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**Values as driving forces of culture-specific consumption patterns
– an empirical investigation of wine consumers**

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*Contributed Paper prepared for presentation at the International Association of
Agricultural Economists Conference, Beijing, China, August 16-22, 2009*

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Abstract

Nowadays, consumers do not just consider the functional use of a product important, but also the emotional experiences a product is able to provide. These emotional experiences are sated with non-material elements of a product whose accordant importance depend on the values held by consumers. Hence, by referring to Means-End-Chain-Theory it can be stated that personal values constitute the actual buying motive. For this reason, the identification of values helps to explain purchasing motives and preferences.

Since values do not just influence a consumer's purchasing decisions, but vary between cultural circles, it is expected that cultural values lead to culture-specific consumption patterns. To determine these 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 using laddering-interviews. The results of this empirical study will be presented in this paper. In doing so, we highlight some differences concerning the consumption habits of German and Ukrainian wine consumers which might be caused by the divergent cultural background of the consumers surveyed.

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

1 Introduction

Products obtainable in advanced societies generally are mature, and thus different manufacturers' products only exhibit minor differences. Hence, the material needs of the consumers are satisfied, and so they look more for the satisfaction of emotional needs. To illustrate the priority ascribed to the emotional experiences associated with a product we refer to the example of a sparkling wine, namely the brand Mumm. Whereas the traditional German sparkling wine predominantly serves the consumer to celebrate special occasions, the rival products, e.g. Freixenet, convey the emotional experience of a positive change of mood. Such an emotionality is what young consumers associate with sparkling wine consumption and

beyond that, they want to give an expression to their modern lifestyle with the aid of Freixenet. The brand Mumm, on the other hand, which to younger consumers appears stuffy and old-fashioned, is not in a position to generate this emotional experiences and thus it is of no interest to this target group. In order to attract the attention of younger consumers, the brand Jules Mumm was developed, which was designed with the emotionality desired by the consumers: the experience of a positive change of mood (KUES et al., 2003).

As can be seen from this example, products do not just impart to the consumer a functional use, but emotional experiences as well, e.g. a positive change of mood. Because of the structure of the consumer's needs, these experiences are frequently the most important product characteristics when the consumer makes purchasing decisions (KOTLER and BLIEMEL, 1999: 21-26; KROEBER-RIEL and WEINBERG, 2003: 128-129). As these emotional experiences are sated with non material elements of a product which are derived from the personal values held by the consumers, the identification of values helps to explain purchasing motives and preferences. Hence, the primary aim of consumer research is to explain buying decisions by analysing the interdependency between a consumer's personal values and his/ her consumption habits.

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 (ENGEL et al, 1995: 612-616; HOFSTEDE and HOFSTEDE, 2005: 6-8; OSINGA and HOFSTEDE, 2004: 308; WATSON et al., 2002: 295). By identifying values in different cultural circles, the connection between values and consumer behaviour of a cultural circle is being investigated in the course 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 paper.

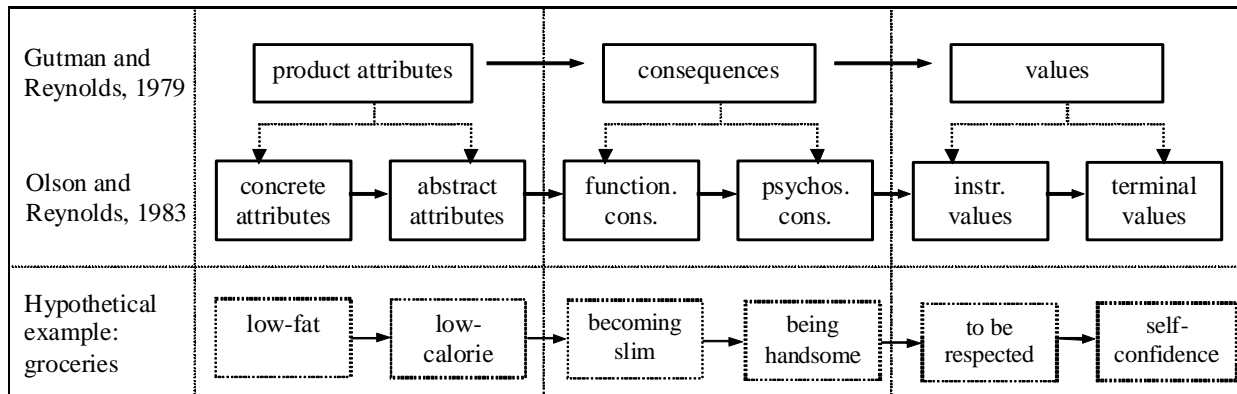
Thus, our paper is structured as follows. In the second chapter, we identify the virtual buying motive by referring to Means-End-Chain-Theory. The third chapter will be dedicated to the empirical study. Hence, we firstly describe the process of collecting the empirical data via Soft-Laddering. Afterwards, the results of the laddering-interviews with German and Ukrainian female wine consumers will be presented. In chapter 4, some differences between consumption habits in the contemplated cultural areas will be highlighted. Our paper finishes with some summarising conclusions.

