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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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LA SOCIÉTÉ DES ALCOOLS DU QUÉBEC (SAQ)

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PRESENTATION OF THE CASE^[s1]

The Société des alcools du Québec (SAQ) is the state-owned enterprise whose mandate is to manage all trade of alcoholic beverages within the Canadian province of Quebec. In addition to an online store, it operates a total of 841 point of sales across Quebec: 402 branches, and 439 agency stores (grocery stores and convenience stores authorized to sell alcohol). (SAQ, 2017a)

The SAQ almost entirely separates the prevention of dangerous alcohol-related behaviours from the actual sale of alcoholic beverages. Indeed, the SAQ's only form of in-store prevention is through measures aimed at avoiding the sale of alcohol to underage or intoxicated individuals. SAQ stores are otherwise designed to deliver a pleasant shopping experience, like any other store would be, and its vision is nothing but 'to become a world leader in the selection and sale of wines and spirits'. (Ibid)

Most prevention occurs outside of stores, and the SAQ's prevention strategy is limited to shaping Quebecers' **intention** to engage in risky alcohol-related behaviours. In order to do so, the SAQ collaborates with Éduc'alcool, promoting responsible drinking behaviours through information campaigns and education. Not only have studies suggested that behaviour interventions aimed at intentions are limited (e.g., Webb & Sheeran, 2006), but Lawton and colleagues have also pointed out to the importance of considering both **affective** and **cognitive** components of attitudes in predicting health-related behaviours. Their findings suggest that when cognitive and affective attitudes diverge, which is the case for alcohol-related behaviours, affective attitude ('drinking is fun') will be a stronger predictor of risky health behaviours (Lawton & al., 2009).

Let's express things as they are: the SAQ is an extremely profit-oriented organization, and its prevention program is not serious. Considering how lucrative the SAQ's operations are to the federal and provincial governments, this is unsurprising and understandable. It is my view, however, that once the financial cost of the externalities of alcohol consumption are taken into consideration, it will appear quite illogical to pursue such a profit-oriented approach to the sale of alcohol.

Useful Facts

SAQ Stores. Two thirds of the SAQ's 402 branches are labeled *SAQ Classique*, and offer customers a diverse selection of products. The remaining stores are operated under four other banners: (SAQ, 2017a)

- *SAQ Sélection*, where customers can expect a wider selection of products;
- *SAQ Express*, which operate extended hours but offer only a limited selection;
- *SAQ Dépôt*, which are SAQ's warehouse-style stores; and
- ***SAQ Signature***, which are exclusive to Montreal and Quebec City, and where customers can shop for SAQ's most **high-end products**.



SAQ Classique



Montreal's SAQ Signature

SAQ Customers. The SAQ's two main types of customers are *consumers*, who accounted for 81.2% of 2015 sales in liters, and *license holders* (bars, restaurants, hotels, etc.), who accounted for 12.6% (SAQ, 2015). SAQ offers many services to its license holders, such as professional advice on wine selection, special delivery options, and employee training on alcoholic beverages (SAQ, 2017b).

SAQ Inspire. The SAQ recently launched the *SAQ Inspire* program, which allows customers to collect points with every purchase (5 points for every \$1 spent), and to redeem them in order to reduce their bill (\$1 off for every 1,000 points). The system involves the use of a magnetic card, a mobile application, and an online account. (SAQ, 2017c)



MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. Alain Brunet, CEO of the Société des alcools du Québec

From: Camille Girard, Masters student at the London School of Economics

Date: March 27th, 2017

Subject: Business Recommendations for the SAQ

Dear Mr. Brunet,

As a student in psychology and behavioral sciences, I constantly wonder how I could use what I learn for the benefit of my fellow French Canadians. I know caring about Quebecers is something I have in common with SAQ management, as I can tell from the excellent experience I've had every time I've shopped at SAQ stores. I believe this is what makes SAQ such an inspiration for retailers abroad, and never would I propose any change that would compromise that. Please allow me, however, to use the approach of Sweden to demonstrate how state-owned enterprises can maximize the prevention of risky alcohol-related behaviors.

