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## Innovative Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography Applied to Food Consumer's Behavior: The Case of Wine

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### Abstract

Consumers' behavior in food industry is a key point of investigation for marketing. Widely studied in different manners including the use of videos, the recent technological progresses allow now the use of miniaturized video facilities. This pilot study showed, for consumers shopping wines, how subjective video analysis of consumers' activity could greatly contribute to refine investigations whereas consecutive interviews of consumers lied on explicitation technique and goal-oriented verbalization. This was illustrated by comparative data analyses of Russian, Belarussian and French consumers shopping wines in Belarus and Russia. This paper highlighted the effective behavior put in light through subjects' motives analysis. Fundamental differences appeared through subjective analysis whereas this could not be seen through external observations. The findings may be of interest for food producers looking for criteria in order to have the adapted packaging when exporting their products. These results may be of great implication for food marketing in order to adapt the offer in stores.

**Keywords:** Behavior; Consumer; Food Industry; Video; Wine

### Introduction

Consumers' behavior in food industry is obviously a key point of investigation for marketing. It has been widely studied in different manners including the use of videos and their analysis. If ethnographic approach of the topic is applied since long (see for example Wells & Lo Sciuto, 1966), its combination with the use of video for consumers' behavior analysis is more recent. Very few examples are available in the literature and most of them concern external views of consumers in their shopping environment (see for example: Heisley & Levy, 1991; W5, 2007) or in restaurant (Wijk & Mojet, 2010) using even surveillance facilities (Popa et al., 2010).

The recent technological progress allowing the use of miniaturized cameras and camcorders helps researchers nowadays to reach a deeper layer of the consumers' behavior analysis using subjective recordings without disturbance due to heavy and bulky equipment. This was suggested by Belk & Kozinets (2005) and applied by very few researchers in different ways. Basil (2011: 252) described the potential uses of photography and video in observational research, their strengths and weaknesses, highlighting that "marketing researchers may be able to employ images that allow us to reveal aspects of human behavior that we would otherwise miss". Starr & Fernandez (2007) presented a miniaturized video system applied to the study of consumers' behavior, but their paper remained at a technical description of the device.

Hui et al. (2013) applied subjective videos analysis to study consumers' intention in a statistical frame. Few considerations addressed the subjective materiel of videos. On the contrary, Saarela et al. (2013) combined wireless audiovisual observation technology and verbal analysis protocol to collect information about consumer's behavior in stores. They could show how qualitative data on extrinsic and intrinsic factors affected consumers' choices. In the same line the present study investigated consumers' behavior in their purchasing environment using subjective camera combined to the Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography (SEBE) approach (Lahlou, 2011) to capture and analyze the subject's behavior during shopping. More recently, Gobbo (2014) applied the SEBE approach to shoes consumering (videos are available on line: ethnoshoes.com). This allowed him to extract a continuous timeline of action divided in significant phases (orientation, exploration, consideration, involvement).

The present experiments covered comparison of practice of choice of sparkling white wines in a shop in two different countries, Belarus (Gorky) and Russia (Moscow). These conditions were selected because the sponsor of the study wanted to have better understanding of the way consumers could make their choice on the East-European market regarding this kind of products.

They involved three different subjects: Belarusian, Russian and French. This choice was done for behavioral comparison between a subject used to selecting a French wine in France and a subject not used to doing it in East-Europe. The assumption made and leading to this sample of subjects was that the studied product could be suitable by its packaging on the West market according to the West culture but could need adaptation to fit the East market and the East culture.

The study thus addressed the motives and the consecutive actions of different socio-cultures subjects aiming at choosing a given food product on the basis of its packaging in the same environment. The objective was to characterize the resulting behavior and the associated subjective attitude in order to better understand motives and use the findings as a mean to adapt the commercial offer.

## Method

The selection of the shopping environment was oriented towards medium and big stores in order to know the products offered for consumption regarding the wider clientele, unlike spirituous shops.

In Gorky (Belarus), the store was Ievrohopt (Yakoubovskogo yl.) with a surface area of approximately 300 m<sup>2</sup>. Alcohols were presented side exit of the store with some expensive alcohols in the window locked including sparkling white wines.

In Moscow (Russia), the store was Azbouka (Mira pr.) with a surface of approximately 300 m<sup>2</sup>. The store occupied a particular area on the floor: all in length. Ends were equipped with airlocks for entering, but only one was equipped with cash desks. This one was assumed to be the main entrance. Opposite the main entrance were arranged alcohols in rows: first seen over the main entrance were sparkling white wines to the right hand side and, in front, left hand side of main entrance, champagnes.