2 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-Chains-Theory, which implies that product attributes are of little importance to the consumers who try to achieve benefits, i.e. certain consequences, with the aid of product attributes. Hence, product attributes only have a meaning in terms of the consequences they bring about.

However, the prospect of buying different products is not to achieve consequences. In fact, consequences in turn are perceived to satisfy higher needs, i.e. personal values which are defined as enduring beliefs that specific modes of conduct or end-states of existence are personally or socially preferable to opposite modes of conduct or end-states of existence (OLSON and REYNOLDS, 2001: 13). Therefore, the expectation of achieving a personal value through the usage of a certain product is the actual driving force of observable consumption patterns (GRUNERT, 1994: 218; GUTMAN and REYNOLDS, 1979: 132). For simplification, a schematic illustration of the Means-End-Chain-Theory is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The basic form of a Means-End-Chain



Source: GRUNERT, 1994: 216; GUTMAN and REYNOLDS, 1979: 128-150; OLSON and REYNOLDS, 1983: 81

To make the basic idea of the Means-End-Chain-Theory clearer, we refer to the example given in Figure 1. From a consumer's point of view the lower fat content of a grocery such as yoghurt is connected with less calories which helps the consumer to become slim. Furthermore, the functional consequence becoming slim enhances the consumer's outer appearance, so that the consumer feels more beautiful. In the opinion of the consumer, the fact that he/ she looks more handsome will improve his/ her standing in that the consumer will be respected by other people. Finally, by being respected the consumer feels self-confident. If the example in Figure 1 is contemplated the other way around, one can clearly see, that the fact that the consumer wants to satisfy his/ her personal value self-confidence is responsible for the consumer's attempt to be respected by other people. In the consumer's opinion, in order to be respected by other people, he/ she has to look beautiful which is easier with a low-calorie and a low-fat diet. These findings are, in the first place, relevant for consumer research in order to understand why consumers prefer certain product attributes such as low fat content. Since the contribution of these insights goes beyond that of the analysis of observable market stimuli such as product prices as well as income, consumer researchers are able to gain knowledge of the buying process, a domain in which science is still lacking behind and therefore facing some kind of Black Box. In the second place, knowledge of the connection between product attributes and a consumer's personal values offers useful input to several

components of the marketing-mix, e.g. product development and communication strategies as well as market segmentation. To analyse the connection between product attributes, consequences and a consumer's personal values, i.e. a consumer's Means-End-Chains, consumer research uses laddering-interviews.

