

## **Signaling Sparkling Quality: The Case of German Winzersekt**

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### *Abstract*

- *Purpose – This study aims to find differences among consumers regarding the quality perception of different sparkling wine types. The objective is to evaluate the brand potential of “Winzersekt”.*
- *Design / methodology / approach – The study is based on a between-subject online experiment. Each participant is allotted to one of the sparkling wine types (“Winzersekt”, “Sekt”, “Secco”) and states the expected quality for it. The hypotheses are tested with ANOVA and ANCOVA.*
- *Findings – The expected quality of “Winzersekt” is significantly higher than for the other two groups. Regardless of the level of wine involvement, the “Winzersekt” rates significantly higher than “Sekt” or “Secco”.*
- *Practical implications – In order to differentiate winegrowers’ sparkling wine from other sparkling wines and other methods, winegrowers should call their products “Winzersekt”. A national brand could signal the higher quality; consumers could easily find the winegrowers’ sparkling wines in the wide choice of sparkling wines in Germany.*

Key words: Germany, sparkling wine, brand

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, sales of sparkling wine in Germany have fallen continuously, reaching 2.8 million hectoliters in 2018 (Rückrich, 2019). In 2017 an average of 3.5 liters of sparkling wine per person were consumed in Germany while in 2012, sparkling wine consumption was still 4.2 liters per person (Deutsches Weininstitut GmbH, 2018). Nevertheless, Germany is the country with the highest consumption of sparkling wine after France (Fischer, 2018). Furthermore, Szolnoki (2019) found that 34% of respondents consume sparkling wine at least once a month. Sparkling wine is also interesting for the government: The sparkling wine tax, which is 1.02 € per 0.75 liter bottle (Generalzolldirektion, n.d.), revenues of 377.73 million € were recorded in 2018 (Statista GmbH, 2019). The sparkling wine tax only applies from a pressure of 3 bar (Steidl, 2013). With the price of champagne continuing to rise, a new market is opening up for high-quality German sparkling wines (Schön, 2018). Many German winegrowers achieve with their sparkling wines the same quality as champagnes, above all by the same manufacturing process, the classical bottle fermentation (Steve Charters & Spielmann, 2014).

There is a large number of sparkling wines in Germany, which are very difficult to distinguish. Small sparkling wine cellars or wineries specializing in the elaborate production of sparkling wines compete with industrially produced products. How can small, artisan producers differentiate themselves from these industrial sectors? This study tests an approach: A brand for sparkling wines from "real" wineries, namely *Winzersekt*, a combination of the German words "Winzer" (winegrower) and "Sekt" (sparkling wine).

According to Proschwitz & Hanf (2015), branding is becoming increasingly important in the wine industry. Often there is no clear distinction for consumers between industrially produced sparkling wine and winegrowers' sparkling wine; brands need to provide orientation (Hoffmann, 2010). In order to differentiate products in this competitive market, brands build an image in the minds of consumers (Proschwitz & Hanf, 2015).

The following study refers to the German wine market. For this study, a lot of literature is based on wine in general. However, these insights mostly apply to sparkling wine since sparkling wine can be seen as another form of wine.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROBLEM STUDIED

### 2.1 Sparkling wine – a short recap

In order to be allowed to use the term classical bottle fermentation, the sparkling wine has to be produced in a second fermentation in its own bottle, which is why each bottle is unique (Schmidt, 2014). The wine must be stored on the yeast for at least nine months without interruption before the yeast is separated by vibration and disgorging (Bach, Troost, & Rhein, 2010). Another process similar to the classical bottle fermentation is the transfer method. However, the sparkling wine does not remain in the bottle after fermentation, but is pumped under counter-pressure into a collection container, where the yeast is filtered and the shipping liqueur is added (Schmidt, 2014). The lees must be stored for at least 90 days and the total production time must not be less than nine months (Wipfler, 2017). In addition, sparkling wine may also be produced by tank fermentation. In this process, the second fermentation takes place in a pressure tank in which the sparkling wines mature until they are filtered, degummed and bottled (Steidl, 2013). In sparkling wine production, either a second fermentation is introduced in a pressure tank by adding sugar and stopped at a maximum pressure of 2.5 bar, or carbonic acid is added by impregnation (Jakob, 2012).