Systembolaget is basically the Swedish equivalent of SAQ, but likely because of Swedes' particularly severe past issues with alcohol abuse, it differs significantly in terms of what it perceives its mandate to be. Systembolaget in fact calls it a 'social' mandate, and states it as follows:

*Alcohol is not like other products. Which is why Systembolaget is not like other companies. **We exist to limit the harmful effects of alcohol.*** (Systembolaget, 2015)

I understand it would be too much of me to ask that SAQ becomes a non-for-profit enterprise like Systembolaget, besides I don't believe it to be necessary. Which is why I propose instead an action plan based on **increasing sales dollars without increasing sales volume**. By simultaneously adopting measures aimed at responsible alcohol consumption, and others aimed at making consumers *switch* to higher profit margin products, I believe SAQ could achieve a more positive impact on society, while maintaining its bottom line.

In line with the above, here are the three strategies I propose:

1. Design stores for customers to have an optimal shopping experience, without being tempted to buy more **volume**.
2. Facilitate safe drinking behaviors, such as the habit of taking a cab home after consuming alcohol.
3. Focus marketing strategies on upscale products to maximize SAQ's profit to quantity ratio.

Below are three specific recommendations, one per strategy listed above. As I know how committed SAQ is to sustainability, I was careful throughout their design to consider any opportunity to reduce SAQ's environmental impact.

1. A New Vision for SAQ Stores

A series of potential improvements emerged from my analysis of interview data combined to detailed pictures of a typical SAQ store. (The interview was conducted with an SAQ employee equipped with 7 years of experience.)

1. Abandoning product tasting at checkout points.
2. Introducing baskets near checkout points, giving customers a chance to drop items they do not need.
3. Relocating 50 mL spirit bottles away from checkout points.
4. Raising product shelves to avoid displaying products too close to the floor.
5. Providing employee training on how to avoid encouraging customers from buying more than they need.
6. Grouping all organic wines in one section and displaying the fact that they contain significantly less sulphites than regular wines.

Implementing the recommendations above will serve to optimize customer experience, promote responsible alcohol consumption, and reduce SAQ's environmental footprint.

2. An SAQ-Téo Taxi Collaboration to Save People & the Planet

An enquiry into the cost of driving accidents caused by alcohol in Canada immediately reveals the urgency of implementing measures to prevent them. In a study published in 2013, it was estimated that the social cost of crashes involving alcohol or drugs amounted to \$20.6 billion in 2010. In Quebec only, the social cost was estimated at \$3.3 billion. (Pitel & Solomon, 2013)

Table 1. Social Costs of Fatalities, Injuries and PDO Crashes: 2010
(In billions of CAD\$)

JURISDICTION	FATALITIES	INJURIES	PDO CRASHES	TOTAL
British Columbia	2.513	0.479	0.190	3.182
Alberta	2.889	0.550	0.218	3.658
Saskatchewan	1.535	0.292	0.115	1.943
Manitoba	0.798	0.153	0.061	1.011
Ontario	4.289	0.819	0.324	5.432
Québec	2.604	0.496	0.196	3.295
New Brunswick	0.813	0.156	0.062	1.031
Nova Scotia	0.406	0.077	0.030	0.514
Prince Edward Island	0.015	0.003	0.001	0.019
Newfoundland & Labrador	0.211	0.041	0.016	0.268
Yukon, NW Territories & Nunavut	0.105	0.019	0.007	0.132
Canada	\$16.283	\$3.107	\$1.229	\$20.619

What I propose to tackle this issue is a two-fold collaboration with Téo Taxi, a Montreal-based taxi company.

