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## Article

# Social mobility and the social representation of sparkling wine in Brazil and France

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## Social Mobility and the Social Representation of Sparkling Wine in Brazil and France

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**Abstract.** Wine is a social object, established in the Old World and later migrated to the New World. Champagne is an internationally important and famous French sparkling wine, significantly present worldwide. Brazil, a New-World wine producer, has a recent but expanding history of sparkling wine production and consumption. As to its social aspect, this product has different representations and roles in both these countries. Therefore, this study aims to understand how culture and social status influence the organization of social representations associated with sparkling wines in Brazil and France. Thus, we used the Social Representation approach, a theory of knowledge and communication. For content collection, we carried out a verbal association task. Two hundred and thirteen Brazilians and one hundred ninety-eight French participants provided the first four words which came to mind after hearing four inducted words. The verbal associations were categorized using semantic contextualization. Then, we performed a Correspondence Factor Analysis. The results supported our hypothesis that culture, social status, and social origins all influence social representations associated with sparkling wine, revealing this kind of wine to be a product of social distinction and affluence.

**Keywords:** social origins, social representation, wine culture, social norms, wine consumption.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Consumption is a symbolic act, as social behavior is influenced by symbolism around a given product, as well as its social role [1]. Buying a product is not an isolated action. It is rooted in social and cultural values and ideologies. As a cultural product, wine [2, 3, 4, 5, 6] – with collective values and symbolism – projects different representations [5] because of its ancestry. Wine has more than 8,000 years of history [7], and was evidenced in Mesopotamia, a region which developed a rich urban civilization [8], as far back

as 3000 BCE. Wine culture was established in the Old World, represented by European countries, and was later migrated to the New World [9]. Represented by colonized countries, such as Brazil, New-World wine is undergoing an expansion in production [10] and consumption [11, 12], mainly in regard to sparkling wine, which has seen a significant increase in recent years [13, 12]. In Brazil, the conventional sparkling wine market grew around 160% from 2005 to 2017, and Moscatel sparkling wine grew around 400% [13]. France is still the main sparkling wine market in the world [14]. Over the last years, consumption there has remained stagnant, however, with low variation to local products and an increase of around 60% in imported sparkling wines [15].

Despite said stagnation, France is still the world's most important sparkling wine producer. The history of sparkling wine predates 77 CE, but its era of prestige began and continues with Champagne [16] in France. Therefore, Champagne has been followed and imitated all over the world. In the USA, for example, locally produced sparkling wines have used the name "Champagne" to convey a better reputation for themselves [17]. In Brazil, local sparkling wine was initially called "Brazilian Champagne" [18]. Inspired by the Champagne region, replacement products have also emerged in France, such as the Crémants [19] and other sparkling wines. In Brazil, the same representations associated to Champagne are applied to these variants mentioned above. Champagne shares the same representation with conventional and Moscatel sparkling wine and Cider, and, in France, Crémants and other sparkling wines [20]. Despite the physical differences, these products share a social meaning and convey different, historically constructed representations in society.

### *1.1 Social mobility and sparkling wine consumption*

Social mobility concerns status changes, upward or downward in social standing, on a population over time [21]. It is a general aspect of the industrialization process [22]. Europe overwent an upward process during the 1980's and 1990's, but it is currently experiencing a downward process [23]. Nowadays, developing countries are going through an upward process [24], among them Brazil. Such changes in social standing affect consumers' habitus asymmetrically [25]. According to the author, downward mobility provides no incentive to change their habitus as a devalued position. Contrarily, upward mobility works as an incentive to adjust the habitus, creating a blended habitus. In short, a blend of the position of origin and destination, facilitated by a slow and steady upward movement [25].

Despite sharing the same economic access as others in their social class, consumers develop different perceptions, depending on their social origins [26]. Social origins are tied to the one's family's social class and education. Such perceptions are also expressed in behavior. In the high class, people tend to maintain their status throughout their lives, so they try to replicate their family's behavior [27]. However, social origin is not the only influence. In alcohol consumption, one's behavior and perceptions are influenced by their social class and age, particularly during their adolescence and early adulthood [28]. In other cases, such as with music, preferences are related to the origin of the individual's capital and their environment [29]. We also have bandwagon effects. In this case, consumers replicate other people's behavior as luxuries that all should have access to [30]. Privileged classes want to maintain their status and habits, and individuals seek to replicate their position throughout their lives [27]. However, this replication of behavior, the traditional cultural reproduction, might be different because of the education received by one's parents [31]. Upon reaching a new class and amassing wealth, consumers are driven to demanding iconic European products, such as wines, which provide a physical characterization of their economic growth [9].

