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ENHANCING REGION DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TYPICAL FOOD MARKETING AND DESTINATION BRANDING

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Sommario

Introduction

This empirical thesis focuses on how to enhance the development of a region, and more specific on the main role played by typical food marketing and destination branding.
The thesis is divided into two main sections and is structured as the collection of 4 papers:

- Section 1: Food Marketing and Tourism:
  - Paper 1: Consumer Preferences And Certification Of Origin. A Conjoint Analysis of the Case of Fontina Cheese (published in the Italian version[1] by the Journal Mercati e Competitività, Vol 2, 2013 – accredited AIDEA 2013);
  - Paper 2: Comparing Values: Region Of Origin, Producer And Pdo Label. The case of Fontina cheese in Italy (accepted with minor reviews by the International Journal of Tourism Research – ranking B AIDEA 2012 + ANVUR list).
- Section 2: Service Bundling and Destination Branding:
  - Paper 3: Benefits from service bundling in destination branding: the role of trust in enhancing cooperation among operators in the hospitality industry; (presented at the 3rd International Colloquium on Place Management, Marketing and Nation Branding, Lincoln (UK) and accepted with minor review by the International Journal of Tourism Research - ranking B AIDEA 2012 + ANVUR list);
  - Paper 4: Segmenting networking orientation in the hospitality industry: an empirical research on service bundling (submitted at the International Journal of Hospitality Management – ranking A ANVUR + ranking B AIDEA 2012).

Different methodologies are used, according to the research purpose. The four papers presented are research papers, based on original data collections. Each paper methodology is described in the dedicated paragraphs.
The main outcomes of these work are suggestions for the producers of typical food products, for tourist operators and for policy makers, suggestions that may be useful to enhance the development of a region.
In particular, in section 1, a relation between the consumer perception of PDO label and geographical distance is identified and tested, while in section 2 the role of trust among tourist operator is explored and proved to be of high importance in the creation of networks.
A brief introduction on the specific subjects is provided at the beginning of each section, a general conclusions chapter ends this work.

[1] Appendix 1

Section1: Food Marketing and Tourism

Introduction to section 1

Food is an important tourist attraction in a great variety of forms, it enhances or it may even be central to the visitor experience. Food has assumed an important role in tourist decision-making and satisfaction, tourism products and place promotion strategies (Henderson, 2009).

The relation between food and tourism has been a topic of considerable debate over the last decades.

Despite the increasing importance of food in the tourism supply, Hudman, in 1986, acknowleged food not to be a main driver in the determination of tourism demand. However in the last years this scenario deeply changed. Food become a core ingredient of the "tourism product" (Defort, 1987) and a significant part of toursist' expenditure: food and beverage expenditures amount to one-third of overall tourist expenditures of the global tourism turnover (Meler and Cerovic´, 2003).

Food is first of all a physical need, vital for physical sustenance, thus tourists have to eat while visiting. But nowadays, for some, food is much more: it can be a major motivator, that satisfies a huge variety of needs, overtaking the simply nutritional requirements. Food is a way to look for pleasure, for entertainment , it can serve as social purpose and it is a way to discover the visiting land, while exploring and compare local habits with tourists' own culture (Hegarty and O'Mahoney, 2001).

Tourists with specific interest may plan their trips to include beverage or food tasting, or they may have a more casual attitude through food experiences. The UNWTO (2003) pointed out that usually tourists decide where and what to eat while travelling (not planning it before the departure) and discover in such way local cuisine. Indoor and outdoor markets are often tourism attraction centers, since they offer tourists the possibility to observe and often to try typical food products. Dining out in local restaurant is considered and interesting pastime and a relaxing break for both business and leisure tourists. Self-catering tourists may be exposed , as well, to local food habits and purchase and cook local ingredient to experiment local cuisine by their own. This experience may as well influence and change food routines once back at home. Food is then a common gift, often bought as a souvenir.

The important role played by food in the overall tourism experience is demonstrated, as well, by the spread of international food products on the supermarket shelves and by the proliferation of multicultural restaurant, that offer consumers the opportunity to live an ethnic experience during their weekly routines (Verbeke and Lopez, 2005). It may let them dream of future trips or help them remind past holydays. Demand from tourists represents, thus, an opportunity to enhance typical food export, enlarging markets beyond domestic limits.

In 2007 Tikkanen created a schema to identify to variety of roles played by foodstuffs in tourism- He pointed out that food can be considered:

. a part of the local culture, which tourists consume;

. a part of tourist promotion;

. a potential component of local agricultural and economic development; and

. a regional factor that is affected by the consumption patterns and perceived preferences of the tourists (Hall and Mitchell, 2001; Misiura, 2006).

In addition to the commonly labeled food tourism, a great variety of new terms have been created to identify different type of food-based tourism, such as gastronomy tourism (Hjalanger and Richards, 2002), culinary tourism (Wolf, 2002) and tasting tourism (Boniface, 2003).

Nowadays food is a critical element in supporting regional and national identities and food marketing has become an effective means to promote tourism destinations. Food and wine, in fact, can be a very powerful influence on feelings of involvement and place attachment (Gross and Brown, 2008). Food tourism strategies are a significant instrument of regional and national development, in particular thanks to the potential leverage between products from the two sectors (Telfer, 2001). The distinctive appeal of a country is based on a range of resources that includes typical food and local cuisine. The development of tourism is, therefore, inextricably linked to the development of these resources (Jones and Jenkins, 2002).

Despite the close relation between food and tourism, it is only recently that the role played by typical food products in attracting tourists to a destination have come to be explicitly recognised by the governments, researchers and by the food and tourism industries.

Local food products are a possible key competitive advantage and they can be a core element in destination branding. The identity of a country and of a destination can be defined considering, among other characteristics, its typical foodstuffs. This is why Henderson (2009) points out the importance of creating a clear gastronomic identity and of defining and communicate a specific heritage. This elements should be exploited in to differentiate and rejuvenate the image of a destination, helping to convey a unique sense of place (Fox, 2007).

Typical food products can thus be central to destination and overall economic development. Food tourism, can also be used in a cluster strategy involving a great variety of tourism operators and producers. This cooperation would bring mutual benefits through the development of commercial synergies.

Local and regional food holds great potential to contribute to sustainable competitiveness in a destination (Rand and Heath, 2008), as well. Food tourism could enable destination marketers and entrepreneurs to optimise the tourism potential of local and regional food.

Food tourism should become a tool in rural development which can stimulate agrarian economies in danger of decline (Boyne et al., 2003).

Food tourism appears to be a great opportunity for tourism operators, but it should to be exploited paying attention to quality standards, different needs and effective communications if it is to realise its potential as an asset for both the food and tourism industries. On one hand, tourists are becoming more adventurous and are willing to try and discover new experiences in general and according to food in particular. On the other hand consumers are also more concerned with food safety, genuine and authentic products.

Henderson (2009) affirms that "Tourism is both an outcome of and vehicle for globalization and the imperative of striking a balance between the local and global pertains to food as much as other arenas".

<u>Paper 1</u>: Consumer Preferences And Certification Of Origin. A Conjoint Analysis of the Case of Fontina Cheese

Christian Garavaglia[2] and Elena Maria Marcoz

Abstract

Purpose – This paper analyzes purchasing decisions when specific information sets occur. In order to evaluate how the certification of protected origin (P.D.O.) is perceived in different areas, a statistical analysis was conducted in reference to Fontina cheese.

Design/methodology/approach - A specific questionnaire was drawn up and 200 consumers, from Milan and Aosta, were selected by random sampling. The original data collected were used to study consumer preferences through conjoint and cluster analysis.

Findings - The results show that P.D.O. certification greatly influences purchasing decisions, increasing consumer willingness to pay. Moreover, perception of the P.D.O. label was found to differ according to consumer place of residence (Milan or Aosta). This seemed to be due to the the finding of different main quality indicators in these areas: consumers in Aosta considered origin of the product to be the main indicator of the quality of the product, those living in Milan placed greater trust in certification.

Research limitations/implications – The sample dimension is the biggest limitation. This research could be further developed and improved by extending the empirical analysis to consumers living in other countries. It would also be interesting to run experimental economics sessions. Correspondence between the results of such sessions and conjoint analysis would make the conclusions more robust.

Originality/value - This empirical analysis supports previous studies on the importance of P.D.O. certification (Dimara and Skuras, 2005; Bruwer and Johnson, 2010). By comparing the attitudes of consumers living near to /far from the place of production, it adds a new dimension to previous research in this field.

Keywords P.D.O., food, quality perception, conjoint analysis, certification, typical products

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

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In recent decades, changing attitudes to food have led to considerable changes in the significance attached to buying and consuming food. Nowadays, buying food is far more than a simple response to a physiological need (Cullen, 1994; Squires *et al.,* 2001).
These important changes, due largely to the fact that today's consumers are increasingly aware, informed and demanding, have led to a significant shift in the demand for food considered authentic and high quality (Sabbe *et al.*, 2009). Trends in demand (Nomisma, 2003) confirm that consumers in developed countries are increasingly sensitive to food safety and quality and show greater willingness to pay (WTP) for products that have these characteristics.
Certification of geographical origin is one of the ways of signaling quality and product differentiation. Serving as a guarantee of food safety and wholesomeness, it provides consumers with positive utility. It is also an indicator of authenticity and respect for traditions. Lastly, indication of geographical origin evokes environmental values, since it certifies that the product was made in a natural way and according to precise standards (P.D.O, I.G.P., P.G.I., D.O.C.G., D.O.C.).
The model developed by Moschini *et al.* (2007) shows that consumers are willing to pay a premium price for high quality products. Certification of "protected designation of origin" (P.D.O.), being regulated at institutional level, can be considered a credible quality indicator, even though some authors doubt the actual ability of these brands in reporting product quality (Grunert, 2005).
In this paper, in line with Lancaster (1971), a product is regarded as a grouping of several attributes. Consumers derive utility from the consumption of products according to their preferences and from the set of characteristics that define those products. The differential attribute we considered in this consumer preference analysis was P.D.O. certification, a dichotomous variable whose presence (or absence) affects the degree of consumer preference..
The reference product in this study is Fontina cheese, a local Italian product that, unlike other, better known products, has not previously been the subject of a specific analysis. Worldwide there exist numerous certified locally-produced foods, often not widely known outside the region in which they are produced. Italy alone has thirty P.D.O. certified cheeses (CE n. 121/2010); some of these, such as Grana Padano and Parmigiano Reggiano, are famous, while others, like Fontina, are less well known. This survey aims to investigate consumer preferences and purchasing behavior with regard to Fontina cheese, in order to identify the key elements for optimizing the promotion of this product.
Specifically, our aim was to test empirically the following three hypotheses:
(HP1) P.D.O. certification significantly influences consumer preferences;
(HP2) P.D.O. certification of food leads to a higher WTP;

(HP3) There exist regional differences in consumer perception of P.D.O. certification.
To test these hypotheses, original field data were collected and statistically analyzed using SPSS software.
The paper is structured as follows: a brief literature review (section 2) is followed by a presentation of the methodological approach to this empirical analysis (section 3); the results are then described (section 4), as are the consumer profiles emerging from a multivariate analysis (section 5). After analyzing consumer WTP in relation to P.D.O. certification (section 6), the paper ends with some brief concluding remarks (section 7).

2. Literature review

When choosing food, consumers are guided by their perceptions regarding the intrinsic properties of products, as well as by their extrinsic characteristics (Busacca, 2004; Lee *et al.*, 2006; Bello Acebrón e Calvo Dopico, 2000; Goldstein *et al.*, 2008; Shankar *et al.*, 2009). The intrinsic properties are, in fact, internal properties of the product that cannot be directly perceived by consumers, such as quality, safety, respect for environmental standards, and authenticity. The consumer registers only the extrinsic, i.e. external, characteristics of a product (e.g. color, shape, labels), which are tangible, visible and directly verifiable. Thus, the information set available to consumers (extrinsic, not sensory information) plays a crucial role in influencing their preferences, particularly for products with credence attributes (Grunert, 2005), i.e. characteristics that the consumer may not be able to verify even after purchasing and consuming them. Indeed, few consumers have the expertise to know whether certain food preparation procedures were actually followed or to judge the authenticity of a food product. As a result food products certainly seem to constitute credence goods (Rangnekar, 2004) . This inability to make a proper assessment of features today assigned increasing importance leads consumers to seek external guarantees and assurances to help them choose what to buy: certifications of origin may be good examples of effective guarantees.
Food product labeling plays a direct supporting role in purchasing decisions; Annunziata (2009) has defined it an indispensable source of information and very often the main tool through which consumers evaluate the attributes of a product that might otherwise escape them.
The impact of extrinsic and intrinsic information on consumer decisions and evaluations has been analyzed in several other studies (briefly introduced in the following paragraphs) in different disciplines, such as quantitative marketing, economics and experimental psychology, and sensory analysis.
Many studies have examined the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic information in relation to food and drinks. In Allison and Uhl's seminal paper on beer (1964), consumers were

unable to recognize their favorite brands in blind tests and perception of the characteristics of different beers was found to be linked more to product marketing than to actual physical differences. Vigne and Gergaud (2007) found that consumer preferences for champagne differed significantly only in the presence of extrinsic, rather than just intrinsic, information. Lee *et al.* (2006) found that consumer appreciation of beer tasted twice (first alone and then with the addition of balsamic vinegar) depended significantly on the information the consumer received. Waskin *et al.* (2000) examined the influence of label information on consumer perception and concluded that specific information on the label can change the perception of goods, according to the specific preferences of the consumer.

As regards extrinsic information, product origin appears to crucially influence consumer choices. Bruwer and Johnson (2010) showed that consumers use regional branding cues, information and images in their assessment and evaluation of comparative wine labels. Adding regional information to a wine label increased consumer confidence in the quality of the product. Indication of origin increases the perceived quality of a product (Veale, 2008) and may even be a more reliable indicator of quality than the intrinsic characteristics of the food. Indeed, in Veale and Quester's studies (2009a, 2009b) on wine and Brie cheese, many consumers, even after tasting the products, continued to rely more on the origin of these foods to judge their quality, than on their own sense of taste. The origin become an information surrogate, reassuring consumers about the safety of the product and reducing their perception of the risk associated with its consumption (Kim, 2008; Mørkbak *et al.*, 2010). These results are confirmed in several studies of various products: cheeses (Bernabéu *et al.*, 2010), beer (Lentz *et al.,* 2006), and wine (Orth *et al.*, 2005). In another interesting study, Darby et al. (2008) evaluated the impact of food origin (local production) on consumption choices through the use of conjoint analysis. They looked at how consumers perceive "locally grown" products and at their understanding of "local". In this study, interviewees were presented with four product origin categories (the product in question was strawberries): grown nearby, grown in state (Ohio), grown in the U.S., blank. The consumers were found to attach higher value to local strawberries (without making any distinction between those grown in state and nearby). Strawberries grown in the U.S. and strawberries not carrying information about their origin were less appreciated. Indication of product origin was thus very important: the general indication "grown in the U.S." did not appear to be sufficient to increase the perceived value of the product; conversely, clear indication of origin led consumers to value the product more. Consumer WTP increased significantly only for strawberries grown locally, i.e. in the state and nearby. Essentially, an indication of geographical origin becomes a surrogate for other information, and thus a guarantee of

authenticity and quality. In this study, people were found to trust local production (which they took to mean goods produced within state boundaries), which thus emerged as the main driver of their purchase and consumption choices.
To further clarify the importance of certification of origin, it is particularly interesting to consider the "made in" effect (De Bodinat, 1984; Han, 1989, Roth and Romeo 1992). The place of origin is a piece of information that can considerably influence consumer perceptions and preferences, increasing or reducing the willingness to buy. Different markets may develop different judgments about the ability of a product to meet their needs. The cause of these differences can sometimes be traced back to the country of origin effect, i.e. the way in which a country's image impacts on the consumption of its products.
Recent years have seen a considerable increase not only in information on product origin, but also in the use of labels and certification of geographical origin. The European Union has created, as protection tools, certifications that guarantee the quality of products on the basis of their link with a particular territory. These certifications, guaranteeing not only the territoriality but also the identity of products, include P.D.O. and "protected geographical indication" (P.G.I.), established by EEC Regulation 2081 / 92, recently replaced by EC Reg 510/2006. These are, essentially, public indications intended to provide consumers with information on the authenticity, origin and safety of the products in question. Dimara and Skuras (2005) confirm that food labeling is an important source of information and an indispensable way of signaling quality. Moreover, information linking place and product is one of the first things that wine consumers look for on wine labels. Linking products to place through specification of the use of local raw materials or ancient, traditional methods of production and producing regionally denominated products (P.D.O. or P.G.I. certified) are all strategies designed to differentiate products and thus to allow producers to target high-quality niche markets. Essoussi and Mehdi (2008) analyzed similar phenomena in relation to organic food consumption. The authors divided organic food consumers into two groups: regular consumers (RCs) and non-regular consumers (non-RCs). Both groups proved sensitive to labeling and certifications, being particularly concerned about labels, product certification processes, the control and definition of these processes, and the use of standards. Labels were found to be important to RCs, who consider certified products much safer. A few RCs also attached importance to the certifying body. Europe is highly regarded for its labeling and certification processes and for its regulations controlling the organic food industry. An experimental study by Cavicchi *et al.* (2010) showed that consumers value "Pecorino di Fossa" cheese more highly if it carries a visible P.D.O. label. The same cheese presented exclusively with the corporate brand was rated less

highly. Baker and Mazzocco (2005) remarked that certification of origin plays a major role in consumer choice and influences consumer decisions much more than well-known brands do. Through conjoint analysis, these authors showed that while brand is, for many consumers, an adequate guarantee of quality and safety, an external and official certification is perceived as more reliable. In an interesting investigation into the wine industry, Fait (2010) set out to estimate the value that consumers attach to the concepts of product typicality and origin and to analyze the impact of geographical origin on purchasing behavior. It was found that the average consumer has a good perception of the relationship between wine and territory (land-brand awareness) and that this connection is usually made thanks to designation of origin, rather than brand.

Many other authors have studied the importance of certification of origin as a driver of purchase decisions (Mesías *et al.* 2010; Krystallis and Fotopoulos, 2003; Krystallis and Chryssohoidis, 2005). In particular, Monjardin de Souza Monteiro and Ventura Lucas (2001) considered the effectiveness of certification as an indicator of quality. Investigating the impact of P.D.O. certification on consumer preferences for traditional cheeses in Lisbon, they found that 56% of the respondents judged "recognition as P.D.O." as the most important of a series of product attributes. Tendero and Bernabéu (2005), studying the Spanish cheese market, showed that appellations of origin reassured consumers about the place of production and thus served as food safety guarantees. More recently, Stasi *et al.* (2011), showed how geographical indications, in particular D.O.C.G. certification, reduce the price sensitivity of consumers and diminish the risk of substitution in the wine market. Another interesting study, on olive oil, compared simple indication of origin with official certifications of origin: consumers were found to consider official certifications (P.D.O. in particular, but also P.G.I.) more reliable guarantees of product quality (Menapace *et al.* 2011).

Product origin is clearly important, and certification of origin appears to be the most effective way of conveying this information. Certification is an important driver of consumer choice for many products, generally prevailing over brand and mere indication of product origin. The first aim of our research was to further verify this phenomenon (HP1), and to do this we analyzed, in relation to Fontina cheese, the actual impact of P.D.O. certification on consumer preferences.

Another important aspect of consumer preferences is consumer WTP for the presence or absence of certain characteristics, and/or for information about a product. Novotorova and Mazzocco (2010) and Wang *et al.* (2010) showed that consumers consider origin a reliable surrogate for other information and that their WTP is higher for locally grown products. Stasi *et al.* (2008) assessed consumer preferences on key information that can be found on wine labels, and found certification to be an effective tool for signaling the quality of Italian wines, the pyramid being topped by D.O.C.G, D.O.C. and P.G.I. certified wines. These certifications also increased consumer WTP. In an interesting article, Moschini *et al.* (2007) showed that certification at local level allows vertical differentiation of food products. Consumers equate certification with high quality and realize that certification has costs (including the cost of control). Aware that these costs are sustained precisely in order to guarantee the higher quality of the products, they are willing to pay a premium price for the presence of certifications. These considerations lead on to our second aim (HP2): to quantify consumer WTP for the presence of certifications on Fontina cheese.

Finally, with the exception of a few studies, there has been little investigation of regional differences in consumer preferences. Van der Lans *et al.* (2001) studied the preferences of Italian consumers with regard to extra virgin olive oil and found that product origin and P.D.O. certification can affect consumer choices both directly and indirectly, in the first case through appreciation of these attributes per se, and in the second through perception of them as indicators of quality and thus as surrogates for other information. As regards the direct effect, an interesting phenomenon was highlighted: consumers living in the region where the oil is produced were found to be more sensitive to the origin of the product than consumers from other regions.

Our third aim (HP3) was to explore this last aspect in more detail, studying differences in the way in which Fontina cheese and its characteristics are perceived and valued by consumers residing in the place of production (Valle d'Aosta) and elsewhere (Milan).

In conclusion, the existing literature has shown that certification of origin plays an important role in food purchasing decisions. Our intention, in testing our first hypothesis (HP1), was to measure its actual weight on consumer preferences in relation to Fontina cheese. The next step was to verify the hypothesis that certification corresponds to a greater WTP (HP2) and to look for regional differences in the manifestation of these phenomena (HP3). The general objective of this work was to help to clarify how certain credence attributes contribute to overall consumer perception and how this perception varies between regions.

3. Research method

In order to draw up a questionnaire for our research, we analyzed other studies in the literature (Lawlor and Delahunty, 2000, Harrington *et al.* 2010; Bermúdez-Aguirre and Barbosa-Cánovas Gustavo, 2011; Mathiou, 1974) to identify the important attributes of cheese, especially Fontina cheese. We created an initial questionnaire which was then modified and validated through a qualitative analysis involving eight in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. We interviewed two producers of Fontina cheese in Valle d'Aosta, two members of ONAF (the National Organization of Cheese Tasters) during the "Do the Right Thing" event (held in Milan, 12th-14th March 2010), and four retailers, two in Aosta and two in Milan, at their respective shops. We asked these experts to tell us what they consider to be the main characteristics of Fontina, after which we showed them our questionnaire, asking them to fill it in and comment on it. We asked them whether they judged the questionnaire comprehensive and suitable for investigating consumer preferences with regard to Fontina cheese. In particular, we drew their attention to the attributes selected, on the basis of the literature, to define the profiles for conjoint analysis (Table 1) and the attributes listed in Table 3, whose importance would then be rated by consumers. The interviews were useful for drawing up the final questionnaire, intended as an instrument for clarifying the determinants of Fontina cheese buying behavior and for testing our specific hypotheses about the influence of P.D.O. certification on consumer choice.

The final questionnaire is divided into three parts. Part 1 consists of eight different profiles, each referring to a slice of Fontina cheese. Respondents were asked to rate each slice on a scale of 0 to 100. Part 2 examines buying habits, focusing on three main dimensions: average quantity purchased, place of purchase and drivers of choice. Part 3 focuses on population data.

It should immediately be made clear that "Fontina" is a dairy product that, to use this denomination, must necessarily have P.D.O. certification; a cheese cannot be called "Fontina" without it. In this study, however, in order to quantify the impact of the presence (or absence) of this mark on consumer preferences, we assumed the existence of a non-P.D.O. certified cheese, also called "Fontina".

The final questionnaire was submitted to a random sample of 200 adults, who eat Fontina. This sample size corresponds to the number of respondents (100-200 interviewees) required in order to obtain reliable results from conjoint analysis (Quester and Smart, 1998). The first question specifically asks whether the interviewee is a consumer of Fontina. Only if the answer is affirmative can the interview progress.

In all, 100 questionnaires were administered in Valle d'Aosta, where Fontina is produced, and 100 in Milan. On the domestic market, most Fontina cheese is sold to the North of Italy (Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria, Veneto and of course Valle d'Aosta), which absorbs 80% of total production. Central Italy absorbs 8%, while 2% is sold to the South. The remaining 10% is exported. As regards domestic consumption, Lombardy is the region that buys most Fontina (38% of production for the Italian market), followed by Valle d'Aosta (20%). Therefore, in our study of regional differences in consumer preferences we decided to focus on the province of production (Aosta) and on Milan, where Fontina cheese is widely known. The questionnaires were completed in different settings: large-scale retail outlets, i.e. supermarkets, hypermarkets and discount stores (34.5%), specialist grocery stores (21%), on-line (25%) and elsewhere (19.5%). The stores were chosen randomly in order to limit the use of time and economic resources.

The data obtained through the questionnaires were coded using SPSS software, and analyzed. In particular, we used univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses, applying conjoint and cluster techniques.

Univariate analysis was used to identify the general characteristics of the sample, and bivariate analysis to identify relationships between the variables through contingency tables[3].

Conjoint analysis is widely used in marketing to evaluate consumer preferences (Hair *et al.*, 1998), particularly with regard to food product attributes (Ahmed *et al.*, 2004, Bernabéu *et al.*, 2008 and 2010, Darby *et al.* 2008; Kim, 2008; Veale and Quester, 2009). We used conjoint analysis to estimate the utility values associated with different levels of the attributes of Fontina cheese; this was done by disaggregating the overall opinion expressed by the consumers into a set of carefully selected profiles. In short, conjoint analysis split this opinion, bringing it back to individual preferences for each single attribute and level.

Four main characteristics of Fontina cheese were examined: ripeness, P.D.O. certification, origin and price. According to Murphy *et al.* (2000), conjoint attributes should include the ones that are most important for consumers and the ones that can be influenced or manipulated by producers. Table 1 summarizes the attributes and levels considered in the conjoint analysis study. Each attribute had two levels, with the exception of price, which had three; as a result, there were 24 possible scenarios (2x2x2x3). The Orthoplan subroutine in SPSS was used to produce an orthogonal main-effects design, which ensures the absence of multi-collinearity between attributes. Table 2 shows the eight combinations of attribute levels that resulted and were used in the study. The respondents were asked to rate each of attribute on a scale of 0 (minimum) to 100 (maximum).