- When checking out at SAQ stores, customers will be offered to buy Téo Taxi coupons at a discount.
- When using Téo taxis, customers will be able to redeem their SAQ *Inspire* points to pay for their ride, individually or by combining them to those of their friends.

This project will be operated through the Téo Taxi app, by linking it directly to customers' SAQ *Inspire* accounts.



For parents of teenagers and young adults living in Montreal, the concern goes beyond drunk-driving. No parent likes imagining their young daughter walking alone in the city at night. I remember the rule that my own parents established: 'Every time you're going home late, take a cab. We'll pay you back.' Which is why I propose this additional feature:

- Parents will be able to link their account to that of their child, giving them access to the coupons they bought for them to use.

The exact terms of the agreement will have to be discussed between the two companies, but on top of its financial aspect, SAQ will benefit from this project by reinforcing the perception that it is committed to the environment. Indeed, Téo Taxi is focused on 'making the world a greener, cleaner place', and operates using 100% electric cars. (Téo Taxi, 2017)



3. Targeting Business Sector Employees Through Corporate Caterers

With profit margins above 40%, making consumers *switch* their consumption patterns to products from the *Signature* collection has to potential to significantly increase SAQ's profit per quantity ratio. (SAQ, 2015) I believe SAQ could have a substantial impact on shaping consumer preferences by bringing producers to collaborate with corporate caterers. By catering for corporate events, parties and executive meetings, companies such as Aramark gain access to large groups of upscale consumers. Furthermore, the selection of alcoholic beverages offered at corporate events is usually limited to 1-2 red wines and 1-2 white wines. Through the caterer, selected producers could thus get a numerous high-income individuals to discover and experience together the same products.

Pairing this approach with a system allowing consumers to remember the names of the wines they taste will ensure that they ask for it the next time they visit an SAQ store. They could be offered a business card to slip into their wallet, or simply shown a barcode to scan through the SAQ app.

I am confident that the above recommendations will have a great impact on SAQ's value to society, and on SAQ as an organization.

Yours sincerely,

Camille Girard

THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATIONS

Disclaimer: Interview excerpts were used in my analysis, but due to their length, they had to be excluded from the word count. If this is an issue, they can be skipped. (Although, the reader would be missing out – they are quite fun to read!)[s2]

1. A NEW VISION FOR SAQ STORES

Developed by Prof Lahlou, **Installation Theory** recognizes that behaviours are determined by the combination of *physical*, *embodied* and a *social* layers. This method is highly applicable to behaviours occurring in *installations*, environments where they are the most predictable and standardized. (Lahlou, in press) Given that SAQ's 402 branches are very similar in terms of design and processes, this is a highly suitable method of analysis.