As a product, wine represents cultural and social distinction [2]. Drinking wine improves social relations [32] and has an elitist dimension, such as the maintenance of one's social status, as well as its differentiation and self-promotion [33]. For example, a woman in upward social mobility consumes more wine than women in her group of origin because wine is generally associated with affluence [34]. This is a possible effect of the social value of wine [35] and the different representations associated with it [36], as well as the cultural contexts which influence the way people think about wine [6].

The main context in wine culture is the difference between Old and New-World wine and traditional and non-traditional wine countries. The Old World retains a historical relation to wine, while the New World's association to it is much more recent, and mostly in former European colonies. Traditional wine nations, though they might belong to the New World, form a closer and more familiar bond with wine than non-traditional wine countries. For example, France bears much closer ties to Argentina, a traditional wine producing country, than to Switzerland, whose bond is nearer to Brazil, a non-traditional wine country [38]. The Old World, composed of European countries, is the traditional producer and consumer. The New World is made up of former European colonies, such as Latin America, Africa, Oceania, and

the USA [9], the new consuming and producing countries. Represented mainly by emergent markets, such as China, India, and Brazil, New-World wines have a social influence on wine consumption [37].

In those countries, consumers develop different relations with wine and its different types. Usually, older consumers prefer still wine, while young adults prefer sparkling wine [39] because of their different representations. Sparkling wine has different characteristics concerning types, countries, and segments [40, 41], besides the different consumption contexts [13]. In the New World, sparkling wine is more associated with enjoyment and self-image, while in the Old World, it is more associated with tradition and the product itself [42].

Champagne is the main product of this category. Champagne is an icon, a luxury, and a festive beverage which has shaped modern consumption ideologies [43]. Nevertheless, over the last years, the most important consumption growth has been tied to other sparkling wines. In France, the Crémant had an increase in sales of around 50% from 2005 to 2013 [44]. Brazilian consumers have increased the consumption of local sparkling wines, unlike the increase of consumption of imported wines, mainly from countries in the New World.

### 1.2 The Theory of Social Representations

Social representation (SR) is a theory of common sense in knowledge and communication. It reflects socially constructed knowledge, maintained and shared, aiming to build a reality [45] and beliefs shared by individuals in the same social and historically determined group [46]. SRs may influence individual behavior in collectivity [47] because they aim to understand how people think, communicate, and behave [48]. From them, one can understand how individuals and groups build a stable and predictable world, from an unfamiliar object to a familiar one [49]. Two processes allow this social construction: objectification and anchoring. The former reduces uncertainty, making an abstract object concrete. The latter incorporates the new object in a familiar category based on preexisting knowledge [50, 51, 52].

An SR's activity and construction are the same for all individuals, but objects and their content may vary across cultures [6]. People think and interact according to their own culture, and depending on their group of origin and level of knowledge [53]. An SR might also explain and influence collective behavior [54, 55]. It is a lens we use to see the world and understand the dynamics of social interactions and practices [56]. It was made

to persist and is not constantly changing [57]. According to Abric [58, 59, 60], SRs are structured around a central core and a peripheral system. The central core is rigid and may be activated differently to signify particular objects or practices according to the social context in which they occur [59]. Elements composing the peripheral system are more dynamic, accessible, and adaptable to a concrete reality. They also affect behavior [61, 62, 63] and allow us to understand products and objects from a social and cultural perspective [64], because an SR — as a collectively shared representation — classifies individuals as belonging to a specific group [65].

### 1.3 Summary and hypothesis

The present study aims to understand how culture, social origins, and social class influence the social representations of sparkling wine. Some studies aim at understanding the social aspect of sparkling wine consumption [13; 20, 42], and others focus on sparkling wine preferences [66, 67, 39, 68, 42], its intrinsic and/or extrinsic attributes [69, 70, 71, 41], and the sparkling wine market [72, 73, 74]. No studies have explored social representations of sparkling wine or made a comparison between the Old World and traditional wine countries against the New World and non-traditional wine countries, such as France and Brazil, or even that sparkling wine is a distinct category of wine, and an important product in the wine sector.

