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Champagne as a Symbol of Celebration: The Performativity of Happiness and the Construction of Social Class

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Abstract

Alcohol consumption can be considered as part of everyday life. It is important to highlight and note the internalization of certain patterns presented in advertisements for a specific category or type of alcoholic beverage. This study presents the models behind actions. It analyzes how social class is simulated through consumption and how advertising mediates this simulation. The study discusses class horizon, meaning the social class that an individual aspires to, which is illustrated through consumption. The main results of the study highlight individuals as social class consumers from Jean Baudrillard's perspective. Additionally, the discourse around the champagne glass is viewed from Thorstein Veblen's perspective of conspicuous consumption. My study suggests that individuals are performers who present themselves through what they consider socially desirable, consuming the social position they wish to showcase.

1. Champagne as a Story

Nowadays, it seems quite evident that champagne is associated with celebration and luxury, anywhere in the world. However, in the 17th century, bubbles first appeared in bottles of wine. It seems that an accident causing the fermentation of the wine turned the bottles into bombs, referred to at that time as "le vin du diable"—the devil's wine (Katrandjian, 2012).

According to historians, a monk named Dom Pérignon desperately tried to get rid of the bubbles in the wine, but since he failed, he decided to perfect the process.

Thus, he is credited with the invention of champagne (Katrandjian, 2012). According to the previously cited source, when he tasted champagne for the first time, he exclaimed, "Come quickly, I taste the stars!"

The price of champagne can range from affordable to unimaginably high. The stories surrounding the luxury of spending an evening with a bottle of luxury champagne are diverse. For example, in the nightclubs of major world capitals or in seaside clubs, there is no price too high to celebrate a moment with a glass of champagne. Thus, we can consider champagne as a character in plain sight.

It seems that this was only possible in modern times, but the first person to exhibit unusual behavior, which appears to have been among the first moments of champagne marketing, was in 1878 at the Exposition Universelle De Paris. According to LVMH, Eugène Mercier wanted his champagne to be known and talked about. In 1878, he decided to build the largest wine barrel in the world and bring it to the Exposition Universelle De Paris. The barrel weighed five tons, was five meters tall, and could fill 200,000 bottles. Even though the competition was won by the opposition, the reputation of Mercier's champagne spread quickly and remained associated with originality[1].

During the Belle Époque (between 1871 and 1914), champagne became a mass-market luxury (Barksdale, 2014), and it seems that it has remained so. According to Cult Wines Investment, champagne is the first luxury brand, and its great success seems to be based on the association made in the 19th century as the royal drink—the ultimate or fundamental luxury (drink of the royals-ultimate luxury)[2].

2. Consumption and Society

2.1. Consumption Behaviors, Perspectives, and Influences

Although champagne has been attracting more attention lately, literary references to champagne consumption date back a long time (Beccaria, 2001; Beckert, 2016). Through consumption, people can more easily integrate into a group, adopt a specific language and a set of habits built around it, and compare what is socially desirable to consume and what is not. This entire process is likely achieved through continuous socialization. In the pragmatic theory of the self, George Herbert Mead views the "self" as having two phases. In the first phase, the self is internal and subjective, while in the other, the self is external and social (Marshall et al., 2003). Regarding the studied theme, this could mean that there is a relationship between the inner self and the outer self—the inner self decides how it wants to present itself, and the outer self subsequently executes this presentation. However, I believe the relationship is rather interdependent, with the inner self-setting its level of expectations and being continually reshaped through interactions with the outer self and society.

In the same vein, Erving Goffman and Peter Berger consider identity to be a social process in constant transformation. Goffman (1959) specifically examines

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[1]https://www.lvmh.com/houses/wines-spirits/mercier/, accessed 29 April 2020.
[2]https://www.wineinvestment.com/wine/champagne/, accessed 29 April 2020.

the ways individuals present themselves "on the social stage." This theory, I believe, supports the previously mentioned idea that there is a relationship between the individual and the masks they wear throughout their life, between the inner self and the social self.

Similarly, Berger and Luckmann draw an analogy between human activity as a "human animal" and its organism, which is influenced by human activity through socialization. They argue for the existence of a language that arises from the socialization process, which continues throughout an individual's life. "Viewed from the outside, it is a dialectic between the individual animal and the social world. Viewed from the inside, it is a dialectic between the biological substrate of the individual and their socially produced identity" (Berger & Luckmann, 2008: p. 241). Therefore, the social self is the one that gathers information and transmits it to the inner self, which, in turn, translates it into beliefs, ideas, and actions. If we do not limit ourselves to this, we can extrapolate the idea that one of Robert Cialdini's six principles (Cialdini, 2008) intervenes, namely "Social Proof." Individuals perceive certain behaviors as more appropriate when they see others behaving the same way (Cialdini, 2008: p. 101). Thus, individuals adopt certain behaviors to con-form to societal norms, either out of fear of social sanctions or the fear of being excluded from a group.

