

FROM GRAPES TO STORIES · VISEGRAD REGION

Consumer Insights Report

How ecological wine stories become credible and valuable –
evidence from 13 producer interviews and 698 consumers in
Slovakia, Hungary and Czechia.

June 2026

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Project IVF ID 22510339 – From Grapes to Stories: Storytelling at the Heart of Sustainable Wines in the Visegrad Region

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Consumers believe the story first. Paying more for it is the next step.

698

consumers surveyed

Slovakia, Hungary,
Czechia

4.99

perceived
authenticity

highest outcome, 1–7
scale

4.07

willingness to pay

only 26.1% score high

$r = .73$

emotion ↔ loyalty

the strongest value
pathway

MAJOR FINDINGS

- 1 Credibility is the strongest outcome.** Perceived authenticity has the highest mean score (4.99 on a seven-point scale), and only 6.7% of respondents fall into the low-authenticity range. Ecological wine communication can establish basic credibility, provided it is anchored in signals that consumers can understand.
- 2 Commercial commitment is harder to obtain.** Willingness to pay is much weaker than authenticity: the mean score is 4.07 and only 26.1% of respondents score high. Consumers may accept the story as believable without immediately accepting a premium price.
- 3 Emotional engagement is a selective response.** It records the lowest construct mean (3.87) and the highest low-score share (31.8%). This is not a failure of emotion; it means emotion must be earned. Generic warmth is unlikely to be enough unless the story gives consumers a reason to care.
- 4 The strongest value pathway runs through emotion and loyalty.** The correlation between emotional engagement and loyalty is high ($r = .73$) and the link with willingness to pay is also strong ($r = .68$). Emotion does not replace proof; once credibility is present, emotional resonance helps turn a sustainability claim into consumer value.
- 5 Ecological-wine buyers are the clearest audience marker.** Respondents who often buy ecological wine show stronger willingness to pay (4.52) and loyalty (4.85) than those who never buy it (3.82 and 4.13). Ecological involvement is a practical segmentation variable.
- 6 The story is not identical across countries.** Czech respondents show the highest willingness to pay and loyalty, Hungarian respondents high authenticity but weaker emotional and commercial response, and Slovak respondents comparatively stronger emotional engagement. Regional communication should avoid one generic Central European script.

LEAD WITH EVIDENCE

Use vineyard location, terroir, biodiversity, soil care, production choices and certifications as the backbone of the story.

USE EMOTION CAREFULLY

Emotion should explain why the producer acts responsibly, not replace factual proof or exaggerate ecological claims.

DO NOT OVERCLAIM

The data do not measure wine-tourism behaviour; tourism relevance can be discussed only as an implication, not as a measured effect.

Ecological wine storytelling

What the research outputs indicate about authenticity, emotion, value, and consumer response

13

producer interviews

qualitative study

698

consumer responses

survey dataset

3

markets

Slovakia, Hungary,
Czechia

4

outcomes

authenticity, emotion,
WTP, loyalty

MAIN MESSAGE

The central conclusion is that storytelling is not useful in a generic sense. The stronger and more precise conclusion is that ecological wine storytelling works only when it helps consumers judge claims they cannot directly verify. Place, concrete practice, stewardship, and emotional readability are therefore not decorative additions. They are the mechanisms through which an invisible production system becomes credible to consumers.

The research has two connected phases. Study 1 explains how producers construct ecological wine stories, while Study 2 shows how consumers respond to these stories through perceived authenticity, emotional engagement, willingness to pay, and loyalty. The quantitative section is interpreted cautiously because the strongest patterns are descriptive, correlational, and segmentation-based rather than uniformly causal.

CRITICAL READING OF THE EVIDENCE

The strongest finding is the credibility logic: **consumers are more ready to see the wine story as genuine than to pay a premium or feel personally involved.** The weaker part is the experimental treatment evidence, which moves in expected directions but is not statistically decisive across outcomes.

As a whole, the results indicate that ecological wine communication should not be treated as image-making alone. The main problem is credibility. Consumers cannot inspect soil health, biodiversity protection, low-intervention practices, or long-term stewardship at the point of purchase. This means that sustainability communication must do more than sound attractive: it has to make hidden production choices understandable and believable. The report therefore interprets storytelling as a translation device. It turns practices that consumers cannot directly verify into signals they can evaluate: where the wine comes from, what the producer does, why the practice matters, and why the claim should be trusted.

The evidence is useful precisely because it is not uniformly enthusiastic. It shows promise, but also resistance. Consumers respond most clearly to authenticity; they are less easily moved toward emotional attachment or premium willingness to pay. That distinction is important for wineries. A convincing ecological story may create permission to believe, but it does not automatically create permission to charge more. The

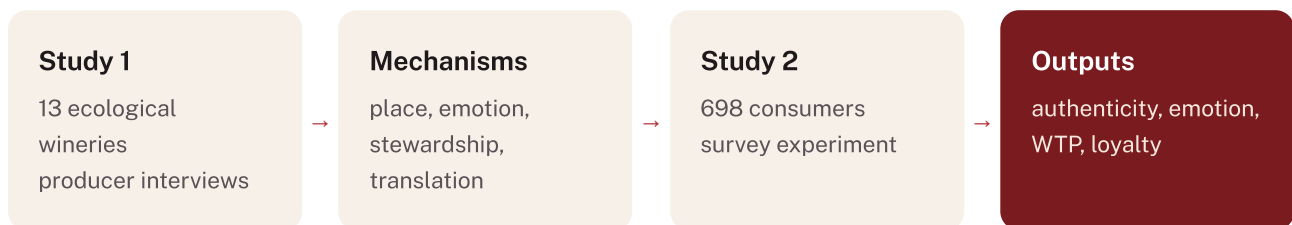
commercial task is therefore sequential: establish credibility first, then explain value, then invite loyalty. Skipping the first step is where sustainability communication often becomes vague, decorative, or vulnerable to accusations of greenwashing.

The report is therefore designed to be used in two ways. For readers outside academia, it explains why ecological wine stories should be evaluated through evidence, not only through attractiveness. For producers and wine associations, it offers a communication checklist: make the claim concrete, connect it to place, show the practice, explain the value, and avoid claiming more than the evidence supports. This dual purpose is important because ecological wine communication must persuade without becoming promotional noise.

How the evidence is built

The research uses sequential design: producers explain the storytelling mechanisms; consumers show how those mechanisms are received.