Table 1: Definitions of *Winzersekt*, *Sekt* and *Secco*

<i>Winzersekt</i>	<i>Sekt</i>	<i>Secco</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• at least 3,5 bar pressure</li><li>• carbonic acid from the second fermentation</li><li>• grapes from own cultivation</li><li>• classic bottle fermentation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• at least 3 bar pressure</li><li>• carbonic acid from the second fermentation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• pressure between 1 and 2,5 bar</li><li>• Still wine with added carbonic acid</li></ul>

### 2.2 Brands in the wine market

„A wine product is something that is made in a winery: a brand is something that is bought by the consumer. A wine can be copied by a competitor: a brand is unique. A wine can be quickly outdated: a successful brand is timeless.” (Spawton, 1998)

Different attributes define the brand and distinguish it from the competition. However, it is not possible to influence how consumers interpret the brand (Lockshin, Rasmussen, & Cleary, 2000). In addition to differentiation, a brand is also often regarded as a quality characteristic. The purchase decision can be simplified for consumers and binds them to the company

(Hünerberg, 2017). Brand awareness builds the brand image (Meffert, Burmann, & Kirchgeorg, 2015). There is brand trust, which is created by fulfilling various requirements. A product needs to meet the consumers' expectations and has to be unique in its selling proposition at the same time (Meffert et al., 2015). Because in Germany, 79% of the wine is sold in supermarkets and discount stores (Szolnoki, 2019), a strong brand can guide consumers (Proschwitz & Hanf, 2015). The origin (country or region) and the producer influence the prices (Schamel, 2006). Brands do not always have to be actively promoted, but can also be discovered by chance, such as the name of a wine line, a wine or a winery (Fleuchaus, 2011).

### 2.3 Involvement

The classification of the quality of sparkling and semi-sparkling wines is often related to the involvement of consumers (Stephen Charters, 2005). Stephen Charters (2005) states that even testers with a high wine involvement rate sparkling wines as more difficult than still wine. The reasons for this mostly are the perlage, the restraint of fruit notes as well as the insufficient experience. Consumers with a high level of involvement pay particular attention to the grape variety, the origin and the vintage (Hirche & Bruwer, 2014). They also consume wine more frequently, spend more money on it and often buy their wine directly from winegrowers. In the wine industry, brands are often based on extrinsic characteristics, such as origin, grape variety or the winery itself, which consumers use to navigate through the shelves (Lockshin et al., 2000).

### 3. HYPOTHESES

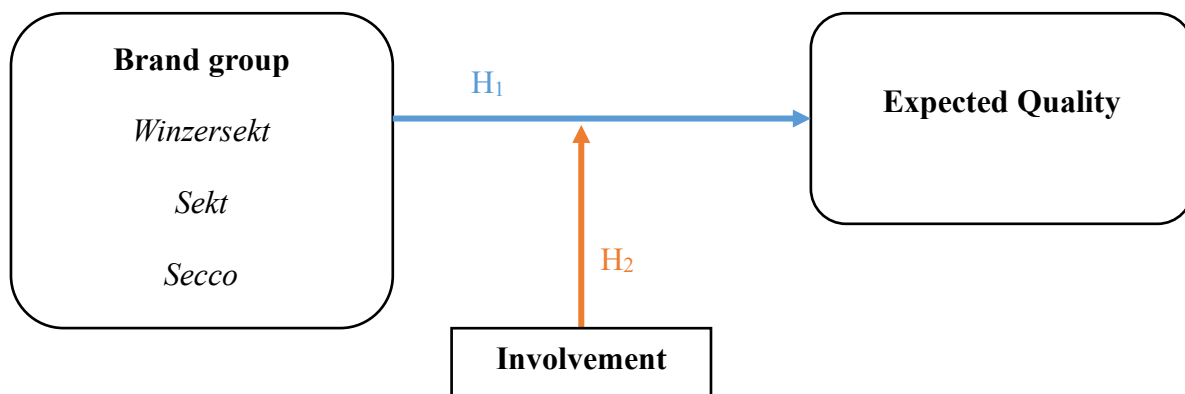


Figure 1: Visualization of the Hypotheses

The following two hypotheses are based on the presented literature. The first hypothesis deals with the expected quality of the bottle shown. Studies show that consumers often use extrinsic characteristics as a basis for assessing quality (Szolnoki, Hoffmann, Roland, & Justus, 2011).