This theory can also be applied to how an individual consumes champagne. Knowing the existing norms in society or the group they belong to—or wish to belong to—individuals strive to adhere to them both out of fear of social sanctions and fear of rejection as part of the group. The individual is aware of themselves and their evolution within social structures and social changes over time, constantly adapting and transforming their consumption habits to align with the demands and what they consider socially desirable.

Social influence is a common feature of everyday life and occurs when thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by external factors. It can take different forms and can be seen in processes of conformity, socialization, social pressure, persuasion, and social change (Smith, Louis, & Schultz, 2011). Social norms are based on social evaluations or social sanctions. They can be defined as standards that we should or should not follow, any kind of positive or negative behavior that modifies behavior (Gibbs, 1965). They are standards of behavior that place one in a certain social class or reference group. The consumption of certain products or product categories is a reflection of what one wishes to convey.

In general, research on decision-making focuses on preconceptions about certain aspects of life. Even though perception is a complex cognitive process that provides a unique and different image of the world from reality, a whole series of factors constantly work to shape it (Dhingra & Dhingra, 2011). Understanding such a phenomenon is important in studying the decision-making process, understanding the functioning of a society, and placing the individual in a social context that defines and explains human behavior. Perception, as defined by Robbins (2000: p. 121), is a process by which individuals organize and interpret sensory

impressions to give meaning to their environment. What is perceived can be substantially different from what is actually real. I consider it essential to understand how each individual interprets reality. Perception can be understood as a process in which "stimuli are received, selected, organized, interpreted, verified, and reacted to" (Dhingra & Dhingra, 2011). The transformation of perceptions can be treated as transfers of opinions, feelings, values, and attitudes resulting from preconceptions. I would go on to say that the entire process is subject to influence, which functions as a shaper of perceptions transformed into consumption habits. Individuals interpret the meaning of a particular type of behavior based on their own assumptions, social contexts, and mass media advertising. All of these function as a stylist of the behavioral model. Attributions–including one's own feelings, opinions, and emotions—are often projected onto various contexts, influenced by personal biases development throughout life via different experiences and exposures.

2.2. Champagne, Society, Hedonic Performance

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields explains actor behavior in market situations from a sociological, not economic, perspective. He defines a field as a network of relations between positions with different types and levels of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Unlike interactionist approaches (Becker, 1982; White, 1981), Bourdieu focuses on objective positions and their relationships, shaped by forms of capital. In the context of champagne consumption, relevant forms of capital include economic, cultural, technological, production processes, and symbolic recognition. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, champagne is a way of objectifying distinction through consumption.

By combining economic and social capital, Blink and Dorton (2012) suggest that consumer behavior is inverse: when prices rise, demand decreases. However, this can be challenged by the idea that rising prices increase a product's perceived value, supported by Cialdini's principle of scarcity (Cialdini, 2008). Luxury items are linked to a "DNA of luxury" (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009: p. 19), symbolizing higher social class. This social class is relative, based on personal aspirations, but objects that lose social significance lose their luxury status (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009: p. 19). Luxury thus involves both social stratification and hedonistic pleasure.

Producers and consumers differ in economic interests and the signals they wish to convey, driven by a desire for distinction. Bourdieu (1996) suggests an alignment between the symbolic hierarchy of producers and the social hierarchy of consumers, such as in the case of champagne. From Bourdieu's (1996) perspective, all consumers can engage with mass-produced goods, but only those with knowledge, or a developed habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), can truly appreciate luxury items like champagne.

Maslow's theory helps explain the need for social recognition and the consumption of status symbols like champagne. Veblen (1899) theorized that individuals

gain satisfaction when others see them consuming expensive products. Champagne, irrespective of its cost, is viewed as a symbol of wealth and status. As Veblen (1899: p. 36) notes, failure in consumption reflects inferiority, reinforcing the desire for products that signify social distinction.

2.3. Consumption and Social Class

I find it necessary to view consumption from a different perspective, considering that the individual tries to convey different signals not only through how they perform but also through what they consume, in a manner that may, at first glance, seem trivial, namely champagne. Both men and women equally transmit signals through what they buy and/or consume. In recent decades, gender has been seen as a social construct that has acquired a preferred place in sociological research. Even though it has taken on a diverse range of meanings over time depending on the context in which it is used, in this paper, I chose to use the concept of gender as "the social expectations regarding behavior deemed appropriate for members of each sex. Gender does not refer to the physical attributes by which men are distinguished from women but to the socially formed traits of masculinity and femininity" (Giddens, 2001: p. 957) or "those meanings, social and cultural norms prescribed to the sexes in certain social systems, through which people are categorized as feminine, masculine, or androgynous" (Grunberg, 2010: p. 209).