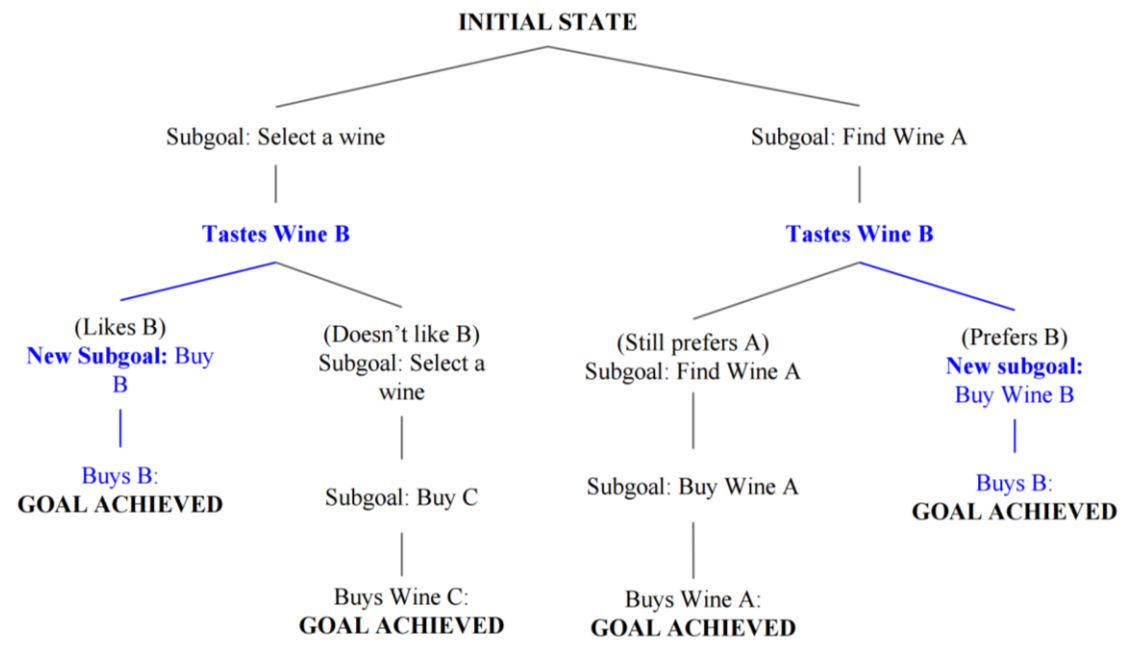
1.1 Producers often work with SAQ to offer product tasting in stores. Tasting stations are either located at the entrance of stores, or at checkout counters. The analysis below justifies why SAQ should **stop product tasting at checkout counters**.

	Consumer	Cashier
Desired behavior	Restraining from buying more than necessary	Efficiently processing purchase items
Problematic layers	Embodied & Social	Social & Physical
Layer of intervention	Physical	Physical

Consumer Perspective

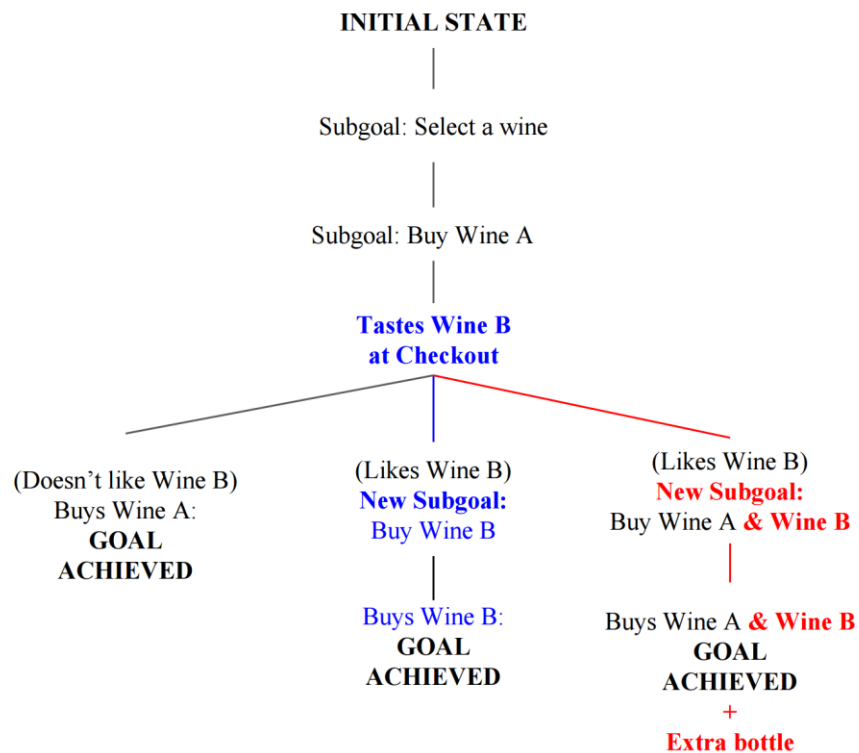
Using **Activity Theory** can shed light on the issue from the perspective of the consumer. As an illustration, the diagrams below illustrate the path of an individual whose goal is to buy a bottle of wine as a gift to dinner hosts. In Scenario 1, tasting Wine B as he enters the store either helps him select a wine (left), or change his initial preference (right).

