What types of risks do French consumers perceive when purchasing wine? An exploratory study

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to gain a better understanding of consumers' risk perception when purchasing wine and to identify which strategies they follow to reduce them. A qualitative study has been carried out through individual interviews of 90 respondents, between 20 and over 70 years, that covers wine purchasing habits, criteria of choice when purchasing wine, labels and risks associated with wine purchasing and drinking. The results of the study are somehow surprising as they reveal that short or long-term physical risk is not perceived as a major risk by consumers. On the contrary, the financial, taste performance-related, self-esteem and psychosocial risks do impact the consumers’ purchasing actions. The most significant implication of this research work focuses on the necessary implementation of greater proximity with consumers.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific Committee of 5AEC2014.

Keywords: consumer behavior; risk perception; risk reduction; wine studies; Proximity

1. Introduction

Since the 1950s, French governments have been implementing actions seeking to prevent alcoholism by raising awareness about the potential health hazards caused by the consumption of alcohol, and particularly that of wine. In spite of those efforts, alcohol remains a major public health problem causing 49000 deaths a year. In 2010, the number of French consumers at risk (addicts or not) amounted to 3.8 million within the 18/75 age group. Although the negative health effects of alcohol have long been clearly shown and explained, French consumers still see wine
drinking or “wine tasting as a way to stimulate one's senses, as a source of pleasure, and even more” (Aron, 1999). In this context, it seems necessary to have a clearer idea of the kind of risks consumers associate with wine purchasing and drinking. What is the exact nature of those risks? Do they impact consumers’ eating habits? Through which decisions and actions will consumers attempt to reduce those risks? Building upon the existing work concerning risk perception when buying food products (Mitchell, 1998; Muraro-Cochart, 2000; 2003; Yeung et Morris, 2001; Pichon, 2006, 2012, Bories and al., 2014), the objective of this research work is to highlight the main issues that fall within the study of consumers' risk perception and to identify which strategies they follow to reduce them. This work aims at gaining a better understanding of consumers' concerns and behaviors when purchasing wine. It also pinpoints existing weaknesses, if any, in consumer relations. After a first part dedicated to a brief review of the literature on food hazards and risk mitigating factors, the methodology used to carry out the study will then be presented. In the third part, the results achieved will be described and discussed. The conclusion will focus on the limitations of this work as well as on the avenues for future research and will suggest recommendations in terms of management strategies.

2. Theoretical background

Food related concerns are not a recent phenomenon. Chiva (1998) recalled that “man has always had to envisage food eating as being hazardous”. Apfelbaum (1998) wrote that “food hazards are never null and are difficult to quantify”. A number of researchers often refer to the incorporation principle to account for this permanent risk-taking condition (Corbeau, in Corbeau and Poulain, 2002). Antoine (1997, quoted by Marouseau, 2001) described the future consumer trends and thought that “if the new consumer may well be a myth, the fearful consumer is a reality”. The concept of risk is everywhere in food marketing and many researchers have attempted to categorize the different types of risks (Kapferer, 1998; Guillon, 1998; Brunel, 2002). According to Brunel (2002), risk is multidimensional and includes the performance, the financial, the short term and long term risk, the psychosocial risks (fear to put on weight, self-esteem), the societal risk (socio-economic and ecological consequences of product consumption). The physical or health risk is the most important food-related risk (Müller, 1985; Kapferer, 1998; Dandouau, 1999; Brunel, 2000; Poulain, 2002; Gallen and Cases, 2003; Muraro-Cochart, 2003; Pichon, 2006 and 2012). It is not easy, however to quantify it (Khan, 1998). Food risk is indeed less than thirty years ago (Apfelbaum,1998; Duby, 1998 ; Gurviez and al., 2003). For all that, authors point out that risk perception has changed and has intensified over the years. Our work first intends to provide an insight into the concept of risk perception associated with wine drinking in order to identify the changes that may have been induced by prevention campaigns against alcohol-related health issues. Since consumers perceive risks, they must try to limit them especially when they intend to purchase a product or a service. The search for information is one of the means to alleviate the perceived risk (Dowling and Staelin, 1994; Volle, 1995). Locander and Hermann (1979) suggest to categorize risk reducing strategies according to the source of information. They distinguish four different sets of sources:

- Impersonal sources motivated by interest (TV and radio commercials, ads and POS advertising),
- Impersonal independent sources (product specifications, consumer’s associations, etc.)
- Personal sources motivated by self-interest (shop assistant’s or producer’s advice), personal independent sources (friends, family, next of kin)
- Sources resulting from observation and direct experience (testing or tasting a product before buy, information on the packaging or demo). “Badges of quality” such as collective brands, quality labels are part of the numerous initiatives undertaken by the French authorities to curb the consumers’ fear when choosing food (Perronty and d’Hauteville, 2000). They are considered as risk framing approaches (Sirieix, 1999; Gurviez, 2001) and as differentiation sources on highly competitive markets.

