

Effects of the wine bottle label on the perceived authenticity and buying intention on a retail website

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Abstract: The aim of this research consists in studying the effects of signs of marking on wine bottle labels, with the perception of authenticity and the buying intention in an online context. Based on a literacy review as well as on investigations issued from an exploratory qualitative analysis led with 34 consumers, cellar men and wine growers, we introduce the theoretical and methodological bases answering this question. It shows the effect of the appearance of the label and of its components on the emotional and behavioural answers of the consumer which are the authenticity they perceived and the buying intention.

Keywords: wine, label, color, authenticity, buying intention, trust, e-commerce

INTRODUCTION

Objective elements allowing the consumer to choose which bottle of wine to buy from the supermarket can be very confusing in today's wine market. With a rich offer of more than 600 references in hypermarkets (Onivins, 2004) and little advice provided, wine has always been presented as a traditional, authentic and natural product. In the same way, the interest of consumers for traditional retail methods is declining compared to the new way of shopping: Internet. Internet offers practical advantages (temporal and spatial), financial (through the opportunity of comparing prices particularly), and hedonic ways of consuming (Eroglu, Machleit and Davis, 2001). Even if a wine selling website offers as many references as a shopping mall, the consumer only sees a little amount of those references on its screen. Compared to shopping mall shelves offering a variety of products and labels at first sight, most of the time an ecommerce website page only shows one label at a time. Specificities related to online purchasing seem indispensable when taking into account wine professionals who bid on this method of selling.

This article examines if effects linked to the perception of the wine bottle label exist and impact on the perceived authenticity and on buying intention of the bottle of wine. It especially aims at studying the aspect of the wine bottle label in order to answer the following questions:

- Online, do some signs of marking over the label, evocate further more authenticity than others do?
- Online, does a label inspiring the authenticity of a wine to consumers incite them to buy this bottle rather than another one?

Whether they were experts or not on wine or with shopping online, consumers have been invited to express themselves about some criteria's for which they make their purchasing choice. They were questioned during an exploratory analysis whose results will be presented in this study. The latter reinforces the importance for wine professionals to consider the aspect of the label thoroughly.

The sober and simple aspect of the label, alongside highlighting of signs such as the *guarantee of wine quality* counts therefore, among the most frequently evocated topics. Beyond the usual signs on the bottle, iconographic details such as the presence of a logotype or an image such as a castle, typographic and the type of colors used, contribute to reinforce the feeling of authenticity of a wine.

THE PERCEPTION OF AUTHENTICITY

The consumption of wine becoming more casual than regular, leads to a fall towards a better quality of wines. The quest of an authentic and qualitative wine remains indeed a major objective for a consumer whose needs of being reassured keeps growing, especially when shopping online. Evaluation of quality and authenticity of a wine is essentially based on the perception of the information provided on the label, one can wonder about the importance of the marking signs it represents.

THE NATURE OF AUTHENTICITY

According to Beverland (2005), « *authenticity is projected via a sincere story that involves the avowal of commitments to traditions, passion for craft and production excellence, and the public disavowal of the role of modern industrial attributes and commercial motivation.* »

Ulin (1995) notes that by defining wine as a natural product, in comparison with an industrial mass product, social, cultural and historical claims become naturalized. Vineyard establishments explain that authenticity is mainly based on the « *terroir* » term (even outside France), which can be defined as « *the holistic combination in a vineyard environment of soil, climate, topography, and the “soul” of the wine producer* » (Guy, 2002, p. 2). Aurier, Fort et Sirieix (2005) precise that the *terroir* represents a usual differentiation support, the image which is brought by the link to the *terroir* is seen as a transfer of the county image of the products, thus enhancing their perceived quality.

ON AN ECOMMERCE WEBSITE, ONLY THE EYES HELP TO APPREHEND THE AUTHENTICITY OF A WINE

Few studies have been investigated in the area of buying wine online. Lynch and Ariely (2000) focused on the cost cuttings in the search for information and the impact of the latter on the consumer sensitivity regarding prices. Stenger (2005), using the work on perception from Hatchuel (1995), adapts the latter to the sales of wine online. Gallen and Cases (2007) demonstrate by working on the consumer behavior the main obstacle for online wine shopping, remains with the impossibility to see the product concretely. Thus, the perception of authenticity seems to come partly from the label.