The area of these store were comparable to those of West-European ones in big towns, as it can be seen in the fifth arrondissement of Paris in France (e.g. "Monoprix" stores) or in Bloomsbury arrondissement in London in UK (e.g. "Waitrose" stores). In these places as well as in Minsk or Moscow, these stores are surrounded by other shops of grocery type. For example, on a block of 5 x 5 streets in Moscow, there may be more than 10 "groceries" for 2 medium surfaces in the district Mira pr.

The subjects were all graduates at least Bachelor + 5 years, male, French, Russian and Belarusian, between 20 and 45 years. The subjects were individually brought in front of the store and were equipped with the camera. Recording was started just before entering the store. For the Belarussian shop, French and Belarussian subjects took the test. For the Russian shop, the same French subject and a Russian subject took the test.

The equipment operated and the related protocol of analysis for the study were based on the Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography or SEBE (Lahou, 2011). This method using recordings of the subjects' activity was shown to be more objective than the method based on interviews or meetings during which the analyst cannot know to what extent the narratives might transform or distort the activity. In addition, the SEBE used subjective videos rather than external videos operating with mini camera which gave more accurate insights of how the subjects acted and thereafter, through interviews, how they made their choice. Le Bellu and co-workers (Le Bellu et al., 2010) demonstrated the efficacy of such method by obtaining a refined description and comprehension of professional gestures in the aim to improve professional training. More recently, Fauquet-Alekhine & Daviet (2014), on the same basis, developed a protocol aiming at detecting and characterizing tacit occupational knowledge through speech and behavior analysis.

The equipment consisted of a pair of glasses with a mini cylindrical camera mounted on the right branch of glasses, connected by cable to a mini camcorder worn on the belt. A lavalier microphone wired on the camcorder provided audio recording (Fig. 1a & b).

Just before entering the store, the subject received the following prior advice: find a bottle of sparkling white wine, French or resembling a French wine, behave naturally, act as if going to buy such bottle.

When the subject came out of the store, the recording was stopped and the subject was interviewed. Interview of ten minutes consisted for the subject to answer the main following questions completed by additional questions aiming at making the subject to give more descriptive answers to the main questions:

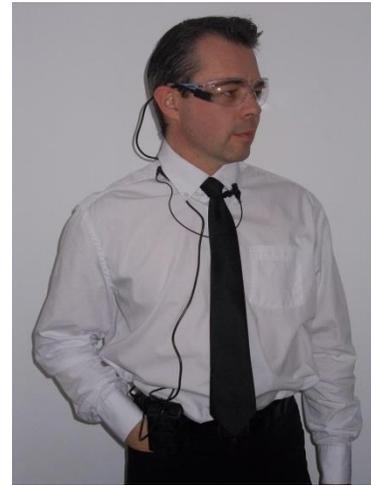
- Did you find what you were looking for?
- On which criteria this opinion?
- How did you perform the task?

Interviews were conducted applying explicitation technique (Vermersch, 1994), a descriptive words implementation of action experienced by the subject. This was undertaken in the frame of a goal-oriented verbalization as done by other researchers (Le Bellu et al., 2010) and used in a previous work. The added value of goal-oriented verbalization was to access motives, goals and sub-goals, and intentions of the subject whilst performing the activity. These motives, goals, sub-goals and intentions shaped the subject's ways or trajectories chosen to reach the final result according to the Activity Theory (Rubinstein, 1946; Leontiev, 1975; Barabanschikov, 2007).

All the videos (lasting less than 3 min.) of each subject were then analyzed for comparison.



**Fig. 1/a**



**Fig. 1/b**

**Fig. 1.** Example of subjective camera device a) from left to right, mini camera on glasses, lavalier microphone, mini-camcorder, belt holster for camcorder b) equipping a subject

## Results & Discussion

All subjects believed having reached the main goal. The criteria for their wine selection are compared in the following for the French and Belarussian subjects. About the Russian subject, information is restricted for commercial purpose and only few features are presented here. These data are derived from interviews with subjects and analysis of subjective videos.

The French subject found a French sparkling white wine in Moscow (import: Vouvray). In Gorky (as well as in Minsk (Belarus) but no comparison was done there), he found bottles that presented themselves as a French wine but were Italian, or of a country probably Eastern Europe but whose origin was difficult in his opinion to establish for someone who does not read Russian: "Baron of Arignac" and "Avenue de Paris". The French subject proceeded in moving toward the alcohol rows, found bottles whose form was champagne type, and eliminated all those whose label was Cyrillic or included only a few words in Latin alphabet, and then read the bottle tag to define the content and provenance.

The Belarussian subject did not find any French wine because there was not any but opted for a bottle which the wine name contained the word "Paris". The Belarussian subject proceeded by elimination of Russian bottles while the Russian subject had many Western European bottles that allowed him to target at the outset the search area.



The French subject had done the same by elimination in Minsk and Gorky, but he was directly oriented in Moscow due to the large offer of Western European bottles.

