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Values as reasons for consumer decisions – an inter-cultural comparison

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Abstract— Nowadays, consumers usually do not just consider the functional use of a product. At least equally important are the emotional experiences that are tied up with the product and that are sated with non-material elements of a product. Which non-material elements of a product are considered important by the consumer, depends on his or her personal values. Therefore, the identification of personal values assists in explaining the consumers' purchasing motives. Since personal values do not just influence a consumers' purchasing decision but vary between cultural circles, it is expected that cultural values lead to culture-specific consumption patterns. To analyse the coherences between cultural values and the consumer behaviour of a cultural circle, 40 female wine consumers, comprised of 20 German and 20 Ukrainian women, were interviewed on the basis of Means-End-Chain-Theory using laddering-interviews. The initial findings of this qualitative survey will be presented in this poster.

Keywords— Means-End-Chain-Theory, cross-cultural comparison, wine consumers

I. INTRODUCTION

Generally, products in advanced societies do not just impart to the consumer a functional use, but emotional experiences as well, e.g. well-being. These emotional experiences are frequently the most important product characteristics when the consumer makes purchasing decisions and are sated with non-material elements of a product. As these non-material elements of a product are derived from the personal values held by consumers, the identification of values helps to explain purchasing motives and preferences.

Moreover, values vary between different cultural circles. Because of this, and of the influence of values on consumer behaviour, cultural values lead to culture-specific consumption patterns. By identifying values in different cultural circles, this connection between values and consumer behaviour of a cultural

circle is being investigated as part of the “Values as reasons for consumer decisions – an inter-cultural comparison” project, supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG). For the examination of consumer behaviour the example of wine in a German-Ukrainian comparison is used. The initial findings of the observed behaviour of wine consumers from qualitative surveys will be presented in this poster. To do so, the theoretical background for the analysis of consumer behaviour as well as the chosen method for collecting the necessary data will be explained. The forth part will give an outline of the behaviour of German and Ukrainian wine drinkers. In the poster, these results will be presented using a graphic representation of the mental associations of consumers. The article concludes with a comparison of German and Ukrainian consumers.

II. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AFFECTED BY VALUES

As a matter of principle, buying behaviour is based on the consumer's belief, a product with its different attributes is a mean to an end. This perception is reflected in Means-End-Chain-Theory, which implies, that product attributes are of little importance to consumers who try to achieve benefits, i.e. certain consequences, with the aid of product attributes. However, the prospect of buying different products does not have to be the achievement of consequences. In contrast, consequences in turn are perceived to satisfy higher needs, i.e. personal values [1]. Consequently, the expectation of achieving a personal value through the usage of a certain product is the actual buying motive. To analyse this connection between products and a consumer's personal values, consumer research uses Means-End-Chain-Theory and correspondingly, laddering-interviews.

III. CARRYING OUT THE DATA COLLECTION USING LADDERING-INTERVIEWS

The applied laddering-interviews take the form of personal in-depth interviews. First of all, the product attributes which are important for the respondent have to be identified. Based on these relevant attributes, the proband is asked to state why certain attributes are important. The answer to this question will be included in the next “Why is that important to you” question. By repeating this sort of “why” questions, the respondent explains which consequences resulting from the purchase of a product are personally relevant and which motivation (value) is the cause of the desire to achieve these consequences [2]. These coherences were determined in the course of 40 laddering-interviews. The survey comprised 20 German and 20 Ukrainian women aged between 25 and 45 who drink wine at least twice a month.

IV. RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL DATA COLLECTION

A. German wine consumers

When drinking or buying wine, the value *well-being/ satisfaction* is important for 12 women surveyed and therewith the most frequently cited value. This value, which states that the respondents' well-being increases, is arrived at by means of an exceptionally nice evening and whenever drinking wine in comparison to their everyday consumption of soft-drinks is something special. The consumers experience this if the wine tastes good. According to the probands, whether a wine tastes good or not depends on several product attributes, e.g. origin, grape variety and especially their preferred flavour.

