



Consumer Vs Producer Misperception: The Case of French Wine

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors designed the study, collected and analyzed the data. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The study aimed at assessing the similarities and the differences between French wine producers' perception of Belarusian consumers and the actual behavior of Belarusian consumers.

Study design: Questionnaires filled in individually were used to compare consumers and producers' perception. The questionnaire was made up of general questions addressing socio-demographic data, the kind of beverage preferred, the frequency of consumption of wine, the type of wine preferred, the origin of the wine preferred (producer country), the price and the criteria for purchasing wine. The aim was to get to know their profiles, their habits regarding purchasing and consuming alcohol and more specifically wine.

Place and Duration of Study: Consumer survey was undertaken in 2018 in Belarus and producers survey was undertaken in 2019 in France.

Methodology: Subjects were all volunteers. Belarussian consumer subjects were healthy (especially no addiction to alcohol, no food disorders) and adult. French participants were experienced producers or novices separated in two sub-samples. Comparison between answers used t-test and z-test.

Results: Producers have a correct representation of the type of wine sought by Belarussian consumers and of the criteria to select it but misperceive who shop for wine and how it is consumed. In addition, French producers imagine their wine to be preferred while it is this of Moldavia.

Conclusion: This may lead the producers to offer the wrong product for the wrong consumer target

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and contribute to explain why French wines only ranked fourth regarding importation of wine in Belarus while France is the world's leading wine exporter. This also suggests that the teaching program in French wine schools might be adapted.

Keywords: Choice; consumer; market shares; perception; producer; wine.

1. INTRODUCTION

With time, communication in marketing theory has evolved [1-6], and the means of communication in the marketing of a product have increased in importance over the past decades [4-9]. This has a positive effect on purchasing products provided that producers and marketers have the correct knowledge of what make consumers select and buy the products. In a previous study [10], consumers' behavior investigated when purchasing wine emphasized a possible divergence between French wine producers and foreign consumers whilst selecting a wine. By comparative data analyses of Russian, Belarussian and French consumers for shopping wines in Belarus and Russia, the study highlighted fundamental differences that could not be perceived through external observations of consumer behavior. It was confirmed that wine producers looking for criteria in order to adapt packaging when offering their products in shops had to adapt these criteria from one country to another as pointed out by other studies [11,12]. It was concluded that, sometimes, this included certain subtleties that could not be suspected if not emphasized by scientific examination. The study focused on French wine.

The question that arose addressed a possible significant gap between, on one hand, how French wine producers evaluated the wine market abroad and the consumer perception of their wine in the foreign market, and, on the other hand, how consumers, in these countries, actually chose their wine. The hypothesis was H1: "French producers do not know what make foreign consumers choose their wine". Examining H1 is of importance because, if validated, it might highlight weaknesses in French wine marketing and, moreover, suggest a new way to teach future producers in the French wine schools.

An exploratory study was conducted with two groups of French wine producers and one group of Belarussian consumers.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Design

In order to examine the hypothesis H1, questionnaires were used to compare consumers

and producers' perception of two different countries, this of producers (France) and this of consumers (Belarus). These countries were chosen in the prolongation of the aforementioned previous study [10]. The questionnaires were completed individually. For the consumers, sampling combined quota sampling and voluntary sampling methods: quotas of people from each socio-demographic category were contacted to respond to the survey and those who volunteered to respond produced data incorporated into the study. For the producers, participants were contacted at random during a wine show in France bringing together several tens of producers from all over France.

2.1.1 Consumers

Consumers were questioned in Belarus as it was one of the country investigated in the previous study [10]. Due to the results of the study, it was assumed that differences could be found with the perception of French wine producers. A survey ($N_c=135$) was undertaken in order to try to identify the profile of consumers who would prefer wine among several types of alcoholic beverage. The representative sub-sample for wine consumers is called "Pro Vinum" in the following. For the survey, the questionnaire was made up of general questions addressing socio-demographic data, the kind of beverage preferred, the frequency of consumption of wine, the type of wine preferred, the origin of the wine preferred (producer country), the price and the criteria for purchasing wine. The aim was to get to know their profiles, and their habits regarding purchasing and consuming alcohol and more specifically wine. Consumer survey was undertaken in 2018.