RESEARCH LOGIC



This order matters. A weaker design would start from the generic assumption that a sustainability story should be emotional and then simply test whether consumers liked it. This research is more defensible because it first identifies how ecological producers actually narrate sustainability in practice. Only then does it test consumer response. The qualitative part, therefore, does real conceptual work. It explains why emotional and place-based cues were selected for the experiment, and it prevents the quantitative study from becoming a disconnected message test. The design is strongest when it is presented as a cumulative chain: producer practice → narrative mechanisms → consumer interpretation → consumer value.

STORY4WINE project investigates how ecological wine stories become credible and valuable, not simply whether consumers like sustainable wine. That distinction is important because liking sustainability and trusting a sustainability claim are not the same thing.

The evidence chain should be read from left to right. The interviews do not merely provide colourful quotations; they identify the mechanisms producers actually use when explaining ecological production. The consumer survey then examines whether those mechanisms matter when consumers encounter a controlled communication stimulus. This is a stronger logic than treating storytelling as a single broad variable. It separates the production side of the story from the reception side of the story, and it makes the report more useful for wineries that need to decide what exactly to communicate.

The chain also shows the limits of the evidence. The producer interviews explain how stories are constructed, while the consumer data show how respondents evaluated one communication context. The findings should therefore guide communication design, not be read as a universal law of wine purchasing. They indicate which cues deserve priority, which outcomes are easier or harder to activate, and where wineries should be careful. In practical terms, the results support a disciplined communication model: start with verifiable place and practice, add emotional readability, and use the story to reduce uncertainty rather than simply to make the winery appear more appealing.

The major outputs

The research produces four practical outputs: a storytelling framework, a credibility logic, consumer value evidence, and a segmentation warning.

OUTPUT	WHAT THE RESEARCH ADDS	WHY IT MATTERS
1. Storytelling mechanisms	Ecological wine stories are built from place-based authenticity, emotional narratives, stewardship narratives, and translation of complex practices.	This gives wineries a more precise vocabulary than generic sustainability communication.
2. Credibility logic	Place and practice turn ecological claims into something consumers can inspect, even when they cannot verify production directly.	It shifts communication from slogans to evidence.
3. Consumer value pattern	Authenticity is strongest (M=4.99), while willingness to pay is lower (M=4.07).	Trust is necessary but not sufficient for premium pricing.
4. Audience differences	Ecological-wine buying history and country differences are clearer than the average experimental effects.	One communication style should not be used for all consumers or all markets.

The most important managerial implication is simple but often ignored: a wine story should reduce consumer uncertainty. It should answer what the ecological claim means, where it comes from, who stands behind it, and why it changes the wine or the land. When the story answers these questions, it can support authenticity. When it only creates atmosphere, it risks becoming interchangeable with ordinary lifestyle branding.

The evidence also exposes a gap. Consumers can accept that a winery appears genuine without feeling emotionally attached or willing to pay a premium. This gap should be treated as the central commercial challenge. The report, therefore, does not recommend “more storytelling” as a blanket solution. It recommends more inspectable storytelling: place-specific, practice-specific, emotionally readable, and consistent over time.

The first output is conceptual: the results clarify what ecological wine storytelling consists of. The second output is diagnostic: it shows that consumers do not react equally across all outcomes. The third output is managerial: it suggests which elements of the story should be emphasised for different audiences. The fourth output is cautionary: it demonstrates that narrative cues may move perceptions in the expected direction without producing large or statistically decisive causal effects. That combination is valuable because it prevents the report from becoming promotional. It gives wineries a usable framework, but it does not pretend that storytelling alone solves the market challenge.

For communication with consumers, the most important message is transparency through explanation. Consumers do not need technical lectures about every vineyard practice, but they do need enough context to understand why an ecological claim is meaningful. A story should therefore answer concrete questions:

What is being protected? Where does this practice take place? How does the winery act differently from a conventional producer? What evidence can the consumer see, visit, read, or ask about? These questions turn storytelling from persuasion into accountability. That is the point at which ecological branding becomes more credible and more useful.

Study #1: Four ways producers make ecology understandable

The producer interviews show that ecological practices are translated through place, emotion, stewardship, and simplified consumer language.

MECHANISM	HOW PRODUCERS USE IT	CONSUMER FUNCTION
Place-based authenticity	They refer to terroir, vineyard landscape, soil, climate, biodiversity, and regional tradition.	Makes sustainability concrete and rooted in a specific origin.
Emotional narratives	They describe care for nature, pride in responsible production, and attachment to the vineyard.	Humanises ecological production and makes it easier to remember.
Stewardship narratives	They frame ecological production as a responsibility toward soil, biodiversity, and future generations.	Shows that sustainability is a long-term philosophy, not only a claim.
Translation challenge	They simplify technical practices such as soil regeneration or reduced chemical inputs.	Turns expert knowledge into consumer-readable evidence.

This is a strong qualitative result because it identifies the building blocks of ecological wine communication. The interviews do not merely report that producers “tell stories”. They show what those stories are made of. This is important because sustainability communication is often criticised for being vague. The four mechanisms identify how producers try to avoid vagueness: they locate the claim, humanise it, moralise it through stewardship, and translate technical details into language consumers can process.

The qualitative result also explains why place-based authenticity is not just a wine-marketing convention. In ecological wine, place performs an evidential role. It connects ecological practices to the visible vineyard environment and the less visible production philosophy behind the bottle.

The four qualitative mechanisms should not be interpreted as four separate campaigns. They work best as a connected communication system. Place gives the story a concrete setting. Stewardship explains the producer’s long-term responsibility. Emotion makes the message more human and memorable. Translation turns complex ecological practices into language that consumers can actually process. A weak winery story usually relies on only one of these mechanisms: it may be emotional but not specific, technical but not engaging, or place-based but disconnected from actual production practices. The stronger story combines the mechanisms without overloading the consumer.

This finding is especially relevant for smaller ecological wineries. Many producers have practices that are meaningful but difficult to communicate in a short label, social media post, or tasting-room conversation. The results suggest that the communication problem is not a lack of content - it is a lack of structure. Producers often have rich material - soils, slopes, biodiversity, family choices, difficult trade-offs, weather

pressure, certification struggles -but these need to be shaped into a coherent narrative. The practical task is to select the few details that make the ecological claim concrete and credible rather than trying to tell everything at once.

Place is the most useful credibility anchor

Place-based storytelling is valuable because it gives ecological claims a location, context, and evidence structure.

The strongest conceptual cue in the results is place-based authenticity. This cue includes references to vineyard location, terroir, landscape, soil composition, climatic conditions, biodiversity, and regional tradition. In ordinary wine communication, these cues often build prestige or differentiation. In ecological wine communication, they perform an additional function: they make sustainability claims more tangible.

