

# The influence of country of origin on the perception of wine personality

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33

34 **Abstract**

35 This study examines how the country of origin (COO) influences consumers' perceptions of  
36 wine product personality, using Aaker's (1997) five-dimensional framework: Sincerity,  
37 Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. An online survey of 848 UK  
38 consumers assessed perceptions of wines from France, Romania, the United States, and China  
39 – countries differing in winemaking tradition, historical depth, production scale, regulatory  
40 frameworks, market maturity, and international visibility. Results reveal significant cross-  
41 country differences in perceived product personality, showing that COO shapes symbolic and  
42 emotional perceptions beyond quality judgments. French wines scored highest on  
43 Sophistication, Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence, reflecting prestige and heritage, while  
44 Chinese and Romanian wines received lower overall scores, indicating less established  
45 identities. U.S. wines held an intermediate position, noted for Competence and Ruggedness.  
46 Consumer involvement intensified ratings across all dimensions, yet country rankings remained  
47 consistent, underscoring the robustness of COO-based associations. These findings demonstrate  
48 that COO influences not only perceived quality but also the products' symbolic and emotional  
49 characteristics. By conceptualizing product personality at the country level, the study provides  
50 a framework linking geographical cues to anthropomorphic perceptions. The results offer  
51 actionable insights for marketers and producers leveraging COO in international positioning  
52 and storytelling strategies.

53

54 **Keywords:** wine, product personality, wine personality, brand personality framework, country  
55 of origin

56

57 **1. Introduction**

58 Wine is one of the most differentiated products in the food market [1], and its perceived quality  
59 is influenced not only by its sensory attributes but also by its symbolic and cultural value. Unlike  
60 many fast-moving consumer goods, wine consumption is often associated with tradition,  
61 lifestyle, identity, and social status [2,3], making it particularly sensitive to external cues such  
62 as origin and reputation.

63 Country of origin (COO) is one of the main extrinsic cues influencing consumer buying  
64 decisions of foreign products [4]. It is well known from the literature that COO plays a central  
65 role in shaping consumer perceptions of wine [5], where COO is closely linked to concepts  
66 such as terroir, heritage, and authenticity. As a result, consumers often rely on origin as a

67 heuristic when evaluating wine, particularly in situations of uncertainty or limited product  
68 knowledge [6]. Wines from different countries therefore tend to evoke distinct associations,  
69 expectations, and mental images.

70 While previous studies have extensively examined the impact of COO on perceived quality,  
71 purchase intentions, and willingness to pay [7,8], less attention has been given to its role in  
72 shaping the symbolic and emotional dimensions of wine perception, such as personality. The  
73 concept of brand personality, introduced by Aaker [9], refers to the extent to which consumers  
74 attribute human characteristics to brands and provides a valuable framework for understanding  
75 how products are perceived beyond their functional attributes. In the context of wine, this  
76 concept can be extended to product personality, as wine – due to its strong symbolic and cultural  
77 embeddedness – can be perceived in human-like terms even in the absence of a clearly defined  
78 brand.

79 Given the critical role of country of origin (COO) in shaping consumer perceptions, this study  
80 aims to explore its impact on the perception of wine personality. Specifically, it seeks to  
81 examine how COO influences the human-like traits and characteristics that consumers attribute  
82 to products. While many models have traditionally focused on measuring brand personality,  
83 several authors have argued that products themselves may also embody personality traits [10–  
84 12]. Unlike brand personality, which is brand-specific, product personality reflects perceived  
85 traits of a product category itself, independent of branding. This distinction is particularly  
86 important for wine, where consumers rely on origin-level cues such as tradition, terroir, and  
87 country reputation rather than individual brands to form personality impressions. Therefore,  
88 building on Aaker's [9] framework, our intention was to measure the personality of the product  
89 rather than the brand, emphasizing COO-based symbolic associations.

90 The UK is the world's second-largest wine market by value and the fifth largest by volume [13].  
91 Its market size in 2025 was estimated at USD 27.23 billion and was projected to reach USD  
92 37.00 billion by 2034 [14]. The great majority of wine consumed in the UK market is imported.  
93 This high dependence on imported wine makes the UK a particularly relevant context for  
94 studying country-of-origin effects, as consumers are regularly exposed to wines from a wide  
95 range of producing countries and are therefore more likely to rely on origin-based cues when  
96 forming perceptions. Wines from certain countries are more strongly represented in the UK  
97 market, particularly those from well-established producers such as France and the United States.  
98 In contrast, wines from less internationally recognised wine-producing countries, such as  
99 Romania, have a more limited presence and are typically found in specialist retailers rather than  
100 mainstream distribution channels. This reduced visibility may contribute to weaker and less

101 clearly defined consumer perceptions. The disparity is even more pronounced for wines from  
102 emerging regions such as China, which remain highly underrepresented in the UK market,  
103 likely resulting in even less developed and more ambiguous consumer perceptions.

#### 104 *1.1. Country of Origin (COO) Effects*

105 The global market is a dynamic and highly competitive arena, characterized by a vast array of  
106 products originating from various regions worldwide. Among the numerous factors influencing  
107 consumer decisions, the country of origin (COO) stands out as pivotal determinant. These  
108 factors extend beyond mere geographic labelling, shaping perceptions of quality, symbolic  
109 meaning, and the perceived identity of products. Understanding how COO shapes the  
110 perception of product or brand personality is essential for producers, marketers, and  
111 policymakers, as it offers guidance on how products can be positioned and differentiated in a  
112 competitive and increasingly interconnected market. This study therefore focuses on wine, a  
113 product category where symbolic and cultural cues strongly influence consumer perception, to  
114 examine COO effects at the product personality level.

115 The concept of country of origin (COO) has long been recognized as a key factor in shaping  
116 consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviour. COO describes the influence of a product's  
117 manufacturing location on consumer attitudes, quality judgments, and brand evaluations  
118 [15,16]. Consumers frequently rely on COO as a heuristic to gauge the quality, authenticity, and  
119 value of a product, particularly when product-specific attributes are unavailable or difficult to  
120 evaluate [17–19]. Research shows that consumers typically view products from developed  
121 countries as superior in quality to those from less developed economies [20,21]. Furthermore,  
122 consumers evaluate products more favourably when they originate from countries with a  
123 positive image, indicating that country-of-origin perceptions can shape perceived product  
124 quality [22]. However, these perceptions are not limited to quality – they also encompass  
125 symbolic traits, such as perceived sophistication, competence, or excitement, which contribute  
126 to a product's personality.