2.1.2 Producers

A first survey ($N_{p1}=25$) was undertaken with French experienced wine producers using the same questionnaire than that of the consumer survey. The aim was to get to know their perception of habits of consumers preferring wine to compare it with consumers' perception. A second survey ($N_{p2}=27$) was carried out with French students at a French wine school. They were met as future producers. The aim was to

assess how the producers' perception could change with professional experience when compared with the first survey. The second survey used the same questionnaire as that used for the experienced producers. There are about a hundred schools of this sort in France. Their teaching and training programs being validated by the French ministry of education, we assumed that the results obtained in one school would be representative of what could be obtained in other schools. Producer survey was undertaken in 2019.

2.2 Subjects

Criteria for inclusion of subjects for the Belarussian consumer samples were: healthy (especially no addiction to alcohol, no food disorders) and adult, the native language being Russian (actually spoken by all Belarussians due to the history of the country). Participants sample was compared with Belarussian population. Demographic data for Belarus was found on <https://www.belstat.gov.by> and compared with the survey sample.

Criteria for inclusion of subjects for the French producer sample were only two: producing wine in France and having French as their native language. Subjects for the French future producer sample were all students of a second-year class from a French wine school, meaning that at the end of the school year, they would soon begin their working life. This was done so as to get their perception as this of very new producers.

All subjects, consumers and producers, were volunteers.

2.3 Statistical Analysis

Depending on the questions, some answers were ranked according to the proposed choices

and others were scored on the 5-point Likert scale from -2 to +2. For each question, a mean score was calculated by averaging answers of the subjects to the questions. Similarity of distribution between samples were assessed using a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test or χ^2 test. Significance of difference between percentages was assessed using a z-test. Significance of difference between mean values was assessed using a t-test.

3. RESULTS

3.1 First Consumer Survey

3.1.1 Representativeness

The consumer survey ($N_{c1}=135$) showed good similarity between the consumer sample and the Belarussian population (Table 1). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test gave a coefficient $D=0.11$ for a critical value equal to 0.136 given for a confidence interval of 0.05. As D was smaller than the critical value, the hypothesis of similarity could not be rejected.

3.1.2 Preferences of the whole sample

There was a clear preference for strong alcohol and wine both of which were associated with a similar percentage of subjects (Fig. 1). It should be noted here that the questionnaire related to the preference of type of alcohol and not to the actual consumption of the type of alcohol: national data showed significantly higher consumption of strong alcohols while the consumer sample showed an identical preference for wine and strong alcohols. The proportions being significant, the identification of a sub-sample preferring wine was thus possible.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the consumer sample ($N_c=135$) compared with the national population

Characteristics	Belarussian population (%) (year: 2018)	Whole consumers sample (%) ($N_c=135$)
Male	47	50
Industry/constructions/transport & communications	39	32
Trade	14	20
Education	10	17
Health & social work	7	10
Agriculture	9	13
Others	19	8

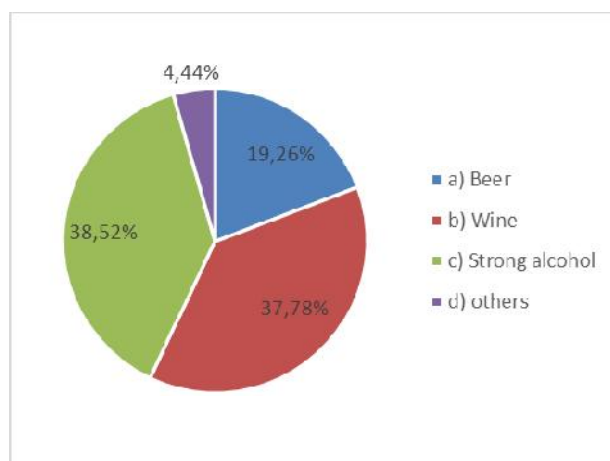


Fig. 1. Preference of alcohol consumptions for the whole Belarussian sample (N_c=135)

3.1.3 Preferences of Pro Vinum sub-sample

The Pro Vinum sub-sample designated participants preferring wine among the proposed choices. They represented 37% of the whole sample. The characteristics showed that the sample was mainly constituted of female participants, suggesting clearly that women generally preferred wine (90% of the sub-sample), the mean age being 35 years old. No particular profession or sector of activity was linked to the sub-sample but the academic level for 72% was that of a Master. The fact that only these criteria could characterize the Pro Vinum sample was similar to the results obtained in studies undertaken elsewhere [13].

Apart criteria to purchase wine (see section 3.1.4), the other characteristics provided by the Pro Vinum sub-sample were very similar to those of the whole sample ($\chi^2(df=10)=0.43$, $p>0.99$). The wine that was most sought-after was from Moldova (33%), Italy (25%) and then France with only 10%; 45% preferred red wine and 39% white wine; they were prepared to spend between 5 and 10€ (51%) or less €5 (33%); 16% accepted to pay 11 to 15€ for a bottle of wine. The frequency of wine consumption was mostly once a week (47%).