3 Empirical Data Collection and Results

3.1 Data Collection using Soft-Laddering

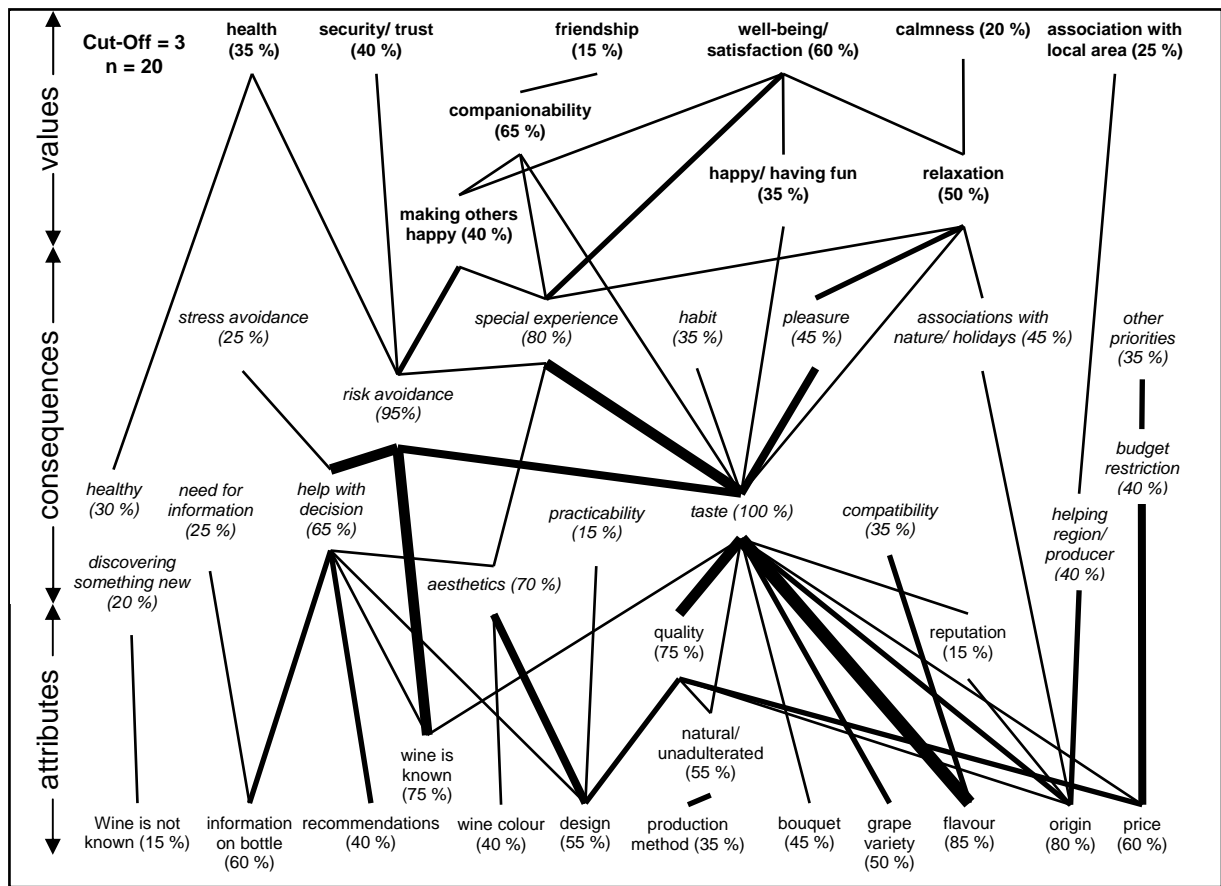
The applied laddering-interviews take the form of personal in-depth interviews. First of all, the product attributes which are important for the respondent have to be identified. Based on these relevant attributes, the interviewee is asked to state why certain attributes are important. The answer to 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 (REYNOLDS and GUTMAN, 1988: 12, 15). 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. The results will be presented using a graphic representation of the associations made by the consumers called Hierarchical Value Map.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 German female Wine Consumers

Figure 2 shows the Hierarchical Value Map, i.e. the graphic representation of the mental associations between product features, the resulting consequences and personal values, derived from the laddering-interviews with German wine consumers.

Figure 2: Hierarchical Value Map for German female wine consumers



Source: Based on own data collection

These associative chains, whose importance (according the frequency with which they were cited) is reflected by the thickness of the line of each association, begin with the product features listed in the lower section of Figure 2 (normal font). The chains continue with the consequences resulting from the purchase or consumption of wine (italics) and finish with the personal values held by the probands (bold). On the basis of these values, which have a strong influence on purchasing decisions (cf. CLAEYS et al., 1995: 193; GRUNERT, 1994: 218; GUTMAN, 1982: 60; GUTMAN and REYNOLDS, 1979: 129), the following claims can be made about the purchasing behaviour of the female wine consumers surveyed.