The Russian subject could choose a bottle of French wine but opted for an Italian.

The three subjects paid attention to the type of cap, but only the French paid attention to the shape of the bottle.

For the Eastern European subjects, the sobriety of the tag appeared important, and the possible recognition of a French word (such as “Paris”) facilitated the orientation of the choice compared to the prior advice.

The question of the price has not been addressed except by the French subject complaining in Moscow of the excessive level of the prices.

French and Belarussian subjects were apparently in the same way when the subjective film of their research was viewed. They even chose the same bottle. But the interview indicated that what motivated their apparently identical behavior was very different. Concerning the subject of Russia, external observations showed he was moving initially as the French subject but then managed differently.

The synopsis of each Belarussian and French subject regarding their general strategy of choice could be summarized as follows, after video analyses and interviews.

For both subjects, from the external observation standpoint:

- Enter the shop.
- Find the aisle of alcohols.
- Stop in front of wine bottles.
- Move to white sparkling wines.
- Check the bottles (without touching) and soon focus on bottles with Latin writings on the tag.
- Take some bottles in the hand (one by one if several) and read the front tag, then backside tag.
- Choose a bottle of wine.

At this step of analysis, one could think that both subjects made their choice the same way. But subjective analysis gave additional elements. The difference between subjects is emphasized with italics in the synopsis.

For the Belarussian subject, from the subjective standpoint:

- Enter the shop.
- Find the aisle of alcohols.
- Stop in front of wine bottles.
- Move to white sparkling wines. Find them due to the specific caps like champagne (sealed by wrapped wire and aluminum foil).
- *Read tags on the selves trying to find the provenance of the wines.*
- Check the bottles (without touching). Eliminate bottles with Cyrillic writings. Soon focus on bottles with Latin writings on the tag.
- Check color of the wine *and presence of bubbles* (written somewhere on the tags).
- Take some bottles in the hand (one by one if several) and read the front tag, then backside tag. *Look for words recalling France.*
- Choose a bottle of wine on the basis of aforementioned features *and also with regards to the sobriety of the tag.*

The Belarussian subject explained that the main feature for him to identify the kind of wine was the cap. The main feature for him to make the choice was a word recalling France and sobriety of the tag.

For the French subject, from the subjective standpoint:

- Enter the shop.
- Find the aisle of alcohols.
- Stop in front of wine bottles.
- Move to white sparkling wines. *Find them due to the specific shape of bottles and caps like champagne.*

- Check the bottles (without touching). Eliminate bottles with Cyrillic writings. Soon focus on bottles with Latin writings on the tag.
- Check color of the wine.
- Take some bottles in the hand (one by one if several) and read the front tag, then backside tag. *Look for words proving the provenance of France.*
- Choose a bottle of wine on the basis of aforementioned features.

The French subject explained that he did not check the presence of bubbles because, in his opinion, such shape of bottle and cap could just be sparkling wine. For the French subject, the main feature for him to identify the kind of wine was the bottle shape. The main feature for him to make the choice was the absence of Cyrillic words combined to words recalling France.

The criteria for their wine selection are summarized for easy comparison in the following table 1.

The comparative analysis showed that for the East-European consumer, the wine producer had to care of the cap and the tag of the bottle. The cap had to present the standards of champagne (sealed by wrapped wire and aluminum foil) and the tag had to look sober with words recalling France. This was more important than the shape of the bottle as for the West-European consumer.

### Concluding Remarks

This pilot study contributed to show how subjective recordings analyses and associated interviews using explication technique and goal-oriented verbalization could give a clear account and a refine description, and therefore understanding, of a consumer’s way purchasing food in a store. This study shows the huge benefit of an in-depth investigation of the subjective dimension of consumption, and the way this can easily be done using subjective cameras.

When investigating the subjective aspect of the consumption through the consumer’s motives that lead the food choice, the analysis reached indeed a deep layer of consumers’ behavior. The proof was done here for wine consumption using weightless video facilities combined with ethnographic observations and interviews through the Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography approach (Lahou, 2011).

The present study showed that the general structure for the choice of a bottle of wine could be made quite differently from one culture to another.

These results may be of great implication for food marketing when seeking improvement of the offer in stores through packaging.

**Table 1.** Criteria for the selection of wines by subject; data from interviews and video analysis with the subjects

Criteria \ Subject	French	Belarussian
Shape of the bottle	X	
Cap sealed by wrapped wire and aluminum foil	X	X
Label in Latin alphabet	X	X
Label not in Cyrillic alphabet	X	X
Name of the French wine	X	
Word that recalls France		X
Bottle/label that reminds a wine of France	X	
Sobriety of the tag		X
Wine color	X	X
Announced presence of bubbles		X



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