A consumer cannot directly observe whether the vineyard protects soil health or manages biodiversity responsibly. But the consumer can evaluate whether the winery explains its ecological practices in relation to a concrete place. This is why place works as a credibility anchor. It narrows the claim. It prevents the message from floating as a generic green statement that could be copied by any producer.

WEAK PLACE STORY

“Our wine is inspired by nature.” This sounds pleasant, but it provides almost no evidence. It does not tell the consumer where the claim comes from or what the producer actually does.

STRONGER PLACE STORY

“Our vineyard on this slope is managed to protect soil life and local biodiversity, because the health of this place shapes the wine.” This links place, practice, and value.

The practical lesson is demanding. Wineries should not use terroir as scenery. They should use it as a proof structure. The story should explain which ecological practices are tied to the vineyard and why those practices matter. This does not require technical overload, but it does require specificity.

PRODUCER DECISION RULE

If a place-based statement could be used by almost any winery, it is too generic. A useful place story should contain details that belong to that vineyard, that region, or that production philosophy.

Place-based authenticity is the strongest bridge between ecological production and consumer understanding because it connects sustainability to something observable. Consumers may not verify all production practices, but they can understand that a vineyard is located in a specific landscape, shaped by a particular climate, and managed under particular conditions. When the story links ecological practices to that place, sustainability stops being an abstract claim and becomes part of the wine's origin. This is why terroir should not be used as a romantic background only. In the research, place works as a credibility device: it anchors the claim in soil, landscape, biodiversity, and regional continuity.

The managerial implication is quite demanding. A place-based story must be specific enough to be inspectable. A vague statement such as 'made with respect for nature' is too weak because almost any producer can say it. A stronger statement connects the practice to the vineyard: what is done, where it is done, and why it matters for the wine, the land, or the local ecosystem. This does not mean that every

communication should become technical. It means that the story should include at least one concrete anchor that allows consumers to see the difference between a credible ecological claim and a generic sustainability slogan.

Emotion helps when it carries evidence

The results show that emotional and stewardship narratives make ecology human, but they should not replace proof. Emotional storytelling appears in the interviews through the language of care, pride, attachment, harmony with nature, and commitment to future generations. This matters because ecological production is otherwise easy to describe in technical terms that many consumers will not process. Emotion gives the story a human centre. It turns “soil management” or “biodiversity protection” into a meaningful producer choice.

The danger is that emotion can become a shortcut. If a winery uses emotion without concrete anchors, the story may sound sincere but unverifiable. This is where stewardship becomes important. Stewardship gives emotion a responsibility structure: protection of soil, biodiversity, ecological balance, and long-term continuity. It tells consumers that ecological production is not a decorative brand position but a repeated production commitment.

COMMUNICATION LAYER	WEAK USE	STRONGER USE
Emotion	Passion, love, nature, and care without practice details.	Care and pride are connected to concrete choices in the vineyard.
Stewardship	Broad promise to protect the environment.	Specific responsibility toward soil, biodiversity, reduced inputs, and future vineyard health.
Consumer translation	Technical jargon or vague slogans.	Plain-language explanation of what changed in production and why it matters.

The report should therefore avoid presenting emotional storytelling as a magic lever. Emotion is valuable when it helps consumers understand why the ecological choice matters. It is weak when it merely tries to make the wine feel warmer or more romantic.

The emotional mechanism is important, but it is also the easiest to misuse. The research shows that producers naturally talk about care, pride, responsibility, and attachment to the vineyard. These elements can help consumers understand why ecological production is not merely a production method but a value commitment. Yet emotion alone is not evidence. If the communication relies only on warmth, nostalgia, or moral language, consumers may experience the story as pleasant but still have no stronger reason to trust the ecological claim. This is why emotion should be attached to concrete practices rather than used as a substitute for them.

A useful emotional story, therefore, has an object. It is not simply a story about passion; it is a story about caring for a specific vineyard, protecting a specific landscape, changing a specific practice, or accepting a specific production trade-off. The emotion makes the claim accessible, while the evidence makes it credible.

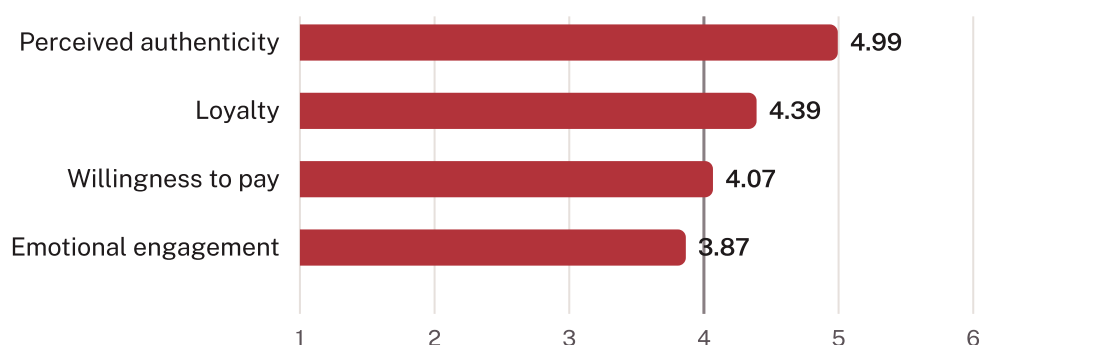
For wineries, this means that emotional storytelling should be edited carefully. The question is not whether the story sounds moving, but whether the emotion helps the consumer understand what the producer actually does and why that effort deserves attention, trust, or support.

Study #2: Capturing consumers' perceptions

Consumers first accept authenticity, then hesitate on value

The survey shows a clear hierarchy: authenticity is the strongest response; emotional engagement and premium willingness are more difficult to activate.

COMPOSITE MEANS



Composite means on a 1–7 scale; the vertical line marks the neutral midpoint (4). Source: STORY4WINE consumer survey (n = 698).

Perceived authenticity was the highest-rated outcome (M=4.99), followed by loyalty (M=4.39). Willingness to pay was lower (M=4.07), and emotional engagement was lowest (M=3.87). This hierarchy is commercially important. Consumers can believe the wine story before they are ready to pay more, recommend more strongly, or feel personally connected.

For producers, this means authenticity should be treated as the entry point, not the finish line. A credible story opens the door. It does not automatically create willingness to pay. The next step is to explain the value created by ecological production: quality, care, risk reduction, environmental responsibility, scarcity, or local contribution.

