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# **Culture-specific Consumption Patterns of German and Ukrainian Wine Consumers**

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**Paper prepared for presentation at the 113<sup>th</sup> EAAE Seminar “A resilient European food industry and food chain in a challenging world”, Chania, Crete, Greece, date as in: September 3 - 6, 2009**

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# Culture-specific Consumption Patterns of German and Ukrainian Wine Consumers

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**Abstract.** By referring to Means-End-Chain-Theory, we identified personal values as the actual buying motive. Since these values vary according to the consumer's cultural background, it is expected that culture-specific values lead to culture-specific consumption patterns. To verify this proposition, we conducted laddering-interviews using the example of wine in a German-Ukrainian comparison. As expected, consumers differ with respect to their purchasing motives.

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

## 1 Introduction

Despite all differences between people there is at least one common characteristic between all people in the world. They have to consume food products. Thus, food consumption is very suitable for comparisons between nations and/ or cultures. In general, these types of comparisons of consumer behaviour try to identify how (exogenous) stimuli affect the buying decisions of consumers. Here, the researcher has the choice to explicitly include or even focus on the processes that are happening within the consumers or to regard them as a black box. In our study we take the first approach. Hence, the first aim of our research is to explain buying decisions of German and Ukrainian wine consumers 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). Thus, the second aim of this paper is to identify values in different cultural circles and the connection between values and consumer behaviour. For the examination of consumer behaviour the example of wine in a German-Ukrainian comparison is used. The initial findings 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 is dedicated to the consumers' cultural background. After having stated these theoretical deliberations, we illustrate empirically the importance of values while deciding which product to buy in chapter 4 and 5. To do so, we firstly describe the process of collecting the empirical data via Soft-Laddering. We deliberately decided on this qualitative approach which is able to provide knowledge concerning a consumer's reasons for preferring one product in order to not limit our empirical study to the analysis of observable market stimuli such as prices. Afterwards, the results of the laddering-interviews with German and Ukrainian female wine consumers will be presented. In chapter 6, some differences between consumption habits in the contemplated cultural areas will be highlighted. Our paper finishes with some summarising conclusions. The paper is based on the project "Values as reasons for consumer decisions – an inter-cultural comparison", supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

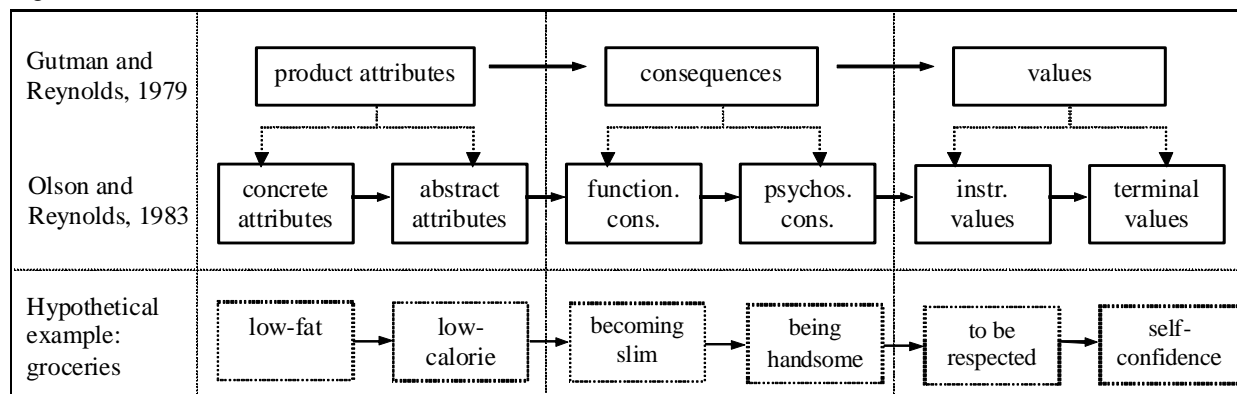
## 2 Consumer Behaviour affected by Values

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-Chain-Theory, which implies that

product attributes are of little importance to the consumer who tries to achieve benefits, i.e. certain consequences, with the aid of product attributes.

However, the prospect of buying different products is not to achieve consequences. In fact, consequences 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 buying motive (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 of low-fat food (Figure 1). From a consumer's point of view the lower fat content of a grocery such as yoghurt is connected with fewer calories which help 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 this example 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 personal values offers useful input to market segmentation as well as to several components of the marketing-mix, e.g. product development and communication strategies.