Regardless of gender, the discourse around consumption can be analyzed in various ways. Goffman (1979: p. 7) argues that "women and men have behavior models described in advertisements, unconsciously wishing to become those individuals." The media, as a tool of socialization, shapes public opinion and guides actions. Baudrillard (2005) claims this is a myth, as society consumes the idea of consumption itself, not out of necessity but because it is socially constructed. Advertising plays a central role in this discourse, acting as "the anthem" of consumption (Baudrillard, 2005). Baker (1998: p. 6) sees advertising as a force shaping mass culture, while Seyffert (Todoran, 2005: p. 39) views it as attracting attention to durable goods. Konig (Todoran, 2005: p. 39) describes it as influencing the human psyche, creating voluntary desires. In essence, advertising aims to shape perceptions and attitudes towards products by triggering psychological actions that lead to purchasing decisions.

Individuals' actions are socially controlled and reflect the cultural model in which they are performed (Baudrillard, 2005). Consumption choices are not made freely but are influenced by the values imposed by society. According to Baudrillard (2005), people do not choose what to consume independently; rather, their choices are based on a system of values dictated by social norms. In this sense, consumption becomes a performance that reflects the social class to which an individual aspires or belongs. This challenges the idea of individual autonomy in decision-making, as choices are influenced by a set of implicit societal values. Champagne consumption, often linked with refined events, exemplifies how brands use collaborations with public figures to promote social status. For example, partnerships

like Bollinger with James Bond films, or Dom Perignon's collaborations with fashion icons, show how advertising can create strong associations with wealth and prestige. Furthermore, champagne producers have successfully leveraged social media platforms, such as Instagram, to position their products in luxurious and aspirational settings, reinforcing their image as symbols of status and exclusivity.

This theoretical framework is particularity relevant in understanding champagne consumption as it represents a social symbol deeply embedded in cultural norms, group dynamics, and individual perceptions. Champagne consumption often reflects status, identity, and adherence to societal expectations, showcasing how social influence and perception shape and reinforce its symbolic value in various contexts.

3. Champagne and Society: How Is Champagne Constructed as the Queen of Alcoholic Beverages?

3.1. Research Context and Objectives

This study aims to investigate the consumption patterns portrayed in champagne advertising, focusing on the activities, environment, and values constructed around it. Special attention is given to the relationship between advertisement representations and individual consumption patterns, as well as the image built around the class consumption model. Due to legal restrictions, video advertisements could not be analyzed, so I turned to champagne brand websites to study their presentations and advertisements in relation to the discourse on champagne consumption. This approach helps assess whether advertising has created a distinct sociality through champagne promotion.

The study also seeks to understand whether champagne is consumed by individuals who typically drink alcohol or only on special occasions. This reflects the idea that champagne is often reserved for specific moments, even for those who do not regularly consume alcohol.

The first part of the study identifies the key patterns in champagne advertising, while the second explores the discourse of occasional and regular champagne consumers, examining their consumption patterns and self-perception as champagne drinkers.

The central objective of this research is to analyze how advertising shapes the social system and influences the relationship between social and semiotic levels, particularly in alcohol consumption. I aim to study how advertising mediates class simulation through consumption, focusing on the representation of individuals in champagne ads and their alignment with consumer behaviors in everyday life.

The study compares the models of individuals in champagne advertisements with the self-reported behaviors of consumers, exploring the activities, environment, and values associated with champagne consumption. The research assumes that different types of alcohol create distinct social contexts and that individuals' consumption choices may either confirm or challenge typical societal patterns.

I expect to identify how individuals adopt behaviors and lifestyles based on the

social class they aspire to, particularly through the lens of J. Baudrillard's theory that consumption signals class. Champagne, as a symbol of class, serves as a marker of social position, with individuals consuming it to signal their desired social identity.

This research will address questions such as: What connection exists between advertisements and personal identity? How is champagne perceived in celebratory contexts, and when is it consumed? Champagne consumption often symbolizes values like friendship, social status, and acceptance, suggesting that such qualities are achievable only through consumption. Ultimately, I propose that the combination of individual and champagne constructs the social meaning of both, with champagne acting as a signifier of social class. The key question is whether social class demands champagne of a particular quality, or whether the quality of champagne determines the social class it represents.

3.2. Methods

The study is divided into two sections: content analysis and interviews. Through content analysis, I developed a research framework and created an interview guide to examine the contrast between individuals depicted in champagne advertisements and those in everyday life.