The composite means show a clear ordering of consumer response. Perceived authenticity is the strongest outcome, which means that many respondents were willing to regard the winery and its sustainability claims as genuine. Loyalty is lower, and willingness to pay and emotional engagement are lower still. This is a useful hierarchy because it identifies the path from belief to value. Consumers may accept that a winery is credible before they feel personally connected to it, and they may feel some connection before they are willing to pay a premium. The gap between these outcomes is where communication strategy has to do its work.

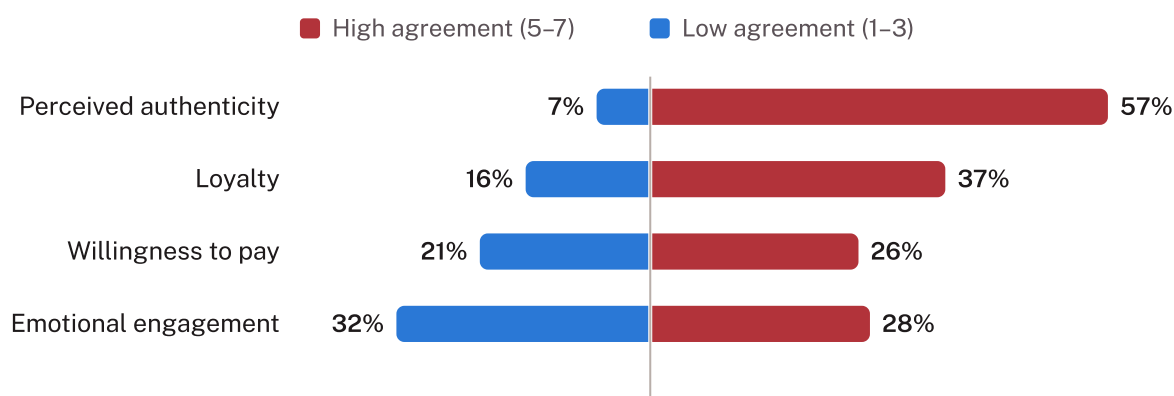
The finding also prevents an overly optimistic reading of sustainability storytelling. Authenticity is a necessary foundation, but it is not the same as market conversion. A consumer may think the winery is genuine and still choose a cheaper alternative, remain unsure about ecological wine, or fail to feel emotionally involved. This means that wineries should not stop after building a credible origin story. They need to explain what the ecological choice changes for the wine, the vineyard, the consumer, or the local community. The story must connect credibility to value. Otherwise, authenticity remains a positive perception without a strong behavioural consequence.

The results also indicate where additional consumer research would be most useful. The central managerial question is not whether respondents can recognise authenticity; many already can. The harder question is what kind of evidence turns that recognition into stronger loyalty and price acceptance. Future communication tests should therefore compare different value explanations: quality improvement, environmental protection, local heritage, health of the vineyard, biodiversity, scarcity, craft, and community contribution. Each explanation may appeal to different consumer segments, and the present results suggest that assuming one universal value argument would be weak.

Authenticity has the widest positive base

High agreement is most common for authenticity, while emotional engagement has the largest low-agreement share.

HIGH AND LOW RESPONSE SHARES



Shares of respondents by construct mean. Source: STORY4WINE consumer survey (n = 698).

The positive base is largest for authenticity: 57% of respondents gave high scores, compared with 37% for loyalty, 26% for willingness to pay, and 28% for emotional engagement. Low agreement was especially visible for emotional engagement (32%).

This pattern suggests that the story was believable for many consumers but not necessarily intimate. That is not a failure. Ecological wine is a product category where credibility may matter before emotional closeness. The task for communication is to build a credible foundation first and then develop deeper engagement through repeated contact, vineyard updates, transparent practices, and tasting experiences.

The high- and low-response shares make the same point more sharply. Authenticity has the broadest positive base, while emotional engagement has the largest share of low responses. This suggests that the communication was easier for consumers to believe than to internalise. That is not a trivial distinction. Believability can be created through concrete cues, but emotional involvement usually requires stronger relevance, identity fit, or prior interest. A wine story can be credible without becoming personally meaningful for every consumer, especially in a general sample where many respondents may not be committed ecological-wine buyers.

For producers, the implication is segmentation. Communication should not assume that all consumers are equally ready to be emotionally engaged by ecological production. Some consumers may only need clear assurance that the claim is credible; others may seek a deeper story about place, philosophy, and stewardship. The report therefore supports layered communication. The first layer should be short, concrete,

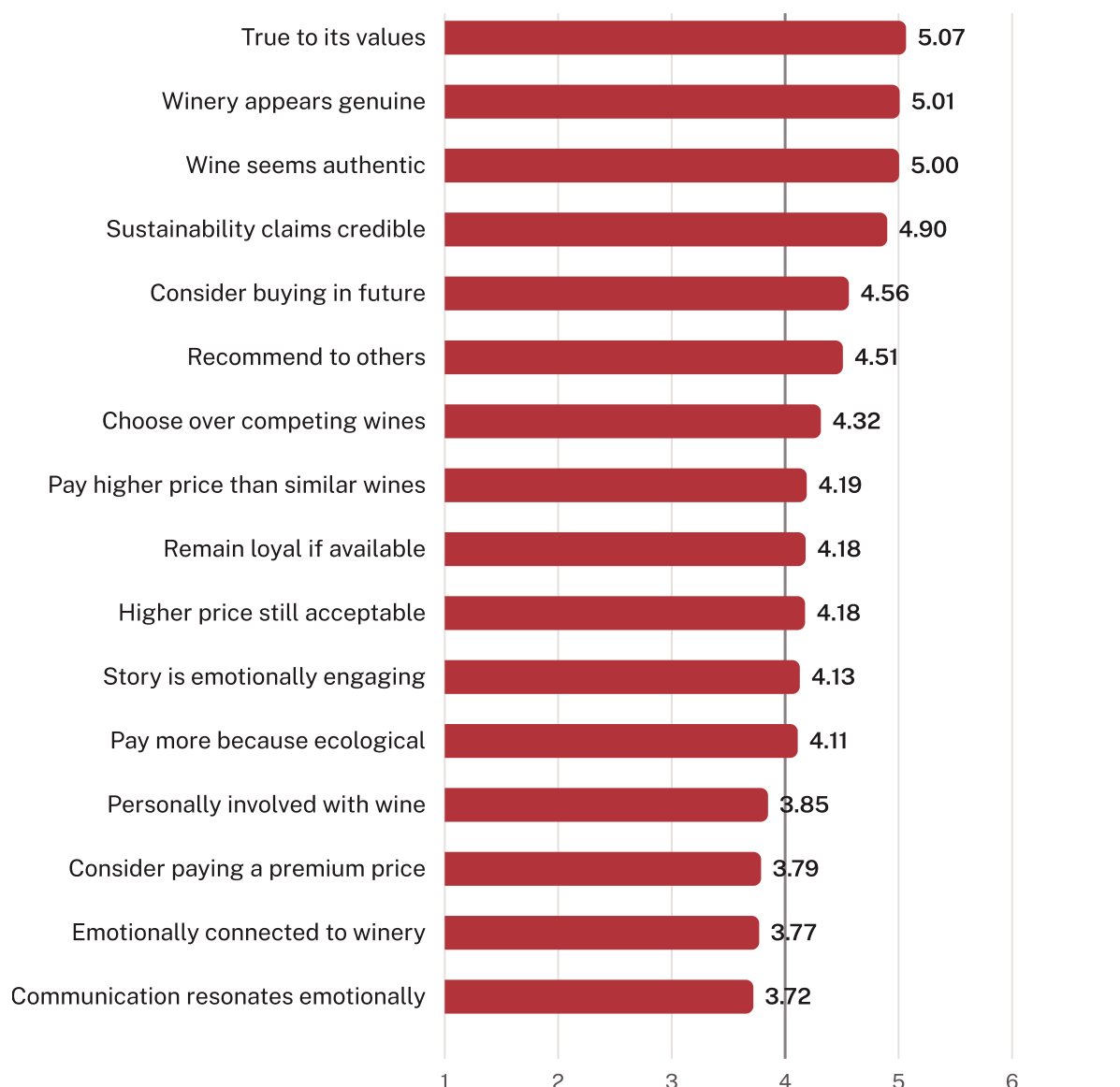
and credibility-oriented. The second layer can offer more emotional and contextual depth for consumers who want to know more. This approach avoids forcing a long narrative onto consumers who are not ready for it, while still giving motivated consumers the richer story they may value.