This work also aims at looking into the signs of quality (e.g. quality labels) as perceived by the consumers and into the consumer’s behavior around wine and wine-drinking.
3. Methodology

A qualitative study has been carried out through individual interviews of 90 respondents between 20 and over 70 years. The distribution of interviewees function of sex and age group is shown in table 1 below. The interviewer’s guide book dealt with the following themes:

- Theme 1: Wine purchasing habits (type of wine, when, who for ? ...)
- Theme 2: Criteria of choice when purchasing wine
- Theme 3 :Labels
- Theme 4 :Risks associated with wine purchasing and drinking

Table 1. Respondents distribution according to sex and age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-24 years old</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29 years old</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39 years old</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44 years old</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49 years old</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54 years old</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59 years old</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64 years old</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69 years old</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 70 years old</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to encourage discourse production, stimuli have been indicated in the guide book : they are presented in the annex of the article. An average of one-hour interviews were made possible by the tool selected for collecting data. Data collecting took place between October 2013 and December 2013. The corpus collected through the qualitative study was analyzed with the Alceste software.

3.1 ALCESTE and the processing of collected data

ALCESTE is an analysis software program for text-based information designed by the French school of text-bases information analysis. Overall, there are two methods for data representation, the factor-based methods and the classification methods, which aim at describing contingency or attendance/presence tables.

These tables, for example, will match up the answers given to a question with the words used. In that case, the objective is to calculate the distances between the various answers or individuals function of the vocabulary distribution. The representation of the tables will thus be either factor-based or hierarchical. In the factor-based case, the factors summing up the whole information are extracted, then the associations between the table lines and columns are represented as a graph. The factor-based analysis of single and multiple linkages can be said to belong to this type of method.

The classification case will focus more on hierarchical methods, whose two types are the bottom-up and the top-down methods. The bottom-up classification will use a classification tree to represent the distances existing between the words in a given text, starting with calculating the distances between the words and then, aggregating the two closest words. This pair will form a new dot likely to be aggregated, next, distances between the dots are calculated and the same process is carried out until a final dot is reached. The number of classes is then selected by defining a cut-off in the classification tree. The classes thus defined are classes of words bearing some closeness within the text.

ALCESTE Uses the top-down classification method, which means that text units (context-related units) are classified, and not individual words. Briefly, it is an iterative approach starting with the first class which contains all the text units. This class will then be partitioned in two sub-classes in which the vocabulary categories will be as different as possible. Next, at each calculation phase, the largest remaining class will be partitioned in two sub-
classes and so on, until reaching a given number of classes previously predefined. The classes thus obtained are text unit classes displaying a rather close vocabulary distribution, even though those classes have been discriminated through contrasted vocabulary. ALCESTE uses statistical methods such as lexical and distributional statistics. Lexical statistics compares texts by calculating how often words appear. Lexicometry consists in calculating these frequencies as well as spotting and adding up co-occurrences.1 Distributional statistics consists in defining, in a given text, the typology of French language used, looking at the syntax and the way some categories of words are used, such as pronouns, articles, etc. Jean-Paul Benzékri (1981) was the first one, followed by Max Reinert (1990) to use the units and methods of distributional statistics to find out how the text authors refer to the theme of the texts, not from the point of view of style, but of contents. ALCESTE (Analyzing Co-occurrent Lexems in a Set of Text Segments) can be defined through three approaches:

- A lexical approach relying on lexical statistics and lexicometry;
- A content analysis approach, which consists in dividing the text into context;
- A data analysis approach to classify the context units2.

The data collected have been analyzed by ALCESTE. Table 2 provides a synthetic view of the data used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Data used by Alceste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of extra words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classified text units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance index (IP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of distinct words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus size</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Results

ALCESTE first divided the corpus into small text units before launching a single classification. 69% of the text units of the corpus were classified (Relevance index) and 31% were excluded from the analysis. The classified units have been distributed into 6 groups or classes of characteristic statements. This classification first provides a synthesis of the main themes dealt with by respondents in the qualitative study.

