

Executive summary

Introduction

The focus of my dissertation “Consumer preferences and attitude for wine attributes: the case of sustainable labelling” is to explore the issues around sustainability in the wine industry; the investigation was conducted both in Italy and abroad over the last three years of my Ph.D.

Even though from literature review emerged that price, sensory characteristics, previous experience are the most important attributes for choosing a wine, this dissertation aims to analyse the introduction of the sustainable attribute in the wine industry, providing more insights into consumer perception and preferences for non-conventional wines. All such research has been carried out with the essential contribution and the supervision of Professor Daniele Rama of the Department of Agricultural Economics (Piacenza University) and Prof. Cristina Mora and Prof. Davide Menozzi of the Department of Food Science (University of Parma).

Research problem

The central research question addressed is whether consumers have a positive perception and interest in sustainability in the wine sector. Several following sub-research questions have been investigated. For instance, what influences consumers during their purchasing? Do they take into consideration environmentally friendly or organic attributes? Are such indicators able to provide a more positive image of the product? Is eco-labelling a key factor to drive the purchase of environmentally friendly wine? Are organic and sustainable labels perceived to be (almost) the same or do consumers distinguish between such indications? Is there any price premium paid by consumers for an Italian sustainable labelling system for wine? What is the trade-off between the sustainable logo and the geographical indication on a wine label?

Methodology

After the literature review and participation in conferences on the topic of the investigation (in 2012), the study started with preliminary focus groups and in-depth personal interviews (in

2013) with consumers from different nationality (Italy, Germany, Spain) and meetings with wine producers. Then, a survey to investigate the attitude towards sustainable labelled wine (in 2013) and a choice experiment (in 2014) were performed to analyse preferences for different wine labels for a representative sample of Italian wine drinkers.

Concerning the methodologies applied, this thesis takes into account insights from various disciplines to investigate; both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied through a different range of analytical tools. Consequently, three complementary consumer studies were undertaken, each focusing on a particular aspect of the central research question and addressing it with an adequate methodological approach.

Results

Results show that even if in the case of organic wine, consumers' values and interest about environmental responsibilities have to be taken into account because they are the main drivers to influence the purchase, on the other hand sustainable wine needs to be communicated including also social-ethical impact. However, even if the presence of a sustainable logo on the wine bottle might be useful to gain consumers' attention, it might not be an added value for those people who have a low belief in this kind of certification. At the same time, through the choice experiment we confirmed that, even if price and geographical indication are still considered as the most important attributes, for a target of wine drinkers a logo indicating sustainability might be attractive.

Conclusions

Educating and involving citizens to a more sustainable food consumption is a key factor towards a sustainable food system. Even if nowadays sustainable wine still represents a niche market, wineries should start providing consumers with more information about sustainable production practices and certification labelling in order to allow them to make informed choices. In the future this change in communication strategy oriented to show a positive image of environmentally friendly wineries might translate into a competitive advantage.

I hope such findings will be relevant for scientific studies in the field of food consumer science, for policy makers in production method and labelling legislation as well as for the wine companies aiming at implementing and promoting sustainable wine-growing programmes.