For consumer-facing communication, this means that the first objective should be to minimise doubt. The story should help consumers answer: Is this claim believable? Is the producer specific? Is the sustainability practice connected to a real place? Is there enough detail for me to see what is being done? Only after these questions are answered should the communication attempt to build stronger emotional involvement. This sequence is less dramatic than a purely inspirational campaign, but it is more consistent with how respondents evaluated the story.

The item-level signals show where the story lands

The strongest individual reactions concern genuineness and values; the weakest concern premium pricing and emotional connection.

ITEM MEANS



Item means on a 1–7 scale, ranked from highest to lowest. Source: STORY4WINE consumer survey (n = 698).

The highest item was “true to its values” (M=5.07), followed by “winery appears genuine” (M=5.01) and “wine seems authentic” (M=5.00). The weakest items were emotional connection (M=3.77), emotional resonance (M=3.72), and considering a premium price (M=3.79).

This is a useful diagnostic. The story establishes basic credibility more easily than it generates deeper affect or price acceptance. Producers should therefore not interpret authenticity scores as evidence that consumers are automatically willing to pay more. Premium willingness requires an additional explanation of why ecological production adds value.

The item ranking is diagnostically valuable because it shows exactly where the story performs well and where it performs less well. The strongest items concern the winery appearing true to its values, genuine, and authentic. These are core credibility signals. The weaker items concern emotional connection, personal involvement, and premium pricing. In other words, consumers are more comfortable judging the winery as sincere than making a stronger personal or financial commitment. This matters because it shows that the barrier is not simply distrust. The barrier is the conversion of trust into felt relevance and willingness to pay.

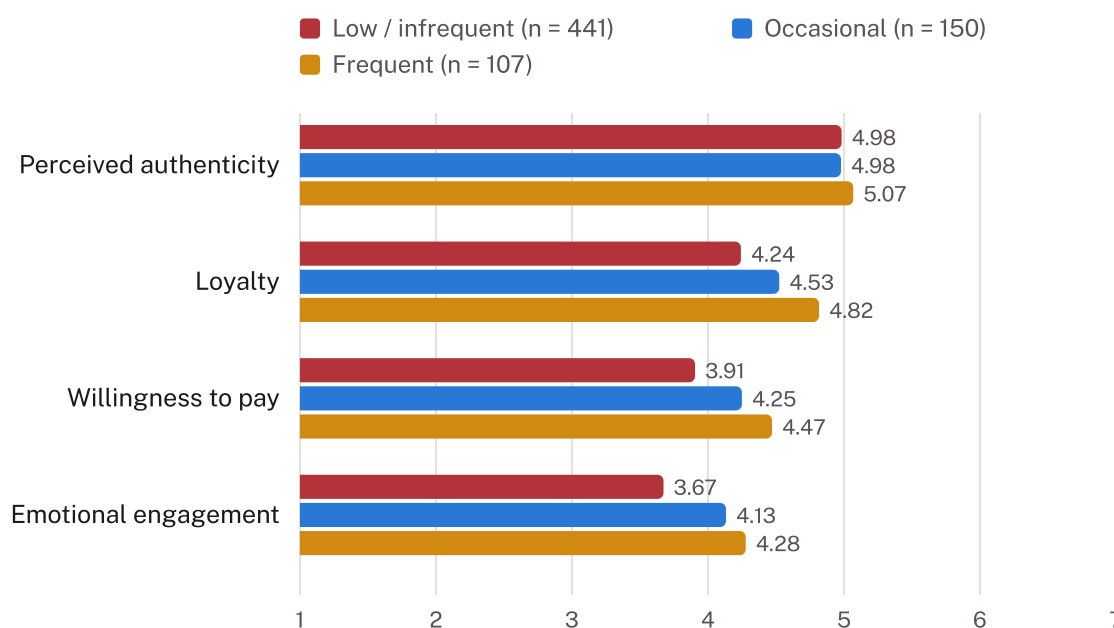
The weakest price-related and emotional items should not be treated as failures of the concept. They are realistic signs of market friction. Paying more for ecological wine requires consumers to see additional value, not just moral virtue. Feeling emotionally connected requires the story to resonate with the consumer's own identity or experiences, not just the producer's intentions. A practical implication is that wineries should test whether their communication explains the consumer benefit clearly enough. Does the story show why ecological production improves quality, preserves a valued landscape, supports local continuity, or offers a more meaningful consumption experience? If not, the story may remain credible but commercially underdeveloped.

The item-level evidence is also useful for editing. If a winery wants to improve its communication, it should not ask only whether the story is beautiful or distinctive. It should examine which consumer reaction the story is supposed to strengthen. A story designed to increase authenticity should contain concrete signals of origin and practice. A story designed to increase emotional engagement should show people, decisions, difficulties, and care. A story designed to support premium pricing should explain what the ecological production changes and why that change has value for the consumer.