Tab. 1 – Attributes and levels

ATTRIBUTES	Ripeness	Certification	Producer	Price per 300g
	old	P.D.O.	high alpine pasture farm	€ 2.7
LEVELS	young	absent	dairy	€ 4.2
				€ 5.1

Tab. 2 - Profiles

[3] To verify the existence of a relationship of dependency between variables two indicators were taken into consideration: the p-value, which represents the level of significance, and Cramer's V index. The level of significance was set at 5%.

PROFILE	RIPENESS	P.D.O. CERTIFICATION	ORIGIN	PRICE
1	mature	absent	high alpine pasture farm	€ 4.2
2	mature	present	dairy	€ 5.1
3	mature	present	high alpine pasture farm	€ 2.7
4	young	present	dairy	€ 4.2
5	young	absent	dairy	€ 2.7
6	young	absent	high alpine pasture farm	€ 5.1
7	young	present	high alpine pasture farm	€ 2.7
8	mature	absent	dairy	€ 2.7

Finally, cluster analysis was used to verify the possibility of identifying homogeneous segments of individuals, in order to divide consumers into *n* relevant clusters. The clusters were then profiled, according to socio-demographic and consumption variables. The algorithm used was the *k-means* and the inputs used to create the cluster analysis were the results previously obtained from the conjoint analysis. The procedure we followed was the same as the one used by other authors in previous research on consumer preferences (and Krystallis Fotopoulos, 2003; Veale 2005).

4. Descriptive analysis

The sample is here described reporting the respondents' personal data: sex, age, occupation and level of education.

The respondents lived in Aosta (50%) or Milan (50%); 45% were male and 55% female. Both sexes were considered since, as pointed out by Belletti *et al.* (1996), the increase in female employment has reduced the degree to which women are responsible for food provisioning. Men were thus interviewed not only as consumers, but also as buyers.

The respondents, whose ages ranged from 19 to 80 years, had a high level of education. As regards occupation, the groups most represented were: white collar workers / teachers (25%), students (18%) and housewives (15.5%).

To study the importance they attached to each single attribute in the process of selecting the product, the consumers were asked to rate the importance (on a scale of 1, little importance, to 9, high importance) of its main features: taste, smell, origin, P.D.O. certification, ripeness, fat content, consistency, color, crust color, presence of holes, price. It was implicitly assumed that consumers decide to buy an item after having evaluated its measurable characteristics (Lancaster, 1971). The highest average importance ratings were assigned to three characteristics: taste, P.D.O. certification and origin[4], which is not surprising since taste is the sense most stimulated when talking about food, and origin and certification express the quality of the product. This last aspect, as noted above, is becoming increasingly important in today's society, since we

[4] The origin refers to the place where Fontina cheese is produced: pasture-based dairy farms or confinement dairies.

are constantly looking for guarantees, especially in the food sector (partly as a result of numerous food scares). In this context P.D.O. certification, in particular, has symbolic value, representing, for example, food safety and wholesomeness of the product.
The bivariate analysis revealed an interesting connection between the place where the questionnaire was administered and consumers' preferred channel for buying Fontina cheese. Most significant was the finding that 84% of the respondents who buy directly from the manufacturer live in Aosta. This cannot be explained only by the greater geographic proximity between Fontina producers and residents in Valle d'Aosta; it is also due to the level of trust that producers have built up in this region over many years. Indeed, in Valle d'Aosta, consumer trust in producers often transcends the trust that may be placed in official assurances of quality, such as P.D.O. certification. In this province, buying directly from producers, many of whom are located in high alpine pastures, can be a considerable undertaking requiring a special journey. Therefore, the willingness to buy from them directly, rather than purchase the product in retail outlets, surely indicates a high degree of trust.

5. Results of multivariate analysis: conjoint and cluster analysis

In this section, we analyze consumer preferences using conjoint and cluster analysis techniques.
Table 3 details the utility[5] that consumers were found to derive from each attribute level, applying conjoint analysis to the whole sample, while Table 4 gives the importance of each attribute. The attributes found to impact most on consumer choice were P.D.O. certification and product origin, thereby confirming our first hypothesis (H1): the presence of P.D.O. certification positively influences consumer preferences. These consumers considered certification a signal of quality, helping them to deduce the intrinsic properties of the cheese. P.D.O. is what von Alvesleben (1989) calls "key information", i.e. information that consumers are looking for in order to infer the internal properties of the product that cannot be perceived (quality, safety, environmental standards, authenticity) through direct perception of its external properties.
The preferred product was found to be the one made in high mountain pastures, thanks to a positive 'made in' effect. Pastures and alpine meadows are, in fact, associated with tradition, authenticity and food safety: values that the consumer, through his consumption of Fontina, wishes to rediscover. The utility of price was inversely proportional to the price level, which indicates a preference, other conditions being equal,

[5] The values of the coefficients must be interpreted in a relative sense (as more or less useful) and not in an absolute sense (a negative value does not imply "disutility," but means that the utility is lower than that associated with a positive or less negative value).

for the lowest price. Ripeness did not greatly impact on the choice, although overall, mature cheese, with its intense taste, was preferred.

Tab. 3 - Conjoint analysis on the whole sample

ripeness	mature	0.417
	young	-0.417
P.D.O.	present	17.862
	absent	-17.862
Origin	high alpine pasture	10.047
	dairy	-10.047
Price	€ 2.7	2.737
	€ 4.2	-0.114
	€ 5.1	-2.624
(Constant)		53.511

Tab. 4 – Importance values

Ripeness	1.344
P.D.O.	57.607
Origin	32.403
Price	8.645

Continuation of the analysis using several discriminating variables (age, favorite sales outlets of Fontina cheese, and place of residence) gave the following results:

- Younger people were found to attach greater importance to P.D.O. certification than to other characteristics, even though this feature mattered considerably less to them than to older consumers. Thus, while P.D.O. certification was the most important element across the sample, its utility for young people was limited. In short, for young people, compared to other age groups, the importance of P.D.O. certification was much closer to that of product origin. Younger consumers were found to need less reassurance about the quality of food and to make little distinction between origin and certification, which they regard as similar indicators. Consumers become more demanding and more concerned about food safety as they get older.
- Interesting results emerged in relation to the different purchase channels. First, P.D.O. certification was found to be by far the most important attribute for consumers who purchase Fontina in supermarkets, markets and traditional grocery stores. While price carries significant weight for consumers who usually buy Fontina in the first two of these channels, it is a much less important consideration for those who usually buy it in specialized stores; nevertheless, the utility to all these consumers was always inversely proportional to the price level. A very different situation emerged with regard to consumers who usually buy Fontina cheese directly from producers: in this group, origin emerged as the most important attribute, while P.D.O. certification was found to be of secondary importance and price was directly proportional to consumer utility. The users of this particular channel were almost all resident in Aosta. Many of them know the producers personally and their trust in interpersonal relationships proved greater

than their trust in P.D.O. certification. In this context, price was again a quality indicator, helping to guide consumer choices (Milgrom and Roberts, 1986; Plassmann *et al.*, 2008a and 2008b).

- Finally, consideration of place of residence produced an interesting finding. Consumers living in Milan were found to attach the greatest importance to the presence of P.D.O. certification, seeing it as guarantee of quality, while in Aosta this feature, still important, was secondary to the origin of the product. In Aosta the quality of the product is associated primarily with the production site. It is not always easy to know the origin of Fontina, especially outside Valle d'Aosta, since the place of production (pasture or dairy) is not stated on the packaging. Thus, for consumers in Milan, P.D.O. certification is the main quality indicator and the guarantee that the cheese was produced in Valle d'Aosta. The different value attached to certification by consumers living in Aosta and Milan verifies our third hypothesis (HP3): that there exist regional differences in the perception of P.D.O. certification. The finding that P.D.O. certification is not the primary concern of consumers living in the region of production should clearly influence marketing strategies, as we point out in section 7. Table 5 shows the utility of the different attribute levels and Table 6 the overall importance of the attributes.

Tab. 5 - Conjoint analysis according to residence

Milan	Ripeness	mature		0.098
		young		-0.098
	P.D.O	present		22.86
		absent		-22.86
	Origin	high	alpine	6.283
		dairy		-6.283
	Price	€ 2.7		4.193
		€ 4.2		-0.124
		€ 5.1		-4.069
	(Constant)			55.529
Aosta	Ripeness	mature		0.736
		young		-0.736
	P.D.O	present		12.864
		absent		-12.864
	Origin	high	alpine	13.811
		dairy		-13.811
	Price	€ 2.7		1.282
		€ 4.2		-0.103
		€ 5.1		-1.178
	(Constant)			51.493

Tab. 6 - Importance values according to residence

Mi	ripeness	0.292
	P.D.O. certification	68.502
	origin	18.826
	price	12.38
Ao	ripeness	2.571
	P.D.O. certification	44.913
	origin	48.222
	price	4.295

In short, the analysis clearly shows that today's consumers need to be reassured about what they eat, even though there are important differences in how different people perceive the quality of a product. This constant search for reassurance is manifested in several ways: in the high importance attached to P.D.O. certification (deemed impartial and official), in the preference for a particular origin (trust in a known producer, in his reputation), and in a predilection for prices considered to reflect the quality of the product. These extrinsic characteristics, central to the conveying of the product's intrinsic properties, help consumers to reduce product search costs (Marescotti and Belletti, 1996).

5.1. A study by cluster analysis.

The results obtained from the conjoint analysis were used as inputs for the cluster analysis, in order to identify homogeneous segments of individuals using the flexible method of segmentation. This tool offers a great advantage over classical segmentation: the formal procedures of the conjoint analysis are more similar to the mental process of choosing a product. Table 7 shows the clusters obtained. The values represent the importance attached to individual product attributes from each cluster.

Tab. 7 - Final clusters

Attributes	whole sample n=200	cautious n= 99 49,5%	gourmet n=20 10%	authentic n=67 33,5%	thrifty n=14 7%	Sig.
Ripeness	1.344	0.344	48.585	15.203	3.375	.000
P.D.O. certification	57.607	76.179	26.219	33.32	25.131	.000
Origin	32.403	12.922	19.536	45.533	18.062	.000
Price	8.645	10.554	5.659	5.945	53.432	.000

Analyzing the size of the four clusters identified, it emerged that the first cluster (cautious) was the greatest (49.5% of the respondents). Cautious consumers consider the presence of P.D.O. certification the most important attribute, which means that their general focus is on the search for quality, followed by the origin of the product. The second cluster (authentic, 33.5% of the subjects) was composed of individuals who consider product origin the primary selection criterion. The remaining two clusters were significantly smaller: the gourmet (10% of respondents) chooses on the basis of ripeness, while the thrifty consumer (7%) is influenced by price.

This analysis confirms and further reinforces the above findings: nowadays consumers trust P.D.O. certification as a guarantee of safe, controlled and quality products (HP1). Food safety often prevails over other product characteristics. However, residence influences perception of P.D.O. certification (HP3).

6. Willingness to pay for P.D.O. certification

Having established that consumer selection processes are influenced most by the presence of P.D.O. certification, it is interesting to verify the hypothesis (HP2) that consumers are willing to pay more in the presence of this differential attribute, here considered a dichotomous variable.

The conjoint analysis provided the utility values of individual attributes and their relative importance. Applying the model developed by Mariani *et al.* (2011), we used these results as inputs. Given that a set of additional utilities was estimated, the total utility of any combination of levels was obtained by summing the corresponding utility values. According to this approach, the total utility associated with profile j is:

$$\hat{p}_j = \beta_1 a_1 + \beta_2 a_2 + \cdots + \beta_i a_i + \beta_n a_n$$

where:

β_i is the part-worth utility assigned to the dichotomous variable a_i ;

a_i refers to a given level of a specific attribute;

n represents the number of all levels of the considered attributes.

The authors defined a coefficient of economic re-evaluation of changes in attribute combinations by a pairwise comparison of the total utility values referred to different alternatives. Let $\hat{p}_b$ be the sum of the utility scores related to the product with the j attribute modification (profile j). They then calculate the total utility variation linked to a modification of the j attribute compared to the status quo level. A first indicator is the ratio M_j:

$$M_j = \frac{\hat{p}_j}{\hat{p}_b} \; con \; \hat{p}_b \neq 0$$

From this total utilities ratio it is possible to understand whether status quo modification generates a gain or a loss in terms of utility. The authors used the relative importance of the modified attribute as an indicator. Introducing the importance of the modified attribute in the previous equation, the coefficient becomes:

$$M_j = \begin{cases} \left[\dfrac{\hat{p}_j}{\hat{p}_b} - 1\right] * \ imp_j & se\ \hat{p}_b > 0 \\ -\left[\dfrac{\hat{p}_j}{\hat{p}_b} - 1\right] * \ imp_j & se\ \hat{p}_b < 0 \end{cases}$$

where imp_j is the importance assigned to attribute *j.* The value $M_j = 1$ represents the indifference level between gain and loss in terms of total utility.

In particular, if $\hat{p}_b > 0$

- $M_j > 0$ means gain;
- $M_j < 0$ means loss.

This formula is suitable for estimating the variation in revenue caused by a change in the status quo profile. Having defined the total revenue associated with the status quo profile as π, the authors proposed to insert this value into the formulas of the economic re-evaluation coefficient to obtain the estimation of revenue variation (V_j):

$$V_j = M_j * \pi$$

The analysis below refers to the results derived from conjoint analysis applied to the whole sample. Table 8 summarizes these values calculated for the sample in general and for sample split by the variables: age, preferred place of purchase, residence.

Tab. 8 - WTP for P.D.O. certification*

Split variable		mean
Whole sample		€ 1.78
Age	24 years or less	€ 0.78
	From 25 to 32 years	€ 1.35
	From 33 to 41 years	€ 2.75
	From 42 to 48 years	€ 2.27
	From 49 to 55 years	€ 2.19
	Over 55 years	€ 1.62
Place of purchase	Supermarkets/hypermarkets/discount	€ 1.84
	Specialized stores	€ 2.14
	Markets	€ 1.68
	Pasture farm/Dairy	€ 0.72
Residence	Aosta	€ 1.04
	Milan	€ 2.68

The method adopted in this study for calculating price changes leads to different results depending on the base profile set. In this study, each profile, in turn, was taken as the base profile, then, from the results obtained, we calculated the mean shown in table 8.

It emerged that consumers accept a positive delta price for the presence of P.D.O. certification, which confirms our second hypothesis (HP2). As pointed out by Cullen

(1994), consumers are willing to pay a premium price for a P.D.O. certified product that provides higher value, both in terms of service (economies of confidence reduce the emotional and cognitive costs associated with the process of weighing up purchase against possible alternatives) and in terms of the meaning it conveys through the ideals it evokes: ancient traditions, authenticity, a healthy environment and a return to one's roots. Therefore, our study, in relation to Fontina cheese, not only establishes consumer preference for P.D.O. certification, but also (and this is perhaps its most important contribution) quantifies how much more consumers are willing to pay for this certification. We found that the WTP for P.D.O. certification in Milan was more than twice that recorded in Aosta (€ 2.68 in Milan versus € 1.04 in Valle d'Aosta, for a 300g slice of Fontina cheese). Consumers from Milan, as shown previously, are much more sensitive to the presence of certification which, for them, is the main guarantee of product quality. In Aosta, instead, P.D.O. certification is not a main attribute inspiring consumer confidence.

As regards the different age groups, individuals aged 33-40 years emerged as the group showing the highest delta price: their WTP for P.D.O. certification on a 300g slice of Fontina cheese was € 2.75.

The study of preferred purchasing place, finally, also gave interesting findings. The results suggested that consumers who usually buy Fontina cheese directly from producers trust their supplier and are not particularly interested in product certification. The highest WTP for the P.D.O. label was found among consumers who usually buy Fontina cheese in traditional grocery stores. Their WTP for the certification was triple that of consumers who usually buy Fontina cheese directly from producers (€2.14 versus €0.72, respectively). These individuals invest resources (time, energy and money) in their purchase and thus demand an incontrovertible certificate of authenticity.

7.Conclusions

P.D.O. certification is the attribute that most benefits consumers and most affects their preferences (HP1). These are the first findings of this analysis, which showed that consumers are willing to pay more for a product whose intrinsic qualities are guaranteed by the presence of a certification mark (HP2).

In Valle d'Aosta, the origin of the product was considered the best guarantee of its quality, whereas in Milan, where people are farther from the places of production, the P.D.O. label is the main quality indicator. The presence of regional differences in the perception of quality (HP3), already pointed out by Van Der Lans *et al.* (2001), was perhaps the most interesting finding to emerge from our study.

In short, as previously reported by Bernabéu *et al.* (2008), different consumer segments were found to attach different importance to certifications of origin and to the origin of the goods. This heterogeneity needs to be taken into account by producers seeking to better focus their marketing strategies.

The research has some limitations and possible areas for improvement. It could be developed and improved by extending the empirical analysis to consumers living in other cities and other countries. In addition, it would be interesting to run experimental economics sessions, for example, consumers who have previously completed a questionnaire might be asked to taste products with different characteristicsand then might be called to buy their favorite product. The correspondence between the results of experimental economics analyses and the results of the conjoint analysis would make the conclusions more robust.

Another interesting development could be the adoption of a dynamic perspective of analysis. There is various evidence that food consumption patterns have changed in recent decades, and it is crucial to monitor how, and how fast, these changes occur, and to look for indicators that may help in predicting further changes. Such findings would undoubtedly favor the implementation of prudent business policies.

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Executive summary and implications for managers and executive readers

The dynamics of consumption in recent decades seem to show a tendency among consumers to attach considerable importance to the extrinsic properties of products. In this context, designations of origin and geographical origin have enormous strategic significance for companies, which have no choice but to consider, carefully, the importance of the "made in" effect, which can be an advantage and an opportunity, but also, in certain circumstances, a constraint that can limit the potential for product development.

The proposed analysis reflects the importance for policy makers of carefully defining the quality indicators of their products, taking into account regional differences in consumer perception. Fontina cheese is just one of the numerous certified products made in Italy and in Europe whose profile could be raised through specific marketing efforts. Among the possible management implications we note the need for differentiated promotional campaigns for Fontina cheese, tailored to specific targets. In Valle d'Aosta there is little to be gained by emphasizing the fact that this cheese is certified, given that P.D.O. certification has little added value for consumers in this area. Here, consumers are more interested in a clear indication of the origin (pasture farm or dairy) of the product. In Milan, on the other hand, P.D.O. certification is an attribute that should be emphasized to encourage purchases. Retailers should be made aware of the importance of the P.D.O. label for these urban consumers. It might also be useful to make consumers outside Valle d'Aosta more aware of the characteristics of Fontina cheese. Often they do not know the differences between Fontina produced in high alpine pasture farms and Fontina produced in dairies. Spreading this information, e.g. through trade shows and through the numerous culinary events held each year in Milan, could help to increase interest in Fontina cheese and lead to product differentiation in the market. This information may be useful to other certified food producers, who might be prompted to study the real added value of certification in the various markets in which they operate and to promote their products accordingly.

Paper 2: Comparing Values: Region Of Origin, Producer And Pdo Label. The case of Fontina cheese in Italy.

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Summary

This research is based on an empirical survey on the case of Fontina, a typical Italian cheese. Our aim is to understand which kind of value can be generated by linking a typical food product to the region of origin/ producer/ certification. The perceived value of these attributes is found to vary according to the distance between the region of origin of the product and consumers' residence. The analysis supports and builds on previous studies on the importance of PDO certification. Importantly, it contributes by eliciting consumers' preferences for PDO according to territorial differences.

Abstract

Purpose

Food and tourism have a very close relation and food can be considered a critical tourism resource. This research is focused on the analysis of consumers' and tourists' food buying behaviours. The aim of this paper is to understand which kind of value can be generated by linking a typical food product to the region of origin/ producer/ certification. In particular, we tested the hypothesis that these elements (region of origin, producer and certification) have a different weight for consumers living in different places. Moreover the research aims at segmenting typical food product consumers, to enables producers and tourism operators to achieve communication goals effectively.

Methodology

The paper is based on an empirical survey that considers the case of Fontina cheese, a typical Italian cheese.

Findings

The research reveals that the origin of the product is, generally, more valued than PDO (Protected designation of origin) certification. The perceived value of these attributes is then found to vary according to the distance between the region of origin of the product and consumers' residence. In particular, the importance of PDO certification for consumers increases with increasing distance from the region of origin of Fontina cheese. PDO is then proved to be much more valued by tourists than by locals.

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Originality/value

The analysis supports and builds on previous studies on the importance of PDO certification (Bruwer and Johnson 2010; Dimara and Skuras 2005). Importantly, this work contributes by eliciting consumers' preferences for PDO according to territorial differences.

Keywords: PDO certification, typical food marketing, origin, destination branding.

Introduction

The European Union (EU) strongly supports the differentiation of typical food products on a regional basis. The importance of protecting this quality differentiation was officially recognized in 1992, when two regulations were adopted: Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92, on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs; and Regulation (EEC) No 2082/92 on certificates of specific character for agricultural products and foodstuffs. The Commission (DG AGRI) created different kinds of certification label that can only be used to describe authentic product corresponding to the specification laid down. The most used is PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) certification, that identifies products with a strong link to the defined geographical area where they are produced. Since 1992, the EU has strengthened its support for the development and protection of local products; in particular, on December 2010, the Commission adopted the Quality Package. This comprised a series of measures designed to consolidate schemes, labelling terms, and initiatives to help producers in communicating the qualities of product to consumers and to improve consumer information about the input to products.

The increased importance of EU certification labels is reflected by the growth of the number of certified products, in 2011, the 1000th quality food name was registered. This growth is explained by the fact that nowadays consumers are searching for higher and higher quality standards. They now require not only much higher dietary, hygienic and health standards in food products, but also look for reliable certifications and reassurance of products' origins and production methods (Kovács and Zsarnóczay, 2007). Certifications assure quality standards (Dimara and Skuras, 2005) since to get the certification label producers have to pass through an official quality control process that guarantees the effective implementation of required production conditions.

Despite plentiful research concerning consumer preferences for food, food buying decisions, and consumer perceptions towards food quality attributes, there is little work focused on consumer's attitudes towards food quality indicators and key information such as certification labels and region of origin. Moreover there is very little work attempting to study the differences in the perception of such quality indicators by consumers living nearby and far away from the region of origin of typical food products. Within this context, the aim of this paper is to understand which kind of value can be generated by linking a typical food product to the region/ producer/ certification from the consumer's perspective and as a consequence where and which kind of value should be generated by the producers. We also aim to investigate whether these elements (region of origin, producer and certification) have a different weight for consumers living in different places. This could be useful to support exporting decisions, since the market of typical food products is growing, reaching consumers all over the world. Moreover this paper also aims to segment typical food product consumers and understand what images different consumers associate with these three elements. Addressing these aims may enable producers and tourism operators to achieve communication goals effectively.

The paper is structured as follows. First a literature review is presented, to define the framework which is the starting point of the present research, and from this review three hypothesis are generated. Second the research method is described and the techniques used are presented. Finally the findings are reported and the results are discussed.

Literature review and research hypotheses

Food is a core element of tourism experiences, it is a tourist attraction in many different ways and can nowadays be considered an effective instrument of destination development (Henderson, 2009).

Tourism and food have a very close relation (Henderson, 2004). Firstly, tourists have to eat while travelling, having thus the opportunity to discover typical food products. Holidays are often considered opportunities to indulge and try new foodstuffs, these experiences can be such appreciated they can even change tourists' consumption patterns. Once returned to their homeland, travellers may want to remind vacations by consuming typical food products and beverages and preparing typical recipes. Secondly food may be the primary motivator for trips (Tikkanen, 2007).

The overall satisfaction of vacations is strongly influenced by gastronomic experiences (Neild et al., 2000) and typical food and wine play an important role on feelings of involvement and place attachment (Gross and Brown, 2008).

Toursits are looking more and more for novelties, adventures and new experiences, especially concerning food. Many are also searching for the genuine and authentic, which, it is believed, can be found in local and typical food products (Reynolds, 1993).

Value in food

Value assumes different significance for different targets and consumers (Fiocca, 1993), value is a complicated concept that assumes different meanings when applied to different contexts. At a basic level, value for the customer is defined as the relationship: benefits *versus* perceived sacrifices (Zeithaml, 1988; Duman and Mattila, 2005) and the value of a brand is equivalent to the concept of brand-equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003).

A brand's main purpose is differentiation (Wood, 2000). Certification labels can be considered as brands: they can be recognized through a logo, they offer protection to products and provide customers with quality assurance (Regulation (EEC) No 2081/92). The region of origin and the producer are not necessarily real brands, but often play the same role and pursue the same goal (Pappu et al, 2005; Teuber, 2011).

Nowadays consumers are very careful and deeply involved in the search for certified quality, particularly when dealing with food. Cullen (1994) underlines how the concept of food has changed and how eating is no longer exclusively and primarily aimed at satisfying a physical need. Consumers want production to follow processes and norms that can reassure them about food safety. They expect raw materials to come from certain regions and different targets assign different value to each element. Drichoutis, Lazaridis and Nayga (2007) investigate this phenomena focusing on the factors affecting product class involvement for food. Results revealed a number of factors that affected overall involvement with food and specific aspects of involvement (i.e. taste, nutrition, origin, ease of preparation and brand name, importance of price).

It's well known that consumers are guided and influenced by a variety of psychological, emotional, economic and social factors and that buying behaviour and process have acquired a semiotic and cultural dimension (Fabris, 2008). This caused an important shift in the priority allocated to different types of goods, which acquire very wide functions. Food, for example, is not only eaten to obtain the daily amount of calories required by our body, but has many other meanings. An expensive and exclusive food represents social status, healthy food stands for a healthy lifestyle, food frequently represents the country in which it is produced, and so on. Nowadays primary needs have been saturated and can therefore no longer be considered to be the main driving force of consumers' choices (Fabris, 2008). Different consumers are characterised by different needs and desires and perceive the value of the same product in a different way. Value is thus a relative perception that can change in response to context.

