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## Social representations of wine and culture: A comparison between France and New Zealand

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to investigate social representations of wine as a function of wine expertise and culture. Wine expertise has been studied extensively in the field of psychology and sensory analysis highlighting perceptual, verbal or memory skills. Wine is at the heart of French customs and eating traditions, and meanings developed about it are the subject of a real social construction and thus of social representations. But what about countries where the culture of wine is not historical? The objective of this research was to study the influence of expertise on social representations of wine from French and New Zealanders. Three hundred and ninety French and 177 New Zealanders, experts and non-experts in wine, participated in the study. To examine the social representation of wine, we used verbal association tasks designed to lead participants to associate the first four words that came to mind at the mention of the word “wine”. Data collected in the association tasks were submitted to a correspondence analysis. Results showed that New Zealanders considered wine with different flavours as a subject of relaxation and fun, but also linked to food. French associated wine with friendship, red wine, and cheese. The results also revealed differences between experts and novices. Novices evoked time of consumption including dinner and party whereas experts referred to sharing, heritage, and conviviality. The results are discussed in terms of theory of social representations.

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## 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Representation and culture

From a psychosocial perspective, the concept of representation has been defined by Jodelet (1989, p. 36) as “a form of knowledge socially developed and shared with practical designs and contributing to the construction of a reality common to a social group”. According to this definition, representations are interpretation systems that organise the world and our relationships with others. Representations operate as reading grids of reality (see Rateau, Moliner, Guimelli, & Abric, 2011, for a review) which guide and organise behaviour and social communication among individuals and groups. In the same vein, a social representation must be viewed as a system of interpretation of reality that governs relations among individuals and groups in their physical and social environments and determines their behaviours and practices (Abric, 1993, 2001a; Rateau et al., 2011).

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As a process, the activity of representation seems to be universal; as a product, it is subject to cultural variations. Indeed, the activity of representation is the same for all individuals; they construct in the same way their representation of the object. However, the product of representation varies from one individual to another depending on their culture; the content of their representation of the object is not the same as their culture.

Many studies, covering different fields of application, have been conducted taking into account the influence of culture on the representations of various objects: in the field of health (Goodwin et al., 2003), of human rights (Passini & Emiliani, 2009), of sensory analysis (Chr  a, Valentin, Sulmont-Ross  , Hoang Nguyen, & Abdi, 2005; Chr  a et al., 2004; Prescott, 1998) and in the field of food choices and representations (Bartels & Reinders, 2010; Blancher et al., 2007; Cervellon & Dub  , 2005; Guerrero et al., 2012; M  kiniemi, Pirttil  -Backman, & Pieri, 2011; Penz, 2006; Rozin, Fischler, Imada, Sarubbin, & Wrzesniewski, 1999; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). All these studies aim to understand choices, behaviours, and beliefs in relation to culture.

With respect to the field of sensory analysis, work has been conducted on the influence of culture on the representations of odours (Chr  a et al., 2004, 2005; Prescott, 1998). Chr  a and colleagues (2004) showed that odour categorization depends on the familiarity

and frequency of exposure to odours, and on the culture. Concerning food representations, with regard to the social construction of organic food products, Bartels and Reinders (2010) have shown that this representation differs according to the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and that their culture has an influence on their consumption behaviour of organic food products. In the same vein, Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) comment that to better understand consumer behaviour in its entirety, it is essential to validate various studies on this theme in different countries.

Taken together, these studies show that consideration of culture allows us to better understand how individuals perceive their environment regardless of the field of application.

## 1.2. Wine and culture

Wine is at the heart of French customs and culinary traditions and can be studied as a social representation (Lo Monaco, 2008; Lo Monaco & Guimelli, 2008, 2011; Simonnet-Toussaint, Lecigne & Keller, 2005). The current research examined the influence of expertise on social representations of wine across France and New Zealand. As emphasised by many authors (e.g. Caillaud, 2010; Jodelet, 2002, 2006, 2008; Wachelke & Contarello, 2010), social representations are embedded in an existing socio-cultural and historical context. Thus, the fact that the socio-cultural history of wine varies between France and New Zealand is likely to have an impact on the representational content associated with wine insofar as culture is used as a framework for the interpretation of representations of objects (Jodelet, 2002, 2006). Thus, as France and New Zealand do not have the same wine culture, because of their history and their practices associated with this beverage, we assume that their representations of this object will be different (see Demossier, 2005, 2011; Wilson, 2004).