Ecological buying history is the clearest audience divider

Consumers who already buy ecological wine often respond more strongly to value outcomes, especially loyalty, WTP, and emotion.

ECOLOGICAL-WINE BUYER GROUPS



Low / infrequent = never or rarely; occasional = occasionally; frequent = often or very often. Source: STORY4WINE consumer survey (n = 698).

Frequent ecological-wine buyers reported stronger willingness to pay ($M=4.47$) and loyalty ($M=4.82$) than low or infrequent ecological buyers (WTP $M=3.91$; loyalty $M=4.24$). The relationship between ecological-wine buying frequency and willingness to pay was positive but modest ($r=0.18$, $p<.001$).

The implication is segmentation, not one-size-fits-all communication. Frequent ecological buyers can handle richer information about ecological practices. Infrequent buyers need a clearer explanation of what ecological wine means in practical terms, why it is credible, and how it differs from conventional alternatives.

Ecological wine purchase frequency is the clearest audience divider in the dataset. Consumers who already buy ecological wine often respond more positively to value-related outcomes, especially willingness to pay, loyalty, and emotional engagement. This is not surprising, but it is highly actionable. Prior behaviour signals readiness. Frequent ecological buyers probably have more category knowledge, stronger environmental interest, or lower scepticism toward ecological claims. They are, therefore, better candidates for richer narratives and more detailed explanations of production philosophy. Less frequent buyers may need a simpler entry point: credibility, taste, availability, and a clear reason to try.

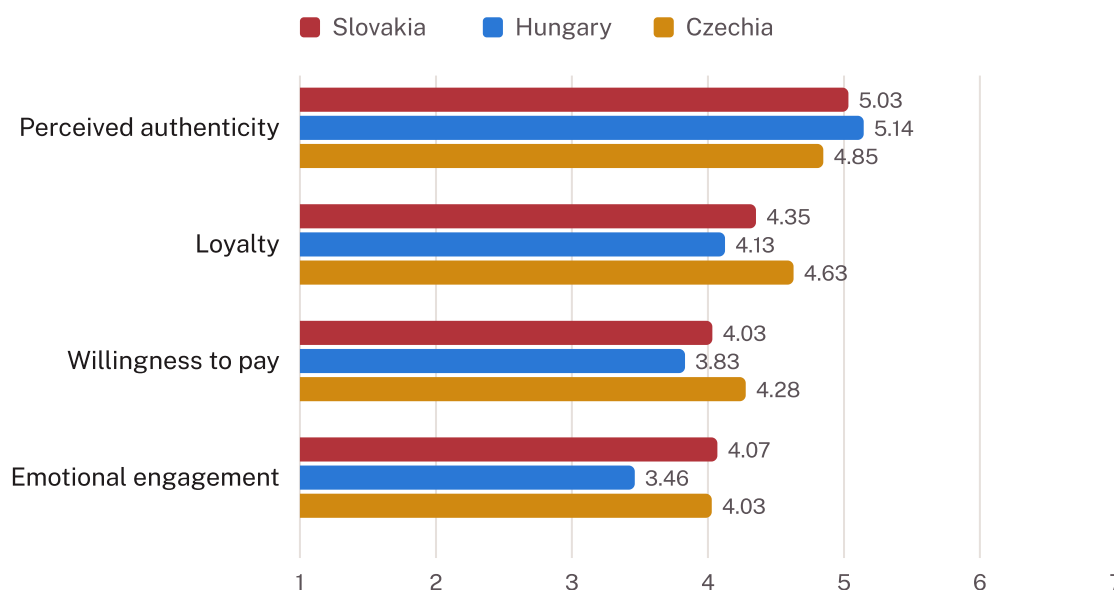
The segmentation implication is that one universal story is unlikely to work equally well for all consumers. A winery speaking to committed ecological buyers can afford to explain biodiversity, soil care, certification, regenerative practices, and long-term stewardship in greater depth. A winery speaking to occasional or rare ecological-wine buyers should begin with lower-barrier messages: what makes the wine genuine, what makes the ecological claim credible, and why the wine is worth choosing today. The evidence, therefore, supports a tiered communication strategy. The same values can be communicated, but the amount of detail, emotional intensity, and practical framing should differ by audience readiness.

The segmentation result should also influence channel choice. Richer ecological stories may work better in settings where consumers have time and motivation to process them: vineyard visits, newsletters, websites, tasting-room conversations, or longer social posts. Short retail environments may require simpler proof points: certification, place, practice, and one clear value proposition. The same winery can use both layers, but it should not expect one short message to carry the entire burden of credibility, emotion, value, and loyalty.

The three markets are not interchangeable

Country-level patterns show that consumer response to ecological wine communication differs across Slovakia, Hungary, and Czechia.

COUNTRY MEANS



Country means on composite scales. Source: STORY4WINE consumer survey (n = 698).

Czech respondents showed the highest willingness to pay ($M=4.28$) and loyalty ($M=4.63$). Hungarian respondents showed the highest perceived authenticity ($M=5.14$) but lower emotional engagement ($M=3.46$). Country effects were statistically significant across all four outcomes, including loyalty ($F=10.24$, $p<.001$) and emotional engagement ($F=12.45$, $p<.001$).

This finding should not be overinterpreted as a cultural explanation without further evidence. The safer conclusion is operational: producers and regional organisations should test and localise message versions. A story that feels authentic in one market may not generate the same emotional or value response elsewhere.

WHAT THE PATTERN SUPPORTS

The data support the claim that the three markets differ in average response levels. This is enough to justify localised communication diagnostics before public rollout.

WHAT THE PATTERN DOES NOT PROVE

The data do not explain why these differences occur. They should not be presented as fixed national traits without additional qualitative or market evidence.

The country-level findings show that Slovakia, Hungary, and Czechia should not be treated as one homogeneous consumer space. The differences are not enormous, but they are large enough to warn against a single regional message. Czech respondents showed comparatively stronger willingness to pay and loyalty,

Hungarian respondents showed comparatively lower emotional engagement, and Slovak respondents sat closer to the middle on several outcomes. These patterns should be interpreted carefully. The dataset does not prove why the countries differ, and the report should not invent cultural explanations. The safe conclusion is that communication should be tested locally.

