Title
What influence does the type of closure have on Swiss consumers’ perception of the quality of a bottle of wine?

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Conference Poster Session

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Keywords
Sensory Consumer test Wine Natural cork Screw cap

Research Question
Is the perception of the quality of a bottle of wine identical between a cork stopper and a screw cap?

Methods
Online questionnaires to measure the impact of the type of closure among various decision-making elements. Consumer tests measuring willingness to pay according to two types of closure.

Results
Screw caps reflect a negative image of wine quality and poor aesthetics compared to the same wine closed with a cork stopper.

Abstract
Screw caps appeared at the end of the 1960s and today represent nearly 30% of the world market for still bottled wines. In Switzerland, this closure has quickly conquered the sector and is used to close nearly 60% of wines. The screw cap also has the advantage of being recyclable, an important argument in a society where manufacturing and consumption methods are based on the ideology of sustainability. From a financial point of view, the screw cap is less expensive than a traditional cork stopper. However, the capsule is not necessarily favored by consumers who tend to prefer a bottle closed with a cork stopper, an external sign of a wine of superior quality. Based on this empirical observation, some Swiss wineries are considering abandoning the screw cap.
The objective of this project is to carry out a real market study in order to provide wine producers with a solid basis for reflection on the corking method for Swiss wines. In this first project, only white wines have been studied, and similar studies could be carried out on rosé and red wines.

On the one hand, the research methods envisaged will be online questionnaires using conjoint analysis to measure the impact of the shutter among various decision-making elements in the act of purchase. To this end, several pairs of propositions will be submitted to respondents who have to choose the product they would buy. A questionnaire, distributed in French-speaking Switzerland, will be supplemented by consumer tests organized on the Changins premises, measuring willingness to pay according to two types of closure (cork or screw cap). The results will be processed at Changins to highlight any influence of closure type on consumer appreciation, perceived wine quality and willingness to pay.

The results will help the industry in their choice of closures and in their communication with consumers. In view of the ever-increasing number of research studies on the technical comparison of wine closures, a scientific contribution on the perception of the end customer, the market and the commercial potential will be of interest to both the scientific community and the profession.

The expected results of this project are therefore manifold. The first is to gain a better understanding of whether or not the screw cap is accepted by Swiss consumers. Next, it will be determined for which type of wine and consumption method the screw cap can be used.

A large panel of consumers was surveyed and experiments combining sensory analysis and experimental economics have provided some answers as to the acceptance or rejection of the screw cap by Swiss consumers. A French-language questionnaire comprising 42 questions was produced and distributed online via the SondageOnline platform. This questionnaire was relayed via social networks and the CHANGINS newsletter between March and June 2022. Of the 380 responses collected, 193 were complete and came from consumers (non-professionals).

Initial results have shown that, in the end, the screw cap is more practical to open, well suited to white wines such as Chasselas and to situations such as festivals/barbecues/hiking (around 44% of the Swiss population go hiking), where practicality takes precedence over aesthetics. However, this obturator reflects a negative image of wine quality and poor aesthetics compared to the same wine closed with a cork stopper. The latter is therefore preferred for weddings and restaurant meals. Up to a price of around CHF 15, participants are willing to buy a bottle of Chasselas, regardless of the type of stopper. Above that price, cork stoppers are preferred.

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