As could have been expected, the value *well-being/ satisfaction* is important for 12 woman surveyed (60 %) when drinking or buying wine 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. Not surprisingly, whether a wine tastes good or not depends on product attributes such as *origin*, *grape variety* and especially their preferred *flavour*. Regarding the preferred *flavour*, most women cited that they favour dry wine. Equally important for the rating of the wine's *taste* is the abstract product attribute *quality* which is determined by the concrete product attribute *price*. So far, the consumers' associations are comprehensible and concordant with the determinants of the wine's *taste* from the production side. On the other hand, consumers often associate product attributes with the *taste* of the wine which are not in line with any reasoned coherences. This is the case with the product attribute *design* of the bottle and the label which determines from a consumers point of view the wine's *quality*. Such a causal linkage between the concrete attribute *design* and the abstract attribute *quality* is not only highly irreproducible, but also subjective. These kind of associations make it even more difficult to understand a consumer's purchasing decisions and the consideration of such an association in marketing strategies is quite challenging.

Since consumers often state that they are somehow overstrained with the amount of products on offer, it is not astonishing that eight respondents (40 %) cited the value *safety/trust*. Behind this value is the consumers' 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. Furthermore, interviewees stated that the risk of a bad purchase is reduced by narrowing down the quantity of wine on offer which facilitates the buying process. This association is represented by the linkage of the psychosocial consequence *risk avoidance* with the functional consequence *help with decision*. As can be seen from the connection of the functional consequence *help with decision* with the product attributes *information* on bottle as well as *recommendations*, the buying process is made easier by considering at least one of the two concrete product attributes.

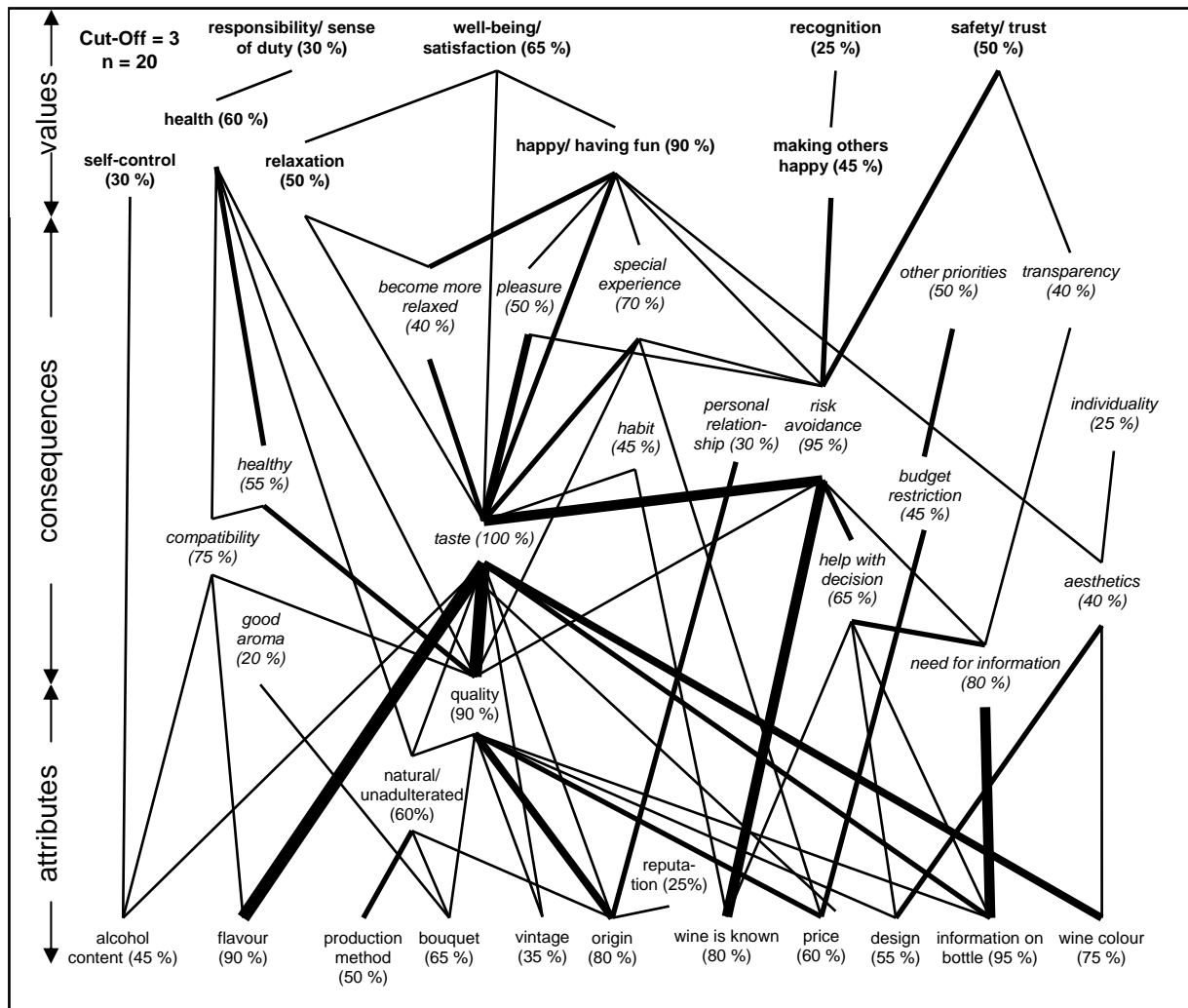
Still five of those surveyed cited the value *association with local area*. This value expresses that consumers identify with their homeland and is a reason why consumers look to help a region or producer economically by deciding to buy wine from that area. Regardless this association, German wine consumers did not mention Germany as their preferred specification of the concrete product attribute *origin*, although this association would have accounted for such a preference. Instead, the German wine consumers surveyed prefer wine from Italy and France.

