

SENSORY TYPICITY OF APPELLATION WINES: HOW TO ADDRESS THIS SUBJECT WITH CONSUMERS?

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Typicity and terroir are notions often used by wine industry professionals. However, do consumers really understand, know and retain these terms? A study completed by the GRAPPE laboratory-ESA of Angers in collaboration with VINIFLOR-Paris showed that the perception of terroir and typicity is strongly influenced by the implication level of the consumer and their implication for wine. These results can be used to propose communication strategies that take into account the implication level of the targeted consumers.

TYPICITY AND TERROIR, CONCEPTS THAT ARE NOT CLEAR FOR NON INFORMED CONSUMERS

Terroir and typicity are complex notions that have several dimensions which are more or less known outside of the wine industry. These notions are mastered by producers and marketers and have the potential to be pertinent communication vectors were consumers to understand them. In fact, new consumers adopt and understand new concepts by relating them to concepts they already know. The premise that is being evaluated is that terroir and typicity are too difficult to communicate as a whole. For new markets and new consumers, this complexity can dissuade the adoption of the concept. Therefore, the general perception of terroir and typicity concepts were studied on French wine consumers. The objective being to lay down the framework for communication actions adapted to different consumers and to their "wine implication" level.

A study conducted online

The study objective is to evaluate consumer knowledge of terroir and typicity concepts. This study was executed through August and September 2008 via internet in order to have national coverage and to give the respondents the chance to answer the questions in their own time. The questionnaire was sent to 4000 wine consumers taken from two sources: consumers registered on the website of the Vignerons Indépendants and the Alumni of the Ecole Supérieure d'Agriculture of Angers. Six hundred and four responses were collected and these were well situated across France (consumers from almost all the departments). However, men (83%) and of individuals living in couples (figure 1) were over represented. All age categories were represented. Wine consumers (69% occasional and 27% regular) with different implication levels responded to the questionnaire. Overall the implication level was high enough, most likely due to the particular sources from which the consumers were selected.

Figure 1: Respondent repartition at the national level (no responses in the light blue coloured departments)