The relationship between producers and consumers is characterised by an information mismatch that can cause difficulties to consumers who presumably want to understand the real value of a product. Sogn-Grundvag and Østli (2009) study how consumers evaluate unbranded and unlabelled food products and explore their ability to select the products with the highest potential to meet their expectations regarding eating quality. Results indicate that Portuguese consumers, in spite of substantial experience in buying, preparing and consuming *bacalhau*, are uncertain in their in-store quality assessment

and often use rather curious quality criteria: touching the dried and salted cod trying to "feel" the quality was common, some even broke the fish tail to assess the dryness. In order to avoid such confusion, producers often use different kinds of labels, like certifications or brands of origin, which become indicators of information and quality.
It is crucial to take into consideration the analysis of the perception of quality by consumers and its influence on buying decisions (Grönroos, 2000; Busacca, 2004). Interesting models are developed by Von Avesleben (1989) who claims that the consumer can deduce the intrinsic qualities of a product starting from its total quality using information on two or more of its properties (this is the so-called "key information" that allows consumers to save energy and avoid further research, price and brand are the most commonly used) and by Grunert *et al.* (1996) who developed the model of total quality, considering product characteristics in three categories: search, experience and credence attributes. Consumers' preferences are significantly influenced by the information set available, especially for products which have characteristics typical of credence attributes (Grunert, 2005), i.e. characteristics that a consumer may not be able to know even after the purchase and consumption. Only few consumers possess the skills to understand whether the correct procedures for preparation of food have been followed or to judge food authenticity. This suggests that foods have can be characterized as credence goods (Rangnekar, 2004). This inability to make a proper assessment of features that are increasingly assigned importance leads consumers to seek external guarantees and assurances that help them in buying decisions. The origin of food, the producer's reputation and territorial certifications may be good examples of effective guarantees.

Region of origin

Several authors have studied the so called *made in* effect, which is of interest in the study of certifications of origin. The *made in* effect was analysed by, among others, Han (1989), Roth and Romeo (1992), Chryssochoidis et al. (2007), Bloemer, Brijs, Kasper (2009). Pappu, Quester and Cooksey (2006) examine the impact of the country of origin of a brand on its consumer-based equity. They reported that consumer-based brand equity varied according to the country of origin of the brand and product category. This impact of country of origin on brand equity occurred where consumers perceived substantial differences between the countries in terms of their product category-country associations.
Numerous authors (Bruwer and Johnson, 2010; Veale and Quester, 2009) analyse the impact of the food product origin on consumers' decisions. The indication of the origin increases perceived quality (Veale, 2008), since the origin has become an information substitute reassuring consumers about food safety, thus reducing risk perception in food

consumption (Kim, 2008; Mørkbak *et al.*, 2010). These results have been confirmed in various studies of several products, such as wine (Orth *et al.*, 2005), beer (Lentz *et al.*, 2006) and cheese (Bernabéu *et al.*, 2010).
From this, follows our first hypothesis:
H1) For typical food products, the region of origin significantly impacts on value perception.

Protected designation of origin (PDO)

If the origin of products is relevant, the certifications of origin appear to be the most effective way to communicate this information. The Fotopoulos and Krystallis (2003) study can be considered as a fundamental point of reference with which to analyse the impact of certification labels on consumers' decisions. The authors use conjoint analysis to explore Greek consumers' willingness to pay for PDO apples from the area of Zagora, Central Greece. They find that many consumers view PDO labels positively and are willing to pay a premium price for them. However the PDO label is of minor importance for more than a third of the buyers. Menapace *et al.* (2010) compared the simple indication of origin and official certifications of origin for olive oil. They reported that official certifications (in particular PDO) are considered by consumers to be reliable indicators of product quality. Fait (2010) leads an interesting investigation into the wine industry. The study found that the average consumer has a good perception of the relationship between wine and territory (region-brand awareness) and that this connection does not always occur through the single brand but more often by means of the designations of origin. Dimara and Skuras (2005) confirm that information linking place and product is among the top of the list of information that wine consumers look for on wine labels. Linking products to place through the specification of either ancient traditional methods of production or local raw materials and producing regionally denominated products, with certifications such as PDO, is a strategy to differentiate products that enables producers to target a market niche for quality products, serving a wide range of consumer needs.
Several other authors studied certifications of origin as drivers of purchase decisions (Krystallis and Fotopoulos, 2003; Carpenter, 2004). In particular, Monjardin de Souza Monteiro and Ventura Lucas (2001) point out the certifications' effectiveness in reporting quality. Tendero and Bernabéu (2005), studying the Spanish market for cheese, report that the appellations of origin reassure consumers about the place of production and thus serve the purpose of food safety guarantees.
This prior research leads the following hypothesis:
H2) For typical food products, PDO certification is an element that significantly impacts on value perception

Consumers' perceptions according to their distance from the region of origin

Little prior research has investigated regional differences in consumer preferences for certified food. In one study, Baker *et al.* (2004) investigated consumers' attitudes towards organic food, exploring why consumers behave differently in the UK and Germany despite both groups of consumers holding similar attitudes about organic foods. Van der Lans *et al.* (2001) reported on the preferences of Italian consumers for the characteristics of extra virgin olive oil. The authors highlight that the origin and PDO certification can have a direct and indirect effect on consumers' choices. The indirect effect occurs when the origin and the certification are perceived as signals of quality and are appreciated as substitutes for other information. The direct effect occurs when these attributes are valued in their own right rather than only as mediators of other features. Both the origin and the certification indirectly play an important role in influencing consumer choices. As to the direct effect authors identified an interesting phenomenon. Segmenting the market, it emerged that consumers living in the region where the oil is produced are more sensitive to the origin of the product than consumers from other regions.

Downs and Stea (1973, p.317) highlighted the importance of distinguishing geographical distance, which is related to space distance, from cognitive distance, described as "distance estimates and beliefs made or held in the absence of the object and which relies upon memory, stored impressions, judgments and beliefs". Thus, knowledge and the assimilation of cultural values related to a place shorten the cognitive distance among the consumers and the place. We expect that people who live closer or further from the region of origin perceive the value of typical food products as composed of different components, more or less important according to different factors. Our third hypothesis (H3) is intended to explore this aspect in more detail, providing a study of how Fontina cheese, the focus of the present analysis, and its characteristics are differently perceived and valued by consumers residing in the place of production (Valle d'Aosta) and elsewhere.

This leads to the third hypothesis:

H3 Consumers' perception of the region of origin, of the producer and of the certifications varies according to the distance of consumers' residence from the region of origin of the product, in particular:

> H3a Consumer behavior varies with cognitive and geographical distance from the region of origin;
>
> H3b The importance of PDO certification increases with increasing distance from the region of origin;

H3c The importance of the region of origin decreases with increasing distance from the region of origin;

H3d The importance of the producer decreases with increasing distance from the region of origin.

In sum, the existing literature has shown that origin and in particular certificates of origin play an important role in food buying decisions. By testing our first and second hypotheses (H1 and H2), we intend to measure the weight that these exert on consumer preferences for Fontina cheese. Further, we intend to elicit any regional differences in the manifestation of these phenomena (H3).

Research context and methodology

Context

The hypotheses are operationalized by means of a case study of Fontina cheese, produced in Aosta Valley, in the northern part of Italy. Italy is the world leader for the number of certificated products, with 239 products in the EU register, of which there are 149 PDO (2012). Fontina cheese is produced by alpine pastures and dairies that are members of the Milk and Fontina Cooperative Producers (MFCP). The MFCP was founded in 1957 with the aim of collecting, maturing and marketing Aosta Valley's most important agricultural product, Fontina cheese.

From small beginnings, the producers now number 300. In 1958, during the first year of activity the number of cheeses delivered by the members were less than 40,000, while today the amount reaches 350,000 cheeses. The production is limited, thus the quantity available for export is also limited (10% of total production) but nonetheless this cheese is exported worldwide. The production cooperative is UNI EN ISO 9001:2000 certified and has a turnover of about 20.000.000€ (data from Aosta Valley Department of Agricultural and Natural Resources, 2012).

Worldwide there are many certified locally produced foods that are often not widely known outside the region in which they are made. These products may be highly regarded and have high potential. In Italy, for example, there are 41 PDO certified cheeses (Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006), some of which are very well known, such as Grana Padano and Parmigiano Reggiano, while others are less common, such as Fontina cheese. The case study aims to answer the research questions by investigating consumers' preferences for the purchase and consumption of Fontina cheese.

Data collection

To inform questionnaire design, literature was consulted (Lawlor and Delahunty, 2000, Harrington et al. 2010; Bermúdez-Aguirre and Barbosa-Cánovas Gustavo., 2011; Mathiou, 1974) to identify the most relevant attributes of cheese and especially of Fontina cheese. An initial pilot questionnaire was validated through a qualitative analysis, carried out through four in-depth interviews of approximately 30 minutes each. Two producers of Fontina cheese in Aosta Valley and two retailers in Aosta were interviewed to discuss the main characteristics of Fontina cheese and comment on the pilot questionnaire. They were asked if they judged the questionnaire comprehensive and suitable to investigate consumer preferences for the product Fontina cheese. In particular, they were asked to focus their attention on the attributes selected from the literature to define the profiles that would be used in a conjoint analysis (Table 1) and the attributes listed in Table 4, whose importance would then be rated by consumers. The results of these interviews informed the design of the final questionnaire (Lee et al, 2006; Cai, 2002).

The questionnaire comprised three sections. First, profiles of Fontina cheese products were evaluated; second, consumers were asked about their habits and preferences; and third demographic data were collected.

In the quantitative phase, more than two hundred consumers from Aosta, Milan, Switzerland and Greece were interviewed face to face with the objective of eliciting perceptions of value related to Fontina cheese (the product) and the extent to which its value might be generated by the region of origin (Aosta Valley), by the producer (cheese producer), or by the certification label (PDO).

This research used convenience sampling. In Aosta both residents and tourists were interviewed in supermarkets and in traditional specialist food shops. Greek consumers were interviewed in Aosta, too; they were part of a large group of tourists from Greece that spent few weeks in Aosta Valley in February 2011. In Milan and in Switzerland (Lugano) consumers were interviewed outside supermarkets and traditional specialized food shops. Milan is the provincial capital of Lombardy, the region were the most of Fontina cheese is consumed (38% of the Italian consumption); Switzerland is a region often compared to Aosta Valley, because of its similar landscapes and products; Greece is considered as an interesting focus in this research because, as well as Italy, it is well-known for its typical food products, among which there are a lot of certified cheeses (20 cheeses PDO labeled in September 2012).

Thus, the sample included consumers with a spread of geographical distances and knowledge of Aosta Valley. We collected 220 responses, i.e. above the minimum (100-200) recommended by Quester and Smart (1998) to obtain reliable results from conjoint analysis.

Data analysis

Conjoint analysis was used to analyze the relative importance weights of three quality indicators: PDO certification, region of origin and producers of Fontina cheese. Conjoint analysis is widely used in marketing to evaluate consumer preferendces (Hair *et al.*, 1998), particularly to examine preferences for food product attributes (Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2003; Darby *et al.*, 2008). The necessary data for conjoint analysis consists of consumer evaluations of alternative product concepts, described as sets of attributes levels (Gil and Sanchez, 1997).

Murphy *et al.* (2000) point out that the conjoint attributes should include the ones that are most important for consumers and those that can be influenced or manipulated by the producers. Studying Fontina cheese the attributes considered are quality indicators that producers can underline to promote the product. The PDO certification, the region of origin and the name of the producer convey quality in different ways according to different targets.

Table 1 summarizes attributes and levels considered in the conjoint analysis study. Each attribute used two levels, except for price that uses three levels, this means 24 possible scenarios (2 x 2 x 2 x 3). Obviously it would be too tedious for consumers to evaluate all of these scenarios. The Orthoplan subroutine in SPSS was therefore used to produce an orthogonal main-effects design, which ensures the absence of multi-collinearity between attributes.

Table 1. Attributes and levels.

Attributes	**Region of origin**	**Certification**	**Producer**	**Price per 250g**
	Aosta Valley	PDO	High mountain pasture	3 €
Levels	not Aosta Valley	absent	Dairy	5 €
				7 €

Table 2 reports the eight combinations of attribute level that were used in the study. The respondents were asked to rate each of them on a scale from 1 (minimum) to 9 (maximum). The respondents were asked to rate (using a scale from 1 to 9) different importance values for attributes of Fontina cheese: produced in Aosta Valley; has PDO status; and is produced in alpine pastures (Table 4).

Table 2. Profiles.

Profile	**Region of origin**	**Certification**	**Producer**	**Price for 250g**
1	Aosta Valley	PDO	Dairy	5 €
2	not Aosta Valley	PDO	High mountain pasture	7 €
3	Aosta Valley	PDO	High mountain pasture	3 €

Profile	Region of origin	Certification	Producer	Price for 250g
4	not Aosta Valley	absent	High mountain pasture	5 €
5	not Aosta Valley	absent	Dairy	3 €
6	Aosta Valley	absent	Dairy	7 €
7	Aosta Valley	absent	High mountain pasture	3 €
8	not Aosta Valley	PDO	Dairy	3 €

Cluster analysis (K-means) was then carried out from the results of conjoint analysis to identify consumer segments based on the preferences for the several Fontina cheese attributes (Green and Krieger, 1991; Krystallis and Fotopoulos, 2003; Veale 2009). The K-means clustering algorithm resulted in a five-cluster solution. To validate the cluster solutions, univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA, Table 3) was conducted. After a careful examination of solutions involving any number of clusters between four and fourteen, it was determined that the five-cluster solution provided the most meaningful distribution of subjects (Orth et al, 2005). Moreover, owing to the relatively limited size of the sample, the solution of five clusters was considered as the most realistic, easily describable and suitable to our objectives.
Discriminant analysis was then carried out to model how the region of origin, PDO certification and the producers are perceived by consumers and what kind of value they represent.

Table 3. ANOVA.

ANOVA

	Cluster		Error		F	Sig.
	Mean Square	df	Mean Square	df		
PDO	34,795	4	,297	215	116,986	,000
pasture	6,147	4	,396	215	15,532	,000
VdA	37,210	4	,357	215	104,225	,000
3 euro	24,069	4	,252	215	95,606	,000
5 euro	7,313	4	,274	215	26,679	,000
7 euro	18,916	4	,289	215	65,474	,000

Table 4. Values.

Values		
Tradition	Natural food	Quality
Genuine food	Ethics	Respect of the environment
Safety	Healthy	Authenticity
Souvenir	Taste	Childhood memory
Industrial	Fat	Parties

Sample description

Table 5 reports the composition of the sample. People of any age were invited to complete the questionnaire, since Fontina cheese has a wide target, and therefore the respondents span a spread of ages. Forty-three percent of the respondents are men and 58 percent are women. Milan and Aosta each represent 34 percent of the sample, Greek and Swiss people are each 16 percent.

Table 5. Sample description.

		Frequency	Percent
Sex	M	93	42.3
	F	127	57.7
Submission place	Aosta	110	50.0
	Milano	75	34.1
	Lugano	35	15.9
Profession	housewife/ retired	23	10.5
	Student	52	23.6
	dealer/ craftsman	18	8.2
	self-employed	28	12.7
	manager/entrepreneur	24	10.9
	employee/teacher	63	28.6
	Worker	10	4.5
	Farmer	1	.5
	Unemployed	1	.5

		Frequency	Percent
Residence	Aosta	50	22.7
	Greece	35	15.9
	Lugano	25	11.4
	Milano	79	35.9
	North of Italy	17	8.0
	Europe	12	5.0
	Russia	2	.9
Age	18 to 25	50	22.7
	26 to 35	42	19.1
	36 to 45	44	20.0
	46 to 55	41	18.6
	56 to 65	23	10.5
	over 65	20	9.1

Empirical results

Region of origin and protected designation of origin (PDO)

Using the conjoint procedure, utility scores were calculated for each level of each attribute in the conjoint profile of Fontina cheese. The relative importance of each attribute was then calculated as the utility range (i.e., highest minus lowest utility) of the attribute divided by the sum of the utility ranges of all four attributes (Okechuku,1994), to indicate the relative importance of each attribute. The conjoint analysis results indicate that the region of origin is the attribute which plays the most important role in consumer likelihood to buy, closely followed by PDO certification. The relative importance of the former, is 42.7 percent, while the relative importance of the latter is 35 percent. The other attributes considered in the research are less important: the relative importance of price is 14.3 percent and the relative importance of the producer is 8 percent (Table 6).

Table 6. Conjoint analysis results on the whole sample.

		Utility Estimate	Importance Values
Certification	PDO	1.251	34.97%
	Absent	-1.251	
Producer	Pasture	.289	8.07%
	Dairy	-.289	
Region of origin	Aosta Valley	1.526	42.66%
	Not Aosta Valley	-1.526	
Price	3 euro	.486	14.31%
	5 euro	.051	
	7 euro	-.538	
	(Constant)	4.394	

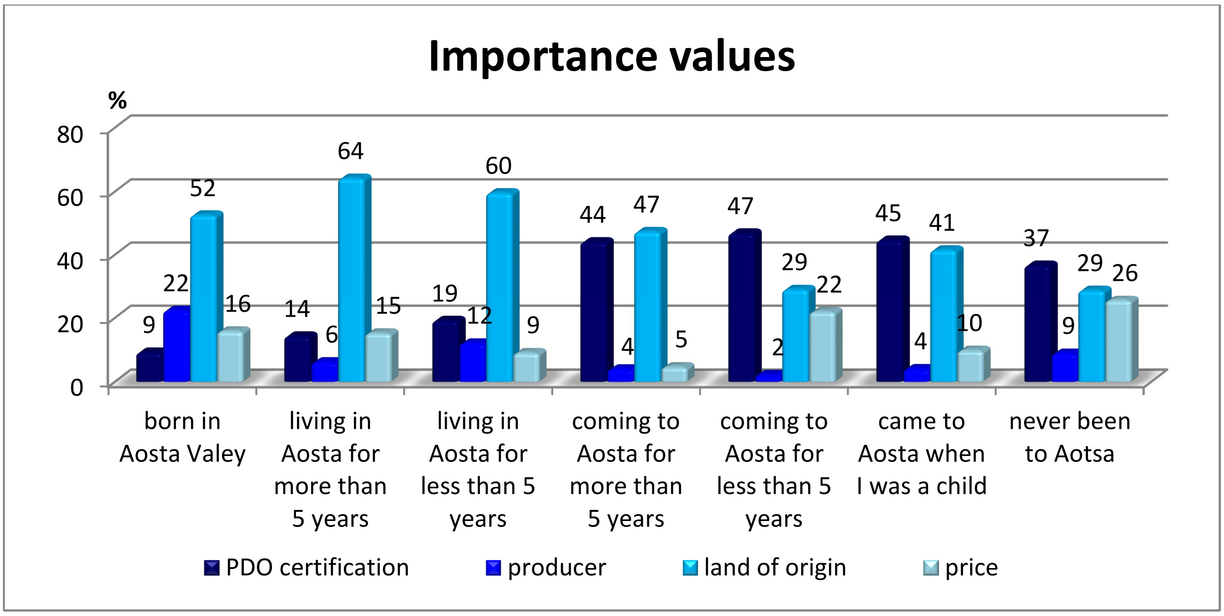
Lowest price has a positive utility compared to highest prices. *Ceteris paribus,* consumers prefer the cheapest solutions.

Consumers' perceptions according to their distance from the region of origin

Cognitive distance

Investigating cognitive distance, we asked respondents how long they had been living in or coming to Aosta Valley, assuming that frequenting a place affects the assimilation of cultural values related to it. Figure 1 shows the pattern of importance across the segments on each of the four elements included in this research.

Figure 1. Relative importance according to cognitive distance.

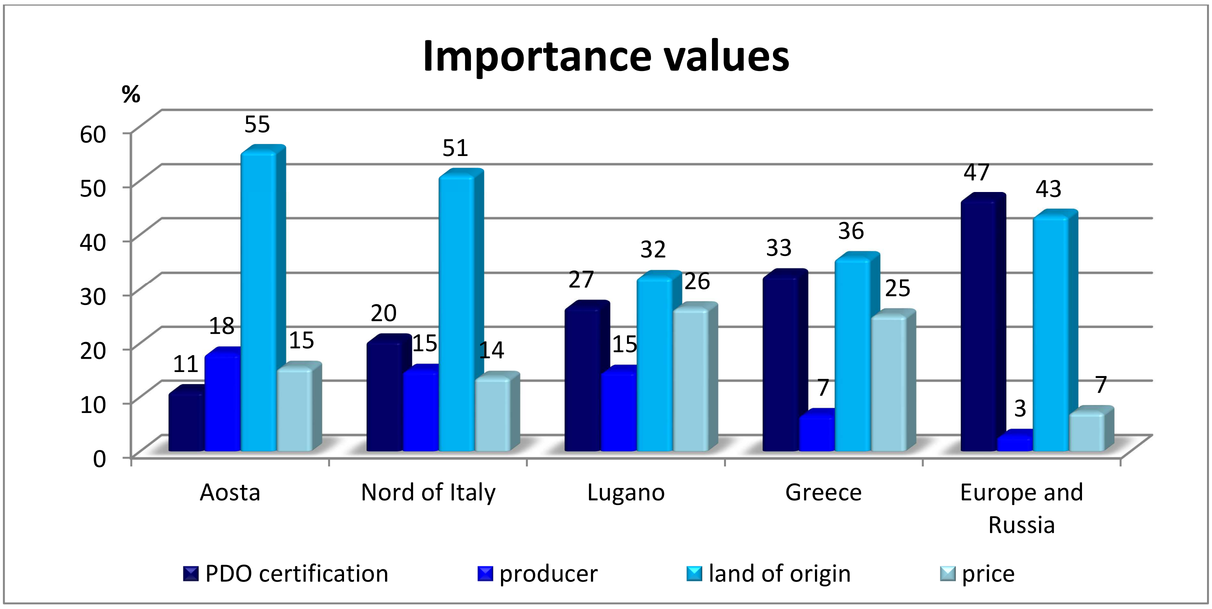


The importance of PDO certification increases with increasing cognitive distance. PDO certification is relatively unimportant for people born in Aosta Valley (9%), while it is the attribute that impacts the most on the behavior of consumers who have been coming to Aosta Valley for less than five years (47%). The producer is very important for people who were born in Aosta Valley (22%) and also for those who live in Aosta Valley (6% and 12% respectively). The region of origin has a relative importance of more than 50% for consumers who live in Aosta Valley.

Geographical distance

Other interesting results emerge if we consider the geographical distance between consumers and Aosta Valley (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Relative importance according to geographical distance.



The importance of PDO certification increases as the geographical distance from the region of origin increases. Consumers from Aosta Valley consider PDO certification as the least important element (11%). On the other hand, the importance of the producer decreases as we move further from the region of origin. The region of origin is one of the most important attributes in every case.

Flexible segmentation through cluster analysis

A K-means cluster analysis was carried out. The five resulting clusters have a significant and clear interpretation. Therefore they were used to represent five segments that differ from each other in their preferences in evaluating Fontina cheese (Table 7 and Table 8). The pattern of importance across the segments on each of the four elements considered (PDO certification, region of origin, producer and price) is represented by Figure 3.

Figure 3. Relative importance in each cluster.

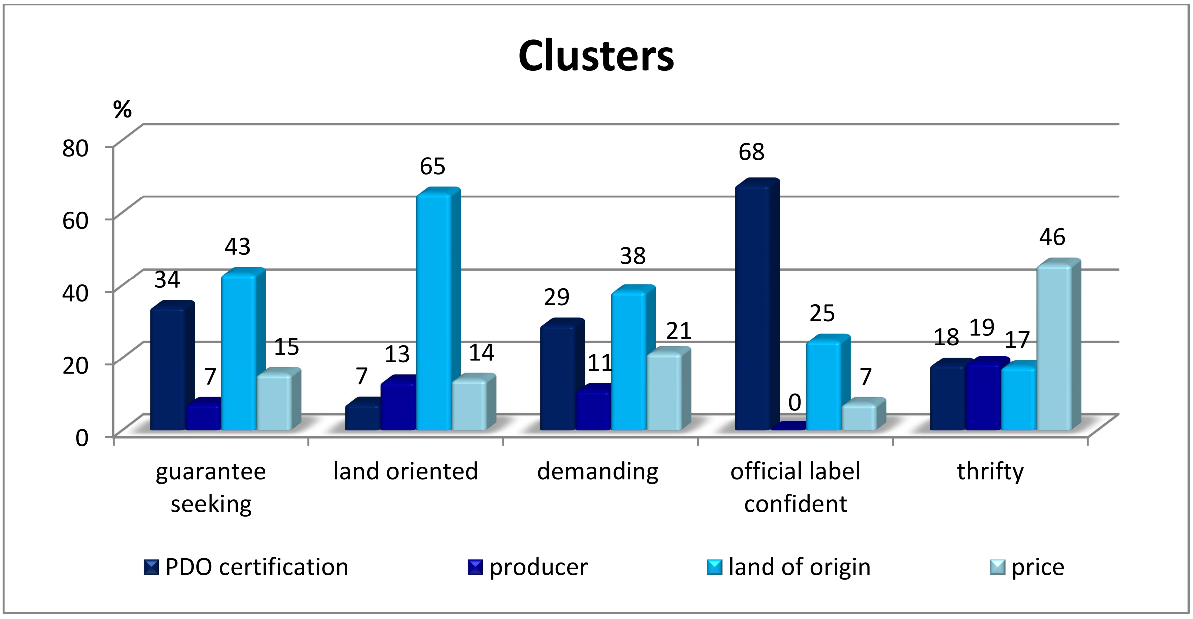


Table 3 showed that the clusters are meaningful and are significantly distinguished from each other on all four importance weights (p<.05). .

Table 7. Means of importance by segments.

