Abstract:
Globalization and the volatility of the environment have altered the competitive landscape of the wine industry. In order to counter the dropping sales, French wineries have to evolve by adopting a new market orientation, with consumers’ preferences at the core of their strategies.
In the economic literature, consumers’ choices have been studied with little consideration for consumers’ preferences because differences in preferences “explain everything and therefore nothing”. It would now be difficult to maintain this stance because researches in marketing, psychology and sociology have shown that preference-based explanations provide a clear understanding of consumers’ behavior.
Past research on consumers’ wine preferences has often focused on the study of one specific cue (i.e. price, quality or brand). This paper attempts to provide a holistic view of consumers’ preferences for Champagne by matching cognitive, affective, and situational factors. Firstly adopting a cognitive approach, the objective of the research is to assess the respective effects of cues on the overall evaluation. Consumers’ judgement for Champagne is based on several cues classified either as intrinsic (taste and terroir) or extrinsic (price, quality, brand and reputation, country-of-origin labelling, exhibition awards, design and lay-out of the bottle). Additionally, affective approach is of special interest since it takes social and cultural aspects into account. These two approaches must be complemented by situational factors, both purchase and consumption, which influence decision-making process and hence willingness to buy. Consequently, our purpose is to identify the determinants of preferences for Champagne and to use them to make a classification.
In empirically identifying driving forces in Champagne preferences, we used 125 survey responses from French Champagne consumers. A questionnaire was developed based on a review of the literature and survey instruments developed by previous researchers. Data were analyzed in two stages. First, descriptive statistics were applied to the collected data to analyse the overall sample profile. The results emphasize that cues evaluation is influenced by age, gender, socio-professional group and purchasing involvement. Moreover, our study suggests that consumers are more likely to use taste, quality or price, as the tree main attributes to
determine their preferences towards Champagne. Age is shown to have an influence on the type of information used to make a choice, the number of purchased bottles and the preference for a purchase place, whatever the purchasing target (self or others). The purchasing place and the choice for a special bottle design respectively vary with gender and involvement.

During the second step, a hierarchical analysis was applied to classify the respondents based on similarities of their age and their purchasing involvement towards Champagne. Consumers were segregated into four clusters. Each subgroup has specific needs and motivations in defining their preferences. Indeed, the distinctive clusters exhibited significant differences in terms of cues’ evaluation, consumption frequency, information used to make a choice and purchase place. These findings can be usefully employed by wineries to satisfy the needs to target groups. In particular, profiles of the four segments provide detailed information to design marketing strategies properly.

*Keywords:* consumers’ preferences, Champagne, cues, determinants, typology