Actually, the number of times the values *friendship* and *companionability* were mentioned is surprising. It was expected that consumers rather drink wine in good company. However, consumers stated that they want to keep up good relationships with others very infrequently. On the other hand, the instrumental value *companionability* was cited by 13 respondents (65 %). Since the linkages between the instrumental value *companionability* and other values and consequences were mentioned only by a few participants, it was not possible to figure out how this value is satisfied. Moreover, the divergent number of times the values *friendship* and *companionability* were cited makes it even more difficult to assess how important these values are when drinking wine. Probably, consumers were not able to think of any reason for the importance of the value *companionability*. Hence, the linkage to the value *friendship* was cited relatively seldom. As can be seen from this example, laddering-interviews with their ability to give good insight into consumers' knowledge structures also comprise some difficulties in that the consumers' ability to express themselves is demanded.

3.2.2 Ukrainian female Wine Consumers

Corresponding to the presentation of the mental associations mentioned by German consumers, the results of the laddering-interviews with Ukrainian wine consumers are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Hierarchical Value Map for Ukrainian female wine consumers



Source: Based on own data collection

As can be seen from Figure 3, the value *well-being/ satisfaction* is important to 13 participants of the study (65 %) which, again, is quite comprehensible. In contrast to the German consumers, who satisfy this value via the psychosocial consequence *special experience*, Ukrainian consumers mostly stated that the value *well-being/ satisfaction* is reached when the consumers' mood is fostered by the consumption of wine and whenever it makes them happy that the wine tastes exceptionally good in a happy atmosphere. Hence, the positive change of mood is brought forward by the good *taste* of the wine.

Furthermore, the instrumental value *happy/ having fun* is reached when the consumers *become more relaxed* because of drinking wine. If so, the interviewees stated that it is easier

to talk to other people and that the wine helps them to reduce complexes. This effect of alcoholic drinks is not startling. Otherwise, it is noteworthy that consumers express this association freely since often personal interviews are characterised by the fact that respondents just mention what seems to be socially desirable. Again, the psychosocial consequence of getting *more relaxed* is arrived at via the good *taste* of the wine which in turn is judged by the consumers' preferred *flavour*. In comparison to the German respondents, Ukrainian consumers do not favour dry wine, but sweet and smooth wines.

Since one would not anticipate keeping up one's own health has a role to play while consuming wine, the importance of the value *health* which was mentioned by 12 participants (60 %) was quite unexpected. 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. In contrast to the functional consequence *compatibility* which refers to short-term damages to health such as headaches, the functional consequence *healthy* adheres to long-term derogations to health. From this association it has to be assumed that consumers somehow are afraid that the wine for some reason such as additives or dishonest production methods might be harmful to health. Maybe Ukrainian consumers already experienced this because the value *safety/ trust* which was cited by 10 interviewees (50 %) with its accordant associations supports this presumption. The value *security/ trust* can 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 expressed in the psychosocial consequence *transparency*. Moreover, consumers get the feeling that they have made the right purchasing decision if the risk of a bad purchase is minimised by deciding to purchase wines that are already known to the consumer.