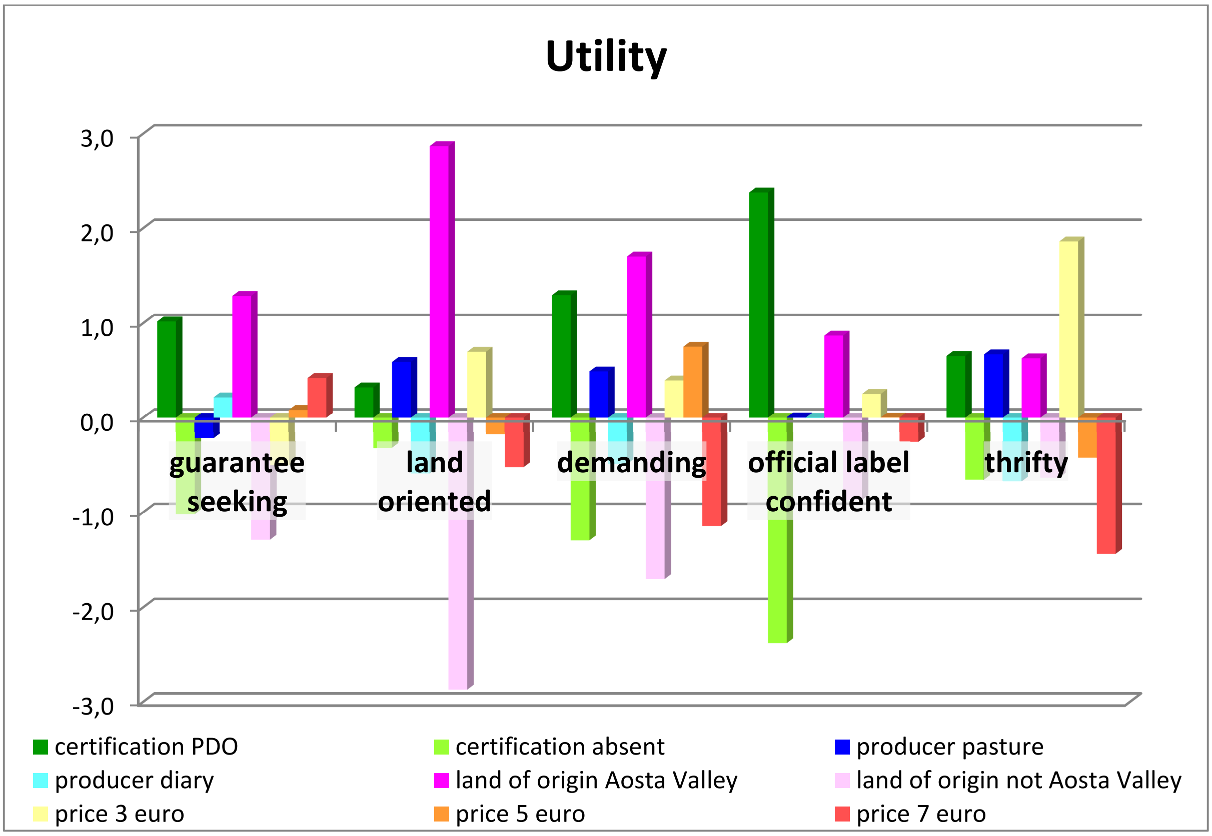
Attributes	whole sample n=220	guarantee seeking n=34 15%	region oriented n=52 24%	demanding n=40 18%	official label confident n=64 29%	thrifty n=30 14%	Sig.
PDO certification	34.969	34.071	7.330	29.205	67.835	18.150	.000
Producer	8.067	7.257	13.457	11.049	.167	18.613	.000
Region of origin	42.655	43.173	65.317	38.353	24.763	17.457	.000
Price	14.308	15.498	13.895	21.393	7.234	45.780	.000

Table 8. Utilities by segments.

Attributes	Levels	guarantee seeking n=34 15%	region oriented n=52 24%	demanding n=40 18%	official label confident n=64 29%	thrifty n=30 14%
Certification	PDO	1.018	.322	1.297	2.381	.654
	absent	-1.018	-.322	-1.297	-2.381	-.654
Producer	pasture	-.217	.591	.491	.006	.671
	diary	.217	-.591	-.491	-.006	-.671
Region of origin	Aosta Valley	1.290	2.870	1.703	.869	.629
	Not Aosta Valley	-1.290	-2.870	-1.703	-.869	-.629
Price	3 euro	-.505	.699	.396	.253	1.861
	5 euro	.083	-.176	.752	.003	-.422

Attributes	Levels	guarantee seeking n=34 15%	region oriented n=52 24%	demanding n=40 18%	official label confident n=64 29%	thrifty n=30 14%
	7 euro	.422	-.522	-1.148	-.255	-1.439

Figure 4. Utility in each cluster.



Consumers in the first cluster (n=34 customers, 15 percent of the total) are called Guarantee seeking because they look for any possible kind of quality guarantee and are very concerned with safety. They consider the region of origin the most important attribute, closely followed by PDO certification. They also consider the producer important and prefer Fontina cheese to be produced in dairies, since they have less trust in pasture (Figure 4 and Table 7). These consumers seldom go to Aosta Valley and many have only been there during childhood. They do not know either the producers or how they work, and consider cheese made in dairies safer, as it seems to be more controlled. They consider price to be important and prefer it to be high, i.e. price has a positive effect in perceived quality (Dodds, Monroe, Grewal, 1991). Being far from Aosta Valley, they need to be reassured about the quality of Fontina cheese through indicators they can easily read.

Cluster 2 (n=52, 24 percent) is labeled Region-oriented, since it includes consumers for whom the region of origin is by far the most important element. They are mainly from Aosta Valley and they claim they would never buy a Fontina cheese that was not from Aosta Valley. They also consider the producer to be important and prefer to buy Fontina made in pasture. PDO certification is not thought to be an efficient quality label.

Cluster 3 (n=40, 18 percent) includes the Demanding, consumers who want everything: quality and a low price. They are very concerned with the origin of Fontina cheese and with PDO certification. They want Fontina cheese to be produced in pastures and are sensitive to its price: they avoid high prices, but do not trust low prices. These consumers look for good value for money.

Cluster 4 is the largest (n=64, 29 percent) and includes customers whose main driver to buy Fontina cheese is PDO certification. We have labeled this segment "Official label confident" to signify that the only element they seem to be interested in is PDO certification. They mainly come to Aosta Valley for leisure, during holidays, they do not know the product very well and to be reassured about its quality by an official label.

Finally Cluster 5 is the smallest segment (n=30, 14 percent). It includes the Thrifty consumers who are mainly interested in low prices.

In sum, the five segments can be named: "guarantee seeking", "region oriented", "demanding", "official label confident" and "thrifty"

Profiling clusters

In order to get further insights into the five segments of customers, a discriminant analysis was operated to profile the clusters by explaining how different quality indicators are perceived and which values consumers associate with them. Discriminant analysis can help to elicit what PDO certification, region of origin and producer mean to consumers (Carroll and Chang, 1970; Rencher, 2002).

Table 9 indicates that three variables (genuine, quality and ethics) are non-significant. The most significant variables are: safety, tradition, party, souvenir and industrial.

Table 9. Test of equality of group means.

	Wilks' Lambda	F	df1	df2	Sig.

	Wilks' Lambda	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Tradition	.845	59.896	2	655	.000
Genuine	.989	3.564	2	655	.029
Safety	.816	73.949	2	655	.000
Souvenir	.881	44.293	2	655	.000
Authenticity	.957	14.719	2	655	.000
childhood memory	.891	39.887	2	655	.000
Party	.876	46.181	2	655	.000
Natural	.899	36.736	2	655	.000
Taste	.929	24.936	2	655	.000
Fat	.975	8.477	2	655	.000
Industrial	.883	43.373	2	655	.000
Quality	.993	2.357	2	655	.095
Ethics	.996	1.282	2	655	.278
Healthy	.982	6.172	2	655	.002
respect for the environment	.971	9.880	2	655	.000

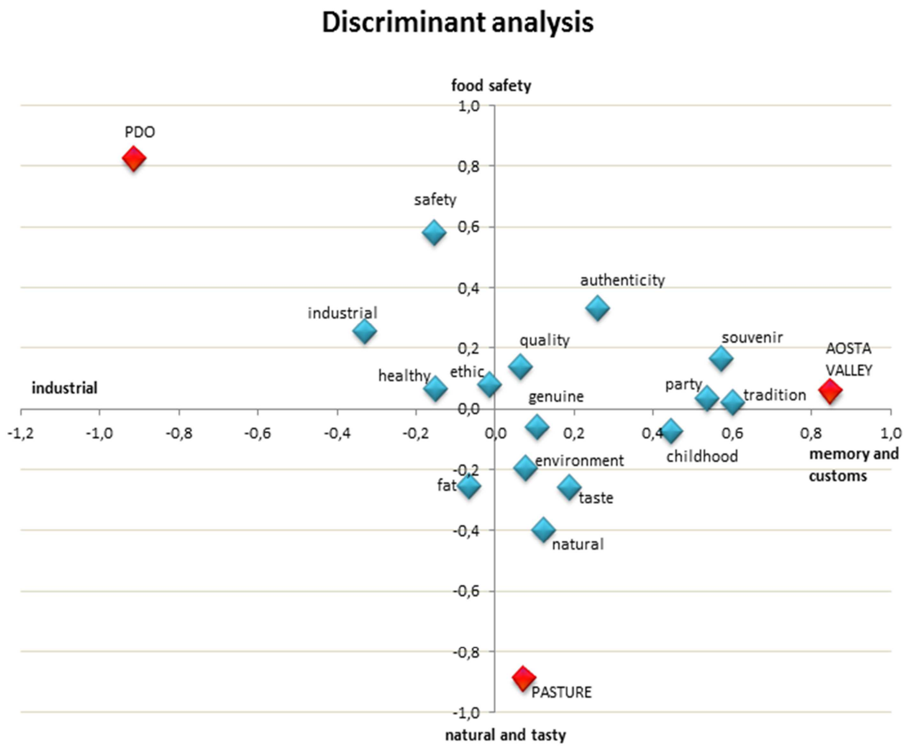
Table 10 indicates the positions of the three significant attributes (region of origin, PDO certification and producer) in the bi-dimensional space representing consumers' perception.

Table 10. Functions at group centroids.

Functions at Group Centroids		
Label	Function	
	x	y
Aosta Valley	.848	.059
PDO certification	-.915	.826
Pasture	.072	-.889

Figure 5 represents consumers' perceptions graphically. PDO certification is considered to be a strong guarantee of food safety that may have similarities to industrial production that consumers may perceive as safer, more hygienic and more controlled than craft production (Murdoch and Miele, 1999). Aosta Valley stands for memory and customs. It represents ancient tradition and helps consumers remember childhood, holidays and pleasant times spent in the mountains (Gilg and Battershill, 1998; Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1998). Pasture, finally, indicates a natural and very tasty cheese. Fontina cheese produced in pasture is perceived as natural, pure and high in fat, i.e. tasty.

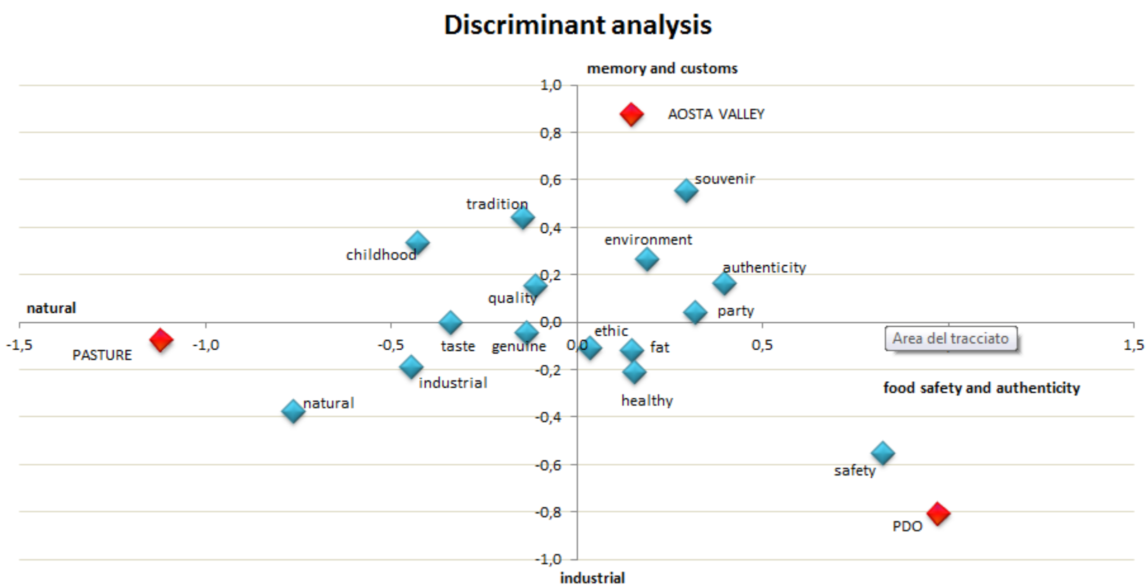
Figure 5. Discriminant analysis.



Considering each cluster we report more detailed results below.

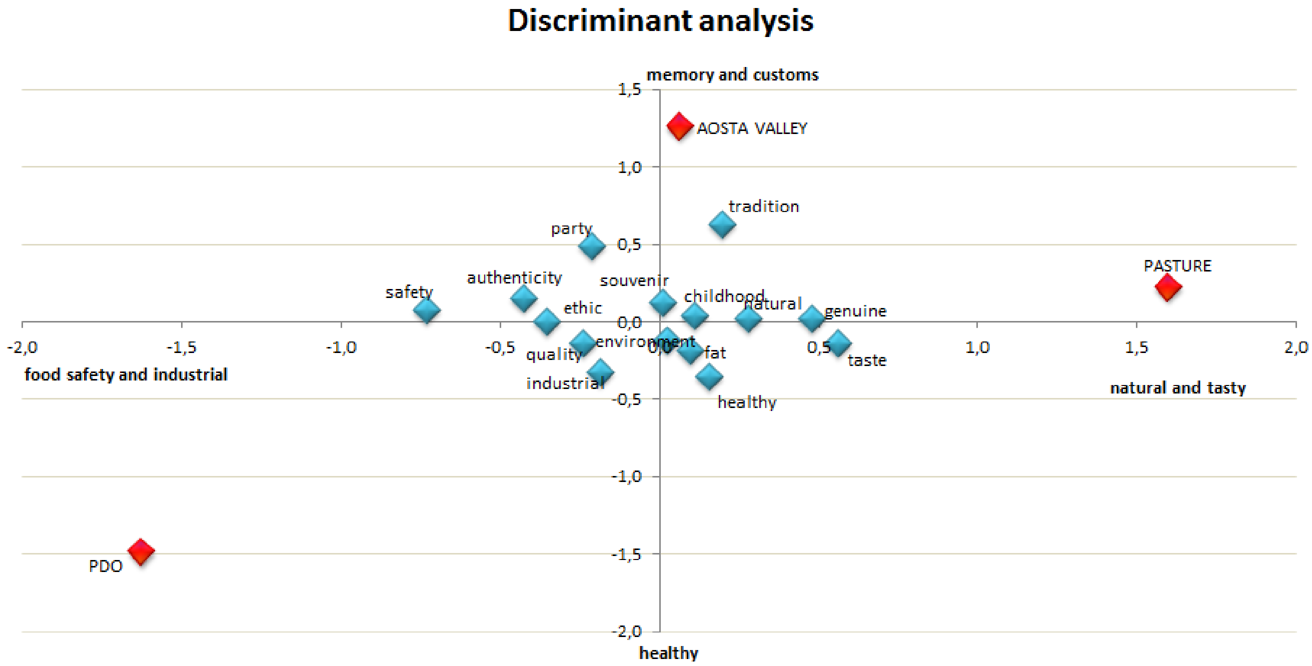
The “Guarantee seeking” cluster (Figure 6) does not associate Fontina made in pasture with food safety. In fact it is the only cluster that prefers Fontina cheese to be produced in dairies. PDO certification and Aosta Valley are the only attributes that this cluster uses.

Figure 6.Guarantee seeking.



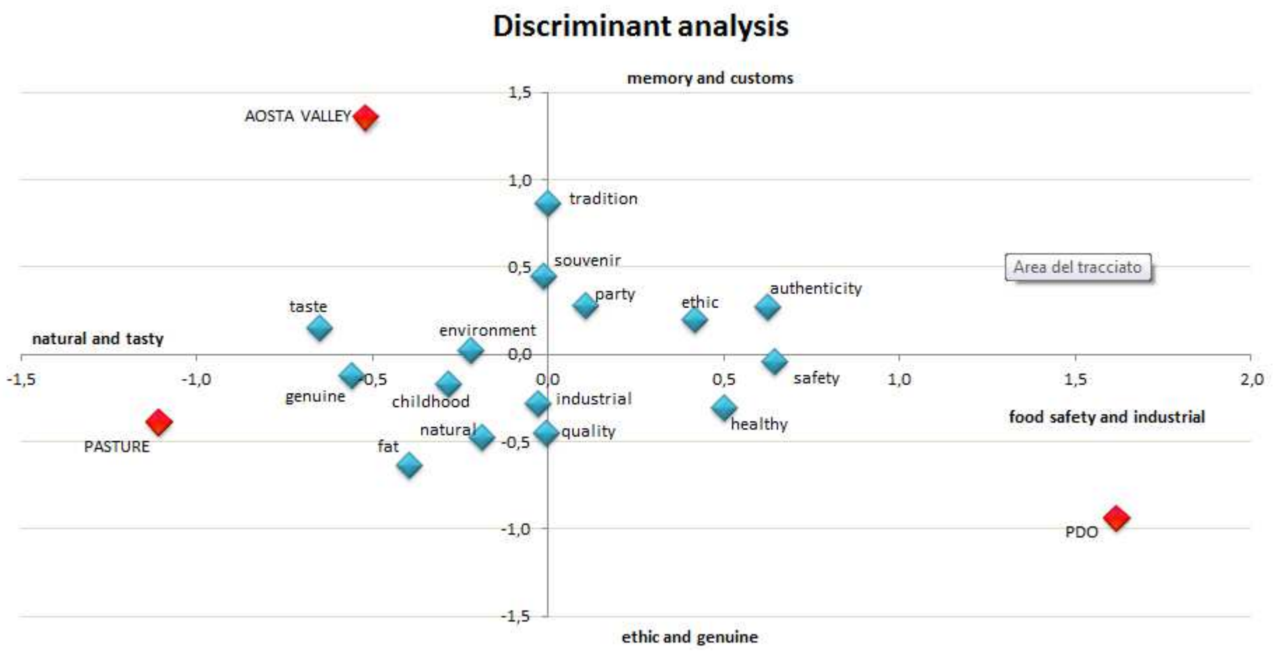
Consumers in the "Region-oriented" cluster (Figure 7), mainly composed of customers from Aosta Valley, consider the region of origin as the most important guarantee. In their opinion, the region of origin represents the only important attribute when buying Fontina cheese. On the other hand, PDO certification is perceived to be distant from the values that Fontina cheese represents.

Figure 7. Region oriented.



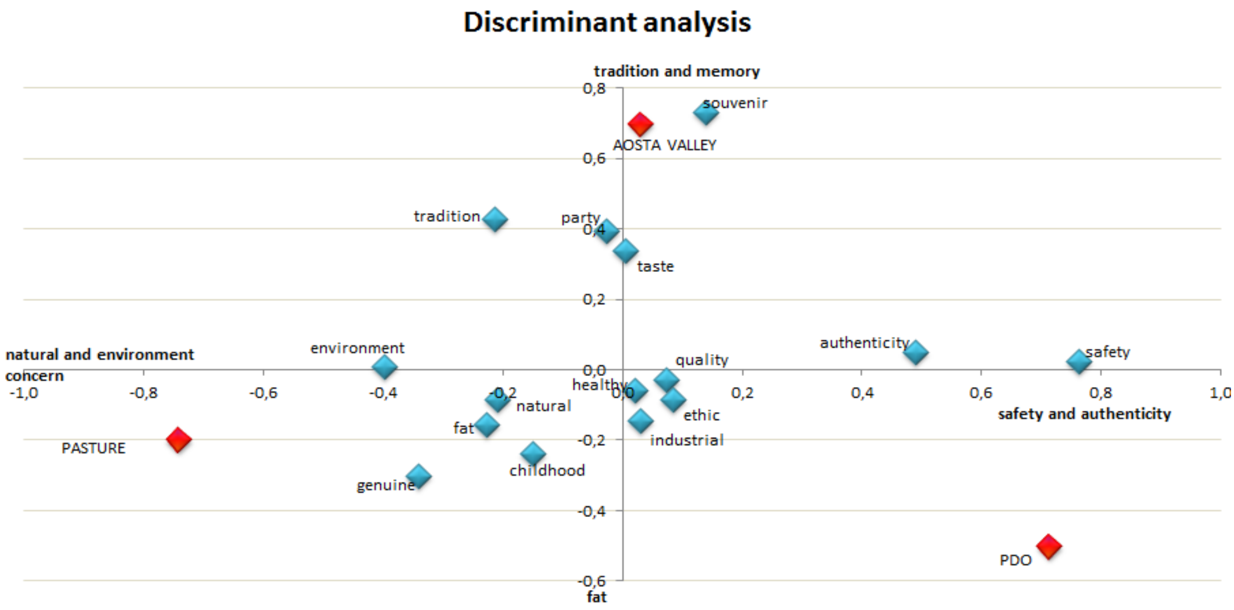
The "Demanding" cluster (Figure 8) wants everything: Aosta Valley as region of origin, PDO certification, pasture as producer and low price. These consumers want Fontina cheese to be from Aosta Valley since that represents tradition, memory and customs; moreover, they also want PDO certification, in order to be reassured about food safety and they prefer Fontina cheese to be produced in pasture as they want to buy a tasty, natural product.

Figure 8. Demanding.



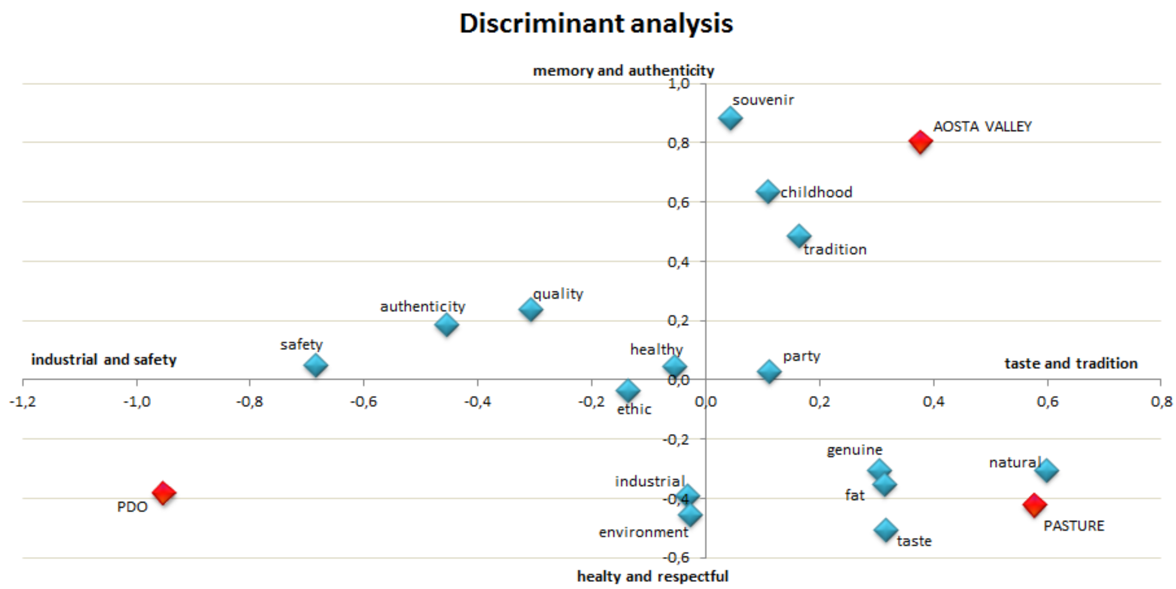
The “Official label confident” cluster (Figure 9) is the only cluster that does not consider PDO certified Fontina cheese to be industrial. PDO certification means safety, authenticity and fat, which is what these consumers are looking for when buying this typical cheese. Aosta Valley represents tradition and memory, values which they are not interested in, since they do not come to Aosta Valley very often and they are not emotionally linked to it.

Figure 9.Official label confident.



Finally the "Thrifty" cluster (Figure 10), is only interested in the price of Fontina cheese. These consumers consider Fontina cheese to be original only if it is produced in Aosta Valley, which embodies memories that may emanate from childhood. Both the region of origin and the pasture are perceived as guarantees of a traditional and tasty product. The pasture and PDO certification are considered to represent a guarantee of healthy food produced with respect for the environment and PDO certification stands for food safety.

Figure 10. Thrifty.



Discussion

Region of origin

Overall, the region of origin is the most important attribute in buying Fontina cheese. In the food industry, territory has many meanings, it can stand for "health" and "safety", it satisfies the "nostalgia" of a past time perceived as "real" and characterised by "wholesome" foods (Gilg and Battershill, 1998), it is associated to "authentic", and "traditional" healthy food (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1998). Consumers are often fascinated by a product claimed to be made in a certain region or country that stands out for its food production (Roth and Romeo, 1992), since it reminds them of values associated with that place and, maybe, pleasant times that they have spent there or would like to. The high utility score for Aosta Valley origin indicates that signalling the origin of Fontina cheese in a clear way increases the consumers' willingness to buy, thus confirming H1.

Protected designation of origin (PDO)

PDO certification is the second attribute that impacts on consumers' preferences. The PDO certification is considered a strong quality label (Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2003) that ensures that a product has been made according to defined norms and processes, with defined raw materials, in a defined place, supporting H2.

PDO certification stands for food safety and health. This is consistent with research carried out wine consumers in Greece (Dimara and Skuras, 2003). European Union certifications, impact on consumers' buying decisions, but not always in a strong positive way (Dimara and Skuras, 2001; Fotopoulos and Kristallis, 2002). The PDO label on cheese can sometimes be considered to be an artificial, industrial label, as highlighted by a member of ONAF:

"Consumers may consider the PDO label as a tool that tries to regulate in a strict way a production process that should be natural".

The results of this study indicate that different segments can variously consider the presence of European certification either as a quality guarantee or alternatively as something artificial that contrasts with the values they are looking for.

The producer

The producer is an attribute whose importance varies according to the segment, decreasing while we move far from the region of origin. The producer's reputation is reflected in the perception of the products and a good reputation means that good values are associated with the products (Souiden, 2006). Building trust can be very difficult and time consuming, especially for SMEs. This may explain why only the consumers who live near the region of origin seem to care about where actually Fontina cheese is produced, while other consumers look for different key information. The executive of MFCP:

“Foreign consumers often don’t even know that Fontina cheese can be produced both in dairies and alpine pastures, they don’t care who the producer is, but ask for a certified product made in Aosta Valley. Consumers from Aosta instead, pretend to know where the cheese has been produced and often prefer to buy it directly in a pasture they know and trust.”