127 The strength of COO effects differs across markets, with developed countries often exhibiting  
128 home-country bias and emerging economies favouring foreign products due to their association  
129 with prestige [23–25]. In the wine sector, COO effects interact with national wine industry  
130 characteristics, including production scale, market presence, regulatory frameworks, and  
131 pricing strategies, shaping both perceived quality and product personality. Countries with long-  
132 established regulatory systems – such as the European appellation frameworks – reinforce  
133 consumer expectations regarding authenticity, quality, and heritage. In contrast, newer or  
134 rapidly expanding wine industries may focus on innovation, scale, or competitive pricing as

135 primary positioning strategies, which in turn influence how personality traits are attributed to  
136 their wines. These industry-specific differences (e.g., production volumes, average price points,  
137 regulatory maturity, and international exposure) represent potential confounding factors in  
138 COO-based personality perceptions and are explicitly discussed in the limitations section

### 139 *1.2. Wine as a Product Category and COO Significance*

140 Regarding wine production, COO carries significant historical weight, with traditional  
141 winemaking nations such as France, Italy, and Spain building strong reputations for producing  
142 high-quality wines tied to their unique terroir – the interplay of soil, climate, and tradition  
143 [26,27]. These deep-rooted cultural associations not only inform perceptions of quality but also  
144 contribute to distinct consumer expectations regarding wine personality traits, such as  
145 sophistication, elegance, and refinement. Long-standing cultural associations have established  
146 a hierarchy of wine-producing countries, where consumers frequently consider wines from  
147 venerable regions as exceptional in both craftsmanship and reputation [28–30].

148 However, while prior research has largely focused on COO effects on perceived wine quality  
149 or brand evaluations, there remains limited understanding of how COO shapes consumers’  
150 perceptions of wine personality at the product level. Emerging wine-producing countries, such  
151 as those in South America and Oceania, are challenging these perceptions by offering  
152 innovative and high-quality products. Despite this shift, COO remains a powerful heuristic,  
153 especially for less experienced consumers who depend on established perceptions and brand  
154 reputation when making selections [8,31,32].

155 The countries selected for this study – France, Romania, the United States, and China – were  
156 deliberately chosen to represent theoretically meaningful contrasts within the global wine  
157 economy, following Villanueva and Ferro’s [33] classification of wine-producing nations.  
158 France exemplifies the Old World Traditional Southern European category (developed, major  
159 player) with unmatched historical depth (dating back over 2,000 years), strict appellation  
160 contrôlée regulations, high average price points in export markets, and dominant symbolic  
161 prestige. The United States represents the Anglo-Saxon New World category (developed, major  
162 player), characterized by technological innovation, large-scale commercial production  
163 (especially California), flexible regulations, and mid-to-premium pricing. China falls into the  
164 Newest New World – Emerging Major player category, with extremely rapid recent growth in  
165 planted area and domestic consumption, but very limited export volumes, minimal presence in  
166 mature markets such as the UK, and generally lower price positioning. Romania belongs to the  
167 Old World Eastern European category (developed but non-major player), with a viticultural  
168 history extending to antiquity (Roman and medieval monastic influences), among the largest

169 vineyard surfaces in Europe (frequently top 5–6 by area), significant production volumes (often  
170 top 10–15 globally), yet limited international brand recognition, lower average export prices,  
171 and a reputation for rustic, value-driven wines. These structural, historical, regulatory, and  
172 market-position differences allow examination of how unequal familiarity, prestige, and price  
173 anchoring may systematically shape personality attributions.

174 Importantly, COO impacts not only quality perceptions but also symbolic and emotional  
175 dimensions of wine consumption. Wine, deeply embedded in cultural and social contexts, often  
176 functions as a marker of identity, status, and cultural capital [32,34]. Notably, French wines are  
177 associated with sophistication and heritage, while Australian wines may be seen as innovative  
178 and approachable. These perceptions are dynamic, continuously shaped by marketing efforts,  
179 consumer trends, and global economic shifts [35]. Contemporary research has highlighted the  
180 growing importance of sustainability and ethical production practices in shaping COO  
181 perceptions, with consumers increasingly drawn to wines from countries with strong  
182 environmental regulations, such as New Zealand or South Africa [36].

183 Within Europe, countries such as Romania represent an interesting case in this context.  
184 Although Romania is among the largest wine producers in Eastern Europe and possesses a long-  
185 standing viticultural tradition, its wines remain relatively underrepresented in international  
186 academic and marketing literature compared to those of Western European countries. This  
187 discrepancy between production capacity, historical depth, and global brand visibility makes  
188 Romania an ideal case for exploring how COO cues influence perceived wine personality, a  
189 perspective that extends traditional brand personality frameworks to the product level.

### 190 *1.3. Brand and Product Personality Frameworks*

191 Beyond COO effects, brand personality serves as a pivotal factor influencing consumer  
192 perceptions across various product categories. Defined as the human-like traits and  
193 characteristics that people associate with a brand this concept was expanded by Aaker [37] who  
194 built upon her father's framework by introducing the seminal five-dimension model: Sincerity,  
195 Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness [9]. This model has become  
196 fundamental to marketing research. Through anthropomorphizing, brand personality stimulates  
197 emotional attachment and guides consumer preferences [38,39]. The framework elucidates how  
198 brands establish consumer relationships by employing human metaphors, allowing consumers  
199 to envision brands as possessing distinct identities [40].

200 While Aaker's model is widely used, it has been criticized for its limited conceptual scope and  
201 potential cross-cultural limitations, as some traits may not translate consistently across different  
202 national contexts. Nevertheless, it remains a robust and widely validated tool for structured

203 comparisons of anthropomorphic perceptions, particularly in categories with strong symbolic  
204 meaning such as wine, where cultural stereotypes and origin cues dominate over brand-specific  
205 imagery. Alternative frameworks focusing on product-specific traits or consumer self-congruity  
206 [41–43] could have been considered, but they generally lack a multi-dimensional structure  
207 suitable for assessing product personality at the country level.

208 By applying Aaker’s model at the product rather than brand level, we leverage its flexibility to  
209 capture anthropomorphic perceptions in a category rich in culture, tradition, and symbolic  
210 meaning. This approach balances theoretical rigor with practical applicability, acknowledging  
211 limitations while providing a coherent foundation for the study’s objectives. Within the wine  
212 industry, brand/product personality is particularly important, enabling consumers to express  
213 their self-concept or desired image through product affiliation. For example, wines projecting  
214 sophistication and elegance resonate with consumers aspiring to convey refinement, whereas  
215 wines embodying adventurous traits appeal to novelty-seeking individuals. This alignment  
216 strengthens emotional bonds, a crucial factor in cultivating enduring loyalty [44,45].

217 Importantly, this section clarifies the conceptual distinction between brand and product  
218 personality: brand personality refers to perceptions tied to a specific brand, whereas product  
219 personality captures human-like traits attributed to a product category itself, independent of  
220 branding. Focusing on product personality allows us to examine how consumers attribute traits  
221 based on COO cues, such as country reputation, tradition, and terroir, rather than brand-specific  
222 marketing or imagery. Wine is particularly well suited for this analysis because consumers often  
223 rely on the country of origin as a heuristic for quality and symbolic meaning, even without  
224 familiarity with individual brands. By assessing product-level personality, we capture the  
225 broader cultural and symbolic associations consumers hold about wines from different  
226 countries, emphasizing how anthropomorphic perceptions operate at the category level.

227 However, while Aaker’s model has profoundly influenced marketing research, critics contend  
228 that it overlooks nuances in cultural and contextual variations in brand or product perception  
229 [46]. Previous research has extended Aaker’s framework by exploring the role of cultural  
230 dimensions in shaping brand personality perceptions. For example, Hennigs et al. [47] found  
231 that brand personality preferences vary by culture, suggesting that brands must adapt their  
232 strategies to align with local values. Brand or product personality embodies consumers’  
233 subjective interpretations of various traits and qualities [48], emerging from positive consumer-  
234 brand / product interactions [49].