Fortunately, Ukrainian consumers once more did not hesitate to state their purchasing motive, although they might have appeared in a bad light. Without worrying about the impression the interviewer might get, participants expressed a desire for social recognition. In

fact, the value social *recognition* was cited relatively seldom, but nonetheless by a quarter of those surveyed. This value is realised by participants 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 *risk avoidance* is important for the wine consumers.

The instrumental value *self-control* was mentioned by six participants (30 %). By this value the wine consumers wanted to express that they do not want to get drunk and to maintain countenance. At first, this meaning of the instrumental value *self-control* does not seem to be comprehensible, especially if the abdication of alcoholic drinks would foster the satisfaction of the value *self-control*. One explanation for this apparent contradiction is that the value *self-control* is just one out of several values which are to be satisfied with the aid of the product wine (*happy/ having fun, relaxation, well-being/ satisfaction*). In the case of not drinking wine, these values could not be reached. Therefore, the abdication of wine is not an option for the respondents. In fact, as can be seen from the association of the value *self-control* with the concrete product attribute *alcohol content*, consumers deem the attribute *alcohol content* important. Hence, consumers prefer wine with low alcohol contents in order to be able to satisfy the instrumental value *self-control*.

4 Comparison of German and Ukrainian Wine Consumers

The first thing that is noticeable when a comparison is made between German and Ukrainian consumers is that some attributes, consequences and values are only significant to one of the two cultures. Some examples for these sorts of differences can be extracted from Table 1.

Table 1: Attributes, consequences and values important to one of the cultures surveyed

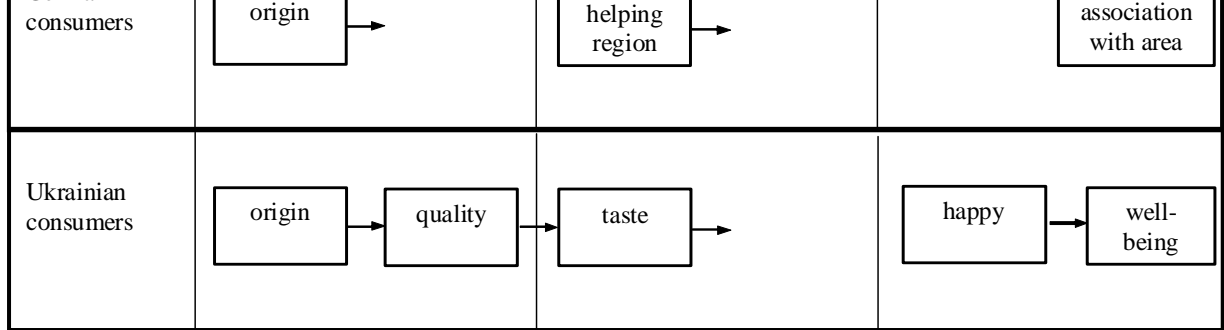
level of abstraction	Consumers from	
	Germany	Ukraine
attributes	recommendations grape variety	alcohol content vintage

consequences	stress avoidance, associations with nature/ holidays, helping region/ producer	transparency, become more relaxed, good aroma
values	association with local area companionability	recognition self-control

Source: Based on own data collection

In addition, the comparison of the associations cited also shows that in some cases both samples deem an attribute important, e.g. *origin*, but this attribute is associated with different consequences and values respectively. These differences are presented in Figure 4 using the schematic illustration of the Means-End-Chain-Theory.