The region of origin, the PDO certification and the producer have different weights when they are connected to different products and targets (Carpenter, 2004), as demonstrated by the cluster and discriminant analysis.

Consumers’ perceptions

Cognitive distance

The importance of PDO certification increases with increasing cognitive distance, confirming H3b. Consumers who know Aosta Valley well do not need PDO certification to be reassured about the quality of Fontina cheese, while other consumers consider the European label as the strongest and most reliable quality indicator. Moreover, some consumers born in Aosta Valley, who claimed to be purists and connoisseurs of Fontina cheese, said they would prefer Fontina cheese not to be certified. These consumers would prefer this product to preserve its natural essence, without being affected by the standards imposed by PDO certification. This is illustrated by a MFCP pasture owner:

“The picture of uncontaminated, pure and wild landscapes, often used to promote typical food from the Alps can contrast with PDO certification. When asking for a typical food product, in fact, the expected values are tradition and handcraft, which do not always seem to be well represented by the standardization and rules of European certification”.

The producer is very important for people who were born or actually live in Aosta Valley. These consumers usually know the producers, their reputation and the way they work personally. They can access information that is not easily available for people not living in Aosta Valley. Consumers born in Aosta Valley consider the producer to be much more important than PDO certification. Consumers who come to Aosta Valley but do not live there often do not know that Fontina can be produced both in dairies and pastures. Being unaware of this difference, they usually do not care who Fontina cheese is

produced by and trust PDO certification to reassure them about the quality of Fontina cheese (H3d).
The region of origin has a high importance for consumers who live in Aosta Valley. They often claim that they would not be interested at all in buying a Fontina not made in Aosta Valley. Illustrating this finding, the MFCP executive argued that:
"We, I mean people from Aosta Valley, are very proud of our typical food products, in particular Fontina cheese. We fought not to let any more producers that operate outside our region call their cheese Fontina. It is our cheese and we won't even consider the possibility of buying a cheese labeled Fontina but produced elsewhere than here [Aosta Valley]"
The region of origin then has an importance very close to or less than PDO certification for consumers who do not live in Aosta Valley. The latter need to be reassured through PDO certification, which they consider to be the label that can guarantee the authenticity and quality of Fontina cheese (H3c).

Geographical distance
The importance of PDO certification generally increases as the geographical distance from the region of origin increases, confirming H3b. Consumers from Aosta Valley consider PDO certification as the least important element; they know the product and do not care whether it is certified or not. Moreover some consumers from Aosta Valley prefer an uncertified Fontina cheese, as it seems to be more natural. They also assign high importance to who the producer is. Pasture is preferred and associated with higher quality.
On the other hand, the importance of the producer decreases as we move further from the region of origin (H3d). Consumers who live far from Aosta Valley consider alternative quality indicators.
The region of origin is one of the most important attributes in every case, but a decreasing trend can be identified in the importance of the region of origin while geographic distance increase (H3c). For Fontina cheese the region of origin is perceived as the main indicator of authenticity. This evidence demonstrates that the characteristics of Fontina cheese are perceived in different ways by different consumers, according to their distance from the region of origin of the product, thus confirming H3.
Different segments of consumers search for quality in different ways, according to cognitive and geographic distance, thus confirming H3a. The more that they know the product, the less they need to be reassured through official labels like PDO, which can be substituted by other indicators. Different consumers attribute different value and meaning to different characteristics of Fontina cheese.

The previous analysis demonstrated that some segments are more sensitive to the territory in which the product is made, whilst others are more sensitive to official certification such as PDO, depending on consumers' perceptions and wants.

Conclusion

Any product is perceived by different consumers in different ways. Value derives from different attributes, according to the type of consumer. When value is based on the origin of the product that can be associated with the region, PDO, or the producer, these different attributes assume a different importance according to the distance (geographical and cognitive). PDO certification can be considered as a good tool to reduce the perceived distance for consumers living far from the region of origin (often tourists) but, on the other hand, it does not add value for people that do not perceive any cognitive distance, as locals.

In the case of Fontina cheese, we pointed out that the region of origin, PDO certification and the producer have different meanings to different consumers. Both the region of origin (H1) and the PDO certification (H2) strongly impact on consumers' quality perception; moreover, the geographical and cognitive distance have a strong impact on the importance attributed to these characteristics (HP3). In particular, far from Aosta Valley, the importance of PDO certification increases. Consumers who live far from the region of origin prefer to buy a product with a strong, international and official guarantee, since they are unable to perceive other characteristics of Fontina cheese as efficient quality indicators.

Comparing the region, the producer and the certification value is relevant from a producer's perspective, in order to understand where and how to gain value and how to embed it into the total offering system. Producers and suppliers should take into consideration these differences to promote Fontina cheese in the most effective way and reach a wide target.

The results reflect, as well, the importance for policy makers of defining and focusing the quality signals of their products, taking into account geographical differences in consumers' perceptions. Fontina cheese is just one of the numerous certified products made in Italy and in Europe that could be further enhanced with specific marketing efforts. Thus, among the possible managerial implications, we highlight the need and the opportunity of communicating the values underlying the main product's attributes in a more efficient way. It may be useful to create differentiated promotional campaigns for Fontina cheese, focusing on a different significant depending on the residence of consumers. Regional symbols should be used in different manners to address different targets. It would be appropriate, to cooperate with the main tourism operators (hotels, restaurants, ...), to promote Fontina cheese directly to tourists, providing them information about its history, its origin, and its connection with Aosta Valley. The PDO certification is then an attribute on which to leverage in order to encourage purchases far from the region of production. Retailers should be made aware of the importance of the PDO label for consumers, to enhance the product leveraging the certification. It might also be useful to promote market education to increase the knowledge of the characteristics of Fontina cheese outside Aosta Valley. Consumers often do not know the differences between Fontina cheese produced in pastures and Fontina cheese produced in dairies. Disseminating this information, for example through trade shows and culinary events, can help to increase awareness and interest in Fontina cheese and lead to product differentiation. Such strategies might also be useful to other certified food producers, who may be advised to evaluate the added value of certification in the various markets in which they operate in order to promote their products accordingly.

The main limitations of this paper arise from the single case study method, convenience sampling and limited sample size. However, the sample size satisfies the minimum recommended by Quester and Smart (1998) to ensure reliable results from statistical analysis. The convenience sampling was chosen in order to save resources of money and time and it ensured, anyway, to get in touch with a good variety of consumers, according to their sex, age and residence.

Therefore, further research is recommended, for example broadening to other food products and more countries.

Worldwide there are many typical food products that are not well-known outside their region of origin. The producers should understand which are the most interesting attributes from consumers' perspective to leverage on them and increase the value of their products. Globalisation processes, with the increasing freedom of movement for goods, has certainly made available a much wider variety of products, creating a need for better consumer information. This need may be satisfied offering consumers certified products or pointing out other core attributes, according to the target that we want to reach.

Furthermore, while firms located in an area can benefit from the image of their home location, also the images of a local business are key for the image of the place. A country's food can be a critical dimension of destination image and the theme has always been used in advertising. Typical food products are core elements in the tourism package and can be considered as a supportive tool to secure a strong identity for the place (Kotler et al., 1999). At the meantime the tourism brand attributes are linked to other products and services destined for export (Kotler et al., 1993). Food thus pervade many aspects of tourism supply and an indistinct and bland gastronomic identity can be a serious impediment to destination success (Fox, 2007). This strong relation cannot be ignored while defining place and destination branding strategies, but should be exploited to add value to the whole tourism offer.

Policy maker may leverage on food marketing to increase the development of tourism industry. Eating facilities, food and drink outlets are becoming core tourism products, since tourists that enjoy gastronomic experiences are often willing to purchase speciality souvenir products and cookery books. Tourism operators should cooperate to organize food festivals, farmer markets, food and drink trails and cooking schools to attract this increasing mass of travellers looking for organised activities, like sampling and learning about typical food products. Food plants may open their doors to tourists, that seems very interested in these facilities (Henderson, 2009).

In addition to being a form of tourist attraction, food is a relevant area of interest for tour operators and travel agents. Many travellers sensitive to food offers, select destinations according to dining options and to satisfy this increasing segment of tourists there are also tourism companies specialized in tours to areas of the world famous for their food and wine (Food and Wine Trails, 2007).

Typical food products became a core element of the global offer of a tourism destination. Food has assumed a prominent role in tourist decision-making and satisfaction, tourism products and place promotion strategies. In a destination perspective, the products and services facilitating a tourism experience should be employed to develop a country brand across different industries, leveraging the country brand through a tourism destination brand (Gnoth, 1998, 2002). Certification labels are useful to help tourists recognising the authentic and traditional products and, as outlined by Gnoth (2002) in his theoretical model of the tourism system, the tourism products and country brands are operationalized in order to link the tourism experience with the products and services that facilitate it. PDO label can deliver a high added value to the food and tourism offering and this potential should be exploited. Further research may focus on how this contribution could be delivered to reach different targets and on how to promote a destination leveraging on its core products.

Numerous authors studied the contribution of typical food products to destination branding (Bruwer, 2012; Hudson and Ritchie, 2009; Lee and Arcodia, 2011), but never considered the difference in perception of tourists living closer or further from the destination. This paper may be a starting point for future researches that should deepen the relation among distance and value perception. Place branding theory should consider these results and focus on the importance of these core elements (certification label, food origin, producer) to build up, create, deliver and communicate the image of a destination.

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Section1: Food Marketing and Tourism

Conclusions of section 1

These empirical analyzes support previous studies on the importance of P.D.O. certification (Dimara and Skuras, 2005; Bruwer and Johnson, 2010).
These articles add to the growing body of literature that suggests the importance of key informations. By comparing the attitudes of consumers living near to /far from the place of production, they add a new dimension to previous research in this field. Importantly, these works contribute to exiting theory by eliciting consumers' preferences for PDO according to territorial differences
Different attributes of the same typical food product are shown to be perceived in a different way by different kind of consumers, specifically, by consumers from the region of production and by tourists. The importance of certification, geographic origin and producer as extrinsic quality cues varies among consumers and thus the use of such quality cues targets specific segments of the market.
These results also contribute to the literature on food tourism and destination branding.
The characteristics of food tourism and specific challenges confronting providers vary with the destinations and stage of overall and tourism development. Food tourism currently enjoys a high degree of popularity and appears to have excellent prospects. It yields numerous commercial opportunities, and requires efforts and investments in products and their marketing by a wide range of tourism operators (Henderson, 2009)
Numerous authors studied the contribution of typical food products to place branding and destination managemnet (Bruwer, 2012; Hudson and Ritchie, 2009; Lee and Arcodia, 2011), but never considered the difference in perception of tourists living closer or further from the destination. These papers may be a starting point for future researches that should deepen the relation among distance and value perception, by considering other typical food products and by expanding the sample.
Cross-border food tourism especially in the Eastern borders of the EU countries is also worthy of future research. People with high income outside the EU need high quality foodstuffs that constitute a motivation for cross-border tourism (Tikkanen, 2007)
Destination branding theory should consider these results and focus on the importance of these core elements (certification label, food origin, producer) that should be leveraged to build up, create, deliver and communicate the image of a destination.

Section 2: Service Bundling and Destination Branding

Introduction to section 2

Service bundling is nowadays considered as an essential mean to provide tourists with a whole and satisfactory experience. It is hard to distinguish from product bundling and service bundling in tourism, since a destination is perceived as a mix of physical attraction and socio-cultural core elements (Morgan et al, 2004), this is why in the following papers I refer generally to “service bundling” in order to study an organized bundle of tangibles and intangibles components.

For a long time the research in the topic of value was focused on the product. From this perspective, the creation of value for customers was based on the management of the product dimensions (Lovelock, 1994). Zeithaml (1988) pointed out that value implies a trade-off between benefits and sacrifices. A different perpective is the one offered by Ulaga (2001) who, speaking about a relational perspective states, “within networks, firms jointly create value through relationships, partnering, and alliances” (Ulaga, 2001: 316).

Creating partnerships with other operators, by joining forces, firms increase their potentialities of business (Kothandaraman and Wilson, 2001) co-creating value (Forsstrom, 2003).

In tourism context the relationships with business operators acquires a great importance in order to increase the value of the offering system realizing a holistic solution. The economic benefit can be synthesized in cost reduction, value engineering, investment quality and concurrent engineering effects of the relationship for both parties (Mandjak and Simon, 2007). Relationships allow to decrease transaction costs and allow an exploitation of the economies of scale and scope (Tremblay, 2000). Through relationships firms can access to complementary resources (Kumar & Van Dissel, 1996). Relationships facilitate the avoidance of costs arising from the resolution of conflicts (Healey, 1998). Moreover relational quality is influenced by trust, satisfaction and commitment. Through relationships between actors with different competences and ability, a firm can develop its potentiality (Hakansson, Ford, 2002).

Bundling has acquired such a high relevance in researchers perspectve since they have understood that tourists are looking for experiences: tourism is increasingly about experiences rather than about places and things (Crotts et al, 2000). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) define a destination as the unit of action where different stakeholders, such as firms, public organizations, service providers, locals and visitors, interact through the co-creation of experiences.

The high number of the involved public and private actors, together with the variety of economic, sociological and cultural trends, generate high complexity in the tourism industry. Tourism operators, thus, have to adopt a creative strategic approach to offer a touristic solutions made up by bundles of services. To reach such a strategic goal tourism operators needs to evolve from a single relationship with customers to interconnected relationships with both customers and other operators. This requires firms to shift from a management perspective focused on the single unit to network management focused on interorganizational relationships, at regional, national and if possible international level (Lemmetyinen ad Go, 2009).

Cooperation is based on relationships between firms founded on co-ordinating mechanism (Axelsson and Easton, 1992) and joint learning perspective (Håkansson, 1993).

In more detail, firms that collaborate are able to:

- access the assets they need and that are held by other firms (Wilkinson and Young, 2002; Gadde et al. 2003; Håkansson and Waluszeski, 2002);
- learn new skills (Sammarra and Biggiero, 2008; Dyer and Hatch, 2006);
- defend themselves more effectively from competitors (Roy and Yami, 2009; Brolos, 2009);
- increase development prospects and financial performance (Gulati et al. 2000; Fritsch and Franke, 2004).

On the basis of these benefits, collaborative strategic approach thus becomes a process through which firms can quickly overcome size limits and transform ideas into business opportunities (Lee and Whang, 2001).

The conceptualization of “the tourism system as a network of interacting service providers” (Gnoth, 2002) outlines the development of partnerships for the touristic operators (Silberberg, 1995) as well as the key role of firms in providing adequate products and services to tourists by responding to their most specific interests and needs (Novelli et al., 2005). The tourism system is thus characterized by an integrated offer of cultural goods, environmental and tourism attractions considering typical food products of agriculture, local handicrafts, and dissemination of tourism firms.

But in order to provide an effective bundle short-term cooperation may not be enough. The relational perspective should overtake the transactional perspective to overcome the

interpretation of exchange limited to the short term perspective. The adoption of a more collaborative culture is a key component in developing a relationship (Fyall et al., 2001).
An important element to enable tourists to consider a destination as a unit, despite the high number of operatators, is branding. Thus a great attention is focused by touristim firms on place branding and on offering of touristic solutions made up by bundles of services.
The application of branding techniques to place and nations is growing. The place branding and its tourism-related sub-sector, destination branding, are considered key points in tourism management. In this perspective through the management of the country branding, the country becomes a place to invest, to live in and to visit (Anholt 2002; 2008). Through the management of place branding, places can attract tourists, factories, firms and can develop markets (Kotler and Gertner, 2002).
Fundamental is the building of the place identity (Morgan et al., 2004, Burmann et al., 2009; Konecknic and Go, 2008), which represents the active part of the place branding process. Moreover the images (Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Moilanen, 2008) of local businesses are important for the image of the place, and also firms can benefit from the favourable image of their home location.
Therefore place branding policies cannot ignore relational issues that can arise in a touristic place and destination.
Cooperation plays a key role in place branding and in tourism destination communities. It supports the sustainable planning and development of destinations (Bramwell and Lane, 2000), for the realization of projects (Vernon et al., 2005), and for destination governance structures (Yuksel, Bramwell, and Yuksel, 2005).

Paper 3: Benefits from service bundling in destination branding: the role of trust in enhancing cooperation among operators in the hospitality industry

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Summary

The main purpose of this paper is to shed light on the role of collaboration among tourism operators in place branding. We investigate the role of trust the relationship between benefits (economic and relational) achievable through service bundling and hoteliers' orientation to networking, i.e. their willingness to collaborate with other touristic organizations (restaurants, spas, sport facilities, etc.) We interviewed 164 hoteliers located in Aosta Valley region in Italy. Outcomes highlight that trust mediates the relationship between relational benefits and networking orientation. Another interesting result is the mediation effect of hoteliers' innovativeness on the relationship between economic benefits and networking orientation.

Abstract

One of the main avenues through which tourism organizations develop the competitiveness of a place, and hence its equity, is service bundling, a practice which is gaining popularity in the tourism industry. In order to create effective service bundles, cooperation within the tourism destinations becomes critical and has a positive impact on the image of places, since it helps the destination in being perceived as unique and well-connected. Trust plays such a fundamental role in developing and managing the relational exchange, that literature on strategic alliances and partnerships considers it as the cornerstone of the relationships among firms (Speckman, 1988; Morgan&Hunt, 1994). The main purpose of this paper is to shed light on the role of trust in cooperation among tourism operators to develop an effective place branding strategy.

Focusing on hoteliers' perspective, this study investigates the impact of perceived benefits (economic and relational) achievable through service bundling on hoteliers' orientation to networking, i.e. their willingness to cooperate with other organizations such as restaurants, theme parks, spas, etc. A survey based on a sample of 164 hoteliers shows that trust in other tourism operators mediates the impact of perceived relational benefits on networking orientation. Another interesting result is the significant impact of

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operators' innovativeness, which mediates the relationship between perceived economic benefits and networking orientation.

Keywords

Trust, service bundling, networking orientation, cooperation, hospitality industry, destination branding.

Introduction

In recent years, tourists' attention on the destination experience has been defined as the ability of a destination to create, integrate and deliver tourism experiences, including value added goods and services for tourists (Hong, 2008); in this perspective, a destination should not be considered as a traditional product, but more as a bundle of tangible (attractions) and intangible (socio-cultural) components (Morgan et al. 2004; Pritchard and Morgan, 2001), "something that is highly experiential" (Govers and Go, 2010, p. 31).

In order to be competitive, tourism firms have been trying to implement new ideas to satisfy, and anticipate, customer needs (Crotts et al., 2000), and service bundling represents a way to provide tourists with experiences. The practice of service bundling needs the development of cooperative relationships between several kinds of organizations that operate in a local context, who must integrate their initiatives to improve the revenues and image of a tourism destination (Blain et al., 2005). This is especially true when considering the tourism industry, characterized by a myriad of SMEs that constitute the "life blood of the travel and tourism industry world-wide" (Erkkila, 2004, p. 1) and strongly influence the development of a local area.

The main purpose of this study is to shed light on the benefits of cooperation among tourism operators in place branding. In particular, we focus on the role of trust in enhancing cooperation within a tourism destination. In doing this, we refer to a specific type of partnership, i.e. service bundling in the hospitality industry, and our aim is to investigate the relationship that exists between perceived benefits achievable through service bundling and hoteliers' networking orientation.

After a literature review, we investigate the Italian tourism industry, considering the context of the Aosta Valley region. The main findings of this research depict how branding a place becomes offering place values for tourists through the combination of cultural, social, natural and economic values generated in interorganizational relationships. Through the development of relationships with several stakeholders the organizations belonging to tourism industry can share information, knowledge and technology, and other critical resources to develop new solutions.

Cooperation within a destination and place branding

The increasing competition in tourism industry requires tourism operators to develop efficient and effective marketing strategies to gain a competitive advantage. Since one of the main indicators of the strength of a competitive advantage is the brand equity (Keller, 1993), brand strategy has become increasingly applied to places. Place branding is considered as the totality of the thoughts, feelings, associations and expectations that come to mind when a prospect or consumer is exposed to an entity name, logo, products, services, events, or any design or symbol representing them (Aaker, 2001).

Following the previous consideration, the destination branding process develops a unique identity and personality of destination that is different from that of competitors (Baker, 2007).

More and more the destination branding has been described as a cooperative effort amongst stakeholders (Blain et al., 2005; Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2003) that involves relational networks linking customers, service providers and other stakeholders (Anholt, 2010).

The tourist product comprises services from several segments of suppliers: accommodation, transport, catering, entertainment, infrastructure, cultural institutions and events and public actions (Hjalager, 2002). The place package is generated by public, private or partnered investment in culture, sports, heritage, districts, education, public facilities, entertainment and tourism infrastructure (Govers and Go, 2010).

Through product bundling, two or more separate products can be sold in one package (Stremersch and Tellis, 2002) at any price. In order to create a bundle, key relationships are developed both with tourism operators and with several kinds of other organizations (Dredge, 2006; Pearce, 2007). The combination of services is necessarily founded on cooperation, a process of joint decision making among key stakeholders of an inter-organizational, community tourism domain (Byrd, 2007; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2007). Local and regional tourism communities are characterized by shared beliefs and preferences, stable membership, and continued relationships (Singleton and Taylor, 1992).

As stated by Jamal and Getz (1995), several factors contribute to the development of cooperative relationships among stakeholders in community tourism settings. Among these factors, stakeholders should recognise their interdependence and the perceived benefits that could be obtained through integration.

In order to face the tourism complexity, these relationships are characterized by interconnections that outline a network (Watkins and Bell, 2002; Novelli et al., 2006). The network, as analysed by the Industrial/International Marketing and Purchasing Group (Ford, 2001), is based on knots (organisations or business units) connected by a net of relationships (Håkansson, 1982). Among the interpretations of network, the IMP Group refers to complex and articulated markets that present peculiarities in terms of number of actors, type of demand, type of order, and especially in terms of customers' active role. Through interactive relationships, actors can share resources and increase their value (Håkansson and Snehota, 2006) in a process of reciprocal adjustment and learning. The interdependences of actors, the interdependences or relationships, activities and resources generated the rainforest metaphor on the base of which the importance of interaction with others is well emphasized. Through connections in time and space, SME's can quickly overcome their size limits and transform ideas into business opportunities. (Håkansson et al., 2009).

The networking is based on the firm need to create a flexible structure, capable to adapt to an extremely changing context in continuous evolution (Håkansson and Snehota, 2006; Powell et al., 1996). Creating partnerships helps firms to increase their potentialities of business (Kothandaraman and Wilson, 2001, p. 384) and to co-create value (Forsstrom, 2003).

Firms that cooperate are able to access the assets they need and that are held by other firms (Wilkinson and Young, 2002). Moreover, through cooperation firms learn new skills (Nooteboom, 2004) and can also increase their development prospects and financial performance (Gulati et al. 2000). Cooperation plays a key role in place branding and in tourism destination communities (Lemmetyinen and Go, 2009), because it supports the sustainable planning and development of destinations (Bramwell and Lane, 2000) for destination governance structures (Yuksel et al., 2005).

In this way firms develop relationships to increase the joint-value for all the actors involved, leading to a win-win-situation. (Roy and Yami, 2009; Brolos, 2009).

The mediation role of trust in cooperative relationships

The governance of the growing relational complexity is supported by trust (Castaldo, 2007). Different definitions of trust are provided by literature. According to Anderson and Narus (1990), trust can be defined as the firm belief that another company will perform actions that will result in positive outcomes for the firm, and it will not take unexpected actions that would result in negative outcomes for the firm. Hausman and Johnson (2010, p. 521) define trust as "confidence in the integrity and reliability of another party", a definition in line with the one proposed by Moorman et al. (1992, p. 315), who define trust as "the willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence".

The trust construct includes two different perspectives: benevolence and integrity (Schoorman et al., 2007; Suh and Huston, 2010). Considering the benevolence dimension, a partner involved in a relationship tends to consider and even protect the focal company welfare, and hence will avoid any unexpected activity that could produce negative effects on the performance of the focal company (Suh and Kwon, 2006). The integrity dimension is conceived as the belief that a partner is reliable, responsible and consistent in fulfilling its promises (Suh and Huston, 2010).

The role of trust in alliance and partnership development has been widely investigated in the literature, which has studied the impact of relational capital on an alliance success (Cullen et al., 2000). Consequences of trust can be synthesized in reducing the degree of decisional uncertainty, increasing the degree of commitment of actors, containing the conflict level, and determining a greater use of non-coercive power sources (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust develops fairness, enhances the level of satisfaction, improves the quality of the relationship and represents a fundamental asset to facilitate cooperative behaviour, since it creates a general environment to develop cooperation among partners (Lui et al., 2006).

In academic literature, trust has also been considered both as an antecedent and as an output of cooperation. Trust has a crucial role in supporting the development of relationships through the time (Pansiri, 2008), and in enhancing the level of loyalty among partners (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002;). According to Wiertz et al. (2004), trust enhances the willingness to cooperate. A significant impact of trust on joint action is also evident in the outcomes of the meta-analysis study on relationship marketing effectiveness presented by Palmatier et al. (2006).

In tourism marketing literature the role of trust has been investigated mainly as an antecedent of customer/tourist loyalty, and mainly from the perspective of the customer/tourist. Some recent studies focus their attention on the role of trust in tourism e-commerce (Kim et al., 2011) and in supporting tourism systems development (Nunkoo and Ramkisson, 2011).

Our study investigates the role of trust in a particular type of partnership, i.e. service bundling. As stated before, hoteliers can benefit from the offering of a bundle of services to their customers. According to their nature, we classified benefits achievable through service bundling into two different categories: economic benefits and relational benefits. Economic benefits are strongly related to the expected improvements of hotel performance (e.g. increases in sales, profits, customer base, etc.). Relational benefits include matters referred to hotel image and hotelier's reputation among other operators and among customers. By perceiving a benefit achievable through service bundling, hoteliers are more likely to cooperate with other operators by joining or creating a partnership with them. This leads to a positive effect on their networking orientation, i.e. their willingness to cooperate and to create a network with other tourism operators, such as restaurants, spas, sport facilities, etc.. Considering the key role of trust in cooperation development stemming from the review of the literature, we assume the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Hoteliers' perception of benefits achievable through service bundling is positively related to hoteliers' networking orientation through the mediating influence of trust in other tourism operators.