I employed a semi-structured interview guide to capture the unique moments associated with champagne consumption and the narratives built around them. The questions were designed to position respondents within the context of champagne consumption, focusing on dimensions such as proximity, social influences, imagery, role models, and self-determination. The methodology integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches, combining content analysis and interview assessments. Special attention was given to the communicative impact of advertisements, analyzing how encoded messages relate to consumer behavior around champagne.

The research instrument involved analyzing champagne advertisements available online. Based on the identified dimensions and formulated premises, I constructed the interview guide. To create an engaging start, respondents were asked to associate a song with a party, serving as both a warm-up technique and a way to explore the types of gatherings they usually attend. This association fostered rapport and encouraged respondents to share personal experiences. The subsequent questions targeted dimensions such as proximity, locations, spontaneous associations, humorous events or parties, and gender dynamics.

Respondents were selected using a non-probabilistic, opportunistic sampling method, specifically the snowball approach, and based on availability. The number of interviews conducted was guided by the principle of information saturation, stopping once additional interviews were unlikely to provide new insights. Respondents were chosen based on their age and gender, focusing on a specific generation to explore how socialization experiences shape consumption patterns. The aim was to construct a profile of champagne consumers, emphasizing the image

they wished to project and the motivations underlying their choices. The ultimate goal was to uncover shared mental frameworks surrounding conspicuous consumption.

The study focused on Millennials provides significant insights into champagne consumption, as this generation is deeply influenced by social factors, media, and personal preferences. Millennials are consistently exposed to stimuli from advertisements, social media, and cultural events, shaping and redefining their perceptions of champagne consumption. This generation is characterized by its close relationship with digital technology, globalization, and a focus on experiences, work-life balance, and social consciousness[3]. However, the analysis of this group can also be contextualized for other demographics, such as older generations or different cultures, offering a broader understanding of global trends in champagne consumption.

3.3. Content Analysis

This study is based on an analysis of champagne advertisements from websites dedicated to this product, as well as the analysis of static advertisements found online. The first part, which is more general, focuses on identifying the main ways of presenting champagne, while the second part is based on identifying the patterns presented in the broadcast advertisements. The analysis was conducted on a number of five websites and 50 advertisements for the five champagne brands.

On the websites, I observed how the bottle is presented, how the champagne is positioned, what champagne signifies, and whether it refers to the individual and who is highlighted. In the analysis of static advertisements, I monitored the presence or absence of various elements such as: proximity, sexualization, interactions, and ways of presenting the product. These elements, observed both on the websites and in the static advertisements, are referred to as part of advertising and serve as an inventory of what I expect to be found or not found in the behaviors and stories described by those interviewed later.

Thus, we will observe the influence of advertising on the cognitive model behind champagne consumption, and how the individual perceives themselves at the moment when they or someone in their proximity consumes this type of alcoholic beverage.

The five brands I chose to study are: Veuve Clicquot, Moet, Armand de Brignac, Krug, and Dom Perignon. To begin with, I will mention that on each of these websites, when an individual wants to access them, they receive a warning message stating that in order to continue viewing, they must comply with the laws in force regarding alcohol consumption in their area of residence. If the country does not impose a minimum age limit in this regard, the website does so. Although this does not fall within the sphere of interest, it is important to highlight the idea of security provided. I consider this idea rather superficial, as at first glance we might believe that it concerns compliance with existing legal standards and simultaneously

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[3]https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescoachescouncil/2024/05/29/the-abcs-of-xyzs-the-evolution-of-technology-across-generations/, accessed 12 December 2024.

care for citizens. However, the fact that you are asked to select your country and year of birth, or simply whether you are 18 years old or not, subtly indicates an interest only in what must be done from a legislative standpoint (Figure 1).
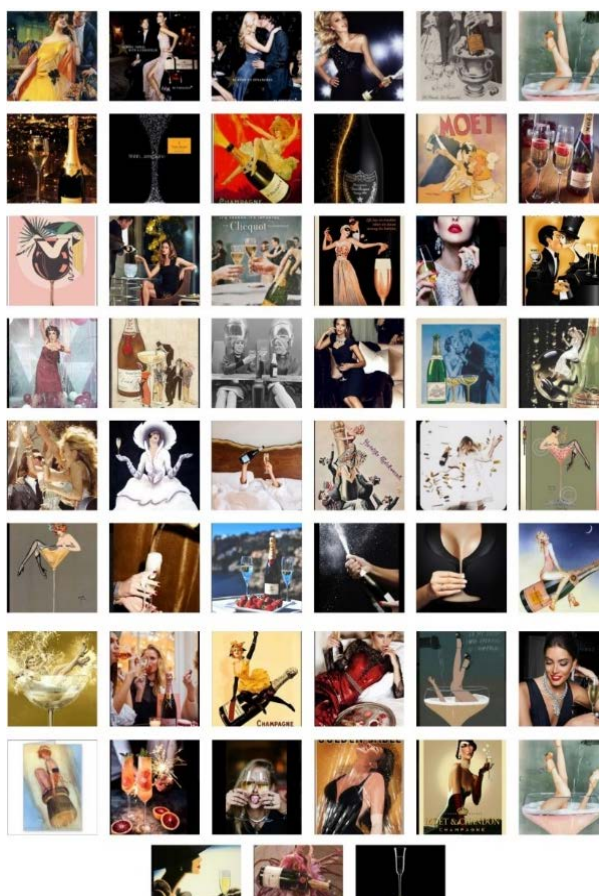