A few studies only have investigated wine across cultures, with most of them focusing on a comparison of Western and Eastern cultures. Jiang (2011) wrote a review of the literature to point out differences in the culture of wine consumption between China and Western countries. According to the author, the consumption of wine has a special status in traditional Chinese culture. The author also stresses that nowadays the Western culture of wine consumption has, to a large extent, had a significant impact on the Chinese culture of wine consumption since wine was introduced into China by the West. However, in China, the culture of wine consumption shows essentially a humanistic dimension in poetry, literature, and so forth, whereas the Western culture of wine consumption is related to respect for and appreciation of the wine itself. In the West, wine is subjected to analytical tasting, observation of colour, inhalation of its aroma, and other evaluative practices. The aim is mainly to enjoy wine, to take pleasure in tasting it. In China, wine is rather seen as a tool of communication but also a tool of creativity.

Other studies have compared Western and Eastern cultures. Do, Patris, and Valentin (2009) compared the beliefs and motivations related to wine consumption in Vietnam and France. Thus, while in Vietnam, wine is a product of modernity, which is consumed as a cultural change to be accepted, in France, it is a traditional product that is consumed by habit. These two cultures were also distinguished by the fact that in Vietnam wine is a marker of personal distinction, and a symbol of social success, while in France it is a marker of national identity. Wine is also considered as a good therapeutic health drink in Vietnam. Nowadays, in France the common perception does not include the health dimension; wine consumers primarily associate wine with pleasure, friendship or conviviality (Lo Monaco & Guimelli, 2008; Lo Monaco, Guimelli, & Rouquette, 2009). Other authors have noted that alcohol-related behaviour needs to be studied according to the socio-cultural

context of consumers. Drinking alcohol is an act that reflects an individual or group identity with consumers perceiving themselves through what they consume and how they consume (Douglas, 1987). Alcohol consumption is also subject to social meanings in many cultures, for example, drinking to celebrate an event (Demossier, 2004, 2005; Fournier, 2003).

In France, wine has a special place among alcohols consumed. According to the latest report submitted by ONIVINS (Office National de l'Interprofession des Vins, 2005), wine consumption in France is decreasing. According to Garrier (2005), the French consume less but better quality wine, and the “wine as food” has become “wine for pleasure”, synonymous with quality and moderate consumption. In New Zealand, wine is not the most popular alcoholic beverage. While the sale of beer accounts for two thirds of the market, its consumption has recently experienced a slight decline, to the benefit of wine sales. Although New Zealand is a small market, it is no less dynamic with a real passion for wine culture (Barker, 2004). Consumers determine the choice of wine by its grape variety, brand, by recommendations or personal experience, and frequently consume wine during meals. Wine consumption during meals is a recent development that can have a high social connotation in some cultures (Do, 2010). Culture influences how people think about wine; however culture is not the only factor involved in how to represent the wine. Indeed, some authors have shown that the level of expertise in wine plays a role in how wine is represented (Urdapilleta, Parr, Dacremont, & Green, 2011).

## 1.3. Representation and expertise

Expertise in wine has been little studied in social psychology, yet it seems a determinant in organising the content of the representation. Lo Monaco and Guimelli (2008) showed that the degree of expertise in wine shapes the degree of knowledge, a critical dimension for the construction of social representations. Similarly, in their work, Simonnet-Toussaint, Lecigne, and Keller (2005) concluded that the positions taken by the subjects are under control of their relationship with wine and therefore their level of knowledge. Thus, they found that negative aspects related to wine are absent among experts, while novices express more sensitivity to the damaging effects of this drink. Lo Monaco and Guimelli (2008) also emphasised this aspect. The results of their research showed that students, trained in different knowledge about wine, make less prominent negative aspects related to the controversy and social debate on wine. Thus, the authors emphasise that the acquisition of a significant level of knowledge on wine participates in the proximity with wine and thus its evaluation.

However, these studies have limitations insofar as the participants are experts in training, not experts confirmed. The level of expertise seems essential in understanding wine representations. In the present study we work with wine professionals with both technical and theoretical knowledge in the field of wine.

## 1.4. Summary & hypotheses

The overall objective of the present study was to investigate the influence of culture and expertise on representations of the object of wine. The study is innovative in that the cross-cultural studies cited above do not address the social representations of wine but the consumption patterns within Eastern and Western populations. Further, previous cross-cultural studies on representations in the areas of sensory analysis and food do not include wine. Finally, studies on social representations of wine that we cited in the introduction were conducted with French participants only. The originality of our present work is based on the study of the influence of expertise level on social representations of wine with

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