235 This construct plays a dual role: it forges emotional connections that are decisive in purchase  
236 decisions [45], while offering psychological comfort through familiarity [50]. Additionally, as

237 a core symbolic attribute [51], such personality facilitates self-expression, prompting  
238 consumers to select products that either mirror their current personality traits [51,52] or  
239 represent aspirational identities [53]. A strong alignment between consumer and product  
240 personalities leads to improved perception, greater consumer stickiness, and increased purchase  
241 intention [54,55].

242 The relative influence of COO and brand or product personality varies substantially across  
243 product categories. For wines specifically, these factors assume heightened importance due to  
244 their dual role as cultural artifacts representing tradition, craftsmanship, and social symbolism.  
245 Distinct from ordinary consumer goods, wine may carry associations with luxury,  
246 connoisseurship, and ceremonial consumption - a context where COO demonstrates particular  
247 significance in luxury markets [56,57]. The importance of COO is further amplified in this  
248 context, as wine consumers tend to ascribe distinct characteristics to wines from different  
249 regions [8,35,58]. Moreover, the aforementioned personality can reinforce or challenge origin-  
250 based expectations [59,60]. This effect is especially relevant for product-level personality,  
251 where consumer impressions are often shaped more by COO cues than by specific brands.

252 This dynamic manifests clearly when comparing New World wines, often characterized as  
253 dynamic and cutting-edge to attract novelty-seeking consumers, with Bordeaux estates that  
254 leverage heritage narratives to embody traditional luxury values. The internationalization of  
255 wine markets has added complexity to how COO and brand/product personality shape  
256 consumer choices. With the erosion of conventional boundaries between Old World and New  
257 World classifications, the competitive landscape is being transformed by non-traditional  
258 producing nations like China and India, which deliver premium offerings at attractive price  
259 points [61,62]. Contemporary wine consumers demonstrate heightened discernment,  
260 demanding greater product integrity, supply chain transparency, and verifiable provenance [63–  
261 65]. These shifts create both opportunities and challenges, requiring wines to navigate evolving  
262 consumer preferences while maintaining distinct identities.

#### 263 *1.4. Research Gap and Objectives*

264 Although prior research has examined COO effects in wine and the role of symbolic  
265 associations, a specific gap persists in understanding how consumers perceive product  
266 personality at the country level (rather than brand level), integrating COO cues with  
267 anthropomorphic perceptions in a culturally embedded category such as wine. This study  
268 addresses this gap by exploring how wines from countries differing in historical depth, market  
269 maturity, international visibility, production scale, regulatory frameworks, and price positioning  
270 are attributed human-like traits by UK consumers. By explicitly applying a brand personality

271 framework at the product/category level and focusing on origin-level cues alone, the research  
272 advances existing knowledge in three main ways: (1) it extends Aaker's framework beyond  
273 brand-specific evaluations to country-level anthropomorphism, (2) it highlights the symbolic  
274 and emotional dimensions of COO in a product category where geographic identity is central,  
275 and (3) it examines the robustness of these perceptions across varying levels of consumer  
276 involvement.

277 In doing so, the research extends the application of brand personality frameworks to wine as a  
278 culturally embedded product category, highlighting both symbolic and emotional dimensions  
279 that have received limited empirical attention. By explicitly focusing on product-level  
280 perceptions rather than brand-level evaluations, the study clarifies how consumers interpret  
281 wine personality based on country cues alone and contributes to a deeper understanding of how  
282 geographic origin shapes the symbolic and emotional dimensions of wine consumption.

283 Additionally, understanding the interplay between COO and wine personality can provide  
284 strategic guidance for producers and marketers seeking to enhance product positioning, develop  
285 targeted marketing campaigns, and cater to evolving consumer expectations. To capture  
286 meaningful contrasts in the global wine landscape, the study focuses on four countries  
287 representing distinct structural positions within the global wine economy: France, Romania, the  
288 United States, and China.

289 France represents a historically dominant and symbolically prestigious Old World producer; the  
290 United States represents a technologically advanced New World producer with strong  
291 commercial orientation; Romania represents an established European wine-producing country  
292 with a long viticultural tradition but limited international visibility; and China represents a  
293 rapidly expanding emerging wine industry whose international image is still developing. This  
294 contrast allows the study to examine how consumers attribute personality traits to wines from  
295 countries occupying different symbolic and market positions, linking theoretical COO  
296 considerations with practical consumer perceptions.

297

## 298 **2. Method**

299 Participants were 848 adult wine consumers (UK residents) recruited via Prolific. The sample's  
300 mean age was 44.7 years (SD = 15.0, range 18–85). Women comprised 55% of respondents  
301 (45% men, <1% other), and the majority were well-educated (65% held at least a bachelor's  
302 degree). Most participants were employed (51% full-time, 16% part-time, 9% self-employed),  
303 with 11% retired, 4% students, and 6% unemployed. All participants reported drinking wine.

304 Participants were included in the final sample after passing attention-check questions and  
305 excluding “speeders” (those with unrealistically short completion times).

306 Each participant evaluated four wine-producing countries – France, Romania, USA, and China.  
307 The country classification scheme was adopted from Villanueva and Ferro [33], an updated  
308 classification of the world of wine. In our study, France was categorized as Old World  
309 Traditional Southern European, Developed, Major player, Romania as Old World Eastern  
310 European, Developed but Non-major player, USA as Anglo-Saxon New World, Developed,  
311 Major player and China as Newest New World, Emerging, Major player. This classification  
312 captures diverse positions within the global wine landscape, including traditional versus  
313 emerging producers, developed versus emerging economies, and high- versus lower-  
314 recognition international markets. Although consumer familiarity with wines from these origins  
315 varies substantially (particularly low for China in the UK market), this design intentionally  
316 captures COO effects as heuristic and symbolic cues, including the influence of general country  
317 stereotypes when wine-specific knowledge is limited.

318 The country order was randomized for each participant. For each country, participants rated its  
319 perceived product personality using Aaker’s five brand personality dimensions: Excitement,  
320 Sincerity, Ruggedness, Sophistication, and Competence. Each dimension was measured by  
321 three trait adjectives (e.g., Sincerity included “sincere,” “honest,” “wholesome”; Excitement  
322 included “trendy,” “unique,” “exciting”), with items drawn from Aaker’s Brand Personality  
323 Scale [9]. Ratings were made on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree that the traits  
324 describe the country’s wine image, 5 = strongly agree).

325 In addition, participants completed the Consumer Involvement Scale [66], indicating how  
326 personally involved they are with wine as a product category. This involvement scale included  
327 five semantic differential items (“important–unimportant,” “valuable–worthless,” “interesting–  
328 boring,” “involving–uninvolving,” “fascinating–mundane”), scored from 1 to 5, with higher  
329 scores reflecting greater involvement. Consumer involvement was included because high-  
330 involvement consumers process information more deeply (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), pay  
331 greater attention to symbolic cues such as COO, and form stronger, more differentiated  
332 perceptions of product personality; it was therefore expected to moderate the intensity (but not  
333 necessarily the direction) of COO-based attributions.