### 3 Cultural Influence on Consumer Behaviour

In order to make a buying-decision, consumers need information about the product in question. However, this process of absorbing and processing information differs according to the consumer's cultural background in that the meaning as well as the importance of certain information may vary. Therefore, the consumer's cultural background acts on the Means-End-Chains as a culture lens (Overby et al., 2005: 146-148). For this reason, the peculiarity of the consumer's Means-End-Chains are subject to his or her cultural background (Overby et al., 2004: 441; Overby et al., 2005: 146-148). The impact of a certain culture on the consumer's Means-End-Chains become apparent if the elements of culture with their respective influence on product attributes, consequences and values are contemplated. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) culture is defined as collective patterns of thought and behaviour which are at least common to the members of one society and therefore distinguish members of one society from the members of other societies. The criteria to differentiate societies are numerous as can be seen from the various definitions of culture (cf. McCort and Malhotra, 1993: 92-97). However, according to Hofstede (2001: 9-11) this variety of culture-specific criteria can be reduced to four elements of culture, i.e. symbols, heroes, rituals and values.

Furthermore, empirical studies confirmed these theoretical findings. These studies that were looking at products such as crisps and chocolate, ecological produced food as well as wine revealed that a consumer's preferred product attributes, the expected consequences resulting from these attributes and the values which the consumer

tries to achieve via the consequences differ according to the consumer's nationality and cultural background respectively (Baker et al., 2004: 1006-1007; Dibley and Baker, 2001: 81, 88-90; Januszewska et al., 2000: 19-20; Naspetti and Zanolì, 2006: 9-13; Overby et al., 2004: 448-451).

## **4 Empirical Data Collection**

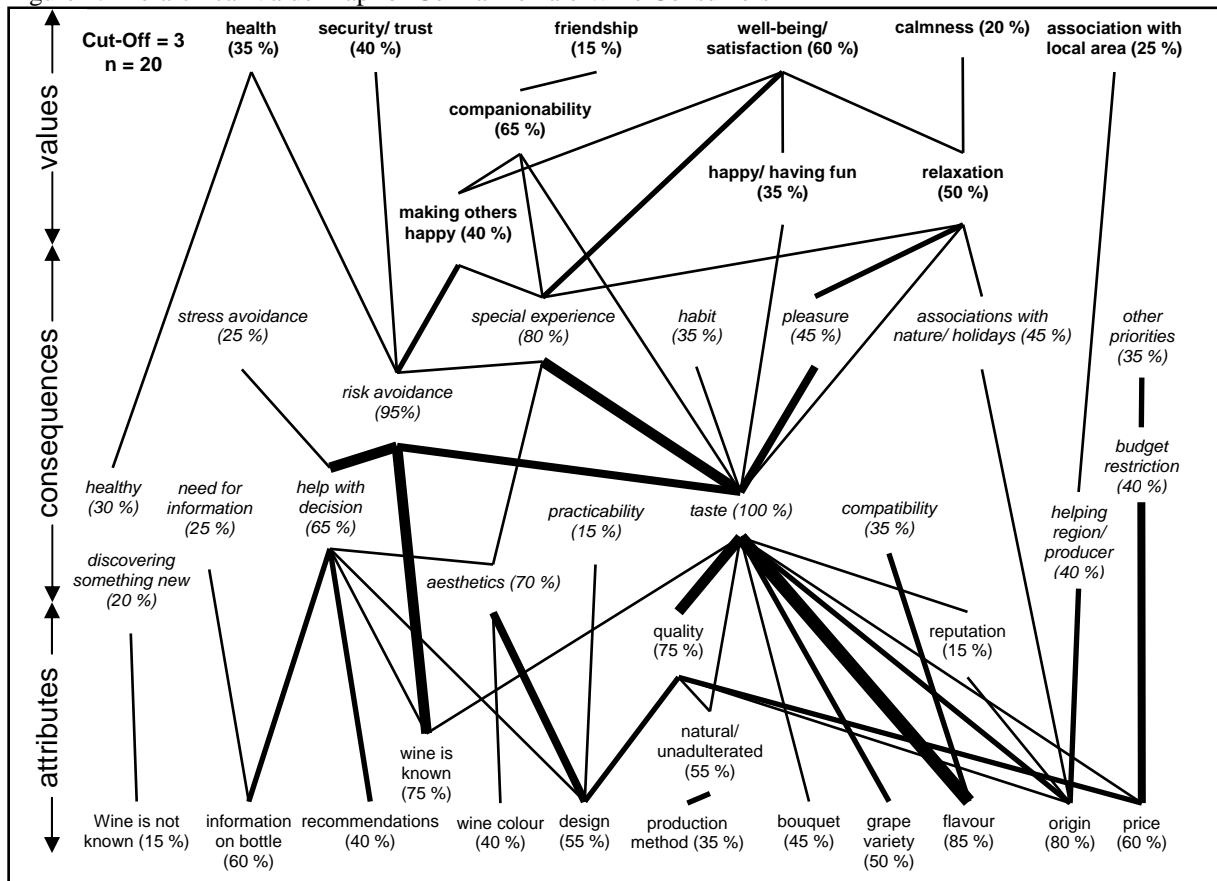
Whereas standardized questionnaires most often verify proposition made up by the researcher, personal in-depth interviews provide the possibility to reveal findings which are yet unknown. Moreover, in-depth interviews enable the researcher to not only consider observable market stimuli in the attempt to explain purchasing behaviour. In fact, with the aid of in-depth interviews one is able to uncover buying motives. For these reasons, we conducted personal in-depth interviews, namely laddering-interviews and given the time constraint preferred to conduct extensive interviews at the cost of the sample size in total. Laddering-interviews are in accordance with Means-End-Chain-Theory in that they provide insight into the product attributes, the consequences and the personal values which are important to the consumer. Hence, the attributes which the respondent considers relevant for his/ her purchasing decision have to be identified in a first step. Based on these 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 (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.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 German female Wine Consumers