Figure 1. Static advertisements for champagne.

Nevertheless, if we connect this to what concerns us in this work, we can mention the almost monopolized concern regarding individuals' consumption, rather than what is considered medically healthy or not in a country—alcohol consumption. Furthermore, once on the site, the content analysis focuses on interpreting information related to concepts such as: proximity, comparisons, presentation styles, and principles.

For the analysis of static advertisements, I chose a total of 50 ads available on Pinterest. The reason I selected this platform is due to its current popularity and the algorithm behind it. Pinterest enjoys popularity immediately after Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Wang et al., 2016). The platform can be considered a source through which consumer choices can be manipulated by distributing ads in the form of photographs. Additionally, another reason for choosing this source is that at the time of conducting the study, Pinterest is an attraction for young people (Wang et al., 2016), individuals whose consumption model is influenced by advertisements I wish to observe in the second stage (the interview). Therefore,

I selected 50 images that are advertisements for the five champagne brands.

It is worth noting that to understand how the images were selected, Pinterest offers a function that allows users to find similar images based on the one currently being viewed, which is the second reason I chose this platform—the algorithm it operates on. Thus, the selection of the 50 images is based on the rationale that it is more likely that an individual viewing one image will also see the others until they decide to search for a different type of image. However, regardless of whether they choose to view something else, Pinterest offers another function that creates a profile of the individual based on the images already seen, ultimately leading the individual to see all the champagne advertisements and thereby imprint a certain type of model in their subconscious (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Analyzed champagne brands: Veuve Clicquot, Moet, Armand de Brignac, Krug, and Dom Perignon.

3.4. Conducting the Interviews

Following the content analysis of the websites and advertisements for the five chosen brands, I constructed a semi-structured interview guide aimed at identifying consumption patterns. More specifically, how the individual who consumes champagne is projected within a society, based on values, culture, and inclinations in directions such as the importance of self-esteem, stigmatization, and social class consumption. Individuals who consume champagne regularly or occasionally were invited to participate in the study, with this variable not being crucial for the final analysis.

Initially, interview participants were assured that they were free to say anything, that there were no right or wrong answers, and that all their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. This was followed by warm-up questions encouraging them to talk about themselves, then questions aimed at discovering their first experiences with champagne, how they spend their leisure time, the difference between sparkling wine and champagne, and what places them in the story of champagne, among other topics.

However, before moving on to the actual discussion, I asked them to position themselves in a context (Who are you with? What are you doing? What kind of party is it? What kind of decor is there?) to capture the significance of champagne consumption. Subsequently, to observe gender differences, I attempted to capture

the handling of the bottle and the stereotypes surrounding this event. Finally, for a cyclical conclusion, I wanted to capture a motto of sparkling wine based on an example from another sector, perhaps that of the working class, namely beer.

The role of each question was to capture the model of the self that consumes champagne, based on the premise that the individual will place themselves in a social context ideal for the moment of champagne consumption. Additionally, the questions were structured to capture dimensions such as: proximity and interactions, placement in a context, narratives constructed around consumption, and bottle manipulation. I consider it necessary to explain the dimension of bottle manipulation, which has strong implications regarding gendering. Thus, behind this dimension lies a whole series of other issues that we can study—from social status (in the case of the server or the husband/wife) to sexualization (**Figure 3**).

Figure 3. Gendering through bottle manipulation.

Another dimension that I treat as an umbrella dimension is placement in a context—this issue focuses both on a social context itself as well as on a place, a location, an event. All these dimensions are closely related to those analyzed in the first part of the research, so that in the end we can discuss in terms of comparison between what is seen and what is done.