334 To ensure the quality of measures, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the  
335 multi-item scales. The CFA supported a five-factor structure for brand personality  
336 (corresponding to Aaker’s dimensions) and a single-factor structure for involvement. All item  
337 loadings were high and significant ( $p < .001$ ), and model fit was acceptable (CFI = .95, RMSEA

338 = .044). Each construct exhibited good internal reliability and convergent validity: Cronbach's  
 339  $\alpha$  values ranged from .78 to .92, and all average variances extracted (AVE = .59–.76) and  
 340 composite reliabilities (CR = .81–.92) exceeded recommended thresholds (e.g.,  $\alpha \geq .70$ , AVE  $\geq$   
 341 .50). These results indicate that the product personality dimensions and involvement scale were  
 342 measured robustly, supporting the validity of subsequent country-level comparisons.

343

344 **Table 1.** Reliability and Validity of Measures by Country of Origin (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , Composite  
 345 Reliability, Average Variance Extracted, and Factor Loading Ranges for each latent construct):

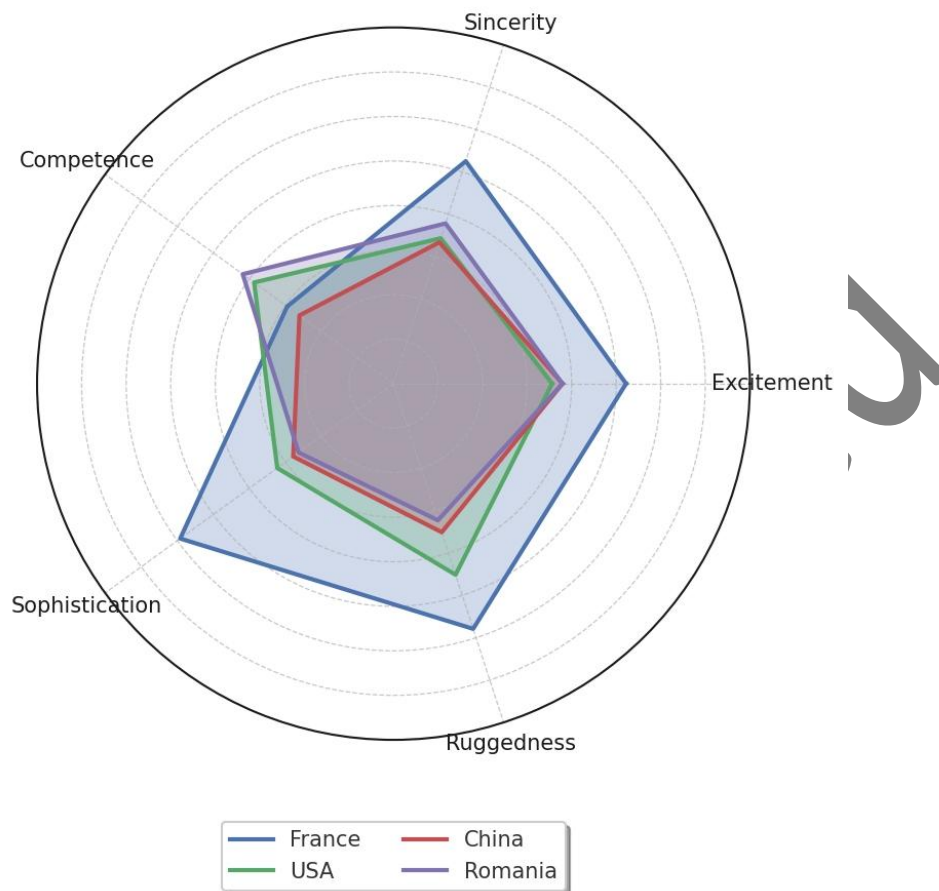
Construct (Country)	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE	Loading Range
Excitement – France	0.76	0.78	0.54	0.59–0.85
Excitement – USA	0.83	0.83	0.62	0.74–0.89
Excitement – China	0.79	0.81	0.58	0.68–0.89
Excitement – Romania	0.79	0.81	0.59	0.68–0.90
Sincerity – France	0.88	0.88	0.71	0.83–0.86
Sincerity – USA	0.91	0.91	0.77	0.85–0.89
Sincerity – China	0.91	0.91	0.78	0.87–0.90
Sincerity – Romania	0.89	0.89	0.74	0.84–0.88
Ruggedness – France	0.88	0.89	0.73	0.74–0.91
Ruggedness – USA	0.90	0.91	0.76	0.81–0.92
Ruggedness – China	0.87	0.88	0.71	0.74–0.89
Ruggedness – Romania	0.89	0.90	0.75	0.77–0.92
Sophistication – France	0.85	0.85	0.66	0.78–0.85
Sophistication – USA	0.88	0.88	0.72	0.84–0.85
Sophistication – China	0.88	0.89	0.73	0.81–0.88
Sophistication – Romania	0.87	0.87	0.69	0.78–0.87
Competence – France	0.85	0.86	0.67	0.77–0.87
Competence – USA	0.86	0.86	0.67	0.76–0.87
Competence – China	0.90	0.90	0.76	0.85–0.90
Competence – Romania	0.88	0.88	0.71	0.80–0.90
Consumer Involvement (All)	0.92	0.92	0.71	0.80–0.88

346

### 347 3. Results

348 Overall, there were pronounced differences in how respondents perceived the wine product's  
 349 personality depending on its country-of-origin. Figure 1 illustrates the mean profiles for the five  
 350 personality dimensions across the four countries, highlighting the systematic impact of COO  
 351 on perceived product personality. French wines were generally attributed the most positive  
 352 product personality traits on four of the five dimensions (Excitement, Sincerity, Sophistication,  
 353 Competence), whereas Chinese and Romanian wines tended to score lower on those traits. An  
 354 exception to this pattern was the Ruggedness dimension: Romanian wines were rated highest  
 355 on Ruggedness, while Chinese wines were rated lowest. U.S. wines consistently fell in the  
 356 middle of the profiles – generally lower than France on most refined dimensions, but higher

357 than China or Romania on certain traits (notably Competence and Ruggedness). These patterns  
 358 underscore that COO shapes both symbolic and emotional perceptions of wine, beyond  
 359 objective product attributes.



360 **Figure 1. Brand Personality Perceptions Across Countries**  
 361 Statistical analysis confirmed significant differences between countries on all five product  
 362 personality dimensions. To assess these differences statistically, repeated-measures ANOVAs  
 363 were conducted for each dimension (Table 2). Repeated-measures ANOVAs for each dimension  
 364 revealed that Country of Origin had a significant main effect on all five Brand Personality  
 365 dimensions (F tests  $p < .001$  in each case), confirming the robust influence of COO on perceived  
 366 wine personality. Effect sizes were large for some dimensions (e.g., partial  $\eta^2 = 0.36$  for  
 367 Sophistication) and moderate for others (e.g.,  $\eta^2 = 0.11$  for Ruggedness).  
 368 Consumer involvement also had a significant main effect on each dimension's ratings (all  $p <$   
 369  $.001$ ), such that high-involvement consumers tended to give slightly higher personality ratings  
 370 overall than low-involvement consumers. However, these involvement effects were relatively  
 371 small in magnitude ( $\eta^2$  ranging from approximately 0.01–0.02), indicating that COO remains  
 372 the primary driver of perceived wine personality.  
 373 Finally, an interaction between Country of Origin and Involvement emerged for two dimensions  
 374 (Excitement and Sincerity), indicating that country differences were moderated to a minor  
 375

376 degree by involvement level. No significant interaction was found for Ruggedness,  
 377 Sophistication, or Competence ( $p > .05$ ), further emphasizing the stability of COO-based  
 378 perceptions across engagement levels.