3.1.4 Criteria of Pro Vinum sub-sample for purchasing wine

The selection criteria to purchase wine were the producing country (41%) and the price (26%). Similar results were obtained elsewhere in another cultural context, Italian consumers [13].

Fig. 2 compares the criteria for purchasing wine between the whole sample and the Pro Vinum sample. The significance of the difference for

each item is given at the top of the bars on the graph, using a z-test. Only one criterion g) showed significant discrepancy: it is clear that Pro Vinum subjects considered it important to have criteria to choose the wine. Referring to the graph, the criteria associated with choosing wine are mainly the price and the producer country (a and b); these are intrinsic characteristics of the product that cannot be changed.

3.2 Producer Surveys

The sample for the experienced producer survey (N_{p1}=25) gathered professionals (mean age: 36 years old., SD=9), 84% male, with average academic level corresponding to two years after secondary education.

The sample for the future producer survey (N_{p2}=27) gathered students (mean age: 20 yo., SD=1.4), 62% male, most of them from a family working in the wine: only 15% were not in this case.

Both samples presented similar results to the questionnaire ($\chi^2(df=54)=21$, $p>0.45$). According to the French producers, the wine that was most sought-after was from France (72% for experienced and 81% for novices), then Italy (about 25%); the preferred wine was red (about 40%); they thought consumers would be prepared to spend for a bottle of wine between 5 and 10€ (experienced) between 11 and 15€ (33%). They estimated that the frequency of wine consumption was mostly once a day. The consumer profile was thought as a male (for more than 84% of the respondents), between 40-60 years old, with a undergraduate academic level according to experienced producers and master according to novices.

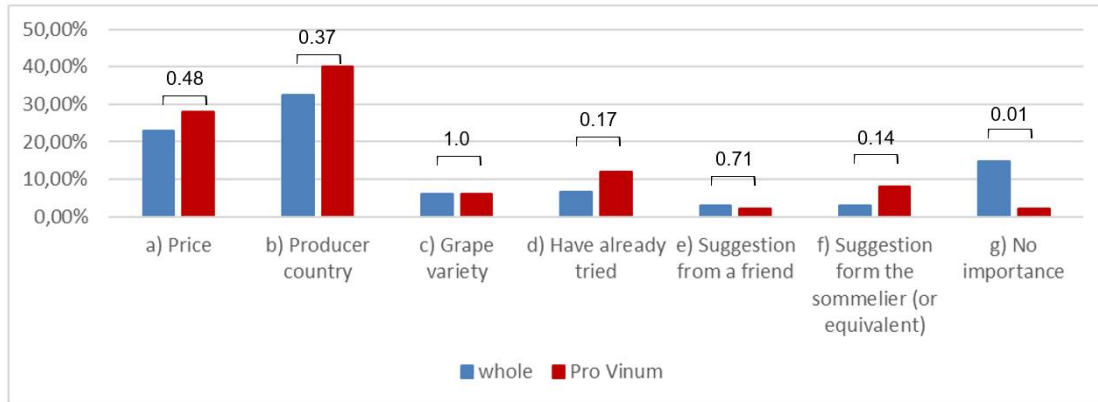


Fig. 2. Percentage of consumers selecting the important criteria for purchasing wine; the significance of the z-test is given at the top of the bars

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Comparing consumers and producers

The points on which there is agreement between the consumers and producers' perception are: the preferred type of wine (red), the main selection criteria (producer and price), and, only for experienced producers ($p=0.18$), the price consumers are ready to pay for a bottle (5-10€) while the future producers overestimate it ($p<0.0001$).

Experienced producers as well as future producers have a significantly erroneous perception of the preference of consumers concerning the provenance of wine: the former clearly imagine a preference for their French wines while the latter prefer the wines of Moldova ($p<0.0001$), the western European wine coming first being that of Italy.

Likewise, the perception that experienced producers and future producers have of the profile of Pro Vinum is erroneous: the Pro Vinum sample is 90% women, around 35 years old, while producers expect men about 40-60 years old. Regarding the academic level of Pro Vinum (Master), if the future producers are well positioned, on the contrary the producers think that the Pro Vinum are undergraduate.

Regarding the consumption frequency of the Pro Vinum, the future producers as well as the producers overestimate it at once a day while it is once a week ($p<0.001$). This may be due to the fact that, in the culture of French producers, wine is the daily drink par excellence.