Consumers might associate craftsmanship and, therefore, higher quality with the term *Winzersekt*. Therefore, the first hypothesis is:

H<sub>1</sub>: The term *Winzersekt* has a positive effect on the expected quality.

Wine involvement is known to be important for the segmentation of wine consumers. Consumers with a lower wine involvement rely on different extrinsic cues than highly involved consumers. (Petzoldt, Profeta, & Enneking, 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to control for the wine involvement in this study as well. Hence, the second hypothesis is the following:

H<sub>2</sub>: The wine involvement influences the assessment of expected quality.

**4. METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted online with the survey tool keyingress. The study is designed as a between-subject experiment. An initial screening of the participants assures that all participants are at least 18 years old and drink at least occasionally sparkling wine. The participants were divided into the three different groups *Winzersekt*, *Sekt* and *Secco*, see table 2.

*Table 2: different labels for the groups Winzersekt, Sekt and Secco*

<i>Winzersekt</i>	<i>Sekt</i>	<i>Secco</i>
		

In this part the participants were asked about the expected quality assessment as well as about the expected place of purchase of the bottles. The quality gradations could be classified between inadequate (1) and very good (5). After this, questions were asked about the general consumption of sparkling wine and wine involvement. The involvement was measured on the basis of ten items, see table 3, in a 5-point Likert scale developed by Hirche & Bruwer (2014). At the end of the questionnaire, the participants answered questions about demographics.

Table 3: Wine Involvement by Hirche & Bruwer, 2014

I have good general knowledge about wine.	Every now and then I visit a wine seminar.
Other people often ask me advice regarding wine	Sometimes, when drinking wine, I like the intellectual challenge of complex tastes.
Wine offers me relaxation and fun when life's pressures build up.	I am or would consider getting a member in a wine club.
I take particular pleasure from wine.	I regularly attend wine events / festivals.
I very much enjoy spending time in a wine shop.	Every now and then, I participate at a wine tasting.

## 5. RESULTS

A total of 696 participants took part in the study, which is why 232 participants were assigned to each group. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for age, gender, household size, monthly net income, frequency of sparkling wine consumption and wine involvement. The average age in all groups lies between 45 and 49 years with an average net income of 2,501€ to 2,750€ in a two-person household.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics

	Winzersekt	Sekt	Secco	Total
<b>Age</b>	Ø 45 - 49	Ø 45 - 49	Ø 45 - 49	Ø 45 - 49
<b>Gender</b>	♀ 51.7 % ♂ 47.4 %	♀ 56.5 % ♂ 42.2 %	♀ 51.7 % ♂ 47.4 %	♀ 53.3 % ♂ 45.7 %
<b>Household size</b>	Ø 2 people	Ø 2 people	Ø 2 people	Ø 2 people
<b>Monthly net income</b>	2501 € -2750 €	2501 € -2750 €	2501 € -2750 €	2501 € -2750 €
<b>Frequency of sparkling wine consumption</b>	once a month	once a month	once a month	once a month
<b>Involvement</b>	Ø 2.10	Ø 2.22	Ø 2.24	Ø 2.19

The  $\chi^2$ -Test was used to test the three different groups for homogeneity. The results (age: df = 20, F = 21.459, p = 0.371; gender: df = 6, F = 5.558, p = 0.474; monthly net income: df = 34, F = 25.470, p = 0.854; frequency of sparkling wine consumption: df = 10, F = 11.498, p = 0.320) do not show any significant difference, so that an equal distribution can be assumed (Backhaus, Erichson, Plinke, & Weiber, 2018).

The participants were able to classify the expected quality in the levels inadequate (1) to very good (5). This clearly shows that the expected quality for *Winzersekt*, which is 3.7, exceeds the other expected qualities. The expected quality for *Sekt* is 3.25 and for *Secco* 3.34.

The wine involvement construct has a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.922. The respondents' involvement is on average 2.19 with a standard deviation of 0.893.