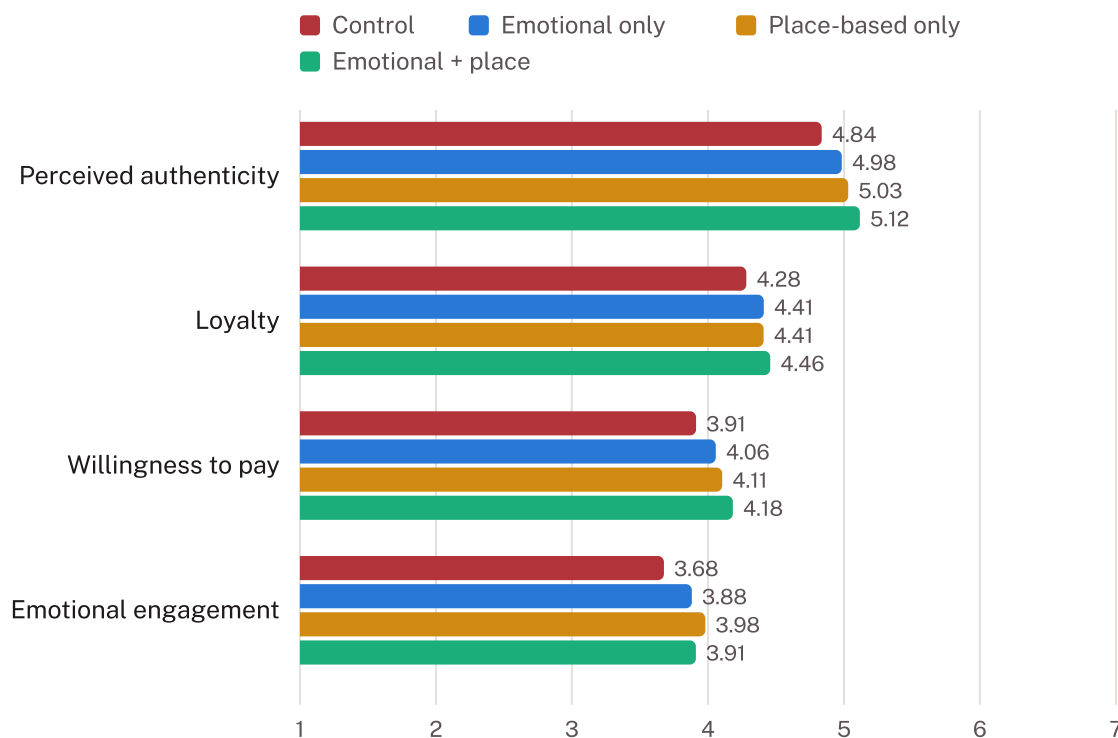
For wineries and regional associations, this means that translation is not enough. A story that works linguistically may still need adaptation in emphasis, proof, and tone. In one market, consumers may need clearer value justification; in another, stronger emotional relevance; in another, more visible credibility cues. Cross-country campaigns should therefore keep the core story stable - ecological practice, place, stewardship, authenticity - while allowing the supporting evidence and language to vary. The project's regional scope is useful because it shows that ecological wine communication in Central Europe requires both shared principles and market-specific calibration.

This also matters for cross-border wine tourism communication. Although tourism was not directly measured, country differences in consumer response imply that regional storytelling should not assume identical expectations across markets. A vineyard route, tasting event, or regional wine campaign should test whether visitors respond more to ecological proof, local heritage, emotional connection, or price-value explanations. Without such testing, cross-country communication risks becoming generic even when the underlying wine stories are rich.

The experiment is directionally useful, but not decisive

The combined emotional and place-based story often scored slightly higher, yet the causal effects were small and not statistically robust.

MESSAGE CONDITIONS



Experimental condition means. Source: STORY4WINE consumer survey (n = 698).

The combined emotional plus place-based condition had the highest perceived authenticity (M=5.12), compared with the control condition (M=4.84). The pattern is directionally sensible, but it should not be inflated. The place cue on authenticity approached conventional significance but did not cross it ($F=3.71$, $p=0.054$).

The dataset does not support a strong causal claim that the two cues reliably increase all outcomes. The better interpretation is that the cues are theoretically well-grounded and directionally promising, but the average treatment effects are modest. Future stimulus work should strengthen cue salience and test whether consumers actually recognise the intended cues.

OUTCOME	MOST RELEVANT CUE TEST	RESULT
Perceived authenticity	Place cue: F=3.71	p=0.054
Willingness to pay	Place cue: F=2.91	p=0.088
Loyalty	Emotional cue: F=0.86	p=0.354
Emotional engagement	Interaction: F=1.55	p=0.214

The experimental condition chart is useful, but it must be read conservatively. The combined emotional and place-based condition often scores slightly higher than the control condition, which is directionally consistent with the project's conceptual logic. However, the statistical tests do not support a strong claim that the manipulated cues reliably caused large improvements across outcomes. This is a crucial point, and it would be misleading to state that adding emotional and place-based cues automatically increases willingness to pay or loyalty. The better interpretation is that the cues are promising design elements, but their effects are modest in this dataset.

This finding may actually strengthen the practical value of the report. It tells wineries that storytelling is not a mechanical formula. Simply adding a place reference or an emotional phrase to a post is unlikely to transform consumer response by itself. The effectiveness of storytelling probably depends on execution quality, prior consumer interest, product credibility, price context, visual presentation, and trust in the producer. The experiment, therefore, supports careful message design and testing rather than blind adoption. A winery should use emotional and place-based cues, but it should also examine whether those cues are specific, credible, and connected to a meaningful consumer benefit.

A sharper version of the experimental implication is this: the presence of a cue is less important than the quality of the cue. A place cue that merely names a region is weaker than a place cue that explains why the landscape matters. An emotional cue that simply says the producer cares is weaker than one that shows a concrete decision or sacrifice. The modest experimental effects may therefore reflect the difficulty of producing strong narrative impact in a brief stimulus, not the irrelevance of storytelling itself.

Value outcomes move together

The correlations show that loyalty, willingness to pay, and emotional engagement are closely connected, but the evidence is associational.

CORRELATION MATRIX

	Perceived authenticity	Loyalty	Willingness to pay	Emotional engagement
Perceived authenticity	1.00	0.51	0.50	0.40
Loyalty	0.51	1.00	0.77	0.73
Willingness to pay	0.50	0.77	1.00	0.68
Emotional engagement	0.40	0.73	0.68	1.00

Pearson correlations among composite outcomes. Source: STORY4WINE consumer survey (n = 698).

Loyalty is strongly associated with emotional engagement (r=0.73) and willingness to pay (r=0.77). Willingness to pay is also strongly associated with emotional engagement (r=0.68). These are not causal estimates, but they indicate that commercial value responses are connected rather than isolated.