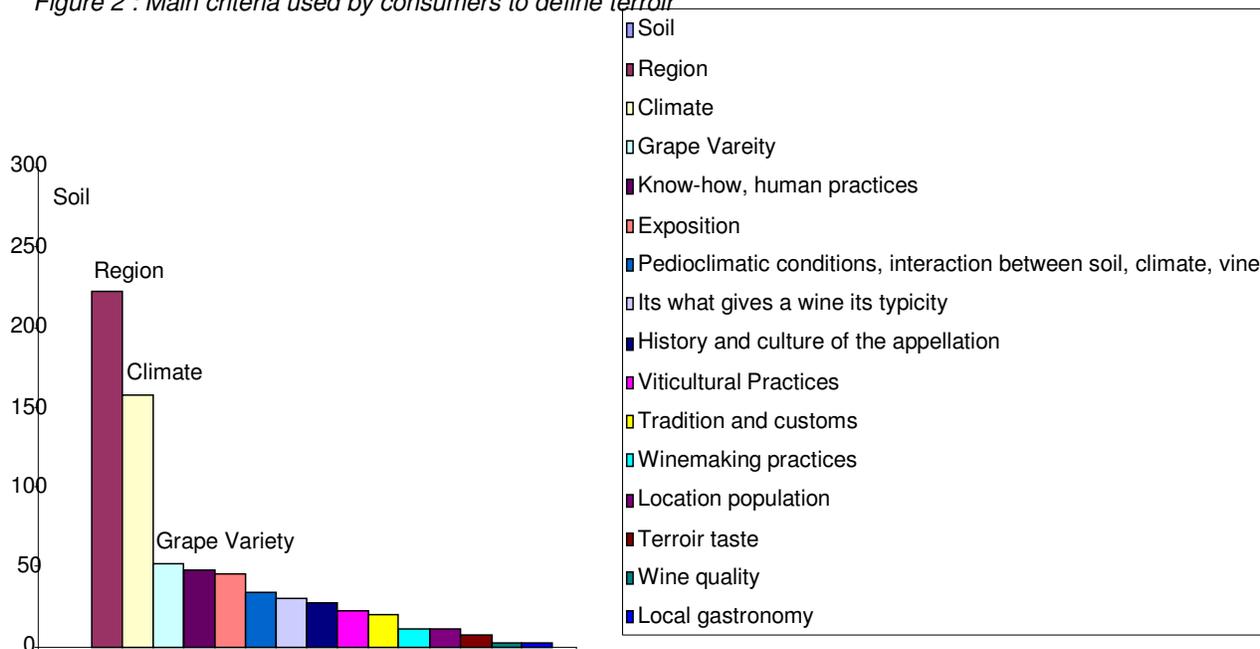


Consumers responded to questions about their buying and consumption behaviours, and to open ended questions: “Can you define the meaning of terroir” and “Can you define wine typicity?” Furthermore, they also responded to a series of questions to evaluate their wine implication level. These aimed to identify if the consumer was interested or not about wine, the wine industry and if they were actively involved in discovering more about the wine world.

Complexity that appears according to implication

The main results of this study (figure 2) showed that the three main criteria used to “define terroir” are the soil, region-production area, and to a lesser extent, climate. The grape variety, human know-how, plot exposition, pedoclimatic conditions, history, vineyard practices, etc... then follow but with lower citation frequency.

Figure 2 : Main criteria used by consumers to define terroir



When the definition given for terroir is studied while taking into account the implication level, it is possible to observe the effect of implication level on terroir understanding. 28% of consumers with low implication levels cite region- production area to define terroir. Some others mention other criteria, but region by far dominates.

69% of consumers with high implication levels cite less frequently region (31%), and cite more often soil (86%), climate (48%) and other more specific terms such as exposition, human know-how... These consumers also state that terroir is an important factor in their wine purchases, more than “less implicated” consumers.

It is also interesting to note that sex, age and consumption frequency do not have an effect on terroir definition. Overall, all the consumers know that terroir is related to the production area. However increased knowledge and interest for wine and the wine industry is linked to a more precise consumer definition of terroir.

As for wine typicity, the responses obtained remain relatively simple and focus mainly on the location where the wine is produced, however with supplementary comments which more precisely define this “location”. It would seem that a large part of consumers do not make a direct link between the typicity and the sensory characteristics of the product or do not mention this link in an explicit manner. It is also interesting to note that numerous consumers explain typicity by making reference to terroir.

Furthermore, the importance of different selection criteria used when buying a “wine that expresses terroir” were also studied using the “Best-Worst” method. Consumers had to choose the most and least important criteria amongst the location, soil type(s), viticultural practices, winemaking practices, climate, and history of the region. The location was found to be the main criteria used to communicate terroir, followed by the soil. The wine history is the least important criteria when it comes to buying (Table 1)

Theme	Most	Least	Utility
Location	195	34	0,40
Soil type(s)	77	35	0,11
Viticultural practices	52	25	0,07
Winemaking practices	39	80	-0,10
Climate	9	58	-0,12
Wine history	26	166	-0,35

Table 1: Importance of buying criteria for “terroir wines”

Message clarification for new consumers

Following this study, it would seem important to clarify the “terroir” message for new consumers. In fact in marketing: a clear and coherent message is essential for effective communication. The study results would suggest that a communication strategy focused first on the production region would be useful to introduce new consumers to notions of terroir. Hence, they could grasp the concept in a simpler manner. After this, it would be possible to add additional more complex information according to the implication level of the consumer, such as in more traditional markets.

CONCLUSION: A DIFFERENTIATED COMMUNICATION STRATEGY ACCORDING TO THE TARGET MARKET

The study results confirm that typicity and terroir notions are known and understood in different manners by consumers. These results can be used to communicate better about terroir wines by adapting communication efforts according to different markets and consumers,

A new consumer would be confused if presented with all the components that explain terroir and typicity whereas a more implicated consumer would possibly be disappointed if details were excessively simplified or omitted from communication strategies.

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