379 In the following, we report each dimension's results in detail, with post-hoc pairwise  
 380 comparisons (Bonferroni-adjusted) to interpret specific country differences. For brevity, we  
 381 focus on the key differences and effect sizes (full pairwise statistics are in Table 3).

382

383 **Table 2.** Repeated-Measures ANOVA Results for Brand Personality Dimensions (Country-of-  
 384 Origin as within-subject factor, Involvement as between-subjects factor).

Dimension	<i>F</i> Country (df)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>F</i> Involvement (df)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>F</i> Country × Involv. (df)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Excitement	195.93 (2.79, 2362)	< .001	.120	49.87 (1, 846)	< .001	.020	4.78 (2.79, 2362)	.003**	.003
Sincerity	262.91 (2.82, 2383)	< .001	.155	48.25 (1, 846)	< .001	.019	3.12 (2.82, 2383)	.028*	.002
Ruggedness	183.65 (2.90, 2452)	< .001	.109	24.92 (1, 846)	< .001	.011	1.39 (2.90, 2452)	.244	<.001
Sophistication	869.34 (2.87, 2425)	< .001	.360	46.41 (1, 846)	< .001	.015	1.85 (2.87, 2425)	.139	<.001
Competence	428.71 (2.73, 2310)	< .001	.229	35.52 (1, 846)	< .001	.013	2.41 (2.73, 2310)	.072	.001

385

386 *3.1. Excitement*

387 For the Excitement dimension, the ANOVA confirmed a significant effect of country ( $F =$   
 388 195.93,  $p < .001$ ) with a large effect size ( $\eta^2 = 0.12$ ). French wines were perceived as the most  
 389 exciting ( $M = 3.61$ ), significantly more so than wines from the USA ( $M = 2.78$ ), China ( $M =$   
 390 2.90), or Romania ( $M = 2.90$ ) (all  $p < .001$ ). The mean difference between France and other  
 391 countries on Excitement was substantial: for example, France vs. USA had a mean difference  
 392 of +0.83 on the 5-point scale (95% CI [0.74, 0.92]), corresponding to a very large effect ( $d =$   
 393 0.94). Similarly, France scored about +0.71 higher than China ( $d = 0.81$ ) and +0.71 higher than  
 394 Romania ( $d = 0.81$ ) on Excitement (both  $p < .001$ ).

395 By contrast, the USA was rated slightly less exciting than both China and Romania. U.S. wines  
 396 had a lower Excitement mean than Chinese wines by  $-0.12$  (95% CI [ $-0.23, -0.01$ ],  $p = .009$ ,  $d$   
 397  $= -0.14$ ), and similarly lower than Romanian wines by  $-0.12$  (95% CI [ $-0.22, -0.01$ ],  $p = .009$ ,  
 398  $d = -0.13$ ). There was no significant difference between Excitement ratings for China vs.  
 399 Romania (means  $\sim 2.90$  for both,  $p = .93$ ). This hierarchy indicates that French wines are  
 400 strongly associated with dynamic and stimulating traits, whereas U.S. wines are comparatively  
 401 moderate in perceived Excitement.

402 High-involvement consumers tended to rate all countries slightly higher on Excitement (overall  
 403 mean difference high vs. low = +0.27,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.31$ ). The Country × Involvement  
 404 interaction was statistically significant for Excitement ( $p = .003$ ), but the interaction effect was  
 405 very small ( $\eta^2 = 0.003$ ). Follow-up comparisons showed that high- and low-involvement groups

406 differed in Excitement ratings for each country in the same direction, with high-involvement  
407 participants giving slightly higher Excitement scores for France (+0.36,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.41$ ),  
408 USA (+0.84,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.95$ ), China (+0.84,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.96$ ), and Romania (+0.76,  $p <$   
409  $.001$ ,  $d = 0.86$ ). Thus, involvement influenced the level of Excitement ratings but did not  
410 substantially alter the pattern of country differences – France remained highest and USA lowest  
411 in both involvement groups, confirming that COO-driven perceptions are robust across  
412 engagement levels.

### 413 3.2. Sincerity

414 Ratings of Sincerity (e.g., being sincere, honest, wholesome) also differed markedly by country  
415 ( $F = 262.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.16$ ). France again received the highest Sincerity score ( $M = 3.63$ ),  
416 significantly higher than all other countries ( $p < .001$ ). The mean difference was +0.91  
417 compared to the USA ( $d = 1.03$ ), +0.96 compared to China ( $d = 1.08$ ), and +0.73 compared to  
418 Romania ( $d = 0.83$ ), reflecting large effect sizes. These large effect sizes (Cohen's  $d \sim 0.8$ – $1.1$ )  
419 reflect a strongly established perception of French wines as sincere and trustworthy. Among the  
420 remaining countries, Romania ranked second ( $M = 2.89$ ) on Sincerity, significantly above both  
421 the USA ( $M = 2.72$ , difference = 0.17, 95% CI [0.08, 0.28],  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.20$ ) and China ( $M$   
422  $= 2.67$ , difference = 0.22, 95% CI [0.13, 0.32],  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.25$ ). Notably, there was no  
423 significant difference between the USA and China on Sincerity (USA–China  $M = +0.05$ , 95%  
424 CI [-0.07, 0.16],  $p = .27$ ), indicating that British consumers perceive U.S. and Chinese wines  
425 as similarly low in sincere/honest personality.

426 In summary, the Sincerity ordering was France (highest) > Romania > USA = China. Consumer  
427 involvement showed a similar pattern as with Excitement: high-involvement individuals gave  
428 slightly higher Sincerity ratings overall than low-involvement (mean difference  $\sim +0.26$ ,  $p <$   
429  $.001$ ,  $d = 0.30$ ). A small but significant Country  $\times$  Involvement interaction was observed for  
430 Sincerity ( $F = 3.12$ ,  $p = .028$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.002$ ). Inspection of simple effects suggested that high vs.  
431 low involvement groups differed most strongly for U.S. wines (high  $M = 2.90$  vs. low  $M = 2.53$ ;  
432  $\Delta = 0.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas their Sincerity ratings for France were more convergent (high  $M$   
433  $= 3.78$  vs. low  $M = 3.47$ ;  $\Delta = 0.31$ ). Despite this interaction, the rank-order of countries on  
434 Sincerity remained the same for both involvement levels, with France highest and USA/China  
435 lowest in each group.

