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Title

NATURALNESS PERCEPTIONS OF WINE BY SWISS AND AUSTRALIAN CONSUMERS

I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Presentation

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Keywords

naturalness, involvement, winemaking

Research Question

How do different wine attributes affect the naturalness perception of Swiss and Australian consumers?

Methods

Online survey with regular wine consumers in German-speaking part of Switzerland and Australia. Data analysis was carried out with SPSS.

Results

Significant differences between Swiss and Australians and low and high level of involvement: t-tests, multivariate ANOVAs and mixed ANOVAs.

Abstract

Consumers around the globe show an increasing demand for food products that are perceived as being natural. Products that are perceived as natural are considered to be more authentic and transparent, and they instill a sense of trust and control. In the wine sector, the trend towards buying natural products has become evident with the increasing interest in the so-called natural wines. Despite the frequent use of the term natural, there is no clear definition of natural. Consumers across countries define natural as the absence of human intervention or artificial substances as well as the absence of additives. Knowing the naturalness perceptions of consumers has become essential for creating and promoting new products because consumers might refuse a product owing to the lack of naturalness, which would lead to reduced turnovers for firms.

The aim of this study was to assess the properties of wine that influence the perceived naturalness of wine, with a focus on winemaking techniques. To this end, an online survey was conducted among regular wine drinkers in the German-speaking part of Switzerland (n=252) and Australia (n=234). The goal of the survey was to reveal the

importance of naturalness in comparison to other factors that affect the choice of wine, such as the country of origin, price, or grape variety and to find out how different wine attributes influence the perceived naturalness. The attributes that were used in the survey were organized into three sections. The first section 'how grapes are grown' included attributes about the origin of the grapes (New World vs. Old World) and the production system (organic vs. non-organic). The second section 'how wine is produced' contained attributes about the additives, processing aids, and technologies that are used in winemaking. The third section 'packaging' focused on the type of closure, namely, oak cork, plastic cork, and screw cap. Differences between the respondents were analyzed based on their nationality as well as the level of involvement with wine.

The results of our study suggested that wine naturalness is an important factor for choosing wine, and differences were observed between the two nations as well as between consumers with varying levels of involvement. Naturalness was significantly more important to the Swiss than to the Australian respondents as well as to respondents with high level of involvement compared to respondents with low level of involvement with wine. The attributes of traditional wine making such as the origin from an old world wine-producing country, wine that was aged in barriques, or wine sealed with a cork cap were perceived as the most natural. The addition of sugar and sulfites or the use of gelatin was regarded as the most unnatural attribute of wine. In terms of production, additives were perceived significantly less natural than processing aids, which were significantly less natural than the technologies that are used in winemaking. Significant differences in naturalness perception of wine attributes were found between Swiss and Australians and as well as between respondents with high and low levels of involvement. For some specific attributes, there was a significant difference in the perceived naturalness between the countries but there was no significant difference between the respondents with different involvement levels. The use of activated charcoal, vanilla aroma (forbidden in both countries), selected yeast strains, reverse osmosis, enzyme addition, aging with oak chips, and sugar addition were perceived to be more natural by Australian respondents than by Swiss respondents. In terms of closure, oak cork cap was perceived to be by far the most natural by both Swiss and Australians as well as respondents with low and high involvement with wine. However, the naturalness ratings for oak cork caps among Swiss respondents were significantly higher than that among Australian respondents and the ratings among respondents with high level of involvement with wine were higher than that among respondents with low level of involvement with wine. Considering the fact that the large majority of Australian wine is sold with a screw cap, it is interesting that Australian respondents perceived oak cork cap to be the most natural. Many of the attributes from the section 'how wine is produced' that involved additives, processing aids, and technologies were considered to be unknown to the respondents. Therefore, respondents were asked to indicate whether they ever thought about the techniques used in winemaking. The results suggested that the belief that a technique is used in winemaking significantly increases the perceived naturalness of an attribute. These findings are in line with the literature that traditional wine production, organic labeling, and involvement are strongly linked with naturalness perception. Furthermore, our results show how culture can have an important influence on the importance of different factors for wine choice as well as on the naturalness perceptions of the wine attributes. Wine descriptions often include information about the production of wine. The findings of this study can help winemakers as well as wine marketers to optimize their communication towards their customers by avoiding terms that decrease the perceived naturalness of a wine. The findings of this study add to the existing research about the naturalness perception of wine by consumers. Further research is needed to understand the importance of wine naturalness for different groups of consumers.

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