4. Champagne Is Drunk Happily: Investigation Results

4.1. Champagne and Gendering

The images analyzed from an advertising perspective generally indicate tranquility and happiness on all levels. Champagne seems to be the glue for a carefree life, in the protective arms of a man. The images present an ideal world in an intimate setting, whether in an indoor or outdoor space. This space is most often in a luxurious restaurant (long curtains, chandeliers) or outside (at night). What is important to note is that the image, most often of two lovers, outlines a space free from everyday worries, under a clear and starry sky. Long dresses, perfectly tailored suits, sparkling jewelry—all belong to a well-defined circle that makes one think of fairy tales with princes and princesses. Therefore, it is not surprising that the individual projects themselves into a quiet space, away from the noise of the city and the burdens of living when relating to champagne consumption, "it's somehow better to associate beautiful moments... because you don't drink champagne when you're sad, I think" (Alina, 20 years old). Although perhaps no one knows the value of the objects in the image, it still places you in an environment

far from being desolate. Women and men seem to be detached from reality; they are never presented as engaging in different activities, thus they cannot coexist without having a common activity (dancing, talking). This connection seems to be the bottle of champagne that underlies each image; no matter how loaded the scene is, marketing strategies have placed it at the forefront of the story (Figure 1). The discourse surrounding the process of pouring champagne into glasses is categorical and strongly gendered—the man being the one to whom this aspect "belongs and is due." From the perspective of static advertisements, women seem to be in the spotlight; the opulence of the champagne bottle is reflected in the gestures and gazes of women. The non-verbal language that we can read in these ads suggests both the submission of women and the imposition of men. The champagne bottle, in itself, is depicted in round shapes and sometimes even with a feminine silhouette. Thus, gender, gender stereotypes, and implicit gendering are concepts that we identify both around advertisements and in the surrounding discourses.

4.2. Champagne and Functional Eroticism

In some of the analyzed images, the man and woman do not look at each other; instead, the woman looks up, and the man looks at her, but in all cases, the man is holding the woman in his arms. Thus, we can believe that this portrays a picture of a patriarchal society with slight inclinations toward the liberation of women. In one of the analyzed advertisements, the two protagonists are surrounded by soap bubbles, an image that led me to think of the expression "they are in their bubble," or perhaps interpreted with another connotation, we might think they are outside the bubble. However it is perceived, the consumer can imagine their own scenario based on their momentary experiences. Thus, champagne advertisements seem to allow you to build your own role on the social stage, with the specification that you must remain in a fairy tale. Therefore, it is not surprising that the stories of those interviewed take various directions and different forms, but all are limited to love, friendship, and events they consider special. A phrase already established among young people is "Wine doesn't ask questions, wine understands." Does champagne not understand? Why is it not drunk when you are alone or when you are sad? These questions seem to have answers to what advertising offers. Ephemeral love is what takes center stage in most static advertisements; however, from a sociological perspective, we can discuss the existence of functional eroticism from Baudrillard's perspective (Baudrillard, 2005). In the context of champagne advertisements, functional eroticism can be seen in the portrayal of idealized romantic or celebratory moments that prioritize visual appeal and symbolic meaning over authentic human connection. The relationships and scenarios depicted—whether it be a man holding a woman or the imagery of soap bubbles—become more about selling an aspirational lifestyle or feeling than about genuine emotional depth. This aligns with Baudrillard's perspective that modern society increasingly experiences reality through constructed and simulated representations, reducing complex human experiences to consumable symbols (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Functional eroticism in static champagne advertisements.

4.3. Being Fabulous, Classy, Fancy

The role of champagne is not to heal wounds; the role of champagne is to celebrate what life has to offer at its best. "Be fabulous" is the license plate of a motorcycle that appeared in one of the ads. Being fabulous is relative, but apparently, in the discourse of those interviewed, it means being at an event, shining, and having fun. Being fabulous can mean dressing elegantly and being arm-in-arm with the ideal man/woman. Being fabulous can also mean having a glass of champagne. However, you cannot be fabulous alone; "I'm the kind of person who drinks alone without any guilt. But I've never had sparkling wine alone" (Ruxandra, 23 years old). Champagne in static advertisements appears only accompanied by appropriate attire and a special place. The discourse around how we should present ourselves before consuming such an alcoholic beverage can be considered quite ethereal; "everyone dressed to the nines" (Cătălin, 25 years old) is a necessity. We can metaphorically suggest that you can only present yourself in front of a glass of champagne as "classy" (Cătălin, 25 years old) or "fancy" (Ana, 24 years old).

All of this is nothing more than projections of an event that seems to be a display of ostentatious consumption; "For a moment for me. For an anniversary. For a celebration. Or simply for an ideal way to start my morning." (Ruxandra, 23 years old), "I think of a somehow elegant, refined context, with quality people savoring the pleasant alcoholic drink intensely. It could be a super fancy party where everyone is dressed to the nines and gathered there to celebrate something important. Then I also think of an evening with friends where we got tired of classic beer and the eternal wine... so we thought to switch it up and go for champagne"

(Ana, 24 years old). What Ana (24 years old) tells us can be interpreted in terms of stepping out of anonymity or nonconformity—beer is classic, wine is always consumed, but champagne can take you out of routine. What makes it so special?