THE LABEL IN THE CHOICE OF THE CONSUMER

Among the studies related to the influence of the label on the wine consumer, the study led by Sopexa Belgium (2005) shows a comparison between French labels and the international market. It indicates that the label has effectively an influence on the consumer's choice thus those of which are «classical» labels, which appear to be more serious, are preferred to the « modern » ones. Respondent's evocate classical, as a criteria which is related to the presence of the castle or an icon representing the *terroir* or the county region where the wine comes from. Furthermore, when the serifs font is used it plays in favor of the institutional and seriousness character of the label. Finally, color also seems to play an important role in this distinction between classic and modern labels.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative analysis based on direct semi-talks interviews has been conducted for various reasons. Firstly, according to our knowledge, no research has yet been undertaken on the perception of authenticity of a wine, regarding its label on an online context. Secondly, it is quite rare to find a literacy opposing the perception of wine experts, particularly wine growers and cellar men, to common consumers, regarding the label and the effects it causes on our decision process, especially in an online context.

In an attempt to obtain information from consumers whether or not they are experts, an* exploratory analysis has been conducted from an interview guide. The latter aimed at making them react on the three following topics:

- The elements on the wine bottle label that they chose to evocate ;
- The emotions and what they felt during their visit on the website ;
- The perceived authenticity, which permits to know the reasons that can cause a comeback on the website, or a longer period of time spent during the search for information.

The consumers we have questioned have been chosen according to their level of expertise on wine (consumer/cellar men/wine growers), age, sex and qualifications in order to obtain a homogeneous sample in terms of sub-categories. The criteria of saturation of data being

followed (Mucchielli, 1991, p.114), we interviewed 34 people. The interview guide was structured and open. It permitted us to obtain interviews based on topics linked to the experience of consumption of wine by our respondents, and regular places of purchase, such as Nicolas (cellar men), hyper and supermarkets, or directly from the wine growers. Once each interview was transcribed, which in general lasted from 15 to 53 minutes, the overall retranscription allowed to obtain a 150 page verbatim corresponding approximately to 16 hours recording.

The qualitative datas have been analyzed thanks to a table summarizing all the results of our respondents, where each construct referred to a "1" weight. Each respondent has his own table file in which all the questions extracted from the interview guide were written in a first time. If a construct appeared once reading the retranscription of a respondent's interview, a figure "1" was notified in a *result* column. In a second time, we grouped the "result" columns of all our respondents in the final table in order to understand precisely what the answers meant, no matter who the respondents were : consumers, cellar masters or wine growers. This corresponded to an alignment of 34 columns, providing or not figures "1". Rows in this table indicated the different themes issued from the interview guide. Topics and words related to a precise field appeared in a "result" column, showing the weight of each construct. It finally permitted us to formulate assumptions linking the answers with the respondent's profiles. Thus, each construct had a weight in a first table, made of rows presenting or not figures "1". Another table served to concatenate the 34 files in a summarizing table, enabling us to use the columns of the "1" to add rows and finally write the results obtained thanks to the addition of all the figures "1".

RESULTS

Either at a cellar-men, in a supermarket or on the Internet, this is the label which appeals to most of the respondents (6/34) and particularly the presence of the castle. A consumer (C1) reinforces this by saying; *"an authentic wine is a qualitative one, where color is used on the label, the photograph of the castle for example"*. A cellar master (P2) reinforces this by saying: *"authenticity, it is the photograph of a castle, or a grape. It's somehow rustic. Authenticity must be a little bit rustic, a little bit "terroir"*.