As to social representations, some studies have been developed about wine. It has been observed that still wine and sparkling wine are traditional and cultural products in France, one of the most important wine producing countries in the world. Contrarily, when compared to France, Brazil's history of wine production and consumption is recent, but has enjoyed significant growth in recent years. Sparkling wine was the most important reason for this growth, mainly due to internal sales, as this product has become linked to partying, luxury, celebrations, and a symbol of social affluence.

Previous studies have already approached social representations of wine in general. Those studies applied different approaches. Consumer proximity to wine improves their knowledge about the product, and, thus, there is an influence on how the object is represented in the consumer's mind [75]. Similarly, social representations allow highlighting how social groups understand the ill-defined concepts of wine [53]. Wine is seen as a traditionally French beverage [36], a cultural object of sociability and heritage [76] in which representations are influenced by culture and expertise level [6]. France is considered a traditional wine producing country, while

Brazil a non-traditional wine producing country [38]. Wine has an “ideal” context of consumption [32, 77] and may have an “ideal” label and bottle [78]; furthermore, it is an object of polemical representations and part of intergroup conflict, connected to social identity [5], represented as a product of social standing and affluence [20, 33].

Social representations are a worldview used by individuals or groups to understand the dynamics of social interactions and to clarify determinants of social practices [56]. Additionally, we have seen that social representations are constructed knowledge, socially and historically maintained, and they influence social behavior. Similarly, social origins, such as the education received by one’s parents’, also affect behavior and cultural practices. Due to these different social representations of wine, class, social origins, and cultural influence, our hypotheses were the following:

H1 – Social status and social origins will influence the way individuals represent sparkling wine, but they will be more important for Brazilian consumers due to their social mobility and the recent rise of the sparkling wine culture.

H2.a – Because the French are closer to and have historical contact with sparkling wine culture – being from a traditional country – social representations shared by them will be more related to wine culture and wine knowledge.

H2.b – Brazilians have a recent history with sparkling wine culture – being from a non-traditional country – and will thus share more trivial representations, showing ignorance about the product.

H3 – Sparkling wine will have shared representations with still wine as well as representations distinguishing the two.

H4 – Consumers will confuse sparkling wine with more familiar sparkling beverages.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Participants

Participants were recruited using the online snowball sampling method via online social networks. This method consists of participants inviting others to share the questionnaire link. The link was shared on Facebook and WhatsApp groups in Brazil and France, and we invited participants to share the link in turn. Two hundred and fifteen Brazilians (151 females and 64 males) and one hundred ninety-eight French men and women (142 females and 56 males) of legal drinking age (see table 1) answered the questionnaire. Wine and

**Table 1.** Participants age distribution across culture, socio-professional category, and social origin.

Age	Total	Brazil	France	SPC+	SPC-	SO+	SO-
18-20	4	1	3	0	4	1	3
20-29	166	94	72	80	86	80	86
30-39	99	68	31	56	43	36	63
40-49	54	20	34	31	23	12	42
50 and over	90	32	58	49	41	16	74

sparkling wine habits were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, where 0 = non-consumer (never), 1 = very occasional (exceptional parties and events), 2 = occasional (occasionally, other occasions besides parties), 3 = regular (regularly throughout the year), 4 = frequent (several times per month) [see 6]. Most participants were regular wine consumers (Brazil  $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ; France  $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = .92$ ) and occasional to regular sparkling wine consumers (Brazil:  $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ; France:  $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = .78$ ). Social origins were measured by their parents’ educational level [see 27, 31]. Socio-demographic questions were also asked, such as age, gender, occupation, income range, and educational level.

