Women and Wine: an Experiment on Stated and Real Behaviour
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The main project purpose was to conduct a comparative study of perceptions regarding the relations between wine and women, in Japan and France. Wine has important economic and cultural values in France, and it has a rapidly growing market in Japan, with a significant proportion of female consumers especially in the latter. While women play important roles as wine consumers and/or producers, their roles have not much been the focus of study. It is thus important to study their respective roles vis-à-vis those of men to understand the magnitude of their presence and influence in the wine sector of both countries. In particular, the research aims to assess how female and male consumers’ valuations of wine are affected by different types of information, and how their valuations differ in two countries, in order to identify the best communication strategy.

An important feature of this project is the analysis of the impacts of product positioning through credence attributes, i.e. unverifiable beliefs or images that a wine producer attempts to create about her/his wine in a target market. Such images are considered to have important signalling effects to the consumers, given the fact that a wine product necessarily signifies a certain degree of uncertainty – you do not know if it tastes good or bad beforehand, thus do not know how much should be paid for it. While Nelson (1970) and Darby and Karni (1973) has identified search, experience and credence (or beliefs) attributes of a product, this project focuses on credence attributes which are considered to generate certain value-added to a product. A wine producer attempts to create credence attributes typically by stating her/his commitment to environmental practices or certain discoveries about the field’s particularities, or by simply talking about her/himself, sometimes with a photo image. This is a wine positioning process through specific communication, where a wine is identified with the expressed images.

The effects of positioning of wine created by a producer are analyzed from two perspectives in this project: (1) factors that affect consumers’ willingness to pay (WTP) for a wine; (2) the degrees of consumers’ willingness to believe the messages/images conveyed by the wine. Consumers’ preferences and valuations about a product are considered to be affected by framing (Tversky and Kahneman 1981; Tversky and Simonson 1993) as well as by sensory expectations which in turn are affected by informational provision. The kind of information provided and the way it is provided can even affect consumers’ sensory experience by affecting their sensory expectations (Lee, Frederick and Ariely 2006).

These perspectives, consumers’ WTP for a wine and willingness to believe a producer’s message, are evaluated in laboratory experiments with women experiencing a wine recommended by a woman or by a men. The experimental procedure is constructed on the basis of Bazoche et al. (2009) or Lange et al. (2002), using typical real sales through auctions. It uses the Becker, DeGroot, Marschak (BDM) mechanism, applied especially to wine, in order to reveal consumers’ WTP in different informational settings (e.g., blind tasting, tasting and label examination, tasting and additional advertising messages). This experimental technique enables us to minimize the biases common in classic survey techniques. It is important to adopt such a methodology, since market data on the marginal effect of specific positioning are not available, although consumers may derive utility from buying positioned or differentiated wine products. Indeed, consumers’ valuation about a wine may well be affected by information that directly speaks to them, i.e. a wine producer’s message induces the consumers to identify a hypothetical relation between the producer and themselves, and such hypothetical relation or perceived positioning can create a premium for the wine in the mind of the consumers. Because positioning is costly to wine producers, its impacts on the (perceived) premium for the product need to be verified. Images can affect the expected quality of the product, consumers’ WTP and product choice, and consequently its market price.

Our results show that women are ready to pay more on a men-recommended wine.