Figure 2 shows the Hierarchical Value Map, i.e. the graphic representation of the mental associations between product attributes, 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 to the frequency with which they were cited) is reflected by the thickness of the line of each association, begin with the product attributes 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. Claey's 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 women 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 consumer's 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.

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.

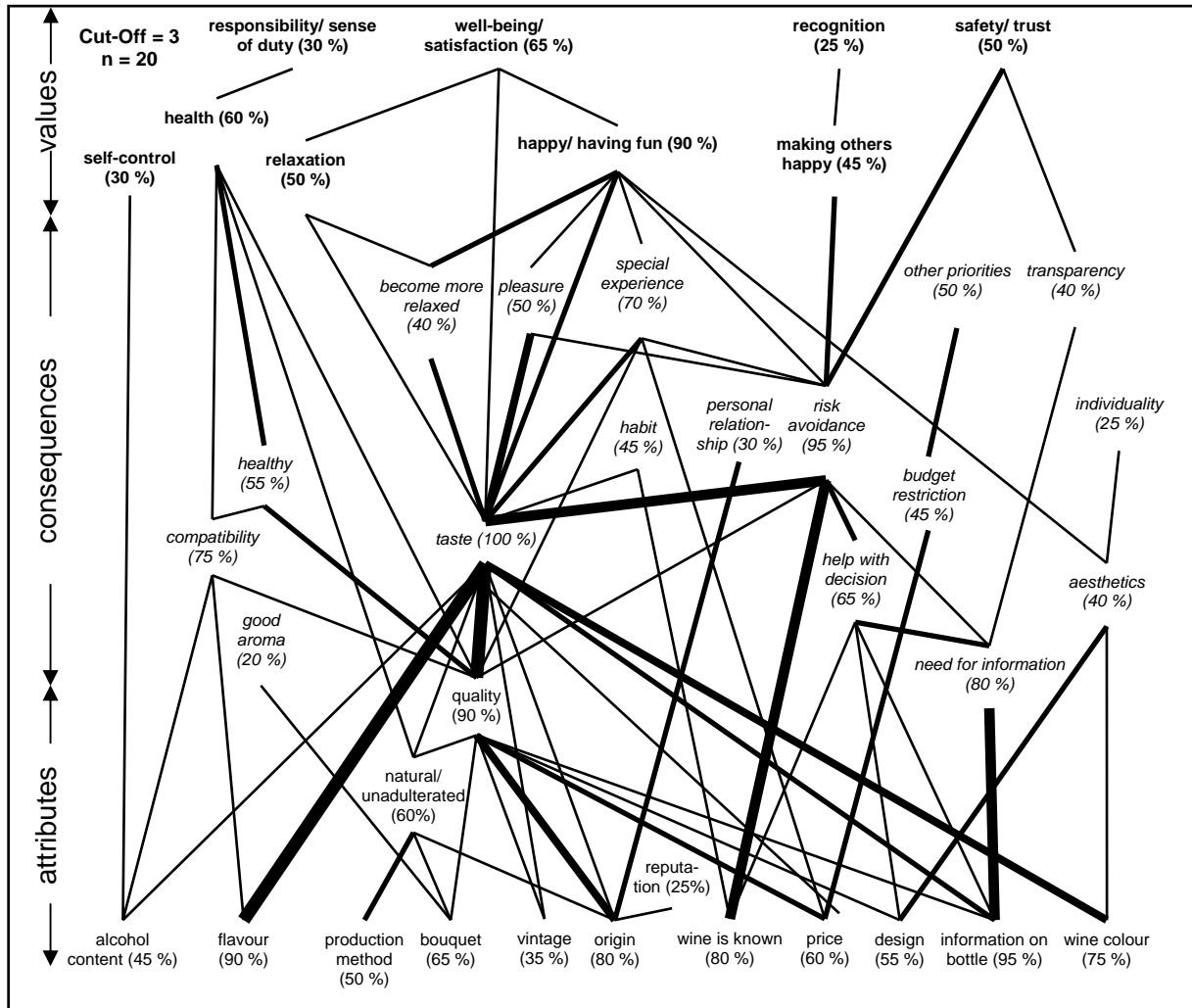
Still five of those surveyed cited the value association with local area. This value expresses that consumers identify with their homeland and is a reason why consumers look to help a region or producer economically by deciding to buy wine from that area. Regardless this association, German wine consumers 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.