The value *safety/ trust* was cited by eight respondents. Behind this value is the desire of being certain that they have made the right purchasing decision. The consumers get this security by reducing the risk of a bad purchase. This happens when consumers decide on a wine that they already know, and which they buy again because they have had a positive experience with it.

Still five of those surveyed cited the value of an *association with their local area*. This value expresses

that consumers identify with their homeland and is a reason why consumers look to help a region or producer economically by deciding to buy wine from that area.

B. Ukrainian wine consumers

Again, the value *well-being/ satisfaction* which is important for 13 probands is the most frequently cited value. This value is reached when the consumer is happy or having fun because of drinking a savoury wine in good company. This positive change of mood is fostered by the good taste of the wine, which is a result of a certain flavour or quality. The quality in turn is judged by the wine's origin.

Since 12 participants cited the value *health*, it is deemed similarly important. The reasoning behind this high level of importance ascribed to the value was that the interviewees have responsibility for other people, usually children. The way that the value *health* is reflected in the purchasing decision is when wines are chosen that, in the opinion of the consumers, are healthy or not injurious to health. According to the Ukrainian probands, whether a wine is healthy or not depends on its quality.

The Ukrainian probands also exhibit a high need for security, which is reflected in the fact that the value *security/ trust* is cited by 10 interviewees. They try to satisfy their need for security by avoiding making a bad purchase. As the concern about a bad purchase includes that an evening might go wrong because of a wine that does not taste good, probands get around this by selecting a wine they like themselves.

The value *social recognition* was cited relatively seldom, but nonetheless by 5 interviewees. This value is realised by participants in the study in situations such as when they are acting as a hostess and consider it important to make their guests happy. To achieve this, the factor of avoiding a bad purchase is important for the probands.

V. COMPARISON OF UKRAINIAN AND GERMAN WINE CONSUMERS

The first thing that is noticeable when a comparison is made between the German and Ukrainian consumers is that some values are only significant to

one of the two cultures. Thus, the value *association with local area*, which was cited by the German women surveyed, did not feature at all amongst the mental associations of the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians, on the other hand, found the value *social recognition* important, which had no relevance for the German women.

The comparison of associations cited also shows that some values are important to both cultural circles, but they are arrived at via deviating consequences. These sorts of differences between Germany and Ukraine can be seen in the value *well-being/satisfaction*. Both cultural circles have the fact in common that the most important value *well-being/satisfaction* is arrived at via the good taste of the wine. According to the statements of the German participants, to increase the feeling of well-being, the factor of making other people happy also has a role to play. Although the Ukrainian women also endeavour to make other people happy, the reason for this is not to increase their own feeling of well-being, but the desire for social recognition.

There are other differences in the value of *security/trust*, which was also mentioned by both cultural circles. For the Ukrainian probands, the value *security/trust* is more tightly integrated into the mental links, because the Ukrainian interviewees differ from the Germans by the fact that the value *security/trust* can also be satisfied if the consumer gets the feeling that the wine comes from a reputable producer or is made using a reputable method. This desire is the explanation for the fact that 16 respondents cited a need for information.

The differences between the observed cultures continue at the level of the consequences, which result from deviating product attributes. This can be seen in the consequence of taste. Whereas the German probands cited grape variety as an indicator for good taste alongside other product attributes, the grape variety is not important to Ukrainian women. The latter cited the product features of alcohol content, vintage and wine colour as indicators for taste.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that the value *well-being/satisfaction* is an important value to be aspired to in the connection with the consumption of wine, albeit the cultural background of the female consumers surveyed. However, there are also values which are relevant for wine consumers belonging to one of the two cultural circles surveyed, i.e. *association with local area* and *social recognition*. Thus, values that determine which emotional experiences a product imparts to the consumer are not only observable in advanced societies, but also in transition countries such as Ukraine. Noteworthy about these results is that even in transition countries emotional aspects are of importance to the consumer while deciding which product to buy, although consumers in transition countries are expected to consider objective product characteristics and especially the price of a product. Furthermore, the laddering-interviews revealed how values are associated with certain product attributes and thereby an explanation for the preference of certain product characteristics is given.

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