### 436 3.3. Ruggedness

437 The Ruggedness dimension (masculine, tough, outdoorsy traits) yielded a somewhat different  
438 pattern from the above: here, Romania achieved the highest scores. The ANOVA showed a  
439 significant country effect ( $F = 183.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.11$ ). Romanian wines were rated the most

440 rugged ( $M = 3.09$ ), significantly higher than all others ( $p < .001$ ). In fact, every pairwise  
441 comparison between countries on Ruggedness was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating  
442 all four means differed from one another. Romanian wine was seen as more rugged than U.S.  
443 wine by  $+0.16$  ( $d = 0.17$ ), more than French wine by  $+0.62$  ( $d = 0.68$ ), and more than Chinese  
444 wine by  $+0.79$  ( $d = 0.86$ ). U.S. wines were the second-highest in Ruggedness ( $M = 2.93$ ),  
445 significantly above France by  $+0.46$  ( $d = 0.50$ ) and above China by  $+0.63$  ( $d = 0.69$ ). French  
446 wines (somewhat surprisingly) scored low on Ruggedness ( $M = 2.47$ ), although still slightly  
447 higher than Chinese wines ( $M = 2.30$ ) by  $+0.17$  ( $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.18$ ).  
448 Overall, the rank-order for Ruggedness was Romania  $>$  USA  $>$  France  $>$  China, indicating that  
449 Romanian wine carries a comparatively stronger “rugged” or tough persona, whereas Chinese  
450 wine is perceived as the least rugged, and French wine – while superior on other traits – is  
451 relatively low on this dimension. The influence of involvement on Ruggedness ratings was  
452 significant but modest (main effect  $F = 24.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.011$ ). High-involvement  
453 consumers tended to ascribe slightly more Ruggedness to wines overall than did low-  
454 involvement consumers (mean difference  $\sim +0.30$  on the 5-point scale). The interaction of  
455 Country  $\times$  Involvement was not significant for Ruggedness ( $F = 1.39$ ,  $p = .24$ ), indicating that  
456 the pattern of country differences described above was consistent across involvement levels.  
457 Both high- and low-involvement groups saw Romania as highest and China as lowest in  
458 Ruggedness, with France and the USA in between.

### 459 3.4. Sophistication

460 Sophistication (glamorous, elegant, upper-class personality) exhibited the largest country-of-  
461 origin effect of all dimensions. The ANOVA yielded  $F = 869.34$  ( $df = 2.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with a  
462 very large effect size ( $\eta^2 = 0.36$ ). As Figure 1 showed, French wines were perceived as far more  
463 sophisticated than wines from any other country. The mean Sophistication rating for France was  
464  $M = 3.96$ , near the top of the scale. In contrast, the other three origins all averaged below 2.7  
465 on Sophistication (USA  $M = 2.61$ , China  $M = 2.39$ , Romania  $M = 2.32$ ). The differences  
466 between France and each of the others were extremely large: France was rated  $+1.35$  higher  
467 than the USA (95% CI [ $1.25, 1.45$ ],  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.53$ ),  $+1.57$  higher than China ( $d = 1.78$ ), and  
468  $+1.64$  higher than Romania ( $d = 1.87$ ). These correspond to very large effect sizes, indicating  
469 French wine’s perceived sophistication is dramatically more pronounced in consumers’ minds.  
470 Across the non-French origins, minor differences were observed: U.S. wines were seen as  
471 slightly more sophisticated than Romanian wines (difference =  $+0.30$ , 95% CI [ $0.20, 0.39$ ],  $p <$   
472  $.001$ ,  $d = 0.34$ ), and also slightly more than Chinese wines ( $+0.22$ , 95% CI [ $0.11, 0.33$ ],  $p <$   
473  $.001$ ,  $d = 0.25$ ). There was no meaningful difference between China and Romania on

474 Sophistication (China was  $\sim 0.08$  points higher;  $p = .018$  after correction,  $d = 0.09$ ). Overall, the  
475 rank-order for Sophistication was France  $\gg$  USA  $>$  (China  $\approx$  Romania), emphasizing the  
476 dominance of French wines in consumers' symbolic and upscale perceptions..

477 High-involvement individuals tended to give slightly higher Sophistication ratings overall than  
478 low-involvement individuals (main effect  $F = 46.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but again the magnitude was  
479 small (mean difference  $\sim +0.25$ ). There was no significant interaction between country and  
480 involvement for Sophistication ( $F = 1.85$ ,  $p = .14$ ), indicating that while involvement influences  
481 the baseline rating, it does not alter the relative positioning. Thus, all groups consistently viewed  
482 French wines as the most sophisticated, with the remaining three countries clustered at the lower  
483 end of this dimension.

### 484 3.5. Competence

485 The Competence dimension (representing leader-like, confident, efficient traits) also showed a  
486 strong country-of-origin effect ( $F = 428.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.23$ ). France again topped this  
487 dimension ( $M = 3.90$ ), being viewed as significantly more competent than the other origins (all  
488 pairwise  $p < .001$ ). French wine's perceived Competence was higher than U.S. wine by  $+0.64$   
489 (95% CI [0.53, 0.74],  $d = 0.70$ ), higher than Chinese wine by  $+1.14$  ( $d = 1.25$ ), and higher than  
490 Romanian wine by  $+1.28$  ( $d = 1.40$ ). These differences are substantial, particularly highlighting  
491 the contrast between France and the two non-Western producers (China and Romania).

492 Among the other countries, we found a clear descending order: USA was rated second in  
493 Competence ( $M = 3.26$ ), significantly above China ( $M = 2.75$ ) by about  $+0.50$  ( $p < .001$ ,  $d =$   
494  $0.55$ ). The USA was also higher than Romania ( $M = 2.61$ ) by  $+0.64$  ( $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.71$ ). Finally,  
495 Chinese wines were seen as slightly more competent than Romanian wines ( $+0.14$  on the scale,  
496 95% CI [0.05, 0.23],  $p < .001$ ), although this difference was relatively modest ( $d = 0.16$ ).  
497 Overall, the Competence ranking can be summarized as France  $>$  USA  $>$  China  $>$  Romania,  
498 reflecting both established reputation and perceived technical expertise.

499 Consumer involvement had a small but significant impact on Competence perceptions (high-  
500 involvement group means were about 0.24 points higher than low-involvement on average,  $F =$   
501  $35.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.013$ ). The Country  $\times$  Involvement interaction was not significant ( $F =$   
502  $2.41$ ,  $p = .072$ ), confirming that the relative ranking of countries remained consistent regardless  
503 of involvement level. In both involvement groups, France and the USA were viewed as more  
504 competent sources of wine than China or Romania, with France firmly at the top. Table 3.  
505 Pairwise Comparisons of Country-of-Origin on Brand Personality Dimensions.

506

507 **Table 3.** Pairwise Comparisons of Country-of-Origin on Brand Personality Dimensions.