These results show that the experienced producers as well as the future producers have a

correct representation of the type of wine sought by Belarusian consumers (red), the criteria to select it (price and origin) and the price ready to pay for a bottle of wine. However, this is not enough to know which product may gain market shares, especially when other important criteria are misperceived: producers have a significant erroneous representation of who shop for wine and how it is consumed. When combined to the fact that French producers imagine their wine to be preferred while it is this of Moldavia (quite different), this may lead the producers to offer the wrong product for the wrong consumer target.

Moreover, the results suggest that the teaching program in French wine schools must be adapted concerning the way producers have to take into account and consider foreign cultures for exportation even though they may present similarities with this of the producers. This teaching perspective is of importance knowing what exportation represents for the French wine 36% (source: <https://interven.fr>, website of the national center of wine inter-professions).

The fact that (future) producers assume that French wine is preferred by Belarussian consumers is an essential weak point because it does not encourage (future) producers to make an effort to find what would allow them to capture Pro Vinum consumers. In addition, the overestimation of the price that consumers are willing to spend for a bottle of wine might lead future producers to offer overpriced products on the market. Therefore, it might reduce the likelihood of interest to consumers. As a conclusion, perhaps might it be interesting to teach these findings to future producers and thus to adapt the content of their academic program addressing these points.

4.2 A Lever in Perspective

The results show that the criteria to choose wine are mainly the price and the producer country (a and b, Figure 2); these are intrinsic characteristics of the product that cannot be changed. However, if the consumer had to choose without anyone else's help, i.e. criteria d-e-f removed from consideration, an interesting criterion not investigated in the present study is the bottle packaging, i.e. the shape of the bottle and the tag. The importance of packaging for wine has already been emphasized [14]. According to results of a previous study [10], the probability that Belarussian consumers actually do care about the packaging of the bottle of alcohol they purchase is high. This may be a research perspective: characterizing the packaging criteria (the bottle and tag designs) making consumers choosing a wine.

4.2 Limitations

At least three imitations are identified.

The first one addresses the representativeness of the future producer survey. It was carried out with French students at one French wine school, assuming that the results obtained in one school would be representative of what could be obtained in other schools. This was assumed on the basis that the teaching and training programs was validated at the national level by the French ministry of education, thus being the same in all schools. However, this assumption was not scientifically verified, i.e. provided by results obtained from other schools.

The second one addresses the experienced producer sample who gathered producers from different regions of France, i.e. producers producing different types of wines from one region to the other. This factor might have an influence that was not taken into account in the study.

The third one relates to the exploratory character of the present study. This means that the study was a small-scale preliminary study conducted to evaluate feasibility, duration, cost, prior to a larger scale study. Hence, the number of subjects was limited, and the generalization of the results must be done with caution.

5. CONCLUSION

The exploratory study aimed at assessing the similarities and the differences between French

wine producers' perception of Belarussian consumers' behavior and the actual behavior of Belarussian consumers. The study was motivated by contributing to explore a hypothesis based on the results of a previous study [10]. The hypothesis was H1: "French producers do not know what make foreign consumers choose their wine".

The results of the present study have partly validated H1 and provided a refined comprehension of the situation.

It appears that the experienced and future producers have a correct representation of the type of wine sought by Belarussian consumers, a correct perception of the criteria to select it (price and origin) and experienced producers have a correct assessment of the price Belarussian consumers are ready to pay for a bottle of wine. But other important criteria are misperceived: producers have a significant erroneous representation of who shop for wine and how it is consumed. When combined to the fact that French producers imagine their wine to be preferred while it is this of Moldavia (quite different wines than these from France) and this of Italia when from West Europe, this may lead the producers to offer the wrong product for the wrong consumer target.

The results may contribute to explain why French wines only ranked fourth regarding importation of wine in Belarus while France is the world's leading wine exporter (in volume); this may also contribute to explain why importation of French wine is about 16% less than Spanish wine and 20% less than Italian wine (source: <https://www.belstat.gov.by>).

Moreover, the results suggest that the teaching program in French wine schools must be adapted concerning the way producers have to consider foreign cultures for exportation which represents 36% for the overall French wine production.

As a research perspective, characterizing the packaging criteria (the bottle and tag designs) making Belarussian consumers choosing a wine may help producers to gain market shares.

DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and

producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study received ethical approval of the Ethics Committee of the Dept. of Social Psychology (LSE, London, UK), Code of Approval: DSP/RS/PFA-3, and has therefore been performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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