IN SEARCH OF THE DETERMINANTS OF WINE AROMATIC TYPICALITY: THE ROLE OF WINE’S LABELS TYPICALITY

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How do marketing tools contribute to posit sensorial products – wine in particular – in the consumer’s mind? Which role play extrinsic attributes on wine’s aromatic typicality judgment?

**Conceptual Framework**

Product typicality is the degree to which a product represents its category (Rosh, 1973; Rosh & Mervis, 1975). Product typicality is determined by the number of attributes shared with the prototype of the category (Loken & Ward, 1990).

Wine aromatic typicality refers to wines sharing a “family resemblance” based on organoleptic characteristics. The notion of aromatic typicality groups together wines recognizable both by the amateur of wine and by the connoisseur as the members of the same category (family) of wine. Wine’s aromatic typicality judgment is based on sensory wine properties like aromas and aromatic compounds and is not easy to establish for “regular consumers” (Bessis et al.1994; Ballester et al., 2005).

**Research hypothesis**

Extrinsic attributes, like packaging, are taken into account when consumers are faced with complex choices and complex products (Brochet & Morrot, 1999; Issanchou & Hossenlop, 1992; Sherman & Tuten, 2011; Rasmussen and Lockshin, 1999). This tendency is also observed for wine. It has been shown that bottle shape, label design, price and region of origin are used by consumers to infer a given wine’s aromatic typicality (Pinneau, et al. 2010). Our research focuses on label design and more precisely on label typicality. Label typicality refers to the degree of conformity of the label design with the “norms”. A given wine label can be more or less typical of labels generally used in the country or region of origin. Following previous research (Celhay and Passebois, 2011), the impact of label design on consumer judgment of wine aromatic typicality is examined.

H1. Label’s perceived typicality is positively related to wine’s aromatic typicality.

Previous research outlines the role of consumer knowledge in products’ evaluation (Symoneaux et al, 2010; Hussain, Cholette & Castaldi, 2007; Lockshin & Rhodus, 1993; Perrouty et al., 2004; Dodd, et al. 2005).

H2. The relation between label’s perceived typicality and wine’s aromatic typicality is moderated by consumers’ subjective knowledge. For “expert” consumers, this
relationship between perceived label’s typicality and perceived aromatic typicality is weaker than for novices.

Methodology
An exploratory empirical study was carried out with the purpose to test 1) the effect of perceived label’s typicality on perceived aromatic typicality and 2) the moderating effect consumers’ knowledge. 119 wine consumers were recruited (49 % female, 40 % between 18-35 years; 30 % between 36 and 47 years; and 31 % more than 47 years old).

Thanks to a pretest, two branded wines were selected, one typical of Bordeaux wines (Baron de Lestac) and one produced in Côte du Rhône region (Cellier des Dauphins). Both wines were comparable in terms of value for money but were supposed to differ in terms of aromatic typicality. Four labels specifically created for a previous study were used in the present research (Celhay and Passebois, 2011). They were supposed to differ in terms of typicality. Indeed, French consumers perceived them as more / less typical of a Bordeaux wine’s label.

Data were collected through a two-stage research design. During the first stage, a blind test was carried out to collect perceived aromatic typicality judgments. Two weeks later, the same persons tasted the same wines but with a typical / atypical label as regards to Bordeaux wines’ labels. Having enjoyed both wines, they were asked to evaluate their aromatic typicality.

Main results
As expected, consumers were able to correctly judge the wine’s aromatic typicality in the blind test condition. Baron de Lestac (from Bordeaux) is perceived as more typical of Bordeaux wine, whereas Cellier des Dauphins (from Côte du Rhone) is perceived as less typical.

Our results show that the perceived aromatic typicality of a given wine is changing when the wine is tasted in blind condition or with modern (atypical) vs. classical (typical) label.

Results also show that the role of label’s typicality on perceived aromatic typicality differs as the wine is really typical or atypical of Bordeaux wines.

In accordance with H1, a label perceived as non-typical is able to deflate wine’s perceived aromatic typicality even if the wine is objectively typical (Baron de Lestac / Bordeaux wines). But a very typical label cannot reinforce the appreciation of aromatic typicality when the wine is not objectively typical (Cellier des Dauphins / Bordeaux wines). Thus, H1 is only partly supported.

Consumers’ subjective knowledge influences the relation between the label’s typicality and wine’s aromatic typicality.

Discussion - conclusion
Beliefs about extrinsic cues are dramatically rooted in the minds of expert consumers so that they automatically associate a particular kind of label with a particular kind of wine aromatic typicality. A possible explanation can be found in neuro-marketing experiments (McLure et al., 2004; Plassmann et al., 2007). Novice consumers are less dependent on global judgments because they are less frequently exposed to wine labels.
From a theoretical standpoint, our study outlines the role of extrinsic cues on consumer appreciations of products. We demonstrate the impact of perceived typicality of wine labels on wine aromatic typicality? Aromatic typicality seems to be linked to aromatics properties but also to semiotic.

From a managerial point of view, our results confirm the strategic role of labels in consumers’ wine perception - especially for expert consumers. A typical Bordeaux wine has to enhance the perceived typicality of its label. On the contrary, a wine-maker wishing to insist on his wine’s difference should also insists on the graphic message

References
Ballester J., Drecrement C., Le Fur Y. et Etievant P. (2005), The role of olfaction in the elaboration dand use of Chardonnay wine concept, Food Quality and Preferences, 16, 351-359.