Scenario 1



In Scenario 2, however, the customer has already made a purchase decision before reaching the checkout counter where an employee offers him Wine B. On top of being tempted by the stimuli, he feels socially pressured to make a quick decision (other customers waiting in line). In such conditions, the **Reflective-Impulsive Model (RIM)** suggests that he will be more likely to make an impulsive purchase decision, buying both products (Strack et al., 2006).

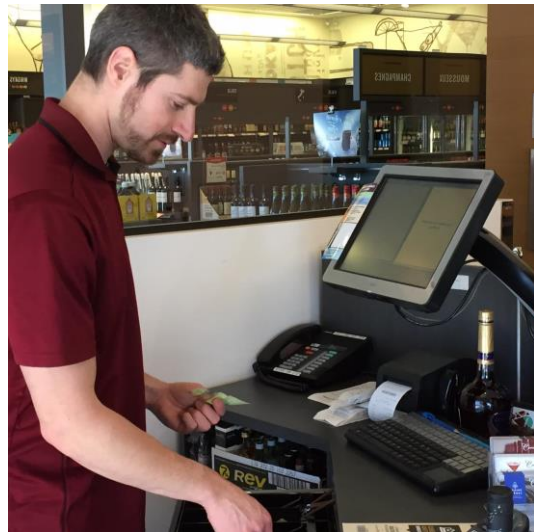
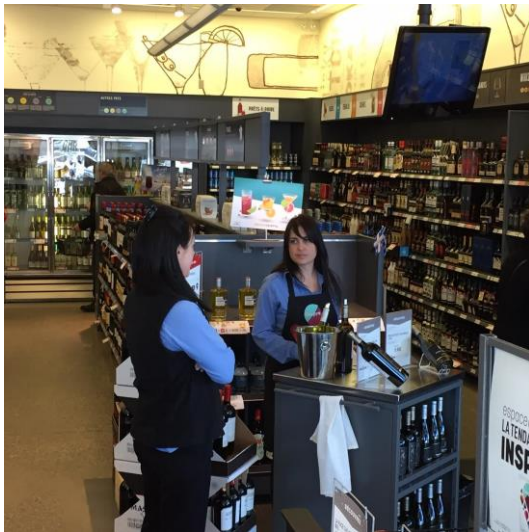
Scenario 2



Employee Perspective

Using a dramaturgical metaphor, Goffman describes face-to-face interactions as theatrical performances (Goffman, 1959). Necessary to a successful performance is the ‘front’ defining the situation to observers. This front is composed at least of a ‘setting’ (physical layout), and a ‘personal front’ (clothing, speech patterns, and bodily gestures).

Establishing this *front* is difficult for employees offering tastings at checkout counters. The picture on the left shows the *setting* that is usually used for wine tastings at SAQ – no such setting exists at checkout points. Furthermore, only the woman on the left is wearing an apron, an element of *personal front* adapted to her role. Finally, the bodily gestures of the man on the right are also inconsistent with the role of a wine salesperson: he is manipulating cash.



My participants also revealed experiencing conflicting role playing when required to execute the tasks of a cashier while offering products to taste. While he compares the role of a cashier to that of restaurant service employees (smile, politeness, formal language), he compares the task of wine tasting to the role of a car salesman (different attitude).

[À la caisse], je dirais que on se rapproche beaucoup d'un service de restauration. Il faut que tu souris, tu restes poli, tu vouvoies les gens. [...] Des fois, il y a des dégustations à la caisse. Ça c'est la partie que moi, je suis moins fan. Pendant que tu fais ton travail d'offrir un excellent service à la caisse, faut que tu vendes des produits, faut que tu fasses goûter aux gens des produits avec une autre attitude. Quand t'essaies de vendre quelque chose, de faire goûter quelque chose, je trouve qu'il faut que t'aies plus une attitude d'un vendeur de char de garage... T'offres aux gens de déguster, mais quand t'es rendu au moment de payer, je trouve que c'est plus un moment... je dirais c'est plus un moment solennel, c'est comme, t'es plus... c'est de la politesse.