Contrast (Country A–B)	Excitement $\Delta$ ( <i>d</i> )	Sincerity $\Delta$ ( <i>d</i> )	Ruggedness $\Delta$ ( <i>d</i> )	Sophistication $\Delta$ ( <i>d</i> )	Competence $\Delta$ ( <i>d</i> )
France – USA	+0.83*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.94)	+0.91*** ( <i>d</i> = 1.03)	-0.46*** ( <i>d</i> = -0.50)	+1.35*** ( <i>d</i> = 1.53)	+0.64*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.70)
France – China	+0.71*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.81)	+0.96*** ( <i>d</i> = 1.08)	+0.17*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.18)	+1.57*** ( <i>d</i> = 1.78)	+1.14*** ( <i>d</i> = 1.25)
France – Romania	+0.71*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.81)	+0.73*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.83)	+0.62*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.68)	+1.64*** ( <i>d</i> = 1.87)	+1.28*** ( <i>d</i> = 1.40)
USA – China	-0.12** ( <i>d</i> = -0.14)	+0.05 ( <i>d</i> = 0.05)	+0.63*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.69)	+0.22*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.25)	+0.50*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.55)
USA – Romania	-0.12** ( <i>d</i> = -0.13)	-0.18*** ( <i>d</i> = -0.20)	+0.16*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.17)	+0.30*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.34)	+0.64*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.71)
China – Romania	+0.00 ( <i>d</i> = 0.00)	-0.22*** ( <i>d</i> = -0.25)	+0.79*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.86)	+0.08* ( <i>d</i> = 0.09)	+0.14*** ( <i>d</i> = 0.16)

508

### 509 3.6. Involvement Effects

510 Across all five dimensions, high-involvement wine consumers gave significantly higher ratings  
511 than low-involvement consumers, reflecting a general tendency for more involved individuals  
512 to attribute stronger personalities to wines. However, the magnitude of this effect was relatively  
513 small (on average, high-involvement respondents' ratings were about 0.25–0.35 points higher  
514 on the 5-point scale; Cohen's *d* ~0.3). Importantly, there were no qualitative reversals in country  
515 rankings between involvement groups, which maintained the integrity of the COO-based  
516 comparisons.

517 As reported above, two interactions were statistically significant (for Excitement and Sincerity),  
518 but these were minor. In those cases, the country differences were slightly amplified for high-  
519 involvement participants. For example, the Excitement gap between France and the USA was  
520 somewhat larger in the high-involvement group ( $\Delta = 0.93$ ) than in the low-involvement group  
521 ( $\Delta = 0.74$ ). Similarly, high-involvement respondents perceived U.S. wines as marginally more  
522 sincere than low-involvement respondents did (narrowing the gap between USA and Romania),  
523 while both groups still rated USA and China significantly lower in Sincerity than Romania or  
524 France.

525 In essence, consumer involvement did not change which countries were seen as best or worst  
526 on each brand personality trait – it primarily influenced the intensity of all ratings, while the  
527 relative COO impressions remained consistent. This suggests that, although highly involved  
528 consumers are generally more generous in their brand personality perceptions, the underlying  
529 country-of-origin effects are robust and widely shared among UK wine consumers.

530 Overall, these results reinforce that France's wines are perceived as having the most exciting,  
531 sincere, sophisticated, and competent personalities, whereas Chinese wines (and to a lesser  
532 extent Romanian wines) lag on these dimensions. Romania excels only in the niche trait of  
533 Ruggedness, surpassing even France in that specific “tough” image, while the USA occupies  
534 an intermediate position, generally outperforming China and Romania on competence and  
535 ruggedness but falling short of France on prestige-related traits.

536

#### 537 **4. Discussion**

538 This research contributes to the growing body of literature examining the influence of country  
539 of origin (COO) on consumer perceptions and wine personality – a product category deeply  
540 intertwined with geographic and cultural identity (Harvey et al., 2014). In product categories  
541 with strong symbolic meaning, such as wine, discussing product personality at the category  
542 level provides deeper insight into consumers' symbolic and emotional engagement.  
543 Consequently, the role of country of origin in shaping the aforementioned personality warrants  
544 closer examination.

545 Interpreting Aaker's brand personality dimensions in the context of wine provides valuable  
546 insight into how consumers symbolically engage with this product category. Among  
547 consumable goods, wine, more than many other consumables, carries cultural, emotional, and  
548 experiential value, making it particularly well-suited to the application of personality-based  
549 frameworks. Several studies have examined the role of wine COO in shaping perceived brand  
550 or product personality traits using established frameworks such as Aaker's [9] five-dimensional  
551 model. Heslop et al. [67] demonstrated that COO affects only two dimensions of personality,  
552 namely Ruggedness and Creativity, and these associations are weak. Zhou & Gao [8]  
553 investigated the impact of COO perceptions on Aaker's five dimensions of wine brand  
554 personality in the Chinese market and found that COO influences Sophistication and  
555 Competence. Applying the Aaker Brand Personality Scale to assess wines from multiple  
556 countries classified as "Old World" vs. "New World" and "traditional" vs. "non-traditional", the  
557 typologies presented by Rodrigues et al. [28] provide a more nuanced understanding of COO  
558 effects on wine perception.

559 In addition, research on consumer involvement as a moderator complements earlier findings  
560 suggesting that involvement intensifies consumer reactions but does not significantly alter  
561 patterns of perception [66,68,69].

##### 562 *4.1. Differences in brand / product personality*

563 The findings indicate that wine's product personality is strongly shaped by the country of origin  
564 across all five of Aaker's [9] dimensions: Excitement, Sincerity, Ruggedness, Sophistication,  
565 and Competence. Country of origin accounted for a substantial portion of the variance in  
566 personality perceptions – for example, 36% of the variance in Sophistication – highlighting the  
567 robust influence of COO-based stereotypes on consumers' symbolic associations with wine.  
568 Some countries conform to widely shared stereotypes, i.e., socially shared beliefs about the  
569 characteristics of a particular country, which subsequently influence perceptions and judgments

570 [70]. As stated by Heslop et al. [67], numerous studies have shown that products from low-  
571 image countries are perceived as lower quality compared to the same products from high-image  
572 countries. France is stereotypically associated with hedonism, leading to perceptions of French  
573 products as enjoyable [71], and is known as a prestigious wine producer rich in tradition  
574 [58,72,73], a finding confirmed in the present study.

575 French wines emerged as clear leaders, rated highest on four out of five personality dimensions.  
576 The most pronounced difference was in Sophistication, where French wines received a mean  
577 score of approximately 3.96, while wines from other countries scored below 2.7. The effect size  
578 (Cohen's  $d = 1.5-1.9$ ) indicates that these perceptions are not only distinct but deeply  
579 entrenched in consumers' mental representations. In addition to Sophistication, France also led  
580 in perceived Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence, further reinforcing its image as the  
581 archetypal wine-producing nation.

582 While French wines consistently outperformed others across most product personality  
583 dimensions, notable patterns also emerged in the evaluations of wines from China, Romania,  
584 and the United States. Chinese wines were rated the lowest, generally equal to or slightly below  
585 Romanian wines on dimensions such as Sincerity, Excitement, and Sophistication. These results  
586 are somewhat consistent with Guardato et al. [7], suggesting that consumers perceive Chinese  
587 wine as underdeveloped in personality, likely due to limited historical connection to wine  
588 culture, international exposure, and scepticism regarding quality or authenticity.