- **Class 1** represents 13% of the classified text units (9% of the initial corpus). It synthetizes the respondents’ discourse concerning the physical risks that might be entailed by alcohol consumption. It is characterized by words like danger, drinking, glass, day, reasoning, alcohol.
- **Class 2** is very different and accounts for 28% of the classified text units (19% of the initial corpus). It regroups the respondents’ discourse concerning the official signs of quality with words like label, organic, agriculture, competition, product.
- **Class 3** represents 18% of the classified text units (13% of the initial corpus). This class deals with the theme of labels with characteristic words like label, Emilion, saint, Bordeaux, bottle.
- **Class 4** represents 22% of the classified text units (16% of the initial corpus). It synthetizes the interviewees’ discourse concerning taste-related performance risk as perceived by the respondents with words like fear, taste, disappointed, to invite, friend, price.
- **Class 5**, which represents 11% of the classified text units (7% of the initial corpus), regroups the respondents’ discourse concerning what they expect from the various players of the wine sector, more particularly, from wine merchants. The main words are wine merchant, surface, advice.

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1 Two words are said to be co-occurent when appearing simultaneously in several text units, whatever their respective place in these text units.
2 context unit: any text segment likely to act as an aid for the study of co-occurrences.
• Class 6 represents 7% of the classified text units (6% of the initial corpus) and describes the respondents’ behavior about wine purchasing on the Internet with characteristic words like Internet, purchase, situation, ideal, to think it over.

After this overall presentation of the various themes dealt with by the people interviewed during the qualitative study, their discourse will now be detailed and studied.

Respondents all agree that drinking wine is not detrimental to one’s health. « It’s not dangerous, it’s even good for your health. If you drink too much, of course, it’s dangerous, just like if you eat too much foie gras. Drinking too much is a matter of people, above all some of them have no limits. ”(Text Unit n° 279, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 3, Woman, over 70 yrs). Drinking wine may even be considered as good for one’s health: « ...drinking a little wine is good for your health. I mean drinking. I don’t know, twice or three times, twice a week would you say it is dangerous to your health? » (Text Unit n° 2490, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 30, Woman, 60 to 64 yrs).

Provided you don’t exaggerate: « it’s the same for everything, you mustn’t take too much of it. But it’s fun, it’s friendly, I think it’s part of a good meal, part of some good moments but it’s not dangerous. You just have to be reasonable » (Text Unit n° 3597, Individual n° 44, Woman, 30 to 34 yrs) and you drink reasonably: « ... my grandfather used to say you should drink I liter a day...yes, that’s a bit too much... I drink a glass of wine with my meal when there’s only the family, and when we have guests, we have a bottle for 4 » (Text Unit n° 3909, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 48, Woman, 60 to 64 yrs).

All the same, the limit between reasonable and exaggerated drinking remains vague: « ... When you drink more than one liter a day, yes, that’s dangerous. Even with 5 or 6 glasses ; but 3 glasses are all right. Beyond 5 glasses, things are getting bad! » (Text Unit n° 1529, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 18, Man , 25 to 29 yrs).

Drinking may be justified by calling for more or less precise evidence: « it’s always been more or less “proved” that you need a little wine every day. The older generations used to drink wine even at breakfast. That doesn’t mean you should drink wine all day long, but if you only do it from time to time, not too much, it’s ok if you know what you’re drinking » (Text Unit n° 1956, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 24, Woman, 40 to 44 yrs).

What people mostly fear is being unable to drive after drinking wine: « I’d only fear drinking too much and not being able to drive back but I can limit myself, I know when to stop before being sick » (Text unit n° 5904, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 71, Woman, Over 70 yrs).

When interviewed about the official signs of quality, respondents declare they know them, but display very little knowledge of their characteristics: « the AOC label, yes, it’s been there for long and it’s very important. “Traditional speciality guaranteed”, I don’t know that but I think it must be a label for good products. A benchmark, I know it, it’s a Leclerc brand, so, I often buy it, but not necessarily when I buy wine but I think it must be a guarantee of quality» (Text Unit n° 174, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 2, Woman, Over 70 yrs). Obviously, the respondent here cannot tell the difference between the official signs of quality and a store brand like Leclerc.

On the whole, respondents seem to find it difficult to have a clear idea of the differences existing between all the official signs of quality « ...protected designations of origin and protected geographical indications, traditional speciality guaranteed...I can’t really tell the difference between the three except that their logo looks the same » (Text Unit n° 6151, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 75, Woman, 40 to 44 yrs).