## 5.2 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: 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 consumers get 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 content in order to be able to satisfy the instrumental value self-control.

## 6 Comparison of German and Ukrainian female 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.

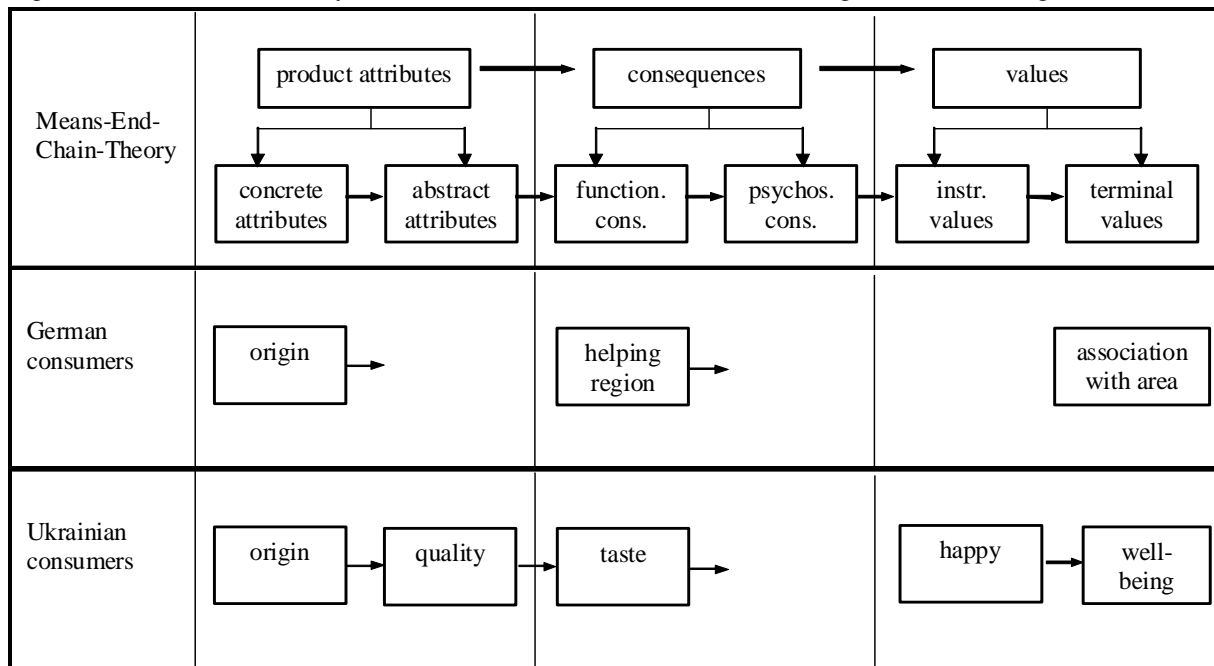
**Table 1: Attributes, consequences and values important to one of the cultures surveyed**

level of abstraction	Consumers from	
	Germany	Ukraine
attributes	recommendations grape variety	alcohol content vintage
consequences	helping region/ producer stress avoidance associations with nature/ holidays	good aroma transparency become more relaxed
values	companionability association with local area	self-control recognition

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.