Hypothesis 2: Hoteliers' perception of relational benefits achievable through service bundling is positively related to hoteliers' networking orientation through the mediating influence of trust in other tourism operators.

Hypothesis 3: Hoteliers' perception of economic benefits achievable through service bundling is positively related to hoteliers' networking orientation through the mediating influence of trust in other tourism operators.

Methodology

Sample

Data were gathered using a 36-items questionnaire, administered during the month of October 2011. A list of 746 accommodation types was drawn from the directory of accommodation facilities provided by the Aosta Valley Regional Office of Tourism. Aosta Valley is a small mountain region located in the North-West of Italy, and has been involved for a long time in promoting its destination as a brand. The tourism industry plays a key role in the economy of this region, especially during the winter season.

We have focused our research on accommodation owners and managers (called "hoteliers") because of the critical role they play in the tourism industry. Thanks to their close contact with tourists, hoteliers represent a reference point for them. This privileged position allows them to better detect changes and new trends in tourist demand. Hence, they can be considered as promoters or even initiators of potential partnerships among tourism operators.

Each accommodation facility of the region received an e-mail invitation to participate in the web-based questionnaire, which was sent in collaboration with Aosta Valley Hotel Association. Two weeks after sending the invitation e-mail, hoteliers were further contacted by a telephone call in order to solicit the participation in the survey. 164 hoteliers agreed to participate and actually responded to the survey. This yield to a net response rate of 22%. Our sample includes four different types of accommodation: hotels (55,5%), B&Bs (27,4%), farm holidays (3,7%), apartment hotels (7,9%), guest houses and stopover locations (5,5%). Most of them are family businesses, owned and managed by one or more components of the same family (64,0%). On average, the organization age is approximately 14 years.

Measures

The questionnaire was developed after an extensive review of the literature, and was structured in two main sections. The first part was focused on service bundling. Respondents were asked to consider an hypothetical bundle configuration (e.g. all-inclusive formulas or the opportunity to combine the accommodation service to spa treatments or to restaurant discounts, etc.) and then to evaluate 30 items related to eight different constructs.

Variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with a value range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scales have been taken from literature and adapted to the hospitality industry context.

The dependent variable Networking orientation has been measured by the Alliance Orientation scale (α=0,906) derived from Kandemir et al. (2006). The nine-items scale includes three different dimensions: (1) alliance scanning, (2) alliance coordination, and (3) alliance learning.

Benefits achievable through the service bundling have been considered as predictors and have been categorized in two classes: economic benefits and relational benefits. Economic benefits have been measured using the three-items scale (α=0,881) proposed by Blomstermo et al. (2004), whereas relational benefits have been measured by a four-items scale (α=0,879) adapted from Blindenbach-Driessen et al. (2010).

Following Kumar (1996), the mediator variable trust has been measured using a three-items scale adapted from Suh and Houston (2010) (α=0,720), which splits the trust construct into two different dimensions: (1) integrity and (2) benevolence.

Control variables of the model are innovativeness, market orientation, service orientation and customer orientation. To measure innovativeness (α=0,801) we have adapted 3 items from Calantone et al. (2002), based on Hollenstein's (1996) firm innovativeness scale.

Market orientation (α=0,674) has been measured by adapting the scale of Narver and Slater (1990), included in the 3rd edition of the Handbook of Marketing Scales (Bearden et al., 2011). This scale has been validated in many following studies and also applied to surveys in the hospitality industry (Wang et al., 2012).

We have adapted the scale developed by Vella et al. (2009) to measure the Service orientation construct (α=0,626). Customer orientation has been measured with a two-items (α=0,752) scale adapted from the one proposed by Deshpandé et al. (1993).

Cronbach's alpha has been used as a measure of reliability because it provides a lower bound to the reliability of a scale and is the most widely used measure. All scales have an alpha greater than 0.60, thus providing an adequate level of reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

In the second section hoteliers have been asked to answer to questions about their business activity, such as organization age, numbers of years from the building, category (number of stars) where applicable, number of rooms, governance type (family business or not), location and accommodation typology (hotel, b&b, farm holiday, apartment hotels, guest house, stopover location). These variables have been included in the model as control variables. Respondents have also been asked if they had any previous experience in selling service bundles.

Findings

In order to test the aforementioned hypotheses, we have adopted the analytic procedure for mediation testing proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). Our analysis has been developed in four steps, estimating a series of separate regression models. We have first considered as independent variable benefits achievable through service bundling as a whole and we have started regressing networking orientation on the independent variable and on the control variables (model 1). We have then regressed networking orientation on trust, the mediator (model 2). At the third step, we have regressed the mediator on the independent variable (model 3). Finally, we have regressed networking orientation on both the independent variable and trust (model 4). We have repeated the same procedure considering as independent variable relational benefits and then economic benefits. In order to test mediation, we have evaluated the change in regression coefficients and coefficients' significance from one model to the other.

Table 1 reports the correlations for all the variables.

Table 1. Correlation among variables

Variables	1.	2.	3a.	3b.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1.Networking orientation									
2. Benefits	,465**								
3a.Economic benefits	,395**	,922**							
3b.Relational benefits	,471**	,966**	,790**						
4.Trust	,386**	,390**	,320**	,404**					
5.Innovativeness	,625**	,405**	,378**	,388**	,176*				
6.Customer orientation	,501**	,406**	,322**	,427**	,265**	,484**			

Variables	1.	2.	3a.	3b.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
7.Service orientation	,320**	,253**	,193*	,271**	,125	,267**	,503**		
8.Market orientation	,539**	,329**	,295**	,324**	,359**	,419**	,389**	,236**	

*Significant at p<0,05, **Significant at p<0,01.

The correlation analysis indicates a positive and significant correlation (from 0,368 to 0,471) for the main variables (predictors, dependent variable and mediator).

In the regression analysis, we first entered the control variables. Consistent with the current research findings, Innovativeness was found to have a significant and positive effect on Networking orientation. We then regressed Networking orientation on benefits (Model 1). Although Benefits through bundling, Economic benefits and Relational benefits were positively related to Networking orientation, the effects of Economic benefits were not significant (p>0,05). We then regressed Networking orientation on Trust (Model 2). Consistent with the current research findings, Trust was found to have a significant and positive effect on Networking orientation (β=,220; p=,000). We then regressed Trust on benefits (Model 3). All of the regression coefficients for benefits were significant. As expected, the effects of Benefits through bundling, Relation benefits and Economic benefits on Trust were positive and significant. Finally we regressed Networking orientation on benefits and Trust together (Model 4). Trust was significantly and positively related to Networking orientation. Moreover, the coefficients of Benefits through bundling and Relational benefits were reduced to non-significance when Trust was added to the regression model. Economic benefits, however, showed different results. The coefficient of Economic benefits for Networking orientation remained non-significant, as it was at Step 1, when Trust was included.

To summarize, the regression results revealed that Trust fully mediated the relationships of Benefits through bundling and Relational benefits with Networking orientation, which support Hypotheses 1 and 2. The regression results for Economic benefits were different. The relationship between Economic benefits and Networking orientation was not mediated by Trust. Hypothesis 3 is not supported (Table 2).

Table 2. Regression results

	Hypothesis 1 Benefits→Trust→Networking Orient.				Hypothesis 2 Relational Benefits→Trust→Net. Orient.				Hypothesis 3 Economical Benefits→Trust→Net. Orient.			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4

Category	,155	,124	,171	,122	,166	,124	,194	,129	,151	,124	,152	,119
N. of rooms	-,096	-,082	-,095	-,078	-,098	-,082	-,100	-,079	-,100	-,082	-,096	-,080
N. years from building	,078	,104	-,107	,099	,085	,104	-,092	,102	,074	,104	-,121	,100
Organization's age	-,002	-,027	,055	-,012	-,007	-,027	,040	-,014	-,007	-,027	,058	-,019
Governance type	-,064	-,039	-,117	-,041	-,063	-,039	-,114	-,041	-,066	-,039	-,120[a]	-,040
Accomodation type Hotel	-,371[a]	-,458[a]	,426[a]	-,454[b]	-,389[b]	-,458[a]	,395[a]	-,463[b]	-,353[a]	-,458[a]	,469[a]	-,452[b]
Accomodation type RTA	-,186[a]	-,235[a]	,241[a]	-,233[a]	-,199[a]	-,235[a]	,220	-,240[b]	-,174	-,235[a]	,270[a]	-,231[a]
Accomodation type B&B	-,328[b]	-,404[c]	,309[a]	-,388[c]	-,336[b]	-,404[c]	,290[a]	-,390[c]	-,327[b]	-,404[c]	,321	-,395[c]
Accomodation type Farm holidays	-,110	-,110	,054	-,120	-,114	-,110	,053	-,123	-,099	-,110	,070	-,113
Innovativeness	,369[c]	,402[c]	-,089	,386[c]	,368[c]	,402[c]	-,084	,383[c]	,379[c]	,402[c]	-,078	,396[c]
Customer orienation	,114	,116	,088	,097	,102	,116	,076	,088	,138	,116	,127	,111
Service orientation	,029	,048	-,077	,044	,026	,048	-,081	,041	,032	,048	-,070	,047
Market orientation	,289[c]	,242[c]	,267[b]	,237[c]	,287[c]	,242[c]	,269[b]	,237[c]	,298[c]	,242[c]	,277[b]	,239[c]
Benefits	,147[a]		,310[c]	,087								
Relational benefits					,170[b]		,315[c]	,112				
Economic benefits									,087		,244[b]	,035
Trust		,220[c]		,195[b]		,220[c]		,187[b]		,220[c]		,212[b]
R^2	,565	,586	,310	,591	,571	,586	,313	,594	,555	,586	,286	,587
Adj. R^2	,524	,547	,245	,550	,530	,547	,248	,553	,513	,547	,219	,545
F	13,734 [c]	14,984[c]	4,751[c]	14,175[c]	14,043[c]	14,984[c]	4,826[c]	14,365[c]	13,196[c]	14,984[c]	4,237[C]	13,940 [c]

n=164

[a]p<0,05

[b]p<0,01

[c]p<0,001

Discussion

This paper examines the issues concerning the mediating role of Trust in tourism operators willingness to cooperate. The main issue is whether Trust provides a general platform for tourism operators to interact. We find that Trust fully mediates the positive relationships of Benefits achievable through the service bundling and Relational benefits with Networking orientation. In other words, Benefits achievable through service bundling have a positive effect on Trust in other operators. In turn, the high level of Trust leads to a higher level of Networking orientation. Our results confirm the idea that Trust bridges the Benefits achievable through the service bundling (in particular Relational benefits) and the Networking orientation. Contrary to our expectations, we had to reject Hypothesis 2, since we could not assess the mediation effect of Trust while considering the relation between Economic benefits and Networking orientation.

We thought about the relation between Economic Benefits and Networking Orientation. Since there is a strong correlation between Networking Orientation and Innovativeness, one of our control variables, we search the literature once more. Literature has shown that Innovativeness is important in cooperation among businesses, and also in tourism.

Innovation is a process that results from various interactions among different actors (Doloreux, 2004) and is traditionally related to the importance of long term relationships between a firm and its suppliers. Different types of partner generate different effects on innovation process. Consequently, the involvement of several actors belonging to different networks allows overcoming the traditional perspective of vertical or horizontal relationships, promoting open business models strictly related to the new innovation landscape (Chesbrough, 2003). Considering the tourism industry, Tremblay (1998) pointed out that different kinds of tourism network and relations may provide different benefits depending on their structures and on the actors involved. Sundbo et al. (2006) studied the role of the innovation in networks related to different types of tourism firms. Moreover, scholars observed how firm members of tourism chains seem to be more innovative than those which are not. In particular, co-operation with tour operators leads to a higher level of innovativeness.
Based on that, we further assume the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Innovativeness positively mediates the relationship between hoteliers' perception of Economic benefits achievable through service bundling and Hoteliers' networking orientation.

Adopting once more the procedure suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986), we find that Innovativeness fully mediates the positive relationships of Economic benefits with Networking orientation (Table 3).

Table 3: Regression results: innovativeness as mediator

	Hypothesis 4 Economical Benefits→Innovativeness→Net.Orient			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Category	,183	,168	,085	,151
N. of rooms	-,065	-,108	,091	-,100
N. years from building	,037	,083	-,099	,074
Organization's age	-,047	-,027	-,105	-,007
Governance type	-,052	-,066	,037	-,066
Accomodation type Hotel	-,379[a]	-,359[a]	-,071	-,353[a]
Accomodation type RTA	-,203[a]	-,178	-,076	-,174
Accomodation type B&B	-,384[b]	-,344[b]	-,150	-,327[b]
Accomodation type Farm holidays	-,110	-,088	-,030	-,099
Customer orientation	,257[b]	,154	,314[c]	,138
Service orientation	,051	,033	,048	,032
Market orientation	,368[c]	,310[c]	,185[a]	,298[c]

	Hypothesis 4 Economical Benefits→Innovativeness→Net.Orient			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Economical benefits	,146[a]		,156[a]	,087
Innovativeness		,395[c]		,379[c]
R^2	,465	,550	,374	,555
Adj. R^2	,419	,510	,319	,513
F	9,971[c]	13,986[c]	6,846[c]	13,196[c]

n=164

[a]p<0,05

[b]p<0,01

[c]p<0,001

In other words if on one side Trust is the bridge between Benefits achievable through the service bundling (in particular Relational benefits) and the Networking orientation, on the other side Innovativeness is the bridge between Economic benefits and the Networking orientation. A higher degree of Innovativeness leads to a higher alliance attitude for tourism operators that pay much attention to Economic benefits from service bundling.

Conclusions

In our study we explore the topic of cooperation among operators in the tourism industry. The development of cooperation among tourism actors operating within a destination has a positive influence on the performance of the local tourism industry. In particular, the destination branding activity is conceived as a cooperative effort borne by stakeholders within a destination (Blain et al., 2005; Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2003). In this sense cooperation plays a key role for place image enhancement and tourism development (Dickinson and Ramaseshan, 2004, 2008). Service bundling practice is becoming more and more common in the tourism industry nowadays, due to the fact that tourists are increasingly looking for tourism experiences rather than simple tourism products. Therefore the tourism industry is facing with a paradox related to the fragmentation on the supply side and to the demand of “all-in-one experience” by customers. For these reasons the development of cooperative relationships aimed at offering tourism packages is of primary relevance for tourism theory and practice.

The creation of tourism packages requires the improvement of cooperation skills among the operators involved (Yeh et al., 2011), and this needs the promotion of an orientation to networking among tourism operators. Synergistic cooperation among tourism providers has proven to overcome the fragmentation, typical of the tourism industry, which is essential to achieve long-term competitiveness (Zehrer, 2009). Considering the tourism side, the development of partnerships based on service bundling enriches and synergizes the destination tourism offer. In this sense, the even more complex tourists’ needs are met in a more effective way, providing a memorable holiday experience. Based on that, service bundling can be conceived as a way to develop the competitiveness of a place and improve its image.

As stated before, service bundling is effective when supported by cooperation among tourism operators. In this sense, trust has been traditionally considered as one of the key factors for cooperation building, but so far its role as a mediator has not been thoroughly investigated in the tourism marketing literature.

The first issue we proposed is whether trust contributes in creating networking orientation among tourism operators, in particular we investigated the hoteliers side. We find that trust fully mediates the positive relationship between Benefits achievable through service bundling and hoteliers' Networking orientation. The perception of benefits achievable through service bundling encourages hoteliers to join or even to create cooperative partnerships among tourism operators. Considering the mediation effect, the hoteliers perception of benefits related to the creation of joint tourism packages increases the level of trust placed in other operators. The high level of trust, in turn, has a positive impact on the hoteliers' willingness to networking. In other words, trust represents a platform that enables cooperation among tourism operators in order to structure their activities and to invest their resources in the creation and offering of a joint tourism product.

We had further deepened our analysis by considering separately the perception of relational and of economic benefits related to the bundling practice. Our data confirm that trust mediates the relationship between perceived relational benefits and networking orientation. The development of trust among operators generates positive effects on their reputation and on their image, which reduce the level of risk in cooperation and lead to a higher networking orientation for hoteliers. Trust therefore provides the logic by which the problems of interdependence and uncertainty in cooperative relationships are solved (Lui et al., 2006).

Contrary to our expectation, we find that trust does not play a mediation role between Economic benefits and Networking orientation. This role is taken instead by Innovativeness. Hoteliers' perception of economic benefits related to the practice of service bundling improves their innovative skills and abilities and thus increases their innovativeness. High level of Innovativeness, in turn, leads to a higher level of Networking orientation. Hoteliers who consider the service bundling practice beneficial under the economic point of view, will improve their innovation skills in order to build a package. It means that the perception of an economic benefit related to the possibility of offering a package has a positive impact on the hoteliers' capacity to innovate, i.e. their

innovativeness. Moreover, the increase in the level of innovativeness flows in a greater openness to cooperation of these forward-looking operators.
The mediation role of trust and innovativeness has several implications for the tourism industry. Considering the positive effect of cooperation on place image, the development of networking orientation among tourism operators has proven to strongly impact on the perception of tourists related to the tourism offer of a place and also to its image. However, the creation of trust-laden networks within a destination is in many cases challenging. This is because the development of trust takes long time and this resource not always is widespread within a tourism destinations. Considering SMEs, trust is also a matter of personal relationship and very often tourism operators are wary of each other.
The perception of benefits achievable through service bundling has a positive effect on hoteliers' orientation to networking, but this is not enough. Trust and innovativeness potentiate their effect on networking orientation. Hence, policy makers should consider the level of trust among potential partners in the destination building activities, and try to enhance it in order to provide a favourable environment for partnerships development. They should act favourably in this sense, by creating discussion boards, facilitating the constructive dialogue among tourism operators and by assuming the role of promoters of this particular type of joint actions.

Limitations of this study are related to the fact that we have investigated only the hoteliers' side in a particular context, i.e. Aosta Valley region. We did not analyze the partners' side of the bundle (spas, restaurants, sport facilities, etc.) and the measure of Benefits achievable through service bundling was assessed asking hoteliers about their personal perception and not by collecting data about the objective performance of the hotel.
Considering Trust, this variable may not always result in reciprocal trusting behaviour if the flow of trust is unilateral.
It would be interesting to extend our study to other destinations and to consider different types of potential tourism partners.
Finally, the analysis of tourism operators' innovativeness and its role in cooperation enhancement needs to be furtherer deepened. This could represent a challenging future path of research.

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Paper 4: Segmenting networking orientation in the hospitality industry: an empirical research on service bundling

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the topic of collaboration in tourism destinations. Collaboration represents a key to overcome the fragmentation of the tourism industry and to better satisfy the more and more experience-centric tourist. Tourism operators are increasingly involved in various types of collaborative partnerships. One among them is service bundling, i.e. the creation and the supply of tourism packages. The study analyzes the drivers underlying the development of service bundling and provides a segmentation of the hospitality industry according to operators' networking orientation. 164 hoteliers from a tourism-based region in Italy were interviewed through a survey. Four clusters of hoteliers were identified and profiled: the Relational/Socials, the Opportunists, the Innovators and the Marketers. Each of them shows a peculiar approach to collaboration and reveals different motivations to be engaged in a partnership. Some managerial implications and directions for policy makers are also provided.

Keywords: Service bundling; collaboration; tourism partnerships; hospitality industry; hoteliers; segmentation.

Introduction

Tourism is the world's largest service industry in terms of gross revenue. International tourism has recovered faster than expected from the impacts of the global economic recession started in late 2008. From 2010 to 2011 international tourist arrivals increased by 4.6%, with a positive growth rate registered in all regions in the world. UNWTO (2011) forecasts that there will be 1.6 billion international trips by 2020, nearly three times the 592 million trips made in 1996. During the 21st century a higher percentage of the total population will travel for tourism, especially going on holidays more often and farther away from their home country.

From the economic point of view, one important characteristic of the tourism industry is that it has a great multiplier effect on other industries (Amalu, Ajake, Oba, & Ewa, 2012). Moreover, tourism accounted for 8% of worldwide global employment in 2010 (WTTC,

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2012). This is the reason why tourism is considered by government policies as one of the most important factors for the development of a country.

Italy stands at the 5th place of the tourism destinations' world ranking (UNWTO, 2011). The tourism industry represents 9.5 percent of the Italian GNP (Eurispes, 2011). Italy has an ancient vocation to tourism, thanks to its cultural, artistic, historical and natural heritage. Formica and Uysal (1996, p.324) define Italy as a "multi-opportunity tourism destination", because of the great attractiveness and the variety of its tourism supply. The tourism industry in Valle d'Aosta (VDA) represents a very interesting study site, since its geographical location, the presence of the highest mountain ranges in Europe and its landscapes make this region a very well-known resort, even beyond Italian borders. Despite its size, VDA is characterized by the presence of thousands of SMEs operating in tourism industry. SMEs constitute the "life blood of the travel and tourism industry world-wide" (Erkkila, 2004, p. 1) and they strongly influence the development of a local area as a destination.

The coexistence of a variety of different SMEs specialized in particular services in a destination context is a fundamental characteristic of the tourism industry (Hjalager, 1999; Wanhill 1996, 2000). Nevertheless, tourism supply fragmentation is more and more dealing with the need of "all-in-one experience" expressed by customers (d'Angella & Go, 2009).

Tourism literature has given a considerable attention to the experiential perspective, and has explored the emotional and hedonic side of a destination experience (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009; Ryan, 2010; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Uriely, 2005; Walls, Okumus, & Wang, 2011; Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). Tourists are becoming experience-centric customers and this evolution has led many operators to broaden their tourism offer, developing bundles of services (in some cases also products). Creating packages in tourism requires collaboration among several operators belonging to different industries. The emergence of this practice and the existence of a wide variety of operators that offer a broad range of services for the winter and the summer seasons make VDA an ideal laboratory to study operators' bundling orientation, i.e. their willingness to collaborate in developing bundles.

In spite of the richness of literature on the topic of collaborative relationships in the tourism industry, research focusing on collaboration among SMEs in the hospitality industry has been confined to a small number of contributions (Buick, Halcro, & Lynch, 1998; Lynch, 2000; Tinsley & Linch, 2001; Alonso, 2010).

This study proceeds from the findings of a previous research (Marcoz, Mauri, Maggioni, & Cantù, 2011) on the relationship between the perception of benefits achievable through service bundling and hoteliers' networking orientation.

This paper focuses on the drivers of collaboration, i.e. the motivations behind the development of a bundle, and provides a segmentation of the approaches to collaboration considering different types of accommodation facilities. The main objectives of this study are:

(1) Identifying the most relevant drivers that enhance networking orientation among tourism operators;

(2) Segmenting hoteliers according to their motivations to collaborate in developing bundles;

(3) Profiling segments according to the operators' characteristics.

The paper is structured as follows. First, an extensive review of the literature on the topics of collaboration and bundling in the tourism industry is carried out (Paragraph 2). Paragraph 3 illustrates the methodological approach, describing the study site, the questionnaire, the scales used to measure the variables, and the sample. Data were analyzed through factor, cluster and CHAID analyses, and findings are presented in Paragraph 4. In Paragraph 5 results are discussed, providing some managerial implications and highlighting the limitations of the study as well as possible future research paths.

Collaboration and service bundling in the tourism industry: a literature review

Collaboration among SMEs in the tourism industry

Tourism is a highly fragmented industry, characterized by the coexistence of a variety of small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) that compete in the same environment, providing complementary products to deliver a comprehensive tourist experience (Greffe, 1994; Hjalager, 1999; Wanhill 1996, 2000; Pavlovich, 2003).

Although their formal independency, a key feature of tourism organizations operating within a destination is their interdependence (Palmer & Bejou, 1995). Co-location and the combined nature of the tourism product lead to the condition of unintentional co-opetition (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011), since the activities and hence the performance of tourism organizations are strongly dependent one each other. Many organizations within the destination are aware of this interdependence and they feel the need to collaborate, or at least co-ordinate their activities through partnerships or alliances with other organizations (Palmer & Bejou, 1995; Lemmentyinen, 2009).

Several authors studied in depth the paradoxical nature of business relationships in the tourism industry (Murphy, 1988; Hall, Jenkins, & Kearsley, 1997; Long, 1997; Goeldner, Ritchie, & MacIntosh, 2000). With reference to studies based on the network approach, it can be stated that "the network simultaneously enables and restricts" an organization constraints (Ford, Gadde, Håkansson, & Snehota, 2003, p. 23; Gomes-Casseres, 1994).

The development of collaborative relationships among firms at the same level of the value chain becomes increasingly determinant for the success of a destination as a whole. Indeed outcomes of collaboration, such as cooperative branding, image enhancement, tourism product portfolio integration, increase the destination competitiveness (Bennet, 1999; Dywer, 2003; Hill & Shaw, 1995; Holder, 1992, Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007). By collaborating, tourism operators can achieve collectively more than the sum of each individual's own effort (Anderson & Narus, 1990).

Collaboration can be developed through formal partnerships or alliances among firms, but also through informal relation-based collaboration. Informal relationships represent a distinctive way to cooperate in regions and communities in the tourism industry (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Bardhan, 1993; Carpenter & Westphal, 2001; Denicolai, Cioccarelli, & Zucchella, 2010; Timothy, 1998). Wang and Fesenmaier (2007) extended the theory on marketing alliances to destination marketing, identifying four key issues for the development of collaboration among tourism organizations within a destination, i.e. preconditions, motivation, developmental stages and outcomes of a marketing alliance (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2005, 2007).

Literature on destination management has widely investigated the topic of collaborative relationships among stakeholders from a macro level perspective, focusing on alliances and partnerships between public and private organizations (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Selin & Chavez, 1995; Palmer & Bejou, 1995; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Watkins & Bell, 2002; Pavlovich, 2003; d'Angella & Go, 2009; Arnaboldi & Spiller, 2011; Beritelli, 2011) and on intergovernmental coalitions (Selin, 1993, Hill & Shaw, 1995, Wong, Mistilis, & Dwyer, 2011a, 2011b) . In particular, collaboration is considered as fundamental for destination management and planning (Jamal & Getz, 1995) and a key requirement for sustainable destination development (Bramwell & Lane, 2000).