Even if the respondents state that they are familiar with the AB label, they sound quite suspicious: « ... the Spanish wine crossing the border and which used to be put in bottles, I can’t remember all the stories, anyway wherever there’s money around, you cannot really trust labels. With the AB label, normally it means that’s it’s really organic, that the food you eat is really organic, but I’m not sure, not all the time, definitely not » (Text Unit n° 3678, Phi = 0.01, Individual n° 45, Woman, 45 to 49 yrs).

Referring to the principle of homeostasis (Brunel, 2002), respondents express doubts about the possible effect of organic products on one’s health: « ... which is not organic, in the end your wine will contain the same chemicals, there’ll be less but there’ll be the same chemicals as the other wine. So, anyway, being organic is for sure a bit better, but, at the same time, if you don’t drink liters and liters of wine, I don’t really think it changes something for your health » (Text Unit n° 2635, Phi = 0.01, Individual n° 32, Women, 30 to 34 yrs).

One of the weaknesses of the AB label is that it does not provide any solution to the taste performance-related risk mentioned in the interviews as it is not a guarantee that the wine will taste good: « ... Actually, organic agriculture means that the wine has been produced along organic norms, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that’s it’s good, it just means that it’s been produced in a certain way» (Text Unit n° 3229, Phi = 0.01, Individual n° 40,
When asked about labels, they insist on their aesthetic look by contrasting modern labels to more traditional ones (Benedetto and Gianluca, 2005): «... yeah, the ..., traditional labels. They want to reassure everybody, so in that case I'd be suspicious about the wine. Then, «château» ... with bits of pink and purple there, quite fun, modern, yes, good» (Text Unit n° 7041, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 86, Woman, 40 to 44 yrs). Originality is important: «it's always a bit repetitive, there, for example, the grenache is more original, there's also the château ..., so the label is better. For most wines, the presentation lacks originality. Always the same type of gothic writing and that's it» (Text Unit n° 7246, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 88, Man, 50 to 54 yrs).

The financial risk is a significant element when choosing wine: «... In all cases, I am always afraid of being cheated when it comes to prices» (Text Unit n° 4815, Phi = 0.01, Individual n° 57, Man, Over 70 yrs). Price is seen as an indicator of quality for the product: «If the price of the bottle was a bit high and the wine not excellent, I am disappointed. But, if the wine is not really good but cheap, I just think, too bad for me, I should have paid more» (Text Unit n° 2892, Phi = 0.01, Individual n°35, Woman, 55 to 59 yrs). Each interviewee mentions a psychological price: «... over three Euros, three Euros fifty for some table wine here you can get some good wines, I'd say decent wines» (Text Unit n° 4911, Phi = 0.01, Individual n° 59, Woman, 45 to 49 yrs).

Beside the financial risk, the taste performance-related risk is paramount for the respondents: «...I always buy the same. I do need to taste wine, that's the way I do. If it suits me, I don't really know why, and the price is all right and I like the taste, then to know about the grape variety, well, that's the thing, if I choose this wine, it is that I like it and I like the grape variety» (Text Unit n° 2433, Phi = 0.01, Individual n° 30, Woman, 60 to 64 yrs)

Tasting is important when choosing some wine: «... sometimes, I buy three, four bottles, I taste them and those I like, I then go and buy three cases» (Text Unit n° 4866, Phi = 0.01, Individual n° 58, Man, 45 to 49 yrs).

The self-esteem psychosocial risk is significant in the case of wine bought for guests: «... If I have some guests, I want them to enjoy good products ... It's always nice to serve good products. When you invite someone, you always try to spoil them a little and it's also a matter of pride ...» (Text Unit n°117, Phi = 0.01, Individual n° 2, Woman,Over 70 yrs). The same risk is experience when a guest: «... if I bring some wine which is not good...if the wine is poor and doesn't go with the meat, if it's corked and just not good once open » (Text Unit n°5331, Phi = 0.01, Individual n° 63, Woman, 30 to 34 yrs). One way to reduce the risk is to try the wine beforehand: «... the day when we have a meal with friends, we like to open the bottles we know are good, then, you can also open the bottle before their arrival and taste it » (Text Unit n°5632, Phi = 0.01, Individual n° 66, Man, 30to 34yrs).

The respondents explain that they very rarely buy wine from wine growers. They prefer supermarkets and, less often, wine merchants. «... I go sometimes when I know the wine grower, but, otherwise, most of the time, I go to supermarkets for everyday wine and, on some special occasions, I may be going to a wine merchant, but it's not often » (Text Unit n° 6572, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 81, Man, 50 to 54 yrs).

They interviewees do not trust sales assistants in supermarkets, quite the contrary with wine merchants, whom they usually trust: «... the approach is not the same, when going to a supermarket, it's different, I rely more on my intuition rather than trust the marketing/sales assistant whose job is to sell me some wine. I'd rather trust the wine merchant or the wine producer's, in places where you can taste the wine » (Text Unit n°6522, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 79, Man, 50 to 54 yrs).

Thus, the wine merchant's advice plays a major role: «... I go to the wine merchant when I can't find what I want in the supermarket. I go straight to the wine merchant where I usually find what I am looking for. They have a wide range of choice and, in general I find what I want. If I have no idea, the wine merchant will help me and advise » (Text Unit n°6924, Phi = 0.02, Individual n°86, Woman, 40 to 44 yrs). Their expertise is acknowledged: « ... I think that wine merchants do know a lot and that they will be able to give a much better advice than in a supermarket or anywhere else » (Text Unit n°2550, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 31, Man, 25 to 29 yrs). The interviewees see them as being able to guarantee satisfaction: «... If I go to a wine merchant, it’s because I want to be satisfied, listen to his advice about what I’m asking, from what I tell him I need precisely» (Text Unit e n°4730, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 57, Man, Over 70 yrs).

The wine merchant’s advice makes the difference between chain stores/supermarkets and specialized shops: «... At Carrefour, they have a good choice ... What I like about supermarkets is the choice and the quantity. I go to «Nicolas », for the assistant’s advice» (Text Uni n°6950, Phi = 0.02, Individual n° 86, Woman, 40 to 44 yrs).

Besides, the quality of supermarket products is seen as questionable: «...you get some advice and I think that the wine is often better quality at a wine merchant or, if you want to go to a supermarket, you should know what you want to buy and find the same wine producers, the same grape varieties and there, pffff, I have been duped quite a
few times » (Text Unit n°6845, Phi = 0.01, Individual n°85, Man, 55 to 59 yrs).

**Proximity**, under almost all its forms (Bergadaà and Del Bucchia, 2009), **is a strong element of the consumers’ choice. Nearby access** is mentioned: « ... I used to buy from the wine grower but no longer so because that wine grower was in the Médoc and I no longer have the opportunity to go to Bordeaux » (Text Unit n°7285, Phi = 0.01, Individual n°89, Men, 40 to 44 yrs)

The respondents are also looking for **human closeness**, particularly with wine merchants: « ... I talk with the sales assistant, I need to talk, it’s an opportunity to talk about wine. Besides, it’s always friendly and, enjoyable » (Text Unit n°6192, Phi = 0.01, Individual n°76, Man, 40 to 44 yrs).

The **wine processing proximity** is also a determining factor in the choice of wine: « ... wine growers produce their own wine. I’d rather use this kind of distribution channel than go through chain distributors. You know how it is made » (Text Unit n°7200, Phi = 0.01, Individual n°88, Man, 50 to 54 yrs).

Similarly, **closeness through identification** plays a part in the choice of wine: « ... as I was telling then, I don’t know much about wine. I first look for products from the South-West, and see if there are some particularly from Gaillac in the supermarket where I usually go ...because I’m pretty sure I’ll get something good. Besides, I live nearby, so I feel it’s a good thing to consume the food or wine from your region » (Text Unit n°20, Phi = 0.01, Individual n°1, Woman, 55 to 59 yrs).

As for buying wine on the Internet, the interviewees do not sound convinced yet: «... I am against buying wine on the Internet, I’d rather see the product, I prefer buying from a shop » (Text Unit n°5527, Phi = 0.02, Individual n°65, Woman, 45 to 49 yrs). Beyond not being able to touch or see the bottle, they see delivery dates as a major problem: « I like taking the bottle with me, then, when you order on the Internet, you’ve got the delivery dates. Delivery, of course, is much slower than when you buy from a shop» (Text Uni n°3003, Phi = 0.02, Individual n°37, Woman, 40 to 44 yrs).

The latter element may be related to **the time-waste risk** often mentioned by the interviewees: « ... I don’t really like wasting my time going shopping, when it’s quick it’s perfect, I know exactly what I want before leaving, I buy it and I’m back » (Text Unit n°4393, Phi = 0.02, Individual n°54, Woman, 55 to 59 yrs).

Following the detailed account of the results of the research, we will now discuss them in the light of previous research work.

5. Discussion

First of all, the results of the study are somehow surprising as they reveal that short or long-term physical risk is not perceived as a major risk by consumers. They resort to the principle of homeostasis to justify that the level of consumption complies with a standard under which wine consumption is meant to have no detrimental impact on one’s health.

On the contrary, the financial, taste performance-related, self-esteem and psychosocial risks do impact the consumers’ purchasing actions.

There is an obvious discrepancy between our actual results and those that could have been expected. Even when stimulating the respondents, their discourse remains neutral and almost distrustful of labels whose names they know but whose contents they ignore. Thus, the official signs of quality do not appear to be playing a part in reducing risks. Consumers seem to ignore these institutional risk-mitigating measures and rely on « DIY » strategies such as proximity, interpersonal trust or simply relying on sensory indicators such as taste.

The results of the research work particularly highlight the fact that **proximity** (Bergadaà and Del Bucchia, 2009), under all its forms, (access, relationship, identification, processing, functional proximity) plays a major part in reassuring consumers about/in their choice (Damperat, 2006 ; Hérault-Fournier and al., 2012, 2014).

This can be accounted for by the emergence of products resulting from industrialized production and food processing which have no identity. (Poulain, 2002). The perception of the complexity of the agri-food sector and the emergence of new food technologies (Kreziak, 2000) have increased the distance between food and consumers. It’s a far cry from when food used to be clearly and emotionally identified, when eaters used to know personally and intimately those who had cooked what had been served in their plates: the aunt’s preserved foodstuffs, garden salads, etc. (Poulain, 1996). In the new context, consumers need to re-create proximity. As they can no longer feel close to the products, they are looking for closer interpersonal relationships they manage to build with wine merchants or wine producers whom they trust.
6. Limitations and avenues for future research

One of the major limitations of this research work lies in the interviews of variable quality. It would have been necessary to go deeper into the topics. And yet, it must be noted that their high number (90), quite rare in exploratory qualitative studies, is definitely an asset and so is the sampling distribution, composed of a population of varied age, sex and social status, instead of the usual student respondents.

One of the avenues for future research would consist in carrying out a quantitative study that would test the various hypotheses to be built from this qualitative study, and, more particularly, the hypothesis considering any proximity between consumers and regional wines, wine producers, wine merchants as a positive contribution to having a positive impact on consumers' trust.

The follow-up work would focus on interviewing a large and representative sample so as to verify the avenues opened by this study: weakness of perceived risks, favouring human reassurance (self, wine merchants…) rather than institutional safeguards (labels and others) and looking for proximity.

7. Theoretical and managerial implications

The first contribution of this research work consists in stressing the necessity to carry on with prevention measures concerning the physical risks entailed by alcohol consumption. Obviously, in spite of the awareness-raising campaigns about the dangers of alcohol and of the fight against alcoholism, consumers seem to be still thinking that « it’s the neighbour who drinks too much wine » and that their own consumption is quite safe. The way forward is that led by the advertising campaign implemented by the « Institut National de Prévention et d’Education pour la Santé » (Nation Institute for Prevention and Health) whose main message is “Drinking a little too much everyday is risky for your life”. Our research work shows that stronger awareness should be raised on this particular point.

If the outcome of this study may lead to question the efficiency of institutional risk-reducing devices such as labels, they confirm the significant part played by the wine merchants’ advice. The wine departments in supermarkets should also be managed by qualified staff, wine experts, capable of helping consumers with their choice (Nowak and Newton, 2006).

Furthermore, in order to lessen the financial and taste performance-related risks, wine tasting sessions should be organized. Wine departments might also be reorganized according to wine tastes rather than only according to geographical origin.

Lastly, the most significant implication of this research work focuses on the necessary implementation of greater closeness with consumers (Hérault-Fournier and al., 2012, 2014). Even if supermarkets and wine merchants do meet the requirement of proximity in terms of access by offering wines from all geographical origins, human closeness in relationships should be established and developed, by, for example, inviting wine producers to introduce their wine on sales premises. This will enable consumers to get to know wine-making methods, thus establishing processing proximity. Wine-tasting sessions will reinforce functional proximity by giving consumers the guarantee they will find the product they are looking for and by reducing their perception of time waste risks when choosing some wine they already know. Last of all, wine producing regions must improve their image so as to develop a strong feeling of proximity through identification with wine consumers.

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