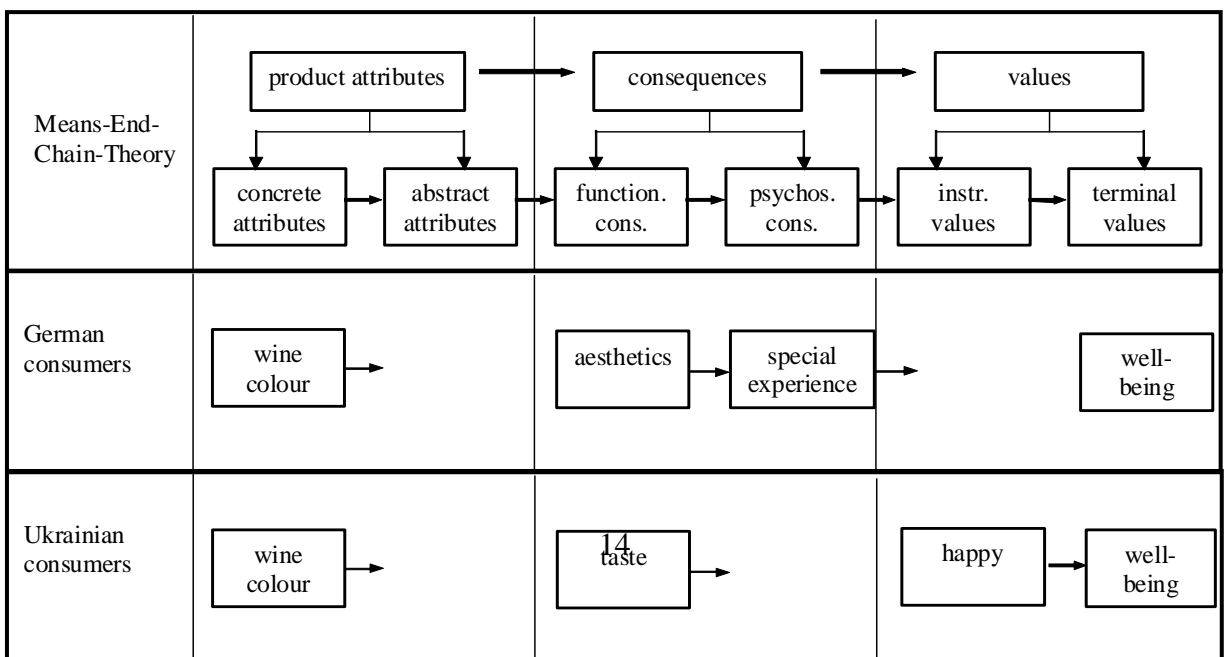
Figure 4: Associations made by German and Ukrainian consumers concerning the attribute origin



Source: Based on own data collection

Furthermore, it was observed that a certain product attribute which is important to consumers from both cultural backgrounds such as *wine colour* brings about deviating consequences. But finally, these consequences satisfy one particular value. Thus, the Means-End-Chains mentioned by consumers from different cultural backgrounds only differ with respect to the consequences. An accordant example is depicted in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Associations made by German and Ukrainian wine consumers concerning the attribute wine colour and the value well-being/ satisfaction



Source: Based on own data collection

When comparing the associations mentioned by German and Ukrainian consumers several differences like the ones depicted in Figure 4 and Figure 5 were identified. Moreover, differences with respect to the usage situation for which wine seems to be appropriate can be highlighted. According to the German consumers the value *well-being/ satisfaction* is arrived at via the psychosocial consequence *special experience*, whereas this special occasion is fostered by the good *taste* of the wine. Hence, consumers stated that drinking wine is not considered something ordinary, but something special. Furthermore, the good taste of the wine is associated with the psychosocial consequence *pleasure* which in turn helps the consumers to relax. Taking all these associations together, one could get the impression that consumers drink wine in order to calm down and to take a break from the bustle of their everyday life. On the other hand, according to Ukrainian consumers the value *well-being/ satisfaction* is arrived at when they are *happy or having fun* because of the good *taste* of the wine. As a result, in case of the Ukrainian consumers the consumption of wine is associated with a positive change of mood and with friskiness. Altogether, these differences in the associations mentioned by German and Ukrainian wine consumers point to diverging usage situations, i.e. the occasion for which German and Ukrainian consumers prefer wine over other drinks differ according to the consumers' cultural background.

Hence, our assumption that values differ with respect to the consumers' cultural background and finally lead to culture-specific consumption patterns is supported by the results of our empirical study. Certainly, it is not possible to transfer these results to the entity of German and Ukrainian wine consumers. Furthermore, we are not able to proof that the differences identified are caused by the consumers respective cultural background.

Nonetheless, we identified differences in consumption habits expressed by consumers from different countries.

5 Conclusions

Referring to Means-End-Chain-Theory we identified a consumer's personal values as the actual buying motive. Moreover, values important to the consumer vary according to his/ her cultural background. Hence, culture-specific values lead to culture-specific consumption patterns. These cohesions were identified in the course of laddering-interviews which were addressing German and Ukrainian wine consumers. From the results, 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 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*. Noteworthy about these results is that even in transition countries values that determine which emotional experience a product imparts to the consumer are of importance 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.

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