The information on the label seems to be much more pleasant if organized (9/34). Indeed, a consumer (C1) thereby explains: *"I quite appreciate when information are easy to read and when it doesn't take too much time to find the origin of the wine."* A grower provides an even more precise explanation in considering the structure of the label: *"If I had to judge a wine thanks to its label, I would say that it should not be too bright, not fade, with circled forms, the picture of the property, but I don't like when it takes too much room, then the name of the wine above the castle's picture should be in black and white, and the vintage win as well as, the name of the owner beneath, on a white background"*. Regarding the label aspect, the sobriety appears to be the most important (16/34), in addition to the simplicity (12/34) and the highlighting of the *guarantee of wine quality* (12/34). The fact that the label does not appear with too many marking signs, seems to be the main concerns for 18 out of 34 respondents, and the fact of putting forward the indispensable information (the *guarantee of wine quality*, the vintage wine, the type of grapes, the presence of medals and distinction to contests and references such as « castle » or « domain » according to the original county), seems very important (10/34). A consumer (C3) thinks: *"[...] a good wine doesn't need an ostentatious label. It's not something people are looking for. What people need must be sober, and the wine will speak by itself.* A cellar master testifies of this aspect by explaining that: *"the label of an important producer is loyal to its producer; sober and authentic, colors must be sober too. A label which is not overloaded, refined, bright, without too much writings, simple and*

easy to analyze, without too much colors. If it's too fanciful, it's not serious enough. It has to be sober, very sober and simple, easy and pleasant to look."

The writing used on the label has to be appealing (*eye candy* using ecommerce vocabulary) to 7 out of 34 answerers, which means that the font is based upon a serif typographic such as « Times New Roman ». This reinforces the prestigious and authentic aspect of the promoted product. The fact that it is more or less designed (by using an italicized font for example), can reinforce this prestigious aspect and highlight the authenticity of the bottle and as a result, the wine (6/34). A consumer (C9) explains why the typographic is important for him: *"I would be more attracted by a distressed label with an elegant writing, a domain name. If there is a comment about the wine, about the county, it will help me to have an idea of the wine before buying the bottle."* This is reinforced by this consumer (C13) who explains that on top of the color, the font is rather important in its choice: *"the label color, yes the color because what charms the eyes, is not the bottle but the color of the label and the presentation, and also the typographic."*

Achromatic colors (black and white) seem preferred (7/34) to chromatic ones (all other colors than black and white). « *Fluorescent* » colors or vivid and chromatic ones, only please 7 out of 34 answerers. This reinforces the importance of classical or heraldic colors, which are preferred to vivid or even fluorescent colors. A consumer (C9) reinforces the importance of colors by stressing traditional colors: *"It's maybe a beautiful label which will urge me to buy the bottle. If it's too loud, vulgar or ridiculous, I will conclude that the wine is of bad quality [...] and will be attracted by a label a little bit distressed."*

Finally, the image with the presence of a picture or an engraving castle is important to respondents (8/34). This is strengthened by elements that cause a positive impression of the product such as its origin (13/34) and its *guarantee of wine quality*. Thus, the authenticity of the product seems to be perceived much better since the guarantee of wine quality appears on the label (19/34), as for the castle (7/34) and the harvesters' name (5/34).

To summarize, this qualitative analysis which aimed at the preparation of a quantitative study shows that some elements of the label are more important than others, among which the name of the castle or domain (12/34), legal references (guarantee of wine quality...) for 13/34 of the respondents. The fact that the label is simple and not too heavy represents one of the conditions in favor of the perception of authenticity of the wine. It is assumed that this simplicity corresponds to « *the wine spirit* » for 11 out of 34 respondents. Consequently, this means that the references that consumers are used to in terms of colors, writings, size of the label, presence of the image and obligatory terms, remain unchanged to build this perception. Finally, a sober and authentic label, which is not too exuberant, seems to be more taken into consideration than another one. Overall it brings the consumer to a higher buying intention on an ecommerce website for 10 out of 34 answerers, whether or not they are expert consumers. The following table highlights key findings of this exploratory analysis (Table 1):

Characteristics of the label	Construct		Frequency of Citation
Figurative Presence/Absence of the castle	1	Presence of the castle is important	6/34
	2	References such as "castle" or "domain" is very important	10/34
	3	The guarantee of wine quality must be highlighted	12/34
	4	Presence of the harvesters' name	5/34
Symbolic Heraldic/Vivid colors	1	Presence of medals and distinction	10/34