To check  $H_1$ , an ANOVA was performed. The homogeneity of the variances is checked by the Levene's test. This shows that the same variances exist in the different groups *Winzersekt*, *Sekt* and *Secco*,  $F(2,693) = 0.946$ ,  $p = 0.389$ . The ANOVA shows that the mean values between the groups differ significantly,  $F(2,693) = 18,209$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $w = 0.22$ . The Turkey post-hoc-test shows a significant difference ( $p < 0.001$ ) between the groups *Winzersekt* and *Sekt*, with a mean difference of 0.448 in the 95% confidence interval (0.26, 0.63) and between *Winzersekt* and *Secco*, with a mean difference of 0.353 in the 95% confidence interval (0.17, 0.54). Hence, it can be concluded that the participants rated the quality of *Winzersekt* higher by 0.448 compared to *Sekt* and 0.353 compared to *Secco*.

With the help of an ANCOVA, the influence of the involvement level for wine,  $H_2$ , is controlled. The homogeneity of the covariates is measured with an ANOVA and shows no significance,  $F(2,693) = 1.647$ ,  $p = 0.192$ , proving that the covariate wine involvement is homogeneous across the groups. The homogeneity of the regression slope is also proven by the significance value  $p = 0.526$ . The significance of the covariate wine involvement is  $p = 0.031$ . Therefore, the expected quality is significantly influenced by the wine involvement. The eta-square ( $\eta^2$ ) is a measurement of the effect strength and states the proportion of variance explained by the respective variable, whereby the value always lies between zero and one (Backhaus et al., 2018). The value for  $\eta^2$  for the covariate wine involvement is 0.007. Thus, 0.7% of the expected quality is explained by the covariate wine involvement. If the covariate wine involvement is controlled, 4.9 % ( $\eta^2 = 0.049$ ) of the expected quality can be explained by the different groups *Winzersekt*, *Sekt* and *Secco*.  $\eta^2$  decreased from  $\eta^2 = 0.050$  to  $\eta^2 = 0.049$  due to the control of wine involvement.

## 6. DISCUSSION

As described in the chapter results, the mean value of the expected quality of *Winzersekt* is 3.7. Expressed in words, this means 'good'. The ANOVA has shown that the word on the bottle has a significant influence on the expected quality. This is examined more closely using a post-hoc-

test. The test showed that the respondents rated the quality of *Winzersekt* 0.448 better than *Sekt* and 0.353 better than *Secco*.

Studies show that the majority of German consumers purchase their wine in discount stores and grocery stores (Szolnoki, 2019). In this setting, product differentiation through a brand is particularly suitable, as consumers often stand in front of the wine shelf without orientation or advice (Proschwitz & Hanf, 2015). Schamel (2006) figured out that it helps to promote the reputation of a wine-growing region or a grape variety, because the promotion of a regional brand has a positive influence on both the signals of regional origin and the quality. A wine line, a wine or a winery can represent a brand (Fleuchaus, 2011). This study shows that the expected quality of *Winzersekt* is higher than *Sekt* or *Secco*. In conclusion, the studies indicate that *Winzersekt* can be used to establish a brand for German winegrowers.

The influence of the wine involvement was tested by the second hypothesis. This shows that 0.7% of the expected quality can be explained by the wine involvement. The influence of the involvement on the expected quality is very small, but significant. According to Petzoldt et al. (2008), consumers like to orient themselves on extrinsic features in order to draw conclusions about the quality of the product. The very small effect of involvement shows that the term *Winzersekt* is positive for all participants.

## **7. THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Many studies show that the introduction of a brand is worthwhile because it gives consumers orientation and thus simplifies the purchase decision. The lack of classification in German sparkling wine is often criticized. Consumers have problems to differentiate qualities in sparkling wines. The wide choice of products complicates the purchase decision even more. Especially in supermarkets, where most consumers buy their sparkling wine, there are no clear differentiations. Industrial sparkling wines can be found next to sparkling wines from winegrowers – almost impossible to distinguish. In addition, sparkling wine is not an everyday product; therefore, consumers are hardly familiar with it, which is a further reason to simplify the purchase decision. This study has shown that the term *Winzersekt* has a positive effect on the quality perception of consumers and that a broad introduction of the term on labels could lead to better differentiation in the market place. Due to the huge variety and complexity, however, consumers need information about the products. There certainly is a lot of educational work to be done in order to explain consumers the differences in sparkling wine productions. Further research in this sector is necessary to refine the statements about the origin of quality expectations for *Winzersekt*.



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