### 2.2 Procedure

We collected the content using a word association task, followed by two steps referring to hierarchical evocation and semantic contextualization [see 65, 60, 79, 80, 81]. Information such as social origins, consumption habits, and sociodemographic data were also requested. Participants wrote (04) words or phrases that came to mind [82] when we asked them about the four different inducing words. The inducing words in Brazil were: “vinho espumante” (sparkling wine), “espumante moscatel” (Moscatel sparkling wine), “sidra” (cider), and Champagne; in France: “vin mousseux,” “vin pétillant,” “vin crémant” – terms used to designate sparkling wine in French, and Champagne. These words were taken in referenced blogs and official content from wine associations, explaining the difference between those products, as well as how the product was misunderstood by the consumer [see 20]. To verify the context and the real meaning of the expressions and words, participants wrote a sentence expressing the meaning of the word and expressions through semantic contextualization [80,81]. The questionnaire was pretested with some Brazilian and French participants to verify their understanding of the terms and the organization in Portuguese and French.



### 2.3 Data analysis

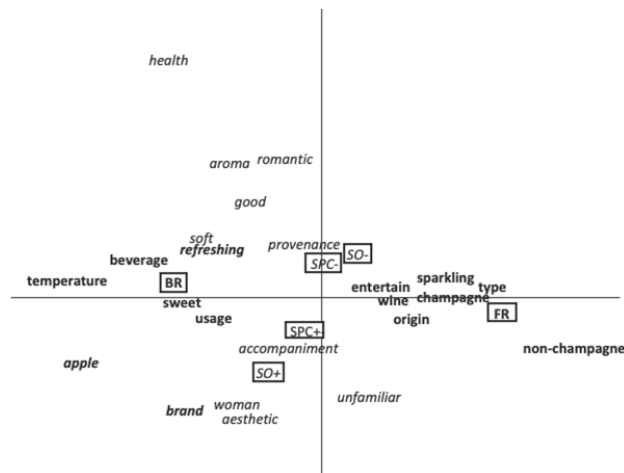
The words collected were categorized according to their meaning and similarity. This technique is based on intuitive-content analyses and aims to exhaust the meanings produced on a word association task [83]. The categorization was done by groups of meanings, based on semantic contextualization, that is, “Champagne,” when related to the wine from Champagne, and “non-Champagne,” when the participants affirm the difference from Champagne [see 81]. Participants’ data was dichotomized by culture (Brazil and France), socio-professional category (SPC+ and SPC-), and Social Origins (SO+ and SO-). Socio-professional category and social origins were dichotomized using the average of participants. Their social status was measured by socio-professional category [see 84, 85, 86]. Social origins were measured by their parents’ education level, following traditional cultural emulation [31]. Education levels were split by 2 years or less, and more than 2 years of a Bachelor’s degree or equivalent (university education). Finally, we performed the Correspondence Factor Analysis (CFA) from a contingency table [see 87], and the results are illustrated with a CFA Graph.

### 2.4 Correspondence Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA is a technique for processing different types of data matrixes, in which we can analyze interdependence between dimensions [88]. In this study, we look for the interdependence between representations associated by participants in the verbal association task (categories) and country of origin, socio-professional category, and social origins as independent variables. This technique allows us to simultaneously analyze independent variables and the verbal production of participants [83, 6], and also highlights the correspondence between the variable modalities and their associated words [6]. Through this method, CFA allows us to highlight social anchoring and helps us identify how the considered object is regarded, according to which positions it occupies in the social field [60]. It was developed to identify the most significant factorial axes [87]. This factorial analysis highlights the differences between association frequencies related to independent variables and their correspondence [80]. The graphical representation of results shows how social representations are organized [88, 83].

## 3. RESULTS

Correspondence Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to study the correspondence between our observations and



**Figure 1.** Graphical representation of the results from correspondence factor analysis (factors 1 and 2).

Note: It is important to read the figure following these instructions: Abbreviations in capital letters which are inside frames represent the terms of independent variables.

BR – Brazilians; FR: French; SO-: Low social origin; SPC-: Low socio-professional category; SO+: High social origin; SPC+: High socio-professional category.

“TERM” means that the term of independent variables accounts for the construction of Factor 1.

“TERM” means that the term of independent variables accounts for the construction of Factor 2.

“Item” means that the item accounts for the construction of Factor 1.

“Item” means that the item accounts for the construction of Factor 2.

“Item” means that the item accounts for the construction of Factors 1 and 2.

Items not considered as important are not showed on the graph, except to SPC+.

modalities (Figure 1). We used Deschamps’ approach [83], applied in recent studies, to define contributions by factors (CF) [see 87, 79, 6].