Considering the level of the individual organization, alliances and partnerships in the tourism industry are considered as "a logical method for growth" (Dev & Klein, 1993, p.42) and a facilitator for market and products development (Chathoth, 2004). However it is possible that the single stakeholder may perceive a little benefit from investing in an alliance or in a partnership, due to the consideration of this type of relationship as low-potential for tourism development. This is especially true when we consider honeypot destinations, where operators do not perceive the need to attract visitors and therefore they do not get involved in any additional collaborative relationship. (Palmer & Bejou,1995).

Considering the stream of research on collaborative relationships among tourism operators (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Bramwell & Sherman, 1999; Hill & Shaw, 1995; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Palmer, 1998; Palmer & Bejou, 1995; Selin, 1993; Selin & Beason, 1991; Selin & Myers, 1998; Tremblay, 2000), a lot of emphasis was placed on the analysis of factors that make a tourism alliance or a partnership successful. With reference to inter-organizational relationships between hoteliers and travel agents in the USA, Medina-Munoz and Garcia-Falcon (2000) identified that trust, commitment, coordination, communication quality, information exchange, participation, usage of constructive resolution techniques as critical factors. Moreover, Pansiri (2008) argues that alliances based on trust, less control level, commitment and compatibility between partners are more likely to be successful.

Another stream of research on collaboration in tourism industry analyzes the motivations underlying firms' collaborative behavior. Beritelli (2011) states that "Cooperative behavior is worthwhile if there is a payoff based on strategy that maximizes advantages and it is also convenient if costs incurred over the whole process are minimized and the if the cooperative behavior takes place in a social context in which the actors strive to gain reputation and rewards" (Beritelli, 2011, p. 612). Wang and Fesenmaier (2007) provide a classification of the motivations to enter a collaborative relationship. These are strategy-related motivations, transaction cost-related motivations, learning-related motivations, cluster competitiveness and community responsibility.

Moreover, several dimensions drive firms' collaborative behavior, such as mutual trust (Bardhan, 1993; Denicolai, Cioccarelli, & Zucchella, 2010; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006), personal commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001), understanding among actors (Saxena, 2006), effective communication (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), social affinity and reciprocal sympathy (Beritelli, 2011), past experience (Scharpf, 1997; Rothstein, 2000; Beritelli, 2011), information exchange. This is especially true for destination marketing, since competitive advantage is gained only through bringing together all the resources, including the knowledge capital and the expertise available from tourism organizations operating in the location (Fyall & Garrod, 2005)..

Despite the variety of literature on the topic, the research on collaborative relationships among operators in the hospitality industry has been very limited when we consider SMEs (Buick, Halcro, & Lynch, 1998; Lynch, 2000; Tinsley & Linch, 2001). Alonso (2010) with his explorative study on the importance of business relationships for small hoteliers is one of the few contributions in this sense. In his qualitative study he explores the importance of collaboration among local businesses, describing the "selfless" approach and symbiotic relationships. Collaboration among small local businesses is a fundamental part of their existence. Through the creation and the building of a well-knit network of businesses, collaboration allows providing a unique experience to visitors, promoting loyalty, positive word of mouth and improving the destination image.

Service bundling as a way to enhance collaboration in a destination

The tourism product is complex and includes both tangible and intangible dimensions (Palmer & Bejou, 1995). It can be considered as a bundle of different goods and services, such as transport, accommodation, sport facilities, cultural and artistic attractions, each of them managed and offered to tourists by formally independent organizations (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007). Tourists derive utility from each one of the different elements that compose the tourism product, but their satisfaction is related to the quality and to the perception of value of the product considered as a whole (Rigall-I-Torrent & Fulvià, 2011; Thrane, 2005).

In a destination setting consumer choices depend on the combination of private and public attributes which determinate the final tourism product (Rosen, 1974; Rigall-I-Torrent & Fulvià, 2011). Private attributes are related to tourism firm's features (e.g. for a hotel they might include hotel category, room cleanliness, sport facilities, food quality, etc.). These characteristics can be determined and controlled by managers that can decide about their embedding in the tourism product. Public attributes include environment preservation, cultural legacy, public safety, image, infrastructures, and also network externalities (Tirole, 1988) within the destination. According to this approach, the overall satisfaction of a tourist depends not only on the products and services offered by the firm, but also on the availability of complementary products offered by other tourism players, operating in the same destination.

Nowak, Sylvain and Mondher (2010) explore the phenomena of the fragmentation of production in the tourism industry related to tourism packages. They assert that the tourism package is a product system that can be divided into many segments of production. Each of these segments is deeply different from the others and so it requires particular skills, technologies and factors of production combined in different proportions (Nowak, Sylvain, & Mondher, 2010).

In the hospitality industry, partnerships are commonly developed to meet the increasingly complex needs, to satisfy the more and more demanding customer, and to provide to tourists a memorable holiday experience. According to Kandampully (2006), hospitality firms and other tourism operators work together in order to provide service bundles to customers that can enhance the image and the perceived value of the services offered by the hotel.

Bundling was first analyzed by economic literature focusing on the issues arising from the point of view of the firm (Stremersch, & Tellis, 2002; Guiltinan, 1987) . The most recent literature on bundling has shifted the focus to the analysis of the customer side (Gaeth, Levin, Chakraborty, & Levin, 1991; Mazumdar & Jun, 1993; Yadav & Monroe, 1993; Johnson, Herrmann, & Bauer, 1999; Naylor & Frank, 2001; Noone & Mattila, 2009). Rewtrakunphaiboon and Oppewal (2008), Munger and Grewal (2001) and Oppewal and Holyoake (2004) investigated the role of information available for the bundle/package and its impact on the tourist's evaluation and purchase process. When products are offered in a bundle, customers evaluate these products differently from their separate selling (Rewtrakunphaiboon & Oppewal, 2008).

As stated before, bundling represents an established practice in the tourism industry. The two more common forms of bundling in tourism are package holidays and package tours. The configuration of these types of bundling could be basic or all-inclusive (Wong & Kwong, 2004). An all-inclusive package is a planned trip, usually paid in advance, that includes transportation, accommodation, sightseeing, meals and at times a guide (Sheldon & Mak 1987; Morrison, 1989). A basic package usually provides accommodation and transportation (Mok & Armstrong, 1995). Packages are usually purchased by first-time tourist in a destination, since the lack of knowledge in availability of facilities, accommodations, facilities, etc. (Lai & Graefe, 2000) and in particular price bundling increases their perception of value (Naylor & Frank, 2001).

Considering the previous theoretical insights, this study attempts to contribute to the research stream focused on collaboration among SMEs in the tourism industry. We investigate the collaboration topic related to a particular partnership setting, i.e. the bundling practice. Through bundling, SMEs, and in particular hoteliers, can operate jointly to deliver an experience-driven tourism product to customers. Collaboration among tourism firms represents an essential feature for the creation and the supply of a bundle.

Considering that segmenting a market represents one of the major methodological approaches used in studies on the hospitality industry (Bowen and Sparks, 1998), the main purpose of this research is to provide a segmentation of the hospitality industry players according to the motivations that drive them to collaborate in creating service bundles.

Methodology of the study

Study site

The research field of this work is VDA, a mountainous region in the North-West of Italy. VDA represents an interesting research field to study tourism phenomena, since the landscape and the copious snow in winter have allowed the development of a flourishing tourism industry. Tourism is one of the strongest points of the Region's economy, with around a year 3,110,000 attendances.

Our research focus is the hospitality industry. In VDA, the added value of the hotels and restaurants sector represents 9 percent of the regional total, much higher than the Italian average of 4 percent (Data from Assessorato al Turismo Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta, 2010). These features make VDA an interesting site to investigate tourism dynamics in the hospitality industry.

Measurement of drivers of collaboration and other relevant variables

Variables were measured using scales widely tested in marketing literature and adapted to the hospitality context. Most of the scales used in this study were included in the 3rd edition of the Handbook of Marketing Scales (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Haws, 2011). To measure hoteliers' orientation towards collaboration, we referred to the Alliance Orientation scale derived from Kandemir, Yaprak, & Cavusgil (2006).

Benefits achievable through service bundling were analyzed using the scales proposed by Blomstermo, Eriksson, Lindstrand and Sharma (2004) and by Blindenbach-Driessen, Van Dalen and Van Den Ende (2010). To analyze trust we followed Kumar (1996), from Suh and Houston (2010). To analyze innovativeness we adapted the scale from Calantone, Cavusgil and Zhao (2002), based on Hurt, Joseph and Cook (1977), Hurt and Teigen (1977), and Hollenstein (1996). We study market orientation by adapting the scale of Narver and Slater (1990), validated in many studies (Deshpandé & Farley, 1996) and also applied to surveys in the hospitality industry (Wang, Chen, & Chen, 2012). We adapted the scale developed by Vella, Gountas, &Walker (2009) to analyze the Service orientation construct. Customer orientation was studied adapting the scale proposed by Deshpandé, Farley and Webster (1993).

Personal interviews were conducted to some executives of ADAVA (the regional hoteliers' association) properly adapt the scales to the specific context, which represents a procedure often used in literature (Lee, Lee, Bernhard, Yoon, 2006; Cai, 2002). The scale items modifications included rewording statements to suit tourism industry (Al-Sabbahy, Ekinci, & Riley, 2002). These procedures yielded to 52 items, which were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with a value range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Sample, questionnaire, and data collection

Data was collected through a 52-items questionnaire submitted to the whole population of accommodation facilities from VDA during October 2011. The list of 746 accommodations was drawn from the directory of accommodation facilities provided by the VDA's Regional Office of Tourism.

Key informants are accommodation owners and managers (hoteliers), who play a critical role in the tourism industry (Labben & Mungall, 2007; D'Angella & Go, 2009).

Each accommodation facility of VDA received an e-mail invitation to participate in the web-based questionnaire, which was sent with the endorsement of ADAVA. Two weeks later, hoteliers were further contacted by telephone to solicit their participation in the survey. 164 hoteliers actually responded to the survey. This yields to a net response rate of 22%, which is uncommon in marketing research (Gummesson, 2003). The main driver of such a high response rate is the endorsement of ADAVA in soliciting hoteliers' interest. The submission period, as well, was mindfully chosen to get hoteliers' collaboration. The questionnaires were submitted during the month of October, a rather quiet time of the year.

The sample includes five different typologies of accommodations: hotels (55.5%), B&Bs (27.4%), agritourism firms (3.7%), apartment hotels (7.9%), guest houses and stopover locations (5.5%).

Data analysis

The 52 items were factor analyzed to identify a set of underlying dimensions for collaboration using the principal component method with Varimax rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests are used to measure sampling adequacy. These indexes show that the data set is suitable, with a value of .868 at the significance level of .000.

Cronbach's α was computed to check the internal consistency of the various items. All factors have a Cronbach's α above 0.721, providing an adequate level of reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

The resulting factor scores were used to identify clusters of respondents motivated to collaborate by similar drivers. Using K-means clustering procedure, hoteliers were classified into 4 mutually exclusive groups.

The Chi-Square Automatic Interaction (CHAID) analysis was finally used to profile the 4 cluster. CHAID has been used also in the field of tourism research (Dinan & Sargeant, 2000; Vassiladis, 2008; Kemperman & Joh, 2003) to identify hotel preferences (Chung, Oh, Kim, & Han, 2004), to analyze expenditure levels (Diaz-Perez, Bethencourt-Cejas, & Alvarez-Gonzalez, 2005), to segment tourists (Kim, Timothy, & Hwang, 2011).

To undertake the CHAID procedure, we defined as dependent variable hoteliers' cluster membership and as independent variables hoteliers' accommodation facility features.

Results

Results of factor analysis

The factor analysis of the fifty-two items measuring hoteliers' network orientation resulted in 10 dimensions, shown in Table 1.

Table 1.Results of factor analysis of hoteliers' networking orientation

Drivers of collaboration factors and items	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance (%)	α	Mean
F1: Benefits achievable through bundling		15.259	11.296	.923	3.950
Service bundling leads to a significant growth of my activity	.788				3.829
Service bundling leads to knowledge increase	.807				4.073
Service bundling leads to business increase	.802				4.018
The reputation of our organization would increase, as a consequence of service bundling	.790				3.951
The knowledge and experienced gained by partners will be of large value for subsequent innovation projects	.667				3.860
Service bundling provides our firm a competitive advantage	.704				3.793
Service bundling satisfies the clients' needs	.734				4.012
Service bundling leads to higher quality	.747				4.067
F2: Hoteliers' innovativeness		4.834	10.096	.912	2.773
Our hotel frequently tries out new ideas	.770				2.732
Our hotel is creative in its methods of operation	.807				3.061
Our hotel is often the first to market with new products and services	.806				3.037
Innovation in our hotel is perceived as too risky and is resisted (reverse)	.747				2.579
Our new products/services introduction has increased over the last 5 years	.648				2.665
We actively monitor our environment to identify partnering opportunities	.597				2.463
We routinely gather information about prospective partners from various forums (e.g., trade shows, industry conventions, databases, publication, internet, etc.)	.544				3.030
We are alert to market developments that create potential alliance opportunities	.763				2.616
F3: Past experience in collaborating/networking		3.429	9.335	.928	2.522
Our activities across different alliances were well coordinated	.856				2.939
We systematically coordinated our strategies across different alliances	.782				2.396
We had processes to systematically transfer knowledge across alliance partners	.783				2.793
We conducted periodic reviews of our alliances to understand what we are doing right and where we are going wrong	.798				1.890
We periodically collected and analyzed field experience from our alliances	.843				2.287
We modified our alliance-related procedures as we learn from experience	.773				2.829
F4: Information sharing		2.914	9.011	.911	2.862
I believe that knowledge sharing among tourism operators can help establish my image as an expert	.733				2.213

Helping other tourism operators address work problems would make me feel happy and satisfied	.713				3.055
I enjoy exchanging knowledge and I don't ask for anything in return	.793				2.835
I am willing to use my spare time to help other tourism operators	.655				3.293
I would personally help other tourism operators regardless of whether or not they ask for my help	.786				2.628
I am willing to help other tourism operators	.728				2.933
I have close and good relationships with people that provide me with information	.521				3.079
F5: Trust in the integrity of other operators		2.450	8.354	.819	3.927
Even when the partner gives us a rather unlikely explanation, we are confident that it is telling the truth	.658				3.768
Only few times the partner has provided us information that has later proven to be inaccurate	.750				3.884
Whenever the partner gives us advice on our business operations, we know that he/she is sharing its best judgment	.709				4.287
Our organization can count on the partner to be sincere	.787				3.963
I trust people who give me information since I consider them highly qualified	.552				4.104
Though circumstances change, we believe that our partners will be ready and willing to offer us assistance and support	.609				3.555
F6: Willingness to learn through collaboration		2.092	5.451	.880	3.555
I am pleased to learn and share knowledge among different partners	.717				3.378
I believe that partners should help each other through collaboration to foster knowledge sharing	.571				3.890
Collaboration is useful to obtain information from friends and colleagues	.790				3.372
Collaboration is useful to obtain information from wide and diverse networks (attending fairs, exhibitions, associations, a wide range of forums, etc.)	.766				3.579
F7: Customer orientation		1.549	5.102	.782	4.280
We assess regularly the satisfaction of our customers	.789				4.122
The accomplishment of our goals is based on the satisfaction of our customers	.628				4.372
We regularly monitor and assess our commitment to customer satisfaction	.810				4.348
F8: Market orientation		1.488	4.364	.729	3.996
It takes us a short time to decide how to respond to our competitor's price changes	.734				3.659
We are fast to respond to changes in our customer's product or service needs	.586				4.311
If a major competitor launches a campaign to our customers, we implement a response immediately	.691				4.018
F9: Service orientation		1.304	4.328	.722	3.029
Our competitive advantage is based on understanding our customers' needs	.447				4.280
I enjoy being around customers	.582				2.561

I am concerned about what customers think of me	.800				3.024
I have the customer’s best interests in mind	.680				2.250
F10: Benevolence towards other operators		1.034	2.571	.761	3.396
When we share our problems with partners, we know that it will respond with understanding	.550				3.957
In the future, we can count on partners to consider how his/her decisions and actions will affect us	.470				3.128
When it comes to things that are important to us, we can depend on the partners' support	.354				3.104
Total variance extracted (%)			69.909		

All ten dimensions have eigenvalues greater than 1 and account for 70 percent of the total variance. All have relatively high reliability coefficients, ranging from 0.722 to 0.928. The first dimension is Benefits achievable through bundling, which explains 11.3 percent of the total variance with a reliability coefficient of 0.923 (see Table 1). Benefits represent a key driver for the creation of partnerships, and are related both to the supply (knowledge increase, business activity increase) and to the demand-side (better satisfaction of customers' needs). Service bundles are perceived as innovations: Hoteliers innovativeness, the second dimension, accounts for 10.1 percent of the variance of networking orientation (α= 0.912). Innovativeness means trying out new ideas, being creative in methods of operation, being the first to market with new products, being alert to market developments to identify alliance opportunities. Then Past experience in collaboration/networking comes into play (9.3 percent of the variance explained, α=0.928), which comprises six items related to the capability of coordinating activities and strategies, of transferring knowledge among partners, of conducting periodic reviews of the partnerships also to improve the procedures. Information sharing, the fourth dimension which explains 9.0 percent of the variance (α=0.911), comprises seven items related to knowledge exchange, to the willingness to help other tourism operators, to the development of close relationship with people who can provide information. Trust in integrity of other operators, the fifth dimension (8.4 percent of the variance, α=0.819), is loaded by items such as being confident that partners in the network tell the truth, are sincere, and are willing to give the best advice. Collaboration in service bundling is fostered by hoteliers' "Willingness to learn through collaboration", the sixth dimension (5.5 percent of the variance, α=0.88), which concerns the belief that collaboration in service bundling helps to increase knowledge among partners, to stimulate teamwork, to get new information from wide and diverse networks. "Customer orientation", "Market orientation", and "Service orientation" are the seventh, eighth and ninth dimension (5.1 percent, α= 0.782; 4.4 percent, α=0.729; and 4.3 percent, α=0.722 respectively). These three factors measure hoteliers' orientation to better satisfy customers' needs, to constantly track customer satisfaction (Customer), to respond fast to competitors' moves (Market), to use service as base of competitive advantage (Service). The final dimension, labeled "Benevolence towards other operators" (2.6 percent of the variance, α= 0.761), consists of three items related to the belief that partners in the network can count on each other on important issues, when circumstances change, and in the future.

Looking at the means of the factors (last column of table 1), the driver with the highest rate is "Customer orientation" (mean value 4.28), followed by "Benefits achievable through bundling" (mean value 3.95) and "Trust in the integrity of other operators" (mean value 3.927). This finding is consistent with previous studies (Gopalan & Narayan, 2005; Fyall & Garrod, 2005; Go & Appleman, 2001). Tourists are becoming more experienced and more discerning, and this leads to an increase in their expectations towards the tourism experience. The multifaceted nature of the tourism experience has stimulated operators to develop relationships with several stakeholders to provide a complete solution to customers' needs (Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006).

Four clusters of hoteliers

A cluster analysis was operated to classify hoteliers into exclusive segments on the basis of the hoteliers' scores on the10 factors identified in the factor analysis. The K-means clustering algorithm resulted in a four-cluster solution, which appeared as the most appropriate. Table 2 shows the summary statistics of the four clusters.

Table 2. Cluster analysis outcome

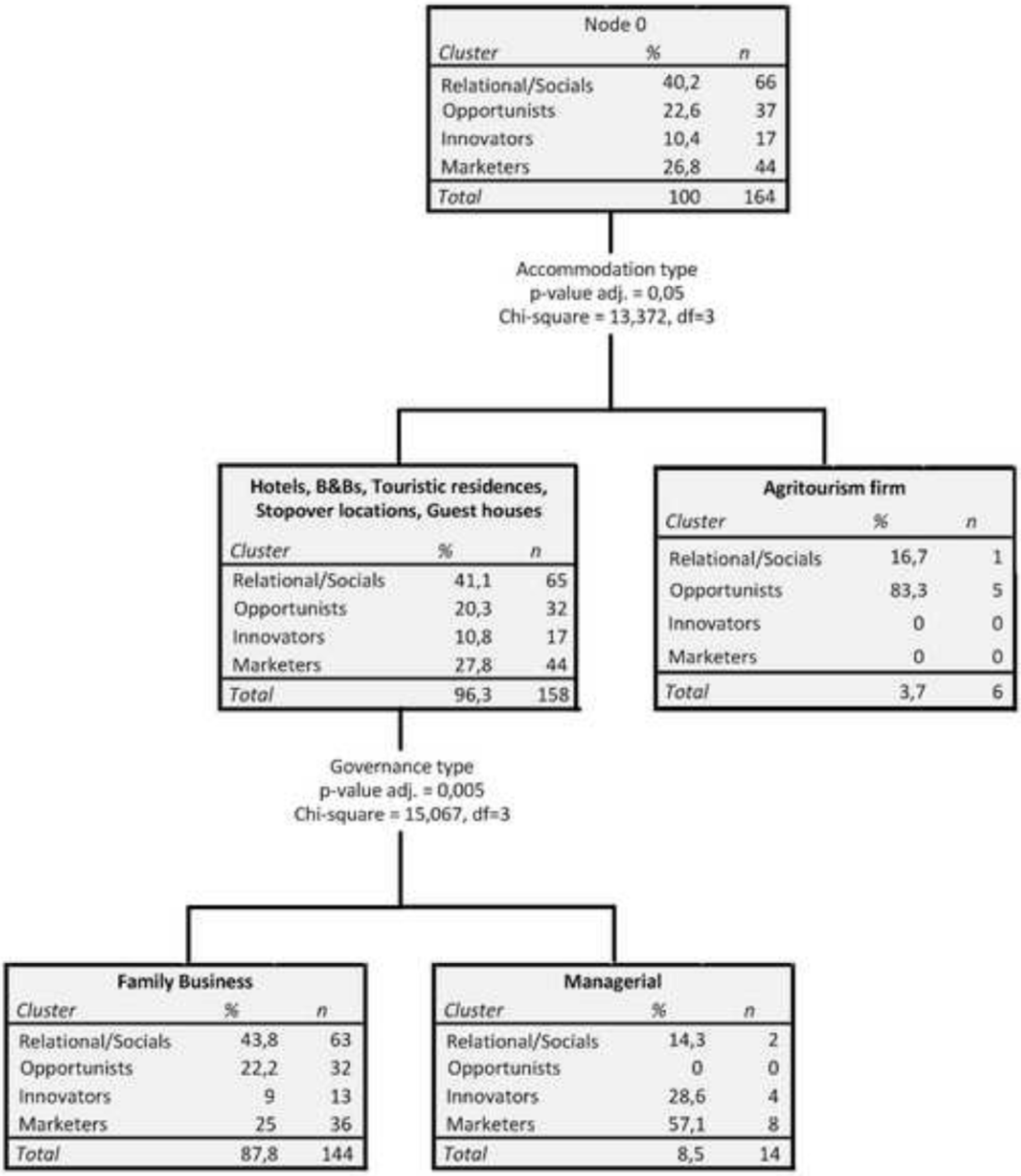
	Cluster 1 (n=66)	Cluster 2 (n=37)	Cluster 3 (n=17)	Cluster 4 (n=44)	F value	Sig.
Benefits achievable	-.17391	.40537	-.46420	.09933	4.305	.006
Innovativeness	-.11317	-.64635	1.40014	.17231	24.241	.000
Past experience	.50090	-.01018	-.15792	-.68178	15.903	.000
Information sharing	.27954	-.40802	.30033	-.19224	5.198	.002
Integrity	.44441	-.43596	-1.01115	.09066	16.108	.000
Willingness to learn	-.07012	-.43102	-.01626	.47391	6.245	.000
Customer orientation	-.23369	-.08259	-.02111	.42815	4.212	.007
Market orientation	-.12297	-.29347	-.35824	.56965	7.734	.000
Service orientation	.23066	-.70574	-.44879	.42087	13.620	.000
Benevolence	-.20526	.48622	-.92390	.25598	11.504	.000
Cluster name	Relational/ Socials	Opportunists	Innovators	Marketers Market driven		

The four clusters have rather different sizes. Cluster 1 is the biggest (66 hoteliers, 40 percent of the total) and includes hoteliers whose main drivers to cooperate are past experience in networking and trust in the integrity of the other operators. We have labeled this segment as Relational/Socials to signify their willingness to create new partnerships on the base of previous experience and with operators they really trust. Hoteliers belonging to the second cluster (n=37, 22.5 percent) are called Opportunists because they appear to be interested mainly in the benefits achievable through service bundling and in the possibility of counting on other operators' support when needed. The smallest cluster (n=17, 10.4 percent) includes the Innovators, hoteliers for whom service bundling is a way to pursue innovation. They are driven mainly by the search for innovation and seem to care less for trust and benevolence towards the other operators of the network. The final segment is cluster 4, the Marketers/Market driven (n=44, 26.8 percent), which includes hoteliers who tend to focus much more on external than on internal drivers. They consider service bundling as opportunities to learn through knowledge sharing, and look at customers and market trends as a source of new ideas.

4.3.Clusters' profiles

CHAID algorithm clearly shows which segmentation variables profile best the four segments of hoteliers. The resulting tree is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. CHAID tree of hoteliers



The first splitting variable is accommodation type (x2 =13.372, d.f.=3, p=0.05), which separates the small number of agritourism firms from all the other hoteliers. Almost all these operators belong to the segment of the Opportunistic operators, i.e. hoteliers mainly driven to collaborate by benefits achievable through bundling and by benevolence towards other operators.