4.4. With Champagne, We Celebrate Life

"Beer is what you drink after a hard day at work, but champagne... you drink champagne when you enjoy a successful day" (Cătălin, 25 years old). Why? Because the individual has constructed mental schemes based on external stimuli. Beer in advertisements, at first glance, without a thorough study, is associated with the desire to escape; however, looking at champagne advertisements, escape is not necessary because it is already associated with freedom.

From the perspective of proximity and interaction, it is interesting to draw a parallel between what is "imposed" through advertising and how individuals describe this social fact. This means that in both situations, the man and woman commemorate their love through champagne, "couples, the joy of being next to the right person and enjoying a glass of champagne" (Cătălin, 25 years old), "For me and a person of the opposite sex" (Eduard, 20 years old). It seems that even those who are not in a relationship drink champagne because "when I drink champagne, I imagine being at a happy occasion in my life or that of my loved ones. I am with my partner/family/friends, we are cheerful, we feel good, we chat and drink" (Ana, 24 years old), "in a restaurant, with friends" (Cătălin, 25 years old). The woman never presents herself as opening the bottle of champagne; "I never open the bottle. This task clearly falls to the men around me. Most of the time, my dad or my boyfriend are the ones who open the bottle" (Ana, 24 years old), while the man sees himself handling the bottle only in exceptional cases where there is no other person who, in their perception, should do it; "if I'm at home, I open it; if we're elsewhere, clearly not me, the waiter" (Cătălin, 25 years old).

It seems that champagne is only drunk in certain contexts, in a specific way of presenting yourself, and with certain people, "A kind of lifestyle. Joie de vivre. The joy of existing, of living and feeling, of seeing the sun. Maybe with relaxation. Maybe with pure happiness" (Ruxandra, 23 years old). Metaphorically speaking, before champagne, you do not present yourself empty; you do not go to fill the voids, but rather you go "with a general sense of well-being, with nice people beside you and with something good to eat on the side" (Ana, 24 years old). It seems that you do not drink champagne dressed in sportswear, you do not drink it alone at home, and most importantly, it seems that champagne "is drunk happily".

4.5. Democratization of Champagne

Nevertheless, it seems that champagne wants us to dress casually; it begins to desire to partake in any event, whether during the day. Does the way websites present themselves aim to change the models constructed around champagne consumption?

Clothing is no longer fancy, champagne is no longer consumed in the evening,

and tailored suits and long dresses have been replaced with jeans and t-shirts. In a dress or jeans, champagne has maintained its elegance, still being presented in shades of gold, white, black, and burgundy. There is an emphasis on the quality of the champagne through the presentation of its place of origin, nature, and wineries, the quality of moments through the smiles on the faces of those enjoying the moment offered by the glass of champagne, and satisfaction and well-being through messages carefully and elegantly written in the presentation. The story constructed by those interviewed overlaps with the recipe for happiness recommended by some types of champagne (Figure 5).
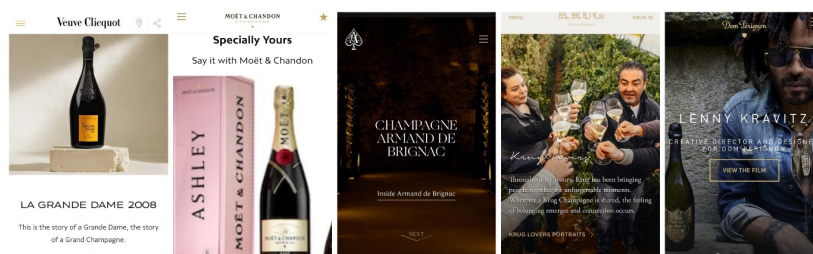

Figure 5. Advertising websites for selected champagnes.

Although each is different, they all compose what they call life: A life in gold (Armand de Brignac), every bottle uncorks a story, every drink celebrates life (Dom Pérignon), has been bringing people together for unforgettable moments (Krug). Even though the essence of elegance, love, and happiness remains in the presentations of the websites, it seems that we can identify a discrepancy between what champagne represents for individuals and how champagne wants to present itself in society. Even though champagne does not wish to heal wounds or be surrounded by silk, it appears that it remains enveloped in elegance and uncompromising selectivity (Armand de Brignac). Being fabulous according to the new image of champagne is to shine and have fun wherever and with whomever you are. The circle I presented after the interviews seems to want to be expanded; champagne is trying to adapt to new social needs while still maintaining its principles. The need of women to step out from under the strong and protective arms of men, the need to emerge from anonymity, in short, the gendering found in the discourse of those interviewed and in the static images of champagne advertisements, is countered by Veuve Clicquot, which considers that it emboldens successive generations of audacious female leaders. Therefore, champagne wants us to believe that we are classy or fabulous regardless of the place or moment in which we consume it because it is what makes us so.