Factor 1 receives contributions related to the variable “culture”: Brazil = .44, France = .49, a contribution of 93% of inertia. Factor 2 is related to social status and social origins. High social origins = .44, low social origins = .23, and low socio-professional category = .13, a contribution of 80% of inertia. The high socio-professional category was excluded because it did not contribute significantly to any factor = .12. Figure 1 shows the organization of factors.

The main opposition, related to culture, is observed in factor 1. For Brazilians, the term “beverage” refers to many different sparkling beverages, such as Cider, Moscatel sparkling wine, and conventional sparkling wine, which have the same usage, such as toasting, cork popping, bubbles, special glasses, “a Champagne flute,” the ideal temperature for consumption, and as a light drink. “Apple” refers to Cider, derisively presented by

some participants as a “poor man’s Champagne.” The terms: “brand”, “usage”, “aesthetic”, and “romantic” refer to visual and social status due to the prestige associated with product consumption. Brazilian participants shared representations of a visual and refreshing beverage, such as with the terms “refreshing”, “beverage” and “temperature”. They are also associated with an easy to drink beverage, soft and sweet, with specific consumption practices.

For the French, “type” and “origin” refer to different products from different regions, such as the different regions where Crémant, in France, or other sparkling wines are produced, such as Prosecco, in Italy, and Cava, in Spain. “Champagne” and “non-champagne” refer to the importance of a good differentiation between the Champagne AOP and substitute sparkling wine. The word “entertain” refers to amusing moments in which sparkling wine is consumed, such as parties and happy hours.

Factor 2 opposes high and low social status, socio-professional category, and social origin. However, there is more consensus in France than in Brazil, which can be explained by the fact that wine is a cultural product in France [6]. There, sparkling wine is seen as “Champagne” and “non-Champagne” - substitute products [20]. Low social status represents sparkling wine as more visual and general characteristics, “refreshing”, “good”, “soft”, “provenance”, “aroma”, and “health”. “Provenance” refers to the raw material used to produce sparkling wine, such as must and grape, and methods in which low status participants affirm they know how sparkling wine is produced. They give more superficial and general information about the product and not details of organoleptic properties, as a traditional wine consumer would [see 38].

Those from high social origins associate sparkling wine with the protection of social standing and distinction, showing their knowledge about the product, the difference between substitutes, or lack of knowledge about them. In France, “non-champagne”, “unfamiliar”, and “accompaniment” show that substitute products are not Champagne. In Brazil, substitutes are not conventional sparkling wine. “Unfamiliar” refers to the lack of knowledge about substitute products. The brand is related to how consumers differentiate products and social standing, mainly in Brazil.

The results show evidence of sparkling wine as a product of social standing and distinction. The object has different social meanings depending on the country in question. In France, “Champagne” and “non-Champagne”, in Brazil, the different sparkling beverages and sparkling wine. In France, the representation is more

related to the different wine types than to the sparkling characteristic; in Brazil, it is related to consumption, rules, and general beverages, not just wine.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to understand how culture and social status influence the organization of social representations associated with sparkling wine in Brazil and France. According to our H1 hypothesis, results show that sparkling wine is seen as a product of social standing and distinction, but in different ways, depending on the country. One can observe that there is a convergence of associations from low social status, origins, and socio-professional category. High social status, social origin, and socio-professional category, which do not contribute significantly to the factor, do in fact converge. Among the French and Brazilians, in line with our theoretical elements, we can see the influence of culture. Indeed, results highlight a cultural difference between traditional and non-traditional wine countries [38].

Moreover, the process and construction of social representations are universal, but the subject differs across cultures [6] and depends on its country of origin [53]. Brazilians have a recent wine history [18, 89], but sparkling wine culture is on the rise. Differently, wine is part of the French identity and culture [90, 5, 6, 38]. Therefore, France is the origin of modern sparkling wine culture [91, 92, 8].