A possible explanation of this phenomenon depends on start-up motivations and goals of agritourism owners and on the features of their guests. Several authors discussed the topic of start-up motivations in rural tourism. Most of them distinguish between economic benefits and non-economic benefits such as personal, social or family benefits related to the start-up of an agritourism firm (Nickerson, Black, & McCool, 2001; Sharpley & Vass, 2006; Tew & Barbieri, 2012). In particular, according to Getz and Carlsen (2000), lifestyle goals are twice more frequent when considering rural businesses. Ingram (2002) points out that another motivation is related to the opportunity to meet new people that share the common interest for nature and tranquility, enjoying the rural lifestyle. Agritourism firms offer to their guests a place to relax and to live an authentic rural experience, breaking out of the city routine. Their customers look for simplicity, tradition and genuineness in their tourism experience. This is why agritourism firms approach the bundling practice only if it could represent a real economic benefit for their activity through the generation of additional revenues. Moreover, the typical agritourism guest is less demanding and used to concentrate its holidays on very short period. In fact the average length of stay is around 2.8 days in VDA (Data from Assessorato al Turismo Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta, 2011) and has significantly decreased in the last decade, registering a -20 percent from 1997 to 2006 (Istat, 2008). Thus the average length of staying at an agritourism accommodation is shorter than one at other type of accommodations. The average length of stay in VdA is 3.24 days (3.12 days in hotels and 5.3 days in RTA). Moreover, another factor that impact on this phenomenon is the great instability that characterizes the business activity in VDA agritourism sector. The number of agritourism firms has definitely grown in the last two decades, from 27 in 1991 to 42 in 2011(Data from Assessorato al Turismo Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta, 2011). However, several openings and closings succeed one another each year: since 2000, 26 new agritourism firms have been created, 15 just in the last 5 years. Their birth has been more stimulated by the influence of regional laws (see also Pulina, Dettori, & Paba, 2006) and by public incentives offered to support the development of this type of tourism activity, than by tradition and experience in hospitality. As such, service bundling represents for agritourism firms a less critical competitive weapon, unless it leads to immediate economic benefits.

The second splitting variable is governance type ($x2= 15.067$, d.f.= 3, $p= 0.005$), which separates family businesses from managerial governance. Family businesses are the largest percentage of hoteliers in VDA: they represent 88 percent of all operators except agritourism firms, while if we include this accomodation typology the percentage rises to

91.5 percent. Family businesses are included in all the four clusters, representing more than ¾ of hoteliers in VDA; even if their presence is relative higher in the two clusters of the Relational/Socials and of the Opportunists (95 and 86 percent of the hoteliers are family businesses, respectively). Being a family-run business does not pair with a specific attitude towards networking orientation, which confirms that demographic variables are very poor a-priori segmentation variables also in service industries (Andereck & Caldwell, 1994). Of the 14 hoteliers characterized by managerial governance, 8 belong to the segment of the Market driven, and 4 to the segment of the Innovators. Being an hotelier with managerial governance makes the difference in terms of service bundling orientation: managers appear to be more outer-directed, more open to market stimuli; they are also more prone to innovate and consider service bundling as an opportunity to learn and as an effective tool for innovation to better satisfy their customers.

Conclusions and implications for tourism operators and stakeholders

One of the fundamental challenges that affect SMEs in the tourism industry is related to the paradox of supply fragmentation versus the demand of “all-in-one” experience by tourists (d’Angella & Go, 2009). More than ever, customers are becoming experience-centric in the tourism industry (Pine &Gilmore, 1999; Uriely, 2005; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

Collaboration among tourism operators represents a powerful tool to overcome the structural limitations of this industry and to create the perception of a whole destination in tourists mind (Dev & Klein, 1993; Chathoth, 2004). Several types of partnerships can be developed in a destination context. One among them is service bundling, which is becoming more and more common nowadays. The creation of tourism packages requires the development of collaborative skills among the operators involved in such a partnership and different motivations drive the delivery of a jointly developed bundle of services.

In this study we explore this particular type of partnership based on collaboration, considering the hoteliers’ side and investigating the motivations behind their natural networking orientation. In general, networking orientation is a complex construct and several authors focused their research on factors that can contribute or obstacle the development of collaboration among tourism operators (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Bramwell & Sherman, 1999; Hill & Shaw, 1995; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Palmer, 1998; Palmer & Bejou, 1995; Selin, 1993; Selin & Beason, 1991; Selin & Myers, 1998; Tremblay, 2000; Medina-Munoz & Garcia-Falcon, 2000; Pansiri, 2008; Beritelli, 2011).

Our factor analysis confirms the multidimensionality of hoteliers’ networking orientation, when analyzing the service bundling practice. We identify 10 factors that contribute to hoteliers' networking orientation, which include functional benefits of bundling, hoteliers' innovativeness, willingness to share information among partners, willingness to learn from partners, trust in other operators, evaluation of previous collaborative experiences and openness to market stimuli. In particular, customer orientation, benefits achievable through service bundling and trust in the integrity of other operators are the factor with higher mean scores. These factors represent the foundation for the choice of getting involved in a package development.

Due to the variety of motivations underlying networking orientation, operators strongly differ in approaching the bundling practice. Through a cluster analysis and a subsequent profiling through a CHAID analysis, we define 4 different clusters of hoteliers: the Relational-Socials, the Opportunists, the Innovators, and the Marketers. The Relational-Socials cluster includes the 40 percent of hoteliers, representing the largest cluster. These hoteliers are naturally prone to relationships creation and development. They consider trust in the integrity of other operators as one of the most important drivers of networking orientation and they also carefully evaluate the experience related to established and past relationships, when considering the opportunity to join new collaborative partnerships. Another large cluster is the Marketers' one (27 percent of hoteliers). These hoteliers are the most open to outside stimuli, taking cues from the market and developing collaborative relationship to satisfy customers' needs. The cluster of the Innovators represent the less crowded one and includes hoteliers who look forward and interpret the service bundling practice as an innovation that allows them to be precursors in better satisfying their customers.

Our study offers some points of reflection on agritourism firms that were classified as Opportunists. The CHAID analysis clearly separates this type of accommodation from the others. Our analysis states that agritourism owners are mainly driven by benefits achievable through service bundling. This fact could be a consequence of the motivations behind the startup of an agritourism firm combined to a legislative factor that translate into a great instability of this sector (high number of new born activities and buried ones). Their attitude towards collaboration is driven by functional benefits and not by the opportunity to develop long term relationships with other operators in the destination. Because of this dynamicity, it's difficult to predict which could be the future orientation towards collaboration, as they become older and more experienced.

The CHAID analysis underlines another important splitting variable, which is governance type. Most of businesses in VDA are family-run. This is a typical feature of the global tourism industry, and even more typical in the Italian economic system, which is highly based on SMEs. Considering their predominance as a governance type, family businesses are present in all four clusters. Therefore their networking orientation is poorly explained by business and firm features. In the case of family businesses, networking orientation is more related to personal characteristics of the owner(s) and strongly relies on its (their) personal network(s). On one side, the high density of family businesses is surely a source of competitive advantage because of the intimate relationship that is created and grows between customers and hoteliers, but on the other side it decreases stimuli in looking outward and consequently to innovation. It is symptomatic that all accommodations run by a managerial governance are much more outward looking, and belong to the segment of the Marketers and to the segment of the Innovators.

Our study offers some interesting insights on networking orientation considering a small and winter tourism based region such as VDA, in which Public Administration (PA) plays a fundamental role for tourism promotion and destination development. PA usually represents a crucial stakeholder in a destination development (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003; Dredge, 2006). Analyzing the different motivations that animate tourism operators, and in particular hoteliers, PA should develop policies that support and stimulate collaboration among tourism operators, providing incentives to joint initiatives and promoting this type of partnership to improve the tourism experience in a destination. Despite a good response rate (22%), our sample could be improved in terms of selection procedure. A quota sample could give an adequate representation to small but significant segments of hoteliers, like managerial type ones and agritourism which show some distinguishing features. To generalize these findings the study could be replicate in similar destinations such as Rhone Alps or South Tyrol, or in destinations characterized by different size, seasonality and culture. Another path for future research could be a longitudinal study aimed at tracking the change (or the stability) of hoteliers' networking orientation, and to test if this orientation changes with changes in the tourists' demand.

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Section 2: Service Bundling and Destination Branding

Conclusions of section 2

These papers focus on one of the main avenues through which tourism organizations develop the competitiveness and equity of a place: service bundling. This practice consist in the creation and the supply of tourism packages and it is gaining popularity in the tourism industry. In order to create effective service bundles, cooperation within the tourism destinations becomes critical and has a positive impact on the image of places, since it helps the destination in being perceived as unique and well-connected. Collaboration represents a key to overcome the fragmentation of the tourism industry and to better satisfy the more and more experience-centric tourist. Tourism operators are thus increasingly involved in various types of collaborative partnerships.

The first study investigates the impact of perceived benefits (economic and relational) achievable through service bundling on hoteliers' orientation to networking. Outcomes highlight that trust mediates the relationship between relational benefits and networking orientation. Trust, thus, represents a platform that enables cooperation among tourism operators in order to structure their activities and to invest their resources in the creation and offering of a joint tourism product.

This analysis has been further deepened by considering separately the perception of relational and of economic benefits related to the bundling practice. Collected data confirm that trust mediates the relationship between perceived relational benefits and networking orientation. The development of trust among operators generates positive effects on their reputation and on their image: trust therefore is a mean to solve the problems of interdependence and uncertainty in cooperative relationships are solved (Lui et al., 2006).

Another interesting result is the significant impact of operators' innovativeness, which mediates the relationship between perceived economic benefits and networking orientation. Trust is proved not to play a mediation role between Economic benefits and Networking orientation, role which is taken, instead, by Innovativeness. Hoteliers' perception of economic benefits related to the practice of service bundling improves their innovative skills and abilities and thus increases their innovativeness. High level of

Innovativeness, in turn, leads to a higher level of Networking orientation. Hoteliers who consider the service bundling practice beneficial under the economic point of view, will improve their innovation skills in order to build a package. It means that the perception of an economic benefit related to the possibility of offering a package has a positive impact on the hoteliers' capacity to innovate. Moreover, the increase in the level of innovativeness flows in a greater openness to cooperation of these forward-looking operators.

The second study analyzes the drivers underlying the development of service bundling and provides a segmentation of the hospitality industry according to operators' networking orientation. Four clusters of hoteliers are identified and profiled: the Relational/Socials, the Opportunists, the Innovators and the Marketers. Each of them shows a peculiar approach to collaboration and reveals different motivations to be engaged in a partnership. This study offers some interesting insights on networking orientation considering a small and winter tourism based region such as VDA, in which Public Administration (PA) plays a fundamental role for tourism promotion and destination development. PA usually represents a crucial stakeholder in a destination development (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003; Dredge, 2006).

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Appendix

Original Italian version of paper 1

SAGGI

PREFERENZE DEI CONSUMATORI E CERTIFICAZIONI DI ORIGINE: UN'INDAGINE DEL CASO DELLA FONTINA TRAMITE LA *CONJOINT ANALYSIS*

Christian Garavaglia, Elena Maria Marcoz***

Riassunto

Lo scopo del lavoro consiste nell'analisi delle scelte di consumo in presenza di determinati set informativi, con particolare attenzione rivolta all'influenza esercitata dalla presenza delle certificazioni di origine sulle decisioni di acquisto. Dall'analisi empirica condotta in riferimento al consumo della Fontina, è emerso come la certificazione DOP abbia un peso rilevante nelle scelte di acquisto. Inoltre, l'analisi quantifica l'incremento di prezzo che i consumatori sono disposti a pagare per la presenza di tale certificazione. I risultati evidenziano, infine, l'esistenza di differenze territoriali nella diversa importanza che tale caratteristica riveste in funzione della residenza degli intervistati, a testimonianza della differenza di segnale di garanzia di qualità ricercato nelle diverse aree geografiche.

Parole chiave: DOP, prodotti alimentari, *conjoint analysis, consumer behavior,* prodotti tipici.

Abstract

Consumer preferences and certification of origin: a conjoint analysis on Fontina cheese

This paper analyses consumers purchasing decisions when specific information sets occur. In particular, we study the value of PDO certification and its impact on consumer's preferences and willingness to pay. The results show that the PDO certification has a substantial importance in consumers' purchasing decisions. As a consequence, consumers recognise a premium price to products with PDO. Finally, we find a dif-

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ference towards PDO certification evaluation, according to the consumers' town of residence (Milan or Aosta): the interpretation of this result is related to the difference in the quality guarantee indicator in the two towns, more connected to the origin of the product in Aosta and to the presence of certification in Milan.

Keywords: PDO, food products, conjoint analysis, consumer behavior, typical products.

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Introduzione

Negli ultimi decenni il consumo di prodotti alimentari ha mostrato cambiamenti sostanziali, legati principalmente all'evoluzione del significato attribuito al loro acquisto, utilizzo e consumo. Ai giorni nostri, l'approvvigionamento di cibo non rappresenta più una semplice risposta a bisogni fisiologici (Cullen, 1994). L'importante cambiamento delle dinamiche alla base del consumo alimentare dipende soprattutto dal diverso atteggiamento assunto dai consumatori, sempre più attenti, informati ed esigenti, che ha causato uno spostamento significativo della domanda verso i prodotti alimentari ritenuti genuini e di qualità (Sabbe *et al.*, 2009). Le tendenze nella domanda (Nomisma, 2003) confermano che i consumatori dei paesi avanzati sono sempre più sensibili alla sicurezza e alla qualità in ambito alimentare e risultano quindi essere disposti a pagare un prezzo più elevato per i prodotti che presentano tali caratteristiche.

Le certificazioni di origine territoriale (DOP, IGT, IGP, DOCG, DOC) rappresentano uno dei modi di segnalazione di qualità e di differenziazione dei prodotti. La presenza di tali certificazioni conferisce al consumatore un'utilità positiva, derivante dalla garanzia di sicurezza alimentare e genuinità, autenticità e rispetto della tradizione. L'origine territoriale evoca, infine, valori ambientali, poiché certifica che il prodotto è stato realizzato secondo precisi standard. Il modello elaborato da Moschini *et al.* (2007) evidenzia proprio come i consumatori siano disposti a riconoscere un incremento di prezzo a fronte di una maggiore qualità percepita per i prodotti con certificazione di origine. La certificazione DOP sarebbe così considerata un sistema credibile di segnalazione della qualità, dal momento che si avvale di idonei meccanismi di controllo ed è regolamentata a livello istituzionale, anche se alcuni autori sollevano dubbi sulla effettiva capacità di segnalare la qualità di tali marchi (Grunert, 2005).

In linea con la tradizione lancasteriana (Lancaster, 1971), l'analisi proposta in questo articolo considera un prodotto come l'insieme di diversi attributi e caratteristiche. I consumatori traggono utilità dal consumo di un prodotto in quanto hanno preferenze e traggono utilità dall'insieme di caratteristiche che definiscono il prodotto stesso. L'attributo differenziale su cui si focalizza il presente lavoro è la certificazione DOP, variabile dicotomica la cui presenza (o assenza) incide sul grado di predilezione del consumatore.

Il prodotto di riferimento della nostra indagine è la Fontina. Si è deciso di prendere in esame un prodotto tipico locale che, a differenza di altri più affermati e conosciuti sul mercato nazionale ed internazionale, non fosse ancora stato oggetto di specifiche analisi. Numerosi sono in Italia e all'estero gli alimenti certificati per i quali esistono ampi spazi di valorizzazione, prodotti che spesso non sono molto noti al di fuori della regione in cui vengono realizzati, ma che hanno un grande potenziale di crescita. Solo in Italia i formaggi certificati DOP sono quarantuno[1], alcuni molto affermati, come il Grana Padano e il Parmigiano Reggiano, altri molto meno diffusi, come la Fontina.

In particolare, il nostro lavoro analizza le preferenze dei consumatori nel caso della Fontina, focalizzandosi sull'influenza esercitata dalla certificazione DOP sulle decisioni di acquisto e consumo. Il contributo originale dei risultati ottenuti consiste:

- nel fornire supporto empirico agli studi sull'importanza delle certificazioni di origine,
- nel definire una stima della disponibilità a pagare per tali certificazioni,
- nell'evidenziare differenze territoriali nelle percezioni dei consumatori, che si rivelano utili per implementare oculate strategie di marketing da parte dei produttori,
- nello studio di un prodotto (Fontina) diffuso ma sinora poco analizzato.

Nel prosieguo del lavoro, al paragrafo 2 è presentata una rassegna della letteratura rilevante, nel paragrafo 3 viene esposta l'impostazione metodologica dell'analisi empirica, nel paragrafo 4 si descrive brevemente il campione, nel paragrafo 5 sono descritti i profili dei consumatori individuati dall'analisi multivariata, nel paragrafo 6 è analizzata la disponibilità a pagare per la certificazione DOP ed infine nel paragrafo 7 sono proposte alcune considerazioni conclusive.

1. Letteratura rilevante

Nell'atto delle scelte di consumo di prodotti alimentari, i consumatori sono guidati dalle proprie percezioni sensoriali riguardanti le proprietà in-

1. Situazione aggiornata al regolamento (CE) n. 121/2010.

trinseche del bene così come dalle caratteristiche estrinseche dello stesso (Busacca, 2004; Lee *et al*., 2006; Bello Acebrón e Calvo Dopico, 2000; Goldstein *et al*., 2008; Shankar *et al*., 2009). Le proprietà intrinseche sono proprietà interne non percepibili del prodotto, come qualità, sicurezza, rispetto degli standard, mentre le proprietà estrinseche fanno riferimento alle caratteristiche esterne di un prodotto, tangibili e visibili, quali colore, forma, etichette. L'informazione riferita a tali caratteristiche estrinseche, non sensoriali, esercita un'importante influenza sulle scelte di acquisto. In particolare, in riferimento a prodotti che presentano caratteristiche tipiche da *credence attributes* (Grunert, 2005), ossia attributi che un consumatore può non essere in grado di conoscere neppure a seguito dell'acquisto e del consumo, il set informativo a disposizione dei consumatori sulle caratteristiche estrinseche assume un ruolo cruciale nell'influenzare le loro preferenze. Considerate le difficoltà nel valutare l'effettiva genuinità dei prodotti alimentari, si ritiene che tali prodotti presentino una chiara caratterizzazione da *credence goods* (Rangnekar, 2004). Proprio questa incapacità di esprimere una corretta valutazione su caratteristiche, cui è attribuita sempre maggiore importanza, porta gli individui a cercare informazioni, garanzie e rassicurazioni esterne, che li aiutino a scegliere quali beni consumare: le certificazioni di origine territoriale ne sono un esempio.

L'etichettatura dei prodotti alimentari assume a tutti gli effetti il ruolo di strumento di aiuto diretto nelle decisioni di acquisto, tanto che Annunziata (2009) la definisce come un'indispensabile fonte di informazione e, molto spesso, il principale strumento tramite cui i consumatori valutano gli attributi di un prodotto che altrimenti non potrebbero conoscere. L'etichettatura rappresenta lo strumento centrale per segnalare la qualità dei prodotti agroalimentari e migliora il flusso informativo tra produttore e consumatore.

Numerose ricerche (Allison e Uhl, 1964; Bello Acebrón e Calvo Dopico, 2000; Waskin *et al.*, 2000; Baker e Mazzocco, 2005; Orth *et al*., 2005; Lee *et al.*, 2006; Lentz *et al.*, 2006; Kim, 2008; Stasi *et al.*, 2008; Veale, 2008; Veale e Quester, 2009a, 2009b; Bernabéu *et al*., 2010; Cavicchi *et al.*, 2010; Fait, 2010; Menapace *et al.*, 2011) hanno analizzato l'impatto delle informazioni estrinseche e intrinseche nell'influenzare le decisioni dei consumatori nell'ambito di diverse discipline, come marketing quantitativo, economia e psicologia sperimentale, analisi sensoriale. Molti di questi studi si sono focalizzati proprio sui prodotti alimentari e bevande. Tra questi, il paper seminale di Allison e Uhl (1964) mostra che i consumatori di birra non sono in grado di riconoscere la loro marca preferita in un *blind test* e che la percezione delle caratteristiche delle diverse birre è legata più alle caratteristiche legate al marketing che alle effettive differenze intrinseche dei prodotti. Lee *et al.* (2006) mostrano come la valutazione dei consumatori per una birra degustata prima e poi con aggiunta di aceto balsamico dipenda in maniera significativa dal set informativo a disposizione del consumatore. Waskin *et al.* (2000), in un esperimento condotto su 155 consumatori, esaminano il ruolo delle informazioni fornite in etichetta nell'influenzare la percezione dei consumatori; ai partecipanti sono state sottoposte all'assaggio 4 barrette nutritive, fornendo per ognuna una diversa combinazione di due informazioni in etichetta: presenza o meno di soia e presenza o meno di un'indicazione di prodotto salutare sulla confezione[2], come se fossero 4 prodotti diversi, mentre in realtà erano tutti lo stesso prodotto. Ne emerge che una specifica informazione presente in etichetta è in grado di modificare la percezione del bene, a seconda delle specifiche preferenze del consumatore.

Tra le caratteristiche estrinseche le informazioni relative all'origine dei prodotti sembrano esercitare un ruolo cruciale sulle scelte di consumo. L'indicazione relativa al luogo di origine incrementa la qualità percepita dai consumatori al punto da essere ritenuta un indicatore di qualità più affidabile persino delle caratteristiche intrinseche dell'alimento: gli studi di Veale e Quester (2008; 2009a; 2009b) condotti sul vino e sul formaggio Brie rivelano, infatti, come, anche dopo aver assaggiato i prodotti, molti consumatori continuino ad affidarsi maggiormente all'origine territoriale di questi alimenti per valutarne la qualità, piuttosto che a far affidamento sul proprio gusto. L'origine territoriale gioca il ruolo di sostituto dell'informazione anche facendosi carico di garantire il consumatore circa la sicurezza alimentare, riducendo la percezione del rischio legata al consumo degli alimenti (Kim, 2008; Garavaglia, 2010). Tali risultati sono confermati in diversi studi relativamente a vari prodotti: formaggi (Bernabéu *et al*., 2010), birra (Lentz *et al.*, 2006), vino (Orth *et al*., 2005). Una ricerca interessante a tal proposito è svolta da Darby *et al.* (2008), che esamina l'impatto esercitato dall'origine (produzione locale) di un prodotto alimentare sulle scelte di consumo, tramite l'impiego della *conjoint analysis*. In particolare, in riferimento al prodotto fragole, gli autori mostrano come i consumatori attribuiscano un valore superiore al prodotto la cui origine risulti chiaramente indicata e vicina al luogo d'acquisto. Risulta così evidente come l'indicazione dell'origine territoriale assuma il ruolo di sostituto di altre informazioni, facendosi carico di garantire ai consumatori la genuinità dei prodotti e rassicurandoli in merito alla loro qualità, influenzandone le scelte di consumo. Inoltre, la ricerca mostra come per questi prodotti la disponibilità a pagare dei consumatori incrementi significativamente. In riferimento a ciò, particolarmente interessante è il cosiddetto effetto *made in* (Roth e Romeo, 1992): il luogo di origine dei prodotti è non solamente veicolo di informazioni, ma anche un fattore in grado di influenzare le percezioni dei consumatori e la loro propensione all'acquisto. La causa di queste differenze può essere ricondotta al *country origin effect,* in base a cui l'immagine

2. In etichetta: "riduce il rischio di problemi cardiaci" oppure nessuna scritta.

del territorio di origine del prodotto impatta sul comportamento del consumatore.

In aggiunta alle informazioni relative al luogo di origine dei prodotti, negli ultimi anni si è molto sviluppata la diffusione dei marchi di certificazione di origine territoriale. L'Unione Europea ha creato alcuni strumenti di tutela che certificano la qualità del prodotto sfruttando anche il suo legame con il territorio, come le "denominazioni di origine protetta" DOP e la "indicazione geografica protetta" IGP, istituite con il Reg. CEE 2081/92, recentemente sostituito dal Reg. CE 510/2006. Queste certificazioni garantiscono la territorialità e la tipicità dei prodotti e sono un chiaro esempio di segnalazione pubblica con cui si ha lo scopo di fornire ai consumatori informazioni relativamente a genuinità, provenienza, sicurezza del prodotto.

In letteratura, Cavicchi *et al.* (2010) mostrano come in presenza di un marchio DOP in sessioni sperimentali riguardanti il formaggio "Pecorino di Fossa", i consumatori attribuiscano valutazioni maggiori rispetto al formaggio presentato esclusivamente con marchio aziendale. Baker e Mazzocco (2005) sottolineano come la certificazione di origine svolga un ruolo preponderante nella scelta dei consumatori, tanto da esercitare un'influenza superiore rispetto alle marche note. Per svolgere questa indagine utilizzano la *conjoint analysis* ed evidenziano come per molti consumatori la marca nota rappresenti già un'adeguata garanzia di qualità e sicurezza, ma una certificazione esterna e ufficiale sia comunque percepita come maggiormente affidabile. Fait (2010) conduce un'altra interessante indagine sul settore vinicolo: studiando il livello di notorietà e l'immagine di alcuni territori vinicoli italiani l'autrice ha rilevato che il consumatore ha mediamente una buona percezione della relazione territorio-vino (*brand-land awareness*) ed il richiamo alla memoria di questa non avviene sempre attraverso singoli *brand* ma più spesso in relazione alle denominazioni di origine. Molti altri autori hanno studiato la rilevanza delle certificazioni di origine come driver delle scelte di acquisto e consumo (Mesías *et al.*, 2010; Fotopoulos e Krystallis, 2003; Krystallis e Chryssohoidis, 2005). Monjardino de Souza Monteiro e Ventura Lucas (2001), ad esempio, studiano l'impatto della certificazione DOP sulle preferenze dei consumatori per l'acquisito di un tipico formaggio di Lisbona, confrontando la certificazione con altri attributi. Il marchio DOP risulta essere l'attributo giudicato di gran lunga più rilevante dal 56% del campione intervistato. Tendero e Bernabéu (2005), studiando il mercato spagnolo dei formaggi, evidenziano inoltre che le denominazioni di origine, rassicurando il consumatore in merito al luogo di produzione, fungono principalmente da garanzie di sicurezza alimentare.

Se l'origine dei prodotti è quindi rilevante, la certificazione territoriale risulta essere il modo più efficace per veicolarla. La nostra indagine intende verificare questo fenomeno (HP1), analizzando l'effettivo peso che la denominazione di origine protetta esercita sulle scelte dei consumatori di Fontina.

Un ulteriore importante aspetto relativo alle preferenze dei consumatori consiste nello studio di quanto i consumatori siano disposti a pagare per la presenza o meno di determinate caratteristiche, e/o informazioni, in un prodotto. Stasi *et al.* (2008) svolgono uno studio in cui valutano le preferenze dei consumatori nei confronti delle principali informazioni che possono essere presenti sulle etichette dei vini. Tanto maggiore è l'importanza riconosciuta alle informazioni in esame tanto maggiore risulta la disponibilità a riconoscere un *premium price* