USING GROUP FOCUS TO STUDY THE REPRESENTATION OF WINE IN VIETNAM

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Abstract

Wine consumption in Vietnam has been on the rise for the last five years. Due to westernization and health awareness, consumers living in urban areas tend to switch from beer and spirits to wine. We are interested in understanding how such a cultural context affects the way people perceive wine in this non viticultural country. Everyday thinking patterns in Vietnam related to wine are explored within the theoretical framework of representations. We used focus group techniques to explore consumers’ representations of wine in two cities in Vietnam (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh-city) and compared them with the representations elaborated by consumers in a viticultural city in France (Dijon). In each country, focus groups were set up to explore the representations of wine among 20 connoisseurs, 20 novice-consumers and 20 non-consumers. Data from the focus groups were independently summarized by three readers to generate central themes.

Preliminary results indicate that, in Vietnam wine is not as associated with sensory pleasure as it is in France, but rather with social and health issues. Most Vietnamese participants declared not to like the taste of wine, but to find it valuable to exhibit bottles or to drink wine on important occasions. Drinking imported wine sounds fashionable and more prestigious than drinking other types of alcohol. Wine is also believed to be beneficial for digestion and virility and protective against the risks of heart attack. These results have several implications for wine marketing in Vietnam.

Keywords: representation, focus group, consumer, Vietnam, wine.

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is a country of 80 million people located in South-East Asia. Contrary to wine-tradition countries, France for example, Vietnam does not produce wine and has no wine tradition. The alcohols commonly consumed include rice-alcohol in the countryside or beer and spirits such as cognac in the city. Nevertheless it seems that, due to westernization and health awareness, consumers living in urban areas have recently begun to switch from beer and spirits to wine. According to the statistics of the “mission économique” (French embassy), wine consumption in Vietnam is on the rise with a potential for annual growth of 7-10%. We can also observe through media communication a willingness on the part of authorities to develop wine. It is therefore important to understand how cultural context affects the way people perceive and think about wine and how Vietnamese differ from people from a wine tradition country. To answer these questions, we carried out an exploratory study in which Vietnam, newly interested in wine, is compared to France, a country considered as elite in matters of wine. That comparison will enable us to partially explain the link between practices and representations toward wine, a newly imported product in Vietnamese culture. Indeed, social representations are formed when given
abstract objects become problematic in a given social context (Clémence, 2001). In the field of food research, the social representation theory has been applied to the study of modern biotechnology (Wagner & Kronberger, 2001), genetic engineering of foods (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999), and word associations of food and eating (Lahlou, 1996; 2001), among others. The findings of this interdisciplinary study will be applicable both to the social representation theory and to the study of wine within food science.

According to Moscovici (1973), social representations can be defined as “a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication […] by providing them with a code for social exchange.” By focusing on everyday communication and thinking, the social representation theory aims to establish a link between the psychological and the social (Moscovici & Vignaux, 2000). Social representations concern the contents of everyday thinking that give coherence to our beliefs, ideas, and connections we create. They enable us to classify persons, objects, and situations, to compare and explain behaviours, and to objectify them as parts of our social setting (Moscovici, 1998). Social representations enable lay people, who do not necessarily possess the theoretical and methodological scientific knowledge, to understand phenomena that would otherwise remain inaccessible (Wagner & Kronberger, 2001). Social representations are group specific in the sense that the objects of the representations are socially constructed, and that the object takes on group specific social characteristics. Groups are characterized by shared, consensual social representations. This consensus is seen to minimize uncertainty in interaction and facilitate communication between individuals and groups (Moscovici, 1981), and it distinguishes social representations from representations that are unique to only a few individuals.

Here, the everyday thinking patterns of Vietnamese participants, living in two Vietnamese cities (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh-city), will be explored and compared with those elaborated by French participants from a viticultural city in France (Dijon): What do they think about wine, what do they expect from wine and what do they do with wine? We decided to use the group interview (focus group) method to explore the everyday thinking patterns of Vietnamese and French people. Twelve focus groups were conducted: six in France and six in Vietnam. The comparison between Vietnam and France should enable us to study the effect of culture on the perception of wine. We will also try to understand how wine drinkers’ degree of expertise could possibly influence their perceived representations of wine.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants

Fifty-three Vietnamese and 56 French (aged 18-63) participants were recruited. The recruitment was based on a questionnaire which enabled us to classify participants into three categories: connoisseurs, novices and non consumers. The questionnaire included questions about actual consumption to distinguish consumers from non-consumers, and
questions about knowledge and interest in wine to distinguish connoisseurs from novices. Non-consumers were people who declared they did not drink wine. Connoisseurs exhibited a higher degree of knowledge about and interest in wine than novices. Six focus groups were conducted in each country, two for each category of participants. Details can be found in Table 1:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Outline of focus groups</th>
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<tr>
<td>FRANCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>connoisseurs</td>
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<tr>
<td>connoisseurs</td>
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<td>Novices</td>
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<td>non consumers</td>
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Procedure

One moderator conducted all the focus group sessions using a standardized protocol of questions and probes. In France, all the focus group sessions were conducted in a meeting room in the Centre Européen des Sciences du Goût (European Center for Taste and Smell, Dijon). In Vietnam, three sessions were conducted in a sensory evaluation room at Hanoi University and the three others in a classroom at the Food Industry College of Ho Chi Minh city. All focus groups were led through the following steps.

General Information

The moderator explained to participants that the aim of the session was to understand what they thought about wine and that the study was a part of a PhD thesis project. The moderator also insisted that participants should express their own ideas, that there were no right or wrong ideas and that all personal opinions were welcome. Finally, the moderator reminded the group that the discussion had to be related to wine.

Familiarization with the task

To make participants comfortable with the up-coming discussion, the moderator familiarized them with an example of the task. He asked participants “When I say “meal”, what comes spontaneously into your mind?” The moderator encouraged everyone to participate in the discussion.

Discussion about wine

As soon as the task was familiar to all participants, the moderator began the main task. He asked “Now, when I say “wine”, what comes spontaneously into your mind?” During the session, the moderator got the discussion back on track whenever it tended to derive from the topic or to boost the discussion by giving turns to participants who seemed to participate too little. Making sure that the discussion did not lag, he also used the following probes to start up the discussion whenever it slowed down: “What comes spontaneously
into your mind when you think of wine?”, “What do you associate with wine?” , “What images do you think of when you think about wine?” At the end of the session, to summarize the discussion the moderator asked, “To summarize what you just said before, what are the negative or positive points about wine?”

Each discussion session lasted approximately one hour and a half and was audio-recorded then transcribed to facilitate systematic analysis.

**Statistical analysis**

The transcribed focus group discussions were first thematically analyzed. Three independent researchers read the verbatim to extract items. An item is one sentence that summarizes an idea mentioned by participants in a focus group. In line with the social representation theory, natural expressions of the focus group members were used. All items from every focus group were compiled by country. We obtained a list of 75 items for France and another of 61 items for Vietnam.

To evaluate the similitude among items, a free sorting task was performed by ten participants from each country. Participants were asked to group together items that seemed similar. They were free to make as many groups as they wished and to put as many items in each group as they wanted. We then derived pairwise similitude estimates in each culture by counting the number of participants who sorted the two items of a pair together. The two resulting co-occurrence matrices were submitted to a correspondence analysis (CA). Using the rule that we retained only dimensions whose singular value was greater than the average value, we retained 20 dimensions in France (85% of the variance) and 15 dimensions in Vietnam (83% of the variance). The projection of the items on these dimensions was then submitted to a hierarchical cluster analysis (HCA) using the ward criteria. 12 groups of items or themes emerged from the French HCA and 10 from the Vietnamese HCA. In a given theme, there are items which were sorted together in the sorting task. Each theme was given a title that expresses the overall idea of all items grouped together in this theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific themes of France</th>
<th>Common themes</th>
<th>Specific themes of Vietnam</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Complex and difficult</td>
<td>Wine is nice and healthy</td>
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<tr>
<td>French culture</td>
<td>Alcohol</td>
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<td>Mediterranean civilization and Christianity</td>
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<td>Wine cellar</td>
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<td>Democratization of the image of wine</td>
<td>Money and luxury</td>
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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We first classified the themes into three categories: themes that were mentioned only in Vietnam, themes that were mentioned only in France, and themes that were mentioned in both cultures (cf Table 2). We then analyzed these three categories separately.

Themes common to France and Vietnam

Wine is a complex and difficult product

In both cultures, wine was regarded as a complex product. It is complex for the diversity of its origins, its grape varieties, its tastes but also its long history. A French connoisseur said “Each wine has its own tastes, odors. And it even changes from one year to another. It is very complex.” And a French non consumer: “It is a complex product. It is not the same between one wine and another or one bottle and another.” This complexity makes wine a difficult product to master. A Vietnamese novice related: “It is difficult to choose wine, to know about wine or understand and really be able to enjoy it.” A Vietnamese connoisseur concluded: “Another negative point is that it is so confusing to tell the difference between products. We already have a hard time distinguishing every brand and knowing from which countries they come. For wine, there are even fewer clues.” Along the same lines, a novice consumer said “I only know Bordeaux. And then, they are all Bordeaux. It is hard to know which ones are good. We therefore care especially about price and packaging.”

Wine contains alcohol

In France this theme was discussed mostly among novices and non consumers and in Vietnam in all focus groups. In both countries participants mentioned that: “Wine is an alcohol and therefore dangerous”, “Wine induces euphoria” and “Wine makes you drunk.” Undeniably, for novices and non consumers, wine is assimilated to other alcoholic drinks. As such, it is perceived at the same time as attractive “wine makes you feel light”, but also as dangerous, like other alcoholic beverages. It is important to know that in the Vietnamese language, there is no distinction between the word “wine” and all other “alcohols”, which are all called “rượu”. Wine is therefore naturally assimilated in the language to all alcoholic drinks. In France, in the past few years, anti-alcohol campaigns have been analyzed by communication specialists as being negative for the image of wine. A non-consumer explained in a focus group: “I don’t drink wine or any other alcohol. I don’t buy wine either. I only see negative aspects of it, like drunkenness and financial problems.” For a long time in France, wine was perceived differently from other alcoholic beverages that have the bad connotation of drunkenness or road accidents or social problems. Half a century ago, wine was still considered as an everyday drink in France. One French connoisseur testified: “Before, in the primary school of every village, there were series of lessons about the effect of alcohol...because it used to be a product of everyday consumption and in great quantity, but not of great quality...” In Vietnam, wine was assimilated to alcohol but a lighter one than traditional alcohol (rice alcohol, cognac): “Wine is light, not as strong as other alcohol.”
Wine and women

This theme was discussed in both cultures but from very different points of view. In Vietnam, wine is considered as more accessible to women than traditional alcohols because it is less strong. A Vietnamese woman explained: “I think wine is accessible to everybody. Some people like it, others do not but everybody can drink it. Easy drinking, not like strong alcohol, especially for women, wine seems an accessible alcoholic drink for everyone at parties or meals among friends. It does not make people drunk quickly but still keeps warming up the atmosphere throughout the event. Strong alcohols, on the contrary make people drunk and quarrelsome.” Another one said: “Actually, it is easier to drink wine than to drink strong alcohol. In a family, mother and daughter can also drink wine as my father and my uncle and men do, for it is not strong. With alcohols, even rice alcohols, it does not work that way.” This opinion was shared among Vietnamese participants: “In our country, people usually say alcohol is for men. In this way, drinking women are not easily accepted […]. It seems that people can accept much more easily a woman drinking wine than strong alcohol. I don’t know, maybe for health awareness reasons or maybe because wine is chic and it is graceful to hold a glass of wine in your hands at parties. That appears modern and charming…”

In France, traditionally, wine was perceived as a man’s drink: “You probably notice that before women did not drink wine.” But there has been an evolution in mentalities: “I still remember, about 30 years ago I went looking for wine with a friend of mine, a woman. We came to an estate in Burgundy. Many men stared at us: Who are these women coming wine shopping… nowadays, people do not care any more. It goes unnoticed. Yes, there has been an evolution”, “With the evolution in mentalities; wine has become a drink for both women and men.” Yet, despite this evolution some clichés seem to persist: “I think, as long as the tradition remains, wine is almost a drink for men. It’s men who go wine shopping, stock bottles, and take care of the cellar. Men drink and talk about wine among themselves. Somehow wine is for men, just like the kitchen, the cuisine, is for women”.

Wine is linked to money and luxury

In all focus groups, participants evoked the price of wine. Some participants, especially among the Vietnamese groups and the non consumers and novice French groups expressed the idea that for them wine was a luxury: “Wine is a deluxe product”, “Wine is an expensive pleasure”, “Wine is reserved to wealthy people.” Other participants, mostly among the French connoisseurs and novice consumers, indicated that it is normal that wine is expensive: “Wine requires laborious work and justifies high prices” and that “There is no need to be rich to drink wine. It’s a question of choice, of priority”, “There is pleasure not only in expensive wines.” The idea is that if you are interested enough in wine it is possible to find good wines that are not too expensive. As a connoisseur puts it: “That’s actually a job to do as there are also wines which are not expensive but absolutely fantastic.” French connoisseurs seemed to look for pleasure more than for high price and some indicated that the market was evolving toward a democratization of wine. On the other hand, some French novice consumers indicated their fear that the high price of wine
might lead them to drink standardized wines. “If a bottle is too expensive you may not want to take the risk of trying it, you might rather go for a standardized product”. And also: “In France, there are estates which adopt a strategy of producing cost-reduced wines by methods that make every wine the same. We are not talking about globalization but we are going somehow in that direction.”

**Wine and events**

Talking about wine made both Vietnamese and French participants talk about special events; however, the nature of the events mentioned in France and in Vietnam is quite different. Most French participants talk about friends and family events. Many of them said: “A bottle of wine, I just cannot drink alone but only with my family or my friends”, “The pleasure of drinking wine is drinking it with good friends to share the pleasure and the good taste of wine.” Undeniably, in France, wine still preserves its connotation: the drink of conviviality, of friendship, and of the family: “Wine marks family events. I stock wines for anniversaries and the birthdays of my children.” The mark of family is strong in wine drinking and wine appreciation. The know-how surrounding wine is something that people said is transmitted within the family “Wine is a culture transmitted from father to son.” In contrast, wine is associated in Vietnam with social events. “For me, wine is for special occasions like parties, meetings, receptions. It is very unusual to drink wine in normal time”, “Wine reminds me of evening parties, receptions with business partners, especially foreigners”, “Wine is only for special occasions like year-end parties with colleagues”. Wine is used in Vietnam for special occasions: receptions, meetings or business parties, this differs from France where wine is said to be first of all for family events like birthdays, Christmas, family meals or for drinking with friends.

**Themes specific to France**

*Terroir, Mediterranean civilization and French culture*

Among the themes specifically discussed in France, these three themes came up very early in the discussion, especially during connoisseur focus groups. Wine was often associated with its geographical origin, with the soil, the ground, the localization of the vineyard where the vines grow. In this way, consumers distinguished a Bordeaux wine from a Burgundy wine as well as a St-Emilion from a Médoc (wines from areas of the Bordeaux region) or a Côtes de Beaune from a Côtes de Nuits (wines from areas of the Burgundy region). Because wine is produced and drunk in almost every corner of France and that has been the case for a very long time, wine was considered by French participants as “not only a drink but a popular tradition derived from a long history” as well as “a culinary art, a know-how.” On a larger scale, wine was said to be “originally from the Mediterranean civilization and symbolically associated with Christianity.” Regarding religion, some connoisseurs noted that thanks to Christianity, notably through “vin de messe” (wine for prayer in a church), wine could reach such a high level of quality and success in history. Wine was supposed by French connoisseurs to be a “know-how” that originally belonged exclusively to a certain culture, possibly French or Mediterranean. A
kind of pride was clearly expressed by connoisseurs who were all living in Burgundy, famous for its long and prestigious history and tradition of wine. “I must sound biased, but I think we are so lucky to be here in Burgundy, a region where we eat good food and drink good wine.” Yet, despite this long wine tradition, some French novice consumers mentioned that even though they associated wine with France, they were aware that France was not the only wine producer and that it is interesting to try wine from other countries as well. “In my opinion, it is better not to be too nationalist … one would rather taste wines from other places. Nowadays there are also very good wines elsewhere, I think…that helps us knowing them better and appreciate them more. That’s a good thing”.

**Wine cellar**

Along with the notions of history and tradition, connoisseurs discussed at length and with strong emotion the importance of having a good wine cellar. Some mentioned that it was an important criterion they had when they bought their house: “When we look at a house for sale, we care about the quality of the roof etc. In my case, I care about the quality of the roof but also the quality of the cellar.” Others invest a lot of time, energy, and passion into building their wine cellar: “Indispensable, when we settled into our house on la Côte, one of my very first preoccupations was building my cellar. I spent a year and a half with a digger to make my cellar.” The cellar, for a wine connoisseur, does not only serve as a place for storage but also as a place of pleasure, “the pleasure of looking at well racked bottles” or of pride: “Such a great pleasure having a nice good cellar. Showing visitors one’s cellar is an act of pride” or of affection: “The cellar reminds me of many family events: from the birthdays of my children to their communions etc…” Connoisseurs usually stock wine for their family events: “Wine marks family events. I stock wines for anniversaries and the birthdays of my children.” So the wine cellar seems to be a very important element in the organization of wine representations for French connoisseurs, which distinguished them from novice consumers and non consumers. There also seems to be a difference between men and women connoisseurs. Despite the fact that most French participants agreed on the equality between women and men as wine drinkers, they often gave a particular importance to men as the master of the cellar in the family: “as a respect for the tradition, choosing wine and taking care of the wine cellar still remain a man’s work, just like it is the man who chooses the wine at a restaurant.”

**Education and transmission**

Another important specificity of French focus groups is the link between family and transmission of wine appreciation. The know-how surrounding wine is something that people said cannot be learned without oral transmission. A novice mentioned: “One needs to learn from someone else to taste wines, it cannot be learned from a book”, a non consumer: “Wine requires initiation and education.” And this transmission generally occurs within the family. A connoisseur said “It was my father who had me try my first glass of wine, then little by little explained to me how to taste wine.” The know-how of wine appreciation is also like a skill to be transmitted from generation to generation, as participants from all categories seemed to agree. They said: “Wine is a culture transmitted
from father to son.” Among them, a female connoisseur was more detailed: “You cannot see people who start tasting wine at 25 years old to appreciate it, I mean. We all need long years to know about wine or should begin when a very young kid. Obviously, in France we have been in a wine culture since we were little kids and there is the familial notion that we have an approach to wine. We begin little by little with that notion and your palate, I mean your taste, is formed and one starts knowing how to appreciate a Grand Cru and... The history and experience of wine is... we learn to taste wine and we learn to love it and so on... I think in a family where the parents do not drink wine, there is little chance that the children will drink wine later.”

**Emotions**

Finally, French connoisseurs and to a lesser degree novice consumers indicated that for them wine was more than a beverage because, contrary to other beverages, they consider wine as a creation: “It is an object of creation, an object of color, of savors, of odors. And it is created, it is a creation!” or an art work: “A very beautiful wine is somehow an artwork, just like a good dish elaborated by a good chef, a painting, a piece of music.” As any creation or artwork, the wine evokes emotions: “When it is successful, it is beautiful in color, beautiful in savors, in tastes; just like the object we have in our glass”, “We are constantly surprised. We are not sure at all about what is waiting for us inside each bottle. We even get surprised when we buy the same wine but from the last year.” It needs some work “It can be compared to music. There is music that pleases immensely. It sounds good, it is nice but very quick, we get tired with... And on the contrary, other music requires listening to 36 times. At the beginning, we have to make an effort then little by little we end up loving it. These things require time to tame, then we will be rewarded”. Finally, for some connoisseurs, wine is even a passion which leads them to collect bottles: “Pleasure, there is pleasure in tidying up bottles”, discovering new aromas “Puligny, Chassagne...., It was a discovery, I smelt aromas, extraordinary”, finding the perfect wine: “Last time, I opened a bottle, it was not OK. I opened another bottle and then another one, we talked about it, we criticized... Wine, that’s something.”

**Themes specific to Vietnam**

**Nice and healthy**

A first interesting theme that emerged from all the Vietnamese focus groups is that wine is perceived as something positive, something with a better image than beer or strong spirits such as rice alcohol or cognac. This positive image can be explained primarily in terms of health issues. A novice consumer explained: “Wine increases your lifespan; it is a nice gift from nature to man.” Another one told us: “I drink a little wine, above all because I think it’s good for my health. It’s true; a sip of wine gives me a good appetite and helps me digest my meals. I can eat more. We often hear people say that drinking red wine is good for the heart” and finally a connoisseur said: “I think we tend to drink too much beer when we eat out and when we invite friends to eat out. Beer is nice and popular but it fills the stomach. Now there is wine, it’s convenient for me. It is not as strong as alcohol, even
cognac or whisky. So, I drink some wine, it is light, it's good like that.” A second explanation for wine’s positive image is linked to its appearance: “One thing particularly nice about wine is its red color”, “The red of wine is beautiful and warm and welcoming. It makes us feel like we are seeing a warm fire in cold winter, it makes you want to come closer”, its origin: “For sure, wine is associated with a chic refined style. When we go to a chic restaurant and we order European dishes, we order a glass of red wine. It’s like traveling, just like we were traveling abroad”, and its implications: “Wine means refined taste”, “Wine is intellectual”, “Wine is mysterious.” Finally, wine is perceived as more romantic than beer or spirits. A connoisseur said: “Wine is romantic too, a dinner together, a bottle of wine on the restaurant table” another one answered “That’s true, there is much less romanticism with beer. Beer is not romantic!”

**Fashionable and prestigious**

More than just nice and healthy, wine is considered by Vietnamese as fashionable and prestigious: “The chic characteristic [of wine] always makes us dream somehow. Maybe, also because of that, people will buy more and more till the day it will not be considered as a chic product anymore”, “Wine is an alcohol from abroad, so completely opposite to traditional alcohol”, “Drinking wine is snobbish”, “Imported wines are more stylish than local alcohol.” In fact, Vietnamese society, newly open to the world, often appreciates things from the West and wine is a good example: “I think Vietnam still stay under-developed compared to foreign countries. Maybe that’s the reason why we need to see things from the outside. Wine is something from abroad imported in Vietnam. It is good to know about modern things”, “When thinking of wine, we think first of foreign countries. Spontaneously, it is a sign from the exterior, France for example”. Wine, like other products from the West, seems to be a window open onto the world and the further away this world is, the more interesting it gets: “That’s true, I still remember once, about ten years ago, someone offered me a bottle of Bordeaux. At that time it was for me something from really very far away. Just thinking of the itinerary that bottle traveled around the Globe to arrive in my possession impressed me so much already. So I did not open it right away. I decided to keep it as people usually say the older a wine is, the better it gets. I kept it therefore for a long time in the kitchen.” Wine, like certain other typical products, provides an imaginative escape for the Vietnamese: “[Wine], that’s first of all France. When I hear someone say “wine from Europe” I think first of France, just like “tea from Asia” makes me think first of China. It seems that French have millenniums of wine history and there are thousands of instruction books about wine”, “In Europe, especially in France, it seems that they have created great specialties to match outstanding wines.”

