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Proposed paper

DOES KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY SPEAKS TO WINE CONSUMERS?
A French case study with respect to Chardonnay¹

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DOES KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY SPEAKS TO WINE CONSUMERS?
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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

When choosing wine, consumers are facing to several information regarding price, brand, grape variety, vintage. Once at home those who wish to be reinsured on the bottle they bought, can find an overflow of information available on the Internet though plenty of websites coming not only from companies but also from consumer associations or simply end-users clubs. However, most information available needs some skills in order to be intelligible. Are consumers able to interpret this overflow of information? It was shown that consumers can decide to remain rationally ignorant due to the opportunity costs of information processing, related to time and allocation of cognitive capacity, exceed the expected marginal benefit of being fully informed.

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The paper presents the results of a consumer survey carried-out in France in 2007 with 220 respondents, focusing on knowledge on Chardonnay. French consumers are deemed to frequently experience such white wine. We assume some information asymmetry exists among consumers, which means that close to the area of production, they may have developed some familiarity with a given product, rather than those living far from this area. Hence, the survey was split into two different regions.

The applied questionnaire included fifty questions on key dimensions of wine knowledge: processing, semantic and geography, in order to assess respondents' awareness on Chardonnay. Some of the questions were: "During wine making process, what is the first fermentation [alcoholic /malolactic /semi-carbonic /don't know]?"; "In which country is located the most important vineyard over the world [Fr /Sp /It /USA /don't know]?" and "What is the peculiarity of wine *Château-Grillet* [most expensive French PDO wine /most northern French PDO wine /smallest French PDO vineyard /don't know]?".

Thus, each respondent was valued on the basis of the level of knowledge shown through his/her responses among the three dimensions: processing, semantic and geography. The distribution of ratings issued from the above-mentioned coding of knowledge level indicates that geography is the dimension of knowledge most shared among the respondents, whereas the processing-related dimension is more discriminating. General wine culture (semantic knowledge) is in medium position.

We called *experts* those of the respondents with a high level of knowledge, whatever the dimension of this knowledge is, and *novices* those showing a low level of knowledge. A k-means clustering was used in order to better explain the diversity of knowledge displayed by the respondents. Four significant segments of respondents were found. Each cluster is described by its relative positioning according to the level of knowledge in each dimension (processing-related, semantic, geographical). The classes are well identified and fairly described.

When looking at explanatory data in order to better characterize the classes, some cross-tabulations were found as significant. The main explaining factors are: self-statement of respondent as connoisseur, region of residence, readings on oenology, level of stocks of wine from Burgundy, diversity of regions in the own wine cellar, number of bottles of white wine in the own wine cellar. Gender, income, age, focused purchase and variety seeking are less but still acting factors.