The results show social representation divergences in Brazil and convergences in France, probably due to their tradition of sparkling wine production and consumption. The results support H2.a, and H2.b hypotheses, in which one’s culture and proximity to wine culture influence social representations associated with sparkling wine. Results confirm prior research about the differences between traditional and non-traditional countries [38]. In Brazil, sparkling wine is more often related to a general, soft, sweet, refreshing, easy-to-drink beverage, and with different brands. In France, it is related to Champagne and substitute products – non-Champagne — from different origins, regions, and countries, and different types: representations linked to knowledge and ignorance regarding the product. This aspect highlights social standing and dominance related to wine consumption [33] and the proximity to wine culture. There are also differences concerning social status, more divergent in Brazil and convergent in France. That evidence likewise contributes to validating our H1 hypothesis.

Wine, in general, is a cultural and social product [2]. Other authors have also showed the different rep-

representations associated with it [77, 75, 5, 6, 78, 53, 36, 93]. In our study, according to our H3 hypothesis, the most important difference between still wine and sparkling wine is the presence of bubbles, foam, aesthetics, and entertainment. However, in Brazil, sparkling wine is represented as a general or common beverage with bubbles. In France, it is represented as wine with bubbles, consumed for entertainment, according to intrinsic and extrinsic quality characteristics [see 94], such as origin and type. In both countries, bubbles are an important element. They emphasize sparkling wine as a distinct category in the wine field, with bubbles, prestige, fun, and a product to be flaunted.

In France, we can observe the association between Champagne and non-champagne and, in Brazil, sparkling wine as a general sparkling beverage, including Cider. It is observed that there is a misunderstanding about the definition of sparkling wine. This result validates our H4 hypotheses about social anchoring, in which individuals familiarize novelty and reduce its strangeness [95]. Both countries anchor in familiar products to understand “new” products. Substitute products, Crémant, Cava, and Prosecco, are compared to Champagne; Champagne, technically a sparkling wine, holds a better reputation [16] and is represented in a different category. In Brazil, substitute beverages, such as Cider, a fermented beverage made from apples, are compared to conventional sparkling wine, sharing representation of sparkling wine, in some cases called “a poor man’s Champagne.” That is an anchoring process in which individuals give sense to a non-familiar object from pre-existing knowledge [50, 51, 52]. The process is related to social representation origins and reinforces social position and sociability [33, 96]. Brazilians in higher social positions have more knowledge about sparkling wine, and the French, about Champagne.

Otherwise, results show the symbolic aspect of sparkling wine consumption related to social factors, such as social standing, position, and mobility. Sparkling wine is a product of social affluence and with a strong visual appeal. However, social representations of sparkling wine, its consumption, and social distinction must be studied further. Thus, our study shows the future directions of social standing and sparkling wine consumption. The rise of sparkling wine consumption in Brazil and France could be explained by social distinction and mobility, mainly in Brazil, where social representations differ depending social origins, suggesting the use of sparkling wine as a product of social standing. Brazil has increased economic and social development in recent years, showing upward social mobility [97]. In upward mobility, individuals try to adapt to a new

social class, in an attempt to become a part of it and to be accepted by it [24]. Then, future research could study the correlation of the social representations of sparkling wine and social domination orientation (SDO), and conspicuous consumption, social representations of sparkling wine supporting a social hierarchy. SDO is the society that tends to have a social structure based on social hierarchies and dominance of hegemonic groups at the top [98]. Conspicuous consumption is “a deliberate engagement in the symbolic and visible purchase, possession and usage of products and services imbued with scarce economic and cultural capital with the motivation to communicate a distinctive self-image to others” [99, p. 217].

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Considering consumption as a symbolic act which bears a social role [1], sparkling wine consumption must be seen as a social and cultural phenomenon. Our research highlights the origins of sparkling wine representation and the anchoring process with Champagne and French practices, as well as the context of its consumption. As proposed by Rodrigues et al. [38], less-known regions must improve wine education as a marketing strategy to increase wine awareness, as it could be an important alternative for the wine market.

Despite its organoleptic characteristics, sparkling wine is an object of representation, and its consumption is a social phenomenon with cultural meaning. The object is used to communicate social class and the need for social affiliation. We highlighted the differences between traditional and Old-World wine, and non-traditional and New-World wine representations. These differences show the influence of Old-World wines and opportunities for wine marketers to build product brands according to consumers’ beliefs and culture, and the openness to new sparkling wine types, mainly in emerging countries, where upward social mobility is occurring and where there is a non-tradition of sparkling wine consumption.

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