The result supports a practical sequence: credibility should be established, engagement should be deepened, and only then should producers expect stronger loyalty or premium willingness. Trying to jump directly from a sustainability claim to a premium price is likely too abrupt for many consumers.

SEQUENCE	COMMUNICATION TASK	CONSUMER RESPONSE SOUGHT
1. Make it believable	Ground the ecological claim in place and production practice.	Perceived authenticity
2. Make it meaningful	Connect the practice to care, stewardship, and people.	Emotional engagement
3. Make it valuable	Explain what the practice changes for quality, land, or scarcity.	Willingness to pay
4. Make it continuous	Keep the story visible after purchase through updates and proof.	Loyalty and recommendation

The correlation matrix shows that the strongest commercial outcomes are interconnected. Loyalty is closely associated with willingness to pay and emotional engagement, while willingness to pay is also closely related to emotional engagement. This means that premium value and loyalty are not isolated responses.

Consumers who feel more emotionally engaged are also more likely to express stronger loyalty and price tolerance. Yet the evidence is correlational, not causal. It does not prove that increasing emotional engagement will automatically increase willingness to pay; it shows that these outcomes move together in the observed responses.

For strategy, the matrix suggests a sensible sequence. Credibility should come first because consumers need a reason to trust the ecological claim. Emotional engagement should follow because it deepens the relationship and makes the story more memorable. Willingness to pay and loyalty are more likely to emerge when credibility and engagement are both present. The report should therefore avoid treating price premium as a direct result of sustainability communication. Premium willingness is a downstream outcome. It requires a story that is credible, emotionally readable, and sufficiently valuable from the consumer's perspective.

The correlation pattern also helps distinguish communication objectives. If the immediate objective is trust, the winery should prioritise authenticity cues. If the objective is repeat purchase or recommendation, the communication needs to go further and strengthen engagement and perceived value. If the objective is premium pricing, the story must make the ecological difference economically meaningful. These objectives are related, but they are not identical. Treating them as identical would lead to a shallow strategy.

What wineries should do with the findings

The report points to a communication system: proof, place, emotion, stewardship, and audience matching.

COMMUNICATION GOAL	WHAT TO COMMUNICATE	WHAT TO AVOID
Build credibility	Use specific vineyard, terroir, production practice, ecological choice, and evidence.	Generic phrases such as “natural”, “responsible”, or “green” without proof.
Create engagement	Show people care, responsibility, and consequences for land and wine.	Pure romance or lifestyle imagery detached from production reality.
Support a premium price	Explain why ecological production changes cost, quality, risk, scarcity, or land stewardship.	Assuming consumers will pay more simply because a wine is ecological.
Strengthen loyalty	Make the story continuous: vineyard updates, seasonal practices, stewardship progress, and transparent communication.	One-off campaign storytelling that disappears after purchase.
Localise markets	Adapt examples and cue emphasis by country and ecological wine-buying maturity.	Using the same message for all consumers and all markets.

The strongest practical recommendation is to design stories as evidence chains. The chain should begin with a claim, attach it to a place, explain the practice, and show why the practice matters. Emotional language should make that chain meaningful, not obscure it. A story that lacks evidence may still be attractive, but it will be vulnerable to scepticism.

The findings also suggest that wineries should treat ecological wine buyers and infrequent ecological buyers differently. Frequent ecological buyers may already understand the category and may value more detail. Less frequent buyers require translation: fewer technical terms, clearer benefits, and more visible proof. This is not about simplifying the truth; it is about making the truth readable.

IMPLEMENTATION SEQUENCE

Start with one core ecological claim, attach it to a specific vineyard practice, explain it in consumer language, and then decide whether the objective is trust, emotional engagement, premium justification, or repeat purchase. One story cannot do all four jobs equally well.

The practical recommendations should be read as a communication discipline rather than a list of campaign ideas. The strongest recommendation is to build every ecological story as an evidence chain. The chain begins with a claim, links the claim to place, explains the practice, shows the producer's stewardship, and then translates the relevance for consumers. This structure helps wineries avoid two common mistakes: vague green language and excessive technical detail. Vague language lacks proof; excessive detail may overwhelm. A useful story sits between these extremes. It provides enough evidence to be credible and enough narrative structure to be memorable.

The report also points to a producer capability issue. Good sustainability storytelling requires more than copywriting. Wineries need to document practices, collect visual evidence, train staff to explain ecological choices, and maintain consistency between labels, websites, tastings, and social media. The story should not change depending on the channel. A consumer who reads a label, visits a vineyard, and speaks to the producer should encounter the same core logic. Consistency is part of authenticity. If the public story is not supported by operational reality, storytelling becomes reputational risk rather than brand value.

Bottom line: make ecological claims inspectable

The major output is credibility through concrete, emotionally readable evidence - not storytelling for its own sake.

The research has a clear and useful contribution. It shows that ecological wine storytelling is not a single communication style. It is a set of mechanisms that allow producers to translate invisible ecological practices into consumer-readable meaning. Place-based authenticity provides the strongest credibility anchor. Emotional and stewardship narratives make the claim human and morally coherent. Translation makes complex ecological practice accessible.

The consumer evidence adds a disciplined warning. Authenticity is easier to activate than willingness to pay or emotional connection. This means wineries should not mistake credibility for conversion. The story must continue beyond "we are genuine" toward "this is why our ecological choices matter for the land, the wine, and your decision."

A strong ecological wine story does not merely say that the wine is sustainable. It shows where the claim comes from, what the producer actually does, why it matters for the vineyard and the wine, and why the consumer can believe it.

The most usable conclusion is that ecological wine storytelling should make sustainability inspectable. Consumers do not need every agronomic detail, but they do need a concrete basis for believing the claim. Place-based cues provide the basis when they are connected to real vineyard conditions. Emotional cues add value when they help consumers understand the human responsibility behind the practice. Stewardship cues strengthen credibility when they show long-term commitment rather than short-term positioning. Together, these elements turn ecological production from a hidden technical attribute into a story consumers can evaluate.

The report, therefore, communicates confidence and restraint at the same time. The research offers a strong framework for understanding how ecological wine stories are built and why they matter. The consumer data show a credible hierarchy of responses and clear segmentation patterns. At the same time, the experimental effects are not strong enough to justify exaggerated claims. The right message for producers is practical: use storytelling, but make it specific; use emotion, but attach it to evidence; use place, but connect it to production; seek loyalty and premium value, but recognise that these outcomes require more than a persuasive paragraph.

Source: This report is based on research performed by the below listed authors.

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