

Consumer Confusion on Sustainable Wine Purchase Decisions. First Findings of a Research on Italian Consumers

Marco Bellotto

University of Trieste, Italy
marco.bellotto@phd.units.it

Gabriele Iaconcig

University of Trieste, Italy
gabriele.iaconcig@studenti.units.it

Patrizia de Luca

University of Trieste, Italy
patrizia.deluca@deams.units.it

Abstract. This paper pursues the investigation perspective outlined by the following research question: how do consumers perceive and respond to the sustainability proposition of products in the case of the wine sector?

Sustainability is a key factor for value creation in various production sectors with different environmental, social, and economic dimensions. It can contribute significantly to pursuing a better reputation and brand image for all stakeholders, particularly consumers (Wilson 2015). However, companies' commitment toward sustainability should be adequately perceived by the consumers to create value. Indeed, the multidimensional meaning of sustainability and the wide offer of products may generate different consumer perceptions and choice decisions (Schäufele, and Hamm 2017).

This investigation perspective fits well in the wine sector. According to recent data (SINAB 2021, 8), about 7% of the world's registered wine-growing area is cultivated using organic farming production methods, with an exceptionally high rate of increase in recent years: +600% in the last twenty years and +114% in the last decade, especially in Europe, where Spain, France and Italy represent the market leaders. On the demand side, numbers are also growing, even though sustainable wine still represents a niche market, given that it accounts for around 3.5% of the total quantity purchased worldwide. In order to compete nationally and internationally, offering sustainable products, wine producers should fully understand consumers' views (Capitello, and Sirieix 2019). Several studies on sustainable wines highlight the interest of consumers in these products. They also show that consumers perceive an information gap about agricultural practices carried out, criteria for quality evaluation, reliability of certifications and other factors that often lead them to a state of confusion affecting their purchasing choices (Capitello et al. 2021; Delmas, and Grant 2014; Forbes et al. 2009; Heinzle, and Wüstenhagen 2012; Mariani, and Vastola 2015; Szolnoki 2013; Zucca, Smith, and Mitry 2009).

This study aims to offer new insights into the sustainable wine market by using a model of consumer confusion (Mitchell, Walsh, and Yamin 2005). Consumer confusion is defined as "consumer failure to develop a correct interpretation of various facets of a product/service, during the information processing procedure" (Turnbull, Leek and Ying 2000, 145). This model includes the following elements: the antecedent factors, the mediating and moderating variables, the possible consumer coping strategies, and the consequences. From the methodological point of view, quantitative research is carried out through a questionnaire on a convenience sample of 120 consumers. Based on multivariate methods, data analysis is conducted using the statistical software SPSS. The study's first findings allow us to highlight the presence of some relevant aspects. First, consumer confusion emerges, mainly driven by information overload, ambiguity, and similarity. Further, other aspects arise from the research:

interesting relationships with mediating and moderating factors, such as product knowledge, consumer involvement, purchase environment; coping strategies, such as confusion reduction, postponing or abandoning purchases; different consequences, such as negative word of mouth, decreased trust and consumer dissatisfaction.

Keywords: sustainable wine, consumer confusion, Italian consumers

References

- Capitello, Roberta, and Lucie Sirieix. 2019. "Consumers' perceptions of sustainable wine: An exploratory study in France and Italy." *Economies* 7 (2), 33: 1-20.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/economies7020033>
- Capitello, Roberta, Lara Agnoli, Steve Charters, and Diego Begalli. 2021. "Labelling environmental and terroir attributes: Young Italian consumers' wine preferences." *Journal of Cleaner production* 304.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.126991>
- Delmas, Magali A., and Laura E. Grant. 2014. "Eco-labeling strategies and price premium: the wine industry puzzle." *Business & Society* 53 (1): 6-44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650310362254>
- Forbes, Sharon L., David A. Cohen, Ross Cullen, Stephen D. Wratten, and Joanna Fountain. 2009. "Consumer attitudes regarding environmentally sustainable wine: An exploratory study of the New Zealand marketplace." *Journal of Cleaner Production* 17 (13): 1195-99.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2009.04.008>
- Heinzle, Stefanie Lena, and Rolf Wüstenhagen. 2012. "Dynamic adjustment of eco-labeling schemes and consumer choice—the revision of the EU energy label as a missed opportunity?." *Business strategy and the environment* 21 (1): 60-70. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.722>
- Mariani, Angela, and Antonella Vastola. 2015. "Sustainable winegrowing: current perspectives." *International Journal of Wine Research* 7 (1): 37-48. <https://doi.org/10.2147/IJWR.S68003>
- Mitchell, Vincent-Wayne, Gianfranco Walsh, and Mo Yamin. 2005. "Towards a Conceptual Model of Consumer Confusion." *ACR North American Advances* 32: 143-50.
<http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/9058/volumes/v32/NA-32>
- Schäufele, Isabel, and Ulrich Hamm. 2017. "Consumers' perceptions, preferences and willingness-to-pay for wine with sustainability characteristics: A review." *Journal of Cleaner production* 147: 379-394. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.01.118>
- SINAB (Sistema d'Informazione Nazionale sull'Agricoltura Biologica) ed. 2021. *La filiera vitivinicola biologica*. Quaderno tematico 5. <https://www.sinab.it/pubblicazioni/la-filiera-vitivinicola-biologica>
- Szolnoki, Gergely. 2013. "A cross-national comparison of sustainability in the wine industry." *Journal of Cleaner Production* 53: 243-51. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2013.03.045>
- Turnbull, Peter W., Sheena Leek, and Grace Ying (2000), "Customer Confusion: The Mobile Phone Market." *Journal of Marketing Management* 16 (1): 143-63.
<https://doi.org/10.1362/026725700785100523>
- Wilson, John P. 2015. "The triple bottom line: Undertaking an economic, social, and environmental retail sustainability strategy." *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 43 (4/5): 432-47. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-11-2013-0210>
- Zucca, Gary, David E. Smith, and Darryl J. Mitry. 2009. "Sustainable viticulture and winery practices in California: What is it, and do customers care?" *International Journal of Wine Research* 2 (1): 189-94. <https://doi.org/10.2147/IJWR.S5788>