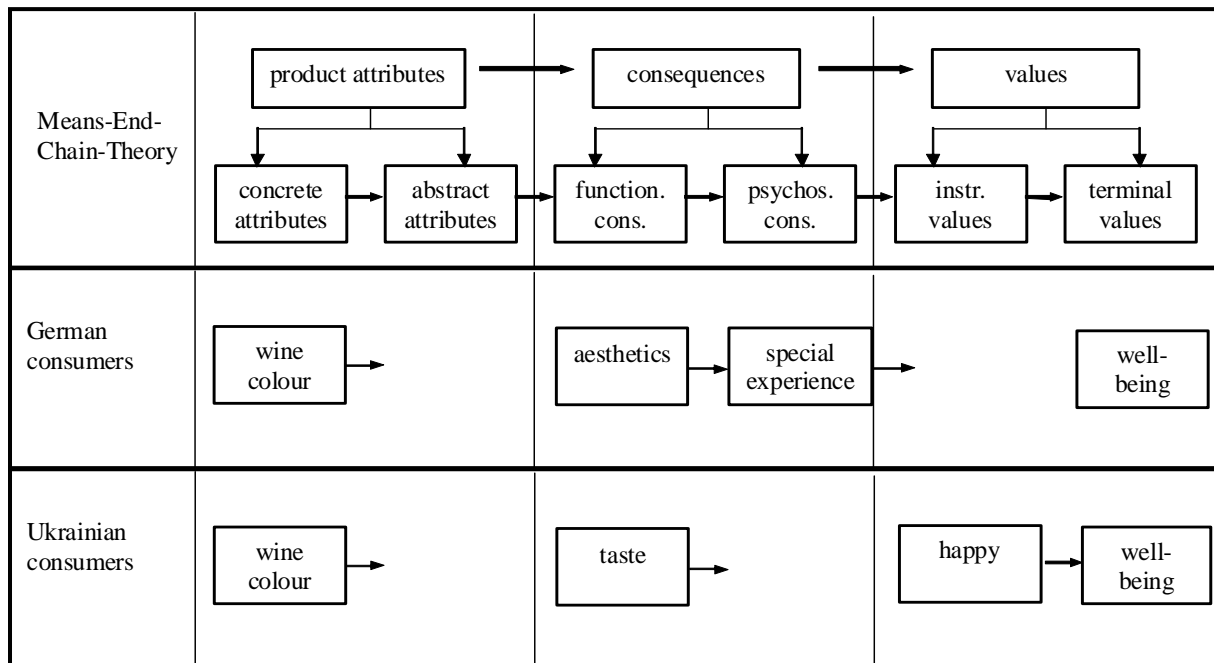
Figure 4: Associations made by German und Ukrainian Consumers concerning the Attribute Origin



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 und Ukrainian 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 prove 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.

Knowledge of these differences in consumption patterns of consumers from diverse cultural backgrounds, namely knowledge of the cohesion between a consumer's personal values, which often depict the actual buying motive, and his/ her cultural background is of great importance for marketing strategies in order to be able to adapt marketing campaigns. Since there are differences between the personal values of consumers from various cultural backgrounds, as can be seen from our empirical study of German and Ukrainian female wine consumers, these have to be taken into account by differentiating the strategic direction of marketing strategies, which should incorporate the culture-specific cognition of products.

## 7 Summary and Conclusions

In advanced societies it is not sufficient to differentiate one's own product from a competitor's product based on objective product characteristics since products in saturated markets hardly differ in terms of objective product features. In fact, producers have to differentiate their products emotionally and therefore have to be aware of the consumer's actual buying motive. By referring to Means-End-Chain-Theory, we identified a consumer's personal values as the virtual purchasing motive.

Secondly, we tried to emphasise that values are a central element of culture. Hence, as values are culture-specific, they lead to culture-specific consumption patterns. These culture-specific consumption patterns were detected in the course of an empirical study comprising 20 laddering-interviews each with German and Ukrainian female wine consumers. This qualitative approach was chosen, because laddering-interviews do not only provide knowledge of the impact of observable market stimuli on buying decisions, but offer insight into the buying process and the consumers' purchasing motives, i.e. the reasons why consumers prefer one product over the other. Based on these interviews, 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 wine consumers surveyed. However, depending on the consumers' cultural background the value well-being/ satisfaction is arrived at via deviating consequences. Furthermore, there are also values which are relevant for wine consumers belonging to one of the two cultural circles surveyed, e.g. association with local area and social recognition. Consequently, as stated in chapter 6 there are differences concerning purchasing motives and preferences between German and Ukrainian wine consumers. Thus, values that determine which emotional experiences the consumers expect the products to deliver 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 including cross-cultural differences.

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