Furthermore, he describes a problem of physical affordances, as the conflicting tasks cannot be executed easily with only two hands.

Quand t'es à la caisse, ton but, c'est de conclure la transaction, pis qu'ils partent sur une bonne note. Pis là, t'es là, en même temps que tu scannes la bouteille, faut que leur offre quelque chose d'autre à boire, pis comme tu peux voir, j'ai deux mains, fait que je scannes les bouteilles, pis là faut que je leur offre quelque chose à boire avec mes deux autres mains que j'ai pas...

The purpose of performances is to give a certain impression to the observer. The observer, in this case, is the consumer. Therefore, not only do checkout counter tastings generate temptation, but they also diminish the quality of customers' experience in stores.

1.2 Relocating 50 mL spirit bottles away from checkout points.

- Desired consumer behavior: Restraining from buying more than necessary
- Problematic layer: Embodied
- Layer of intervention: Physical

Spirit bottles of 50 mL are intrinsically more likely to generate an **impulsive-type response**. They are small, increasing the activation of behavioural schemata: it is easier to picture oneself grasping and drinking from small bottles. There are also cheap (all under \$10), which makes their purchase a low risk one (Strack et al., 2006).

At checkout points, **spacial proximity** and **time pressure** in decision-making are increased: the small bottles are hand-level, and other customers are often waiting in line. Due to the nature of these products, I thus recommend relocating them to give customers a chance to properly reflect on their purchase, without the added proximity and time factors.

1.3 Introducing baskets near checkout points

- Desired consumer behavior: Restraining from buying more than necessary
- Problematic layer: Social
- Layer of intervention: Physical

As they arrive in front of the cashier, consumers might restrain from giving up items if they feel **socially uncomfortable** about changing their mind at the last minute. This can easily be avoided by placing baskets right before checkout points, along with a sign indicating that they are welcome to drop items they no longer want to buy.

1.4 My participant revealed that products on bottom shelves never sell, and this is a source of unfairness towards wine producers. To solve this problem, I recommend **raising product shelves to avoid displaying products too close to the floor.**

- Desired consumer behaviour: More purchases from bottom shelves
- Problematic layer: Physical
- Layer of intervention: Physical

In a series of studies, Meir and Robinson (2004) demonstrated the existence of an embodied association between affect (good vs. bad) and spacial location (up vs. down). However, while a positive (negative) evaluation primes the upward (downward) direction, this effect is unidirectional. That is, an upward (downward) direction does not prime a positive (negative) evaluation (Meir & Robinson, 2004). These findings suggest that consumers' lack of interest for wines on bottom shelves cannot be explained by an embodied association between 'down' and 'bad'.

On the other hand, the pictures below revealed that product displays are so low that they look as if they were designed for children to reach. Since consumers cannot read lower labels without bending all the way down, the problem seems to reside in the physical layer of the installation. I thus recommend raising the entire product display from the ground to restore fairness towards wine producers.



1.5 Providing employee training to encourage responsible drinking

- Desired consumer behavior: Restraining from buying more than necessary
- Problematic layer: Social
- Layer of intervention: Social

Employees play an important role in shaping consumer's purchase decisions. In some cases, they can have a negative influence by encouraging consumers to buy larger quantities. This is an issue, as studies have shown that larger portions significantly increase intake. (Rolls et al., 2002) This idea is well illustrated in the excerpt below:

Le gars il dit, 'Ah je m'en vais juste boire chez des amis, d'après toi, un 13oz c'est tu assez?' Moi je dis 'Oui, mais dans le pire des cas, il y a un 26oz pis ça se perd pas...' Ça dépend du point de vue, à cause que c'est sûr que c'est moins cher d'acheter une plus grosse quantité, mais t'as une plus grande tendance à le boire... c'est comme acheter des bonbons, si t'achètes un gros sac, tu vas passer au travers.

