greater mixed company socializing
- Rising health concerns ... search for lighter, healthier alcohol alternatives



The outcome of these forces has been the spread of wine gifting by dinner guests, wine as a definite alternative when entertaining guests at home, wine heading towards becoming the alcoholic drink of choice among women, men drinking wine to give women company, and wine as the perfect accompaniment to the business lunch. In the transition framework, these are nothing but the elite copying the ways of the 'winners' i.e., the global/western way to be.

When we consider the future of wine in India, the basic questions related to marketing any new drinks category i.e, who (drinker profile), where and when (consumption context) and why (interplay of intrinsic qualities of the drink and the drinker image) all emerge as critical uncertainties. There are leads and signals in the growth of wine in the past few years, but the interplay of different elements of these critical uncertainties yields four possible scenarios for wine in the next decade.



Scenario 1: Women's Favorite

In this story of wine's future, mostly women drink wine. It is women's first choice among alcoholic drinks for in-home and party consumption. It is a fruit juice substitute, a healthy drink, a light alcoholic drink with a sophisticated and stylish, elite image. For this very reason, viz wine's strongly feminine image, it is unable to break in to men's drinking preferences of spirits and beer. While men don't mind drinking wine in mixed company, it is not their drink of choice and this restricts consumption.

In this scenario, continued growth for wine depends on generational change with younger women having fewer taboos on consuming alcoholic drinks. However, this reliance on women as the key drinker group makes its future uncertain. Women's drinking is always subject to religious and traditional, conservative backlash, being perceived as a threat to family stability.

Scenario 2: Yuppie's Choice

In another possible story of wine's future, men latch on to the knowledge and snob value of wine and the possibilities of collection. Much like cars, bikes and scotch, wine attracts them as another product category to read more, know more, collect more and show off more. As a result, it is drunk less than it is bought and collected and stored. Wine is drunk along with food and in mixed company. In-home entertaining is the main drinking context. In this scenario, continued growth for wine depends on its ability to displace spirits and beer in men's drinking repertoire. Generational change is necessary for a fundamental attitude shift to drinking itself, with kick per rupee needing to be replaced by sensory pleasure as the key driver.





Scenario 3: Food and Wine Pairing

In this, third story of wine's future, wine has redefined the way we eat and drink. The idea of eating and drinking together is totally new to urban India and a redefinition of attitudes and beliefs. Traditionally, drink and food are consumed in sequence, first drink and then eat. But wine makes its own place among all drinks by being had together with food. This shift happens from the outside in. Restaurant owners create signature combinations of dishes with wine e.g., biryani with red wine and fish curry with white wine. People begin to appreciate food-wine pairings when eating out and then become keen to try out the pairings at home. While entertaining at home, they find ways to do food+wine pairings in buffet style eating situations. In this scenario, the health benefits of wine stand out and making changes to drinking habits in order to eat more healthily is another trigger for change. Overall the shift happens slowly through process of diffusion - media and PR play an active role.

Scenario 4: Unisex, light, fun party drink

In this fourth scenario, wine itself doesn't become mainstream but wine derived drinks such as wine coolers and spritzers become hugely popular. Wine is unable to break through the barriers of habit, resistance to female drinking etc to enter the mainstream and stays an elite drink. However, wine coolers and other such RTDs make their presence felt and fit into the youth, cool, party scene.



They are equally popular among young men and young women, when it's desirable to drink but not get drunk.

The Scenarios outlined above leverage the driving forces already at work and visible. However, given the extent of social change required for wine to find a place for itself in the mainstream, it would be interesting to explore another driving force it can tap into – a driving force placed right at the intersection of tradition and modernity in new India. And that force is Consumerism. The intersection between tradition and modernity has now crossed a tipping point to become gloriously mixed up. The weight of tradition is being thrown away while the modern is being embraced as a way to explore individual choices and preferences. People are exploring the freedom to define themselves in multi-faceted ways through consumption. The central idea and appeal of consumerism in new India is the freedom of choice. Can wine successfully exploit this?