On websites, more than in static advertisements, the need for differentiation is identified, the trend to make champagne democratic. Thus, we have identified a strong discrepancy between the discourses around champagne consumption and what the images on websites convey. However, although champagne brands wish to reinvent themselves and get closer to consumers and their daily activities, in reality, they are still positioned in the luxury space through price, presentation

colors, and the consumption models presented.

5. Conclusion

From the analysis of static advertisements available on Pinterest, it is evident that advertising plays a crucial role in shaping the social and cultural reality of champagne consumption, a phenomenon also supported by research in the literature. Although advertising cannot capture all possible representations of a product in a society, it significantly contributes to forming the image an individual has about the reality in which they live.

The analyzed advertisements and the discourse surrounding champagne consumption, as revealed through interviews, highlight several common traits. Thus, champagne consumption is frequently associated with moments of celebration, always presented as a festive activity, separate from professional life, and as a social event. In all the analyzed advertisements, champagne is accompanied by images of people dressed elegantly (suits or long dresses), a fact confirmed by the interviewees, who describe these moments as being "dressed to the nines." Additionally, advertisements depict scenes of calmness and elegance, yet these are strongly sexualized. Sexualization is subtly and indirectly present in interviews, such as in the statement, "just me and the person of the opposite sex." Champagne advertising focuses on representing memorable scenes, ones that have already been present in myths and fairy tales and have become an ideal constantly aspired to. Moreover, these images are popular because they suggest a high social status. Thus, the hypothesis that individuals consume products reflecting the social class they aspire to is supported. By consuming champagne, individuals seek to demonstrate, both to themselves and to others, their belonging to a superior class. In this regard, advertising is not solely targeting a particular segment of the population, but rather communicating the possibility of achieving a certain social status through champagne consumption. The use of symbols and specific behaviors encourages individuals to adopt ideas that ultimately lead to ostentatious consumption, motivated by the desire to be perceived as part of a higher social class.

According to specialized websites, champagne no longer needs to be depicted solely as a symbol of elegance and style. It now aims to increase its prestige by positioning itself as superior to other alcoholic beverages. As a result, it no longer requires belonging to a particular group, and the concept of "being fabulous" has become essential for consuming champagne. This directly ties into the new narrative that advertising is constructing around champagne. Individuals believe that any special moment in their lives must be accompanied by a glass of champagne. On the other hand, advertising suggests that special moments can be created because of champagne. This social phenomenon deserves further exploration over the coming years, as at present, there are few instances where champagne consumption is identified as the starting point for creating a memorable story. More often, champagne is seen as a complement to a pre-existing story, a celebratory symbol of an important moment. Champagne is not just a drink, but a symbol of

happiness and celebration—"you drink champagne happily," emphasizing the joy and delight associated with its consumption.

Considering the individual's need to position themselves and be perceived as belonging to a particular social class, we can conclude that this new way of presenting champagne will likely lead to the creation of stratified economic and social groups. Additionally, it is possible that champagne will eventually be consumed in a variety of contexts, losing its ostentatious character.

Regarding gender representation in advertising, both women and men are presented equally. However, subtle differences guide the entire advertising discourse and generate gendered distinctions. This social reality is different from the one depicted in Beccaria's (2001) study, which suggested that advertising mirrors society. Instead, advertising today appears to be a reflection of its own idealization, in which women and men consume champagne together in a specially constructed environment with the appropriate attire. Beccaria (2001), through his approach, more accurately reflects what champagne seeks to construct: an image of society, of what is "right" and "desirable" socially, as reflected more often on websites and less in static advertisements or individual discourse. Champagne advertising, through the association of the champagne glass from the consumer's perspective, reminds us that the inner self is influenced by the external self and that our identity is socially constructed.

This phenomenon can be understood as the individual's desire for a perfect moment, in a society based on social customs and reinforced through advertising. The creation of a "pattern" around champagne, which promotes the aspiration for a particular social class, contributes to shaping a projected image of what is considered socially desirable. Thus, champagne becomes a symbol of class consumption, shaping behaviors and perceptions of social status. Additionally, the act of drinking champagne, in the context of happiness and celebration, strengthens its role not just as a luxury product, but as a social ritual that enhances joy and marks important life moments.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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