589 Romanian wines followed a similar pattern, receiving low scores for most personality traits  
590 tested. However, these wines received the highest scores of all countries on the Robustness  
591 dimension. This indicates that consumers associate Romanian wines with masculinity,  
592 toughness, or boldness, potentially reflecting national stereotypes or rural associations,  
593 providing opportunities for niche positioning in global markets. Micu et al. [74] highlight that  
594 Romania remains relatively unknown in the global wine market, requiring strong branding  
595 strategies to enhance perceived value.

596 American wines occupied an intermediate position. While they did not compete with French  
597 wines, they scored higher than China and Romania, particularly in Competence, and in  
598 Ruggedness relative to Chinese wines. These findings suggest a pragmatic product image  
599 shaped by innovation and technical expertise, consistent with Villanueva and Ferro [33], who  
600 argue that the USA is known for mass production and standardization of wine. Furthermore,  
601 "New World" producers exhibit greater market orientation, as noted by Rojas-Méndez et al.  
602 [75].

603 Taken together, these findings suggest that consumers do not evaluate wine solely based on  
604 intrinsic or sensory attributes, but also through a symbolic and emotional lens shaped by cultural  
605 associations. Country of origin functions almost as a brand itself, evoking human-like traits and  
606 values. France dominates symbolic and emotional traits, Romania and the USA establish  
607 distinct identities through Ruggedness and Competence respectively, while China's wine image  
608 remains underdeveloped.

#### 609 *4.2. The Role of Consumer Involvement in Wine Personality Perceptions*

610 The results show that high-involvement wine consumers rated all countries more positively  
611 across all dimensions of product personality than low-involvement consumers. However, the  
612 relative ranking of countries remained unchanged: France consistently topped most dimensions,  
613 while China and Romania remained lowest, highlighting the robustness of COO-based  
614 perceptions.

615 This suggests that while involvement influences the intensity of responses, it does not alter the  
616 underlying perceptions consumers have about wine-producing countries. These findings  
617 underscore the persistence and strength of country-of-origin stereotypes, even among highly  
618 engaged and knowledgeable consumers. The results align with models of consumer behaviour  
619 that conceptualize involvement as a moderator, influencing evaluations without necessarily  
620 changing their direction [76–78]. In wine, a high-involvement product category, involvement  
621 reflects emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement, resulting in stronger, more  
622 differentiated personality assessments.

#### 623 *4.3. Research implications*

624 The results of this study can be applied in practice by wine producers, marketers, policymakers,  
625 and institutions involved in promoting wine and the national image abroad. French wines,  
626 associated with Sophistication and Sincerity, can leverage narratives emphasizing tradition,  
627 craftsmanship, and premium positioning. Romanian wines, strong in Ruggedness, could adopt  
628 branding highlighting resilience, boldness, or rural authenticity. U.S. wines, high in  
629 Competence, might focus on innovation, technical expertise, and reliability. Chinese wines,  
630 currently underdeveloped in personality, may benefit from campaigns enhancing heritage  
631 credibility and showcasing quality improvements.

632 Understanding the emotional and symbolic associations linked to wines from specific countries  
633 can also guide product storytelling, label design, and promotional campaigns. This is  
634 particularly important for high-involvement consumers, who may respond more strongly to rich  
635 narratives and detailed accounts of terroir, production methods, sustainability practices, or  
636 awards. In contrast, low-involvement consumers may rely more on simplified cues such as

637 origin, label design, or brand / product reputation. Government agencies, export boards, and  
638 national wine associations can leverage these insights to shape country-level branding  
639 strategies, particularly in global campaigns. For countries with lower perceived wine  
640 personality traits, long-term image-building efforts are essential – including promoting quality  
641 standards, certification programs, education initiatives, and participation in international wine  
642 fairs and competitions.

643 It is important to note that this research was conducted among consumers in the United  
644 Kingdom, a mature wine market with a strong presence of international wines [14,79,80]. UK  
645 consumers are generally familiar with wines from a wide range of countries and may hold  
646 strong pre-existing stereotypes about origin, particularly in relation to traditional “Old World”  
647 producers versus “New World” or emerging markets. Therefore, the conclusions of this study  
648 cannot be fully generalized, especially to less developed wine markets where consumer habits,  
649 wine culture, and exposure to international products differ significantly. While the general  
650 patterns (e.g., the influence of country of origin on product personality) are likely relevant  
651 across markets, the specific country rankings and the intensity of perceptions may vary  
652 elsewhere. Consequently, practical implications should be applied with caution outside the UK,  
653 and additional market-specific studies are recommended.

654 Furthermore, consumer familiarity with wines from different countries may vary substantially,  
655 particularly in the case of emerging producers such as China. Personality ratings may therefore  
656 partly reflect broader country stereotypes rather than direct consumption experience.  
657 Acknowledging this, our study design and interpretation consistently emphasize the role of  
658 symbolic COO associations rather than assuming detailed prior knowledge of specific wines.  
659 This methodological alignment ensures that findings are coherent with the theoretical  
660 framework and the survey approach employed. Additionally, potential confounding effects of  
661 unequal market exposure, price anchoring, and general country image (as noted in the country  
662 selection rationale) may have influenced ratings, particularly for low-familiarity origins like  
663 China; future research could control for these factors through familiarity measures or  
664 experimental designs.

665

## 666 **5. Conclusions**

667 This study demonstrates that the country of origin (COO) significantly influences the perceived  
668 personality of wines across all five dimensions defined by Aaker – Excitement, Sincerity,  
669 Ruggedness, Sophistication, and Competence. The results indicate that geographic origin not  
670 only signals wine quality but also serves as a powerful driver of the emotional and symbolic

671 associations consumers form with various wines. French wines, representing the traditional  
672 category, were rated highest in Sophistication, Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence,  
673 reinforcing France's enduring image as a leader in premium wine production. In contrast, wines  
674 from newer or less established wine countries, such as China and Romania, generally received  
675 lower scores on personality traits, suggesting a relatively underdeveloped wine personality that  
676 may pose challenges for global market positioning. The United States occupied a moderate  
677 position, reflecting its emerging yet distinct identity characterized by Ruggedness and  
678 Competence.

679 An important finding of this study is the role of consumer involvement: while high-involvement  
680 wine consumers tend to give stronger personality ratings overall, the relative rankings of  
681 countries remain stable regardless of involvement level. This suggests that perceptions of COO  
682 are deeply rooted and culturally informed, remaining consistent despite variations in individual  
683 consumer engagement. Consequently, marketers and manufacturers should recognize that while  
684 targeting informed consumers can enhance perceptions of wine personality, the underlying  
685 country image remains a key factor shaping consumer attitudes.

686 This research provides valuable guidance for wine producers and marketers aiming to leverage  
687 COO effects strategically. Highlighting personality traits that align with a country's established  
688 image can strengthen brand / product differentiation and consumer appeal. For countries with  
689 weaker wine personalities, targeted marketing interventions – such as storytelling, quality  
690 certifications, and experiential campaigns – may help build stronger and more favourable  
691 associations.

692 Future studies should further explore these dynamics across diverse cultural contexts and  
693 product categories, assess the impact of digital marketing on brand / product personality  
694 formation, and adopt longitudinal approaches to capture evolving consumer perceptions.

695

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