Taste Preferences for sparkling wine products:
a segmentation approach based on sensory cues
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This paper contributes to the literature on segmentation for wine products by investigating various sensory characteristics of sparkling wine and their relevance for taste perception. More specifically, we present findings from an online survey, revealing four sparkling wine segments delineated by consumption habits and socio-demographic variables. Hence we demonstrate the importance of taste preferences as segmentation criteria for sparkling wines.

Sparkling wine is increasingly getting attention from the wine production industry as it is perceived as a growth sector within the portfolio of wine categories. Notably, it is changing from a typical special occasion beverage indulged mainly at the year end to one consumed at more regular social instances. The observation that consumers appreciate sparkling wine as a completely different category to still wine adds further tension to this research area. It asks for a closer examination of the individual and special consumption patterns that sparkling wine signifies for the industry.

From a consumer perspective taste has always been a main criterion when choosing a bottle of wine. This also holds true for sparkling wine. In prior research we isolated taste as the most important quality cue for sparkling wine consumers in Austria. In the paper at hand we go a step further and address which sensory cues attribute to the perfect glass of sparkling wine. Sensory cues that constitute the taste experience of sparkling wine are temperature, sweetness, perlage, colour, mouthfeel and odour. We present findings of an online survey with a sample of 230 Austrian participants living in the Eastern part of Austria, in fact Vienna, Burgenland and Lower Austria, and consuming sparkling wine products. To avoid bias, wine experts or people working in the wine production industry were barred from the sample. Survey questions were assessed with a 5 state likert scale. The average age of respondents is 30, and more than 60% are female. The latter supports the assumption that sparkling wine is perceived to be a female drink and women would thus be more likely to participate in surveys covering such types of beverage. In addition to evaluating the general importance of each of the aforementioned sensory cues, we closer investigate differences within places of purchase, as retail stores, on-premise sales, dedicated wine shops and restaurants, frequency of consumption and preferred sparkling wine product (ranging from Asti, Champagne, Sekt, Frizzante, to Prosecco, and more). Gender, age, place of residence, and education as well as professional background were recorded to further describe the segment in more detail.

Our findings can be categorised into the following four segments for sparkling wine products: Consumers in the first and with 40% biggest segment prefer cold, sweet, light, well-balanced and fruity sparkling wine products with light golden colour. They favour Frizzante and Asti,
consume several times a year and buy wine products in supermarkets or in restaurants/bars. Men at the average age of 40 are slightly dominant in this segment. On the contrary in the second segment, which is dominated by women at the average age of 33 who consume sparkling wine products several times a year or even on a monthly basis and prefer Frizzante and Prosecco. Favourable sensory cues are similar to those of cluster one, except for the colour being rosé rather than golden and the alcohol level should be slightly lower. The third segment runs counter to intuition as it differs strongly from the first two, as there is no clear preference for any particular sparkling wine product, but a clear preference for semi dry, very crisp and full bodied sparkling wine of light golden or yellow colour. In the fourth and last segment, Sekt and Champagne are products of preference and consumers are - similar to cluster one – with average of 37 years rather of older age. Sparkling wine is bought in Supermarkets and dedicated wine shops, and people have a higher level of education than those in the other segments. Their perfect glass of sparkling wine is dry and very crisp, light and balanced, fruity and light golden in colour.

As Brunner and Siegrist (2011) summarize, studies so far either focus on socio-demographic variables or more recently on lifestyle, involvement or motives and benefits in order to segment wine markets. Using taste preferences of consumers as a basis for segmentation, however, is a novel approach and allows for producers and retailers/sellers to create their offering tailored to the specific wants and needs of sparkling wine consumers, and particularly to their distinctive expectations about a perfect glass of sparkling wine. This is the main contribution of our paper.