**Modern, urban and higher social status**

Drinking wine is also considered modern: “The young people of our generation have certain open-mindedness and are interested in novelties like wine” and urban: “Very certainly, it’s urban people who appreciate wine. People from the countryside drink bottoms up. It’s not to taste or appreciate wine this way”. Further than that, wine gives people who drink it a higher social status. A young Vietnamese novice explained “I think
that knowing about wine, alcohol, luxury products, can help me in my job when I am in contact with people, colleagues, partners and customers who are from urban origins. They are very chic and have luxury oriented topics of discussion. The advantage of knowing about those kinds of topics makes me feel confident, people cannot take me for a guy from the country, cannot take me for granted. It is important to impress partners to be able to get in business contact later”.

**Gifts and decorations**

As wine is perceived as nice to look at, it can be used as decoration: “There are, among the people I know, some who like buying bottles of wine just to decorate or to be fashionable. However, wine has not become an everyday object yet” or as a gift “I think in Vietnam, we buy wines primarily to offer to our bosses” “For me, wine is a gift. Sometimes, we do not even care if the person drinks alcohol. No problem, we are actually nearly sure that it will please the person because it is not a question of utility; it is a question of image. Imported alcohol has a good image and prestige. It is used therefore as a gift, and then everyone can make use of it as he pleases. Some people drink it; some people give it in their turn to others”. Someone else agreed: “Honestly, I am pleased when I am given wines or spirits. I don’t really drink much, but I can give it to others, at least I won’t have to go shopping for alcohol when I need some.”

**Positive perspective for wine in Vietnam**

A traditional and cultural drink in France, wine still remains a new product in Vietnam. It is interesting to know what the Vietnamese, new consumers or potential future consumers with limited knowledge about the product, think about its future. This matter was discussed in all focus groups. Some participants hesitated “Maybe wine, like many other things, is just a fashion phenomena.” On contrary, many participants were enthusiastic. One of them said “I think wine is something positive culturally. Before, we didn’t know anything about this product and the main reason was economic. It is still expensive, but as a trend, the more our economy improves, the more modern life gets, the more people are interested in trying new, good things. Wine is one of them, I am sure that it will be much more popular in the future than it is nowadays.”

**CONCLUSION**

As expected, results from this qualitative study showed that social representations of wine depend on culture. The main differences between France and Vietnam result from the status of wine in the two cultures. In France, wine is principally perceived as something people drink for sensory pleasure: “Obviously, we drink wine for the pleasure, that’s for sure!”,”Every wine has its own odors and its own tastes. Each one therefore gives a different kind of pleasure every time.” Besides the pleasure of taste, the French are also interested in wine for the emotions it brings: “Wine evokes emotions, just like an artwork”. Furthermore, wine is a very important part of French culture and a particular pride of the French people. There exists a kind of know-how around wine that requires education
which is given and received through an intergenerational transmission: “Wine is a culture transmitted from father to son”. In Vietnam, wine is not as associated with sensory pleasure as it is in France, but rather with social issues and health: “Wine is good for your health”. Most Vietnamese participants declared not liking the taste of wine “Wine does not taste good!” or “I don’t like the astringency of wine!” but they often found it valuable to exhibit bottles or to drink wine on important occasions. Drinking imported wine seems fashionable and more prestigious than drinking other types of alcohol: “Wine is elegant; it gives me the feeling of success in social life.” Wine can also be used as a gift “Colleagues offer me bottles of wine; I in turn use them to offer as gifts to other people” and is believed to be beneficial for digestion and virility and protective against the risks of heart attack: “Drinking wine is good for the heart. It can also reduce the risk of many diseases.”

The focus group methodology is an explorative tool. Here we used it to highlight aspects of everyday thinking about wine in Vietnam and in France. To validate the results reported in this paper, a questionnaire of social representations of wine has been developed based on the focus group discussions. The results provided by this questionnaire will enable us to quantitatively study the patterns isolated from the focus group discussions.

Despite the limitation of the focus group study presented above, our current results have several implications for wine marketing in Vietnam, as the country is considered as potentially emerging in terms of wine consumption. Understanding Vietnamese opinions, expectations and behaviour toward wine could help later in various aspects of wine marketing: packaging, communication, adapting the sensory profile of the products to local preference.

REFERENCES