1.6 Sulphites in organic wines

- Desired consumer behavior: More purchases of organic wines
- Problematic Layer: Embodied
- Layer of intervention: Embodied

After my participant mentioned that organic products were only sought by customers who suffer from headaches because of sulphites, I found information confirming that organic wines contain substantially less sulphites than regular wines. This is an interesting case of product transfer, and an information that SAQ should display to increase the attractiveness of organic wines (Akrich, 2008).

2. AN SAQ-TÉO TAXI COLLABORATION TO SAVE PEOPLE & THE PLANET

There two categories of buyers for this project are consumers, and parents buying for their child.

2.1 Buyers-Consumers

When it comes to drunk-driving prevention, SAQ collaborates with Éduc'alcool and has so far focused on advertisement campaigns that have successfully shaped Quebecer's attitudes and the relevant social norms ('I know it's bad for my health, and I condemn this behaviour'). However, I believe further prevention could be achieved by strengthening the psychological link between 'drinking' and 'using taxi services'.

Cialdini and colleagues have highlighted the importance of **accessibility** in the effectiveness of public service announcements over time, and demonstrated that linking an injunctive message to a **functional mnemonic cue** increases its future accessibility by activating the norm when the same cue is perceived (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Furthermore, Glasman and Albarracín (2006) have suggested that accessibility is increased when a subject has a **greater amount of thought** and **greater number of reports/expressions** relating to the attitude object.

Before completing their purchase, each customer will systematically be asked if he/she needs taxi coupons. Consequently, they will be prompted to think and express an indirect attitude towards drinking and driving. Over time, this repetition will create a strong psychological link between the concepts of *alcohol* and *taxi*, and the presence of alcohol will act as a mnemonic cue activating the injunctive message that one should take a taxi when he consumes alcohol.

Leveraging Group Effects

Téo Taxi is still a very new service, compared to more established companies such as Uber. In developing this recommendation, I was thus particularly focused on the social processes behind this form of consumption, identifying the *Other* (Moscovici, 1984), and ensuring that SAQ-Téo Taxi benefit from group effects (Lewin, 1943). This is the reasoning behind my suggestion to allow consumers to combine their SAQ *Inspire* points with that of their friends. Indeed, Lewin supports that it is easier to change the practices of small groups, than to change the practices of individuals.

2.2 Parents as Buyers

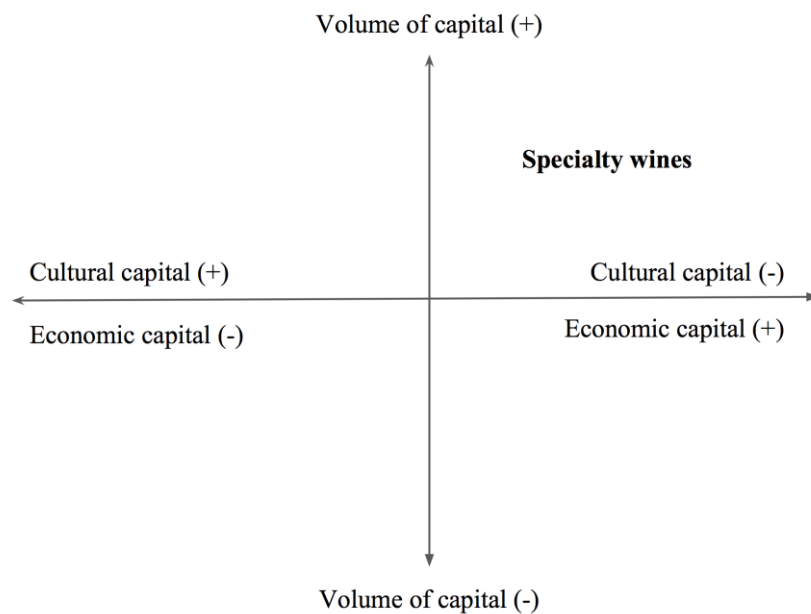
By allowing parents to link their Téo Taxi account to that of their child, SAQ-Téo Taxi targets the parent, rather than the child. Children are an important part of their parents' extended selves, which they will do anything to protect. The permanence of children's inclusion in their extended selves also makes them willing to give in a non-reciprocal way (Cheal, 1986). Finally, buying coupons will be a way to exercise control on their child (Whiting, 1960), in this case through economic resources which are likely more valued by young adults.