	2	Font should be based upon a serif typographic	7/34
	3	A design typographic highlights authenticity	6/34
	4	Classical, Heraldic or chromatic colors (B&W) are preferred to chromatic ones	7/34
	5	Fluorescent colors are preferred among others	7/34
	6	Fluorescent colors or vivid colors are more pleasant	7/34
	7	The writing using a font based upon a serif typographic such as “Times New Roman” and is appealing	7/34
	8	The font is italicized. It reinforces the prestigious aspect and highlights the authenticity of the bottle	6/34
	9	Elements that give a positive impression of the product such as its origin	13/34
	Cognitive Dense/Lightened aspect	1	Writings must be appealing (<i>eye candy</i>)
2		Presence of the wine’s origins	8/34
3		Presence of a picture or an engraving castle is important	13/34
4		Presence of the guarantee of wine quality	13/34
5		Presence of the name of the castle or domain	19/34
6		Presence of legal references (guarantee of wine quality...)	12/34
7		The simplicity of the label corresponds to “ <i>the wine spirit</i> ”	13/34
8		The label must be sober	16/34
9		The label must be sober and authentic, not too exuberant	11/34
10		The information has to be organized	9/34
11		The label must be mere	12/34
12		Not too much signs	18/34
13		A sober and authentic label brings the consumer to a higher buying intention	10/34

Table 1: key findings of the exploratory analysis

CONCLUSION

The content analysis conducted has brought to the fore the relative importance that consumers grant to wine product, according to their expertise level. Common consumers, or specialized sellers (cellar-men) or even wine-growers, each of them has a different perception of the wine bottle label; either on the authenticity aspect perceived or on the intent of purchasing the product during the process of choice. The study of the three groups underlines different perceptions and shows that everyone gives a varied importance to the elements of foreground (color, text, image), or to the elements of background (presence of the *guarantee of wine quality*, name of the proprietary etc.). Consumers could talk about labels of bottles of wine in many different ways. The colors, fonts, size, pictures and so on were precisely described in each interview. According to their preferences on these topics, answers could not be grouped. Thus, we can say than even if the label appears to be the most important item they consider on the bottles of wine, each component of the latter takes a variable part in their speech.

Professionals of wine, whether they are cellar-men, enologists or caterers also have a different perception than consumers regarding the label. Apparently, some of them do not know the origin of a reference on the label such as the *guarantee of wine quality*, or millenniums and other vintage-wines presented on their shelves or on their menus. This can be due to the scholar formation of these persons. Indeed, someone who sells wine in a cellar is not necessarily formed to speak about the different level of information provided on a label. On the contrary, a grower who sells its own wine may be very focused on the image he wants to offer to its customer. He thus may know precisely what each of those information means.

Wine-growers, apparently do not find the label as important when considering its effects on the consumers' perceptions, they put forward the differentiated aspect of their product, especially by evocating its *terroir*. But they sometimes visit cellar-men, if they do not shop in supermarkets, thus find the label strategic when it is time to choose a bottle of wine. The different profiles among these three categories are quite important and reinforce the interest to confirm our results. Most of them know how important the marketing is, and that a "clever" label can serve their product. But for some reasons, they also think that their wine already spread an image of authenticity, because of considerations based on the *terroir* or county of production. They thus do not speak necessarily objectively about it, by thinking first about their own label. Therefore, some of the growers we met knew very well how to talk about this label they know for a long time, because it enhances their product. They were not as precise once talking about labels in general.

In order to validate this assumption, an online survey will be carried out before the end of 2009. The aim of the latter consists in measuring what are the effects of the label and some of its components, on the perception of authenticity and on the buying intention. A complete factorial plan, enabling a detailed analysis of how elements on the label are perceived, has been prepared. We will therefore distinguish between:

- Labels using chromatic Vs heraldic colors in order to compare the modern and classical appearances ;
- Labels showing the image with or without a castle to strengthen the aspect of the *terroir* ;
- Heavy labels Vs minimalist, to compare the soberly and richness of information.

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