If environmental values are important to a parent's identity, and especially if he associates them with pride, offering taxi coupons could also be a way to vicariously consume through his child (Veblen, 1899).

3. TARGETING BUSINESS SECTOR EMPLOYEES THROUGH CORPORATE CATERERS

Targeting Business Sector Employees

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu demonstrates that one's lifestyle, taste and consumption patterns are a function of his location in the social space, which is in turn determined by the *volume* and *composition* of his capital (*economic* vs. *cultural*).



Those in the dominant class whose capital is mainly economic will often have commercial occupations, and Bourdieu suggests that their practices are characterised by the consumption of luxury goods and a 'carefully crafted opulence' (Bourdieu, 1984)

My participant provided significant evidence that the above applies to the consumption patterns of consumers at SAQ. He suggested that buying specialty wines is a way to signal one's knowledge, or to speak in Bourdieu's terms, one's *cultural capital* related to wines.

C'est pas une question de prix nécessairement, mais je pense que quand tu achètes un vin de spécialité, tu projettes une certaine connaissance en tant qu'acheteur.

Importantly, taste in wine can only be developed over time, making it a form of cultural capital only accessible to those with significant **economic capital**. This is clear from the excerpt below, illustrating the failure of other individuals to imitate the taste of the dominant class.

T'as des gens qui sont rendus à 20-21, mettons qui s'en vont souper chez les beaux-parents pour la première fois, pis qu'ils veulent une bouteille de vin, pis là ils cherchent la bouteille de vin, pis ils marchent par nom... Comme admettons le Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Les gens connaissent ça par réputation. Pis là des fois on en vend un, mais il a pas de millésime. En gros, c'est de la merde.

Following the above analysis, if SAQ is to adopt a strategy based on selling more of its upscale products, it is essential that the focus be on **upper-class** consumers with **high economic capital**. This is the reasoning behind my recommendation to partner producers with corporate caterers in order to gain access to Montreal and Quebec City's **business sector employees**.

A Distributed Cognition System

As consumers are enjoying an event with their office colleagues, their attention will likely not be focused on remembering the names of the wines they tasted. This is why it is so crucial to pair this strategy with a distributed cognition system (Hutchins, 1991). The first step will be to distribute their memory onto a card to slip into their wallet, or into the SAQ app. Secondly, as they enter the store, their cognition will be distributed to the sales personnel, who will gladly locate the product for them.

CONCLUSION

My first set of recommendations will have a much more significant impact if they become part of a larger transformation of designs and processes. This however will require a much deeper analysis through a method called Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography (SEBE) (Lahlou, in press). By using this tool with employees and consumers, I believe SAQ will successfully identify the improvements necessary to offer an optimal experience to its consumers, without tempting them to drink more.

My second recommendation is limited by the strong presence of Uber in Montreal. Although I would much prefer for this partnership to be done with a Montreal-based, eco-friendly company, SAQ should not reject the possibility of partnering with a more established taxi company such as Uber.

Partnering with corporate caterers is an interesting strategy. However, its impact might be more limited if the market segment targeted is already saturated. Conducting marketing research prior to its implementation could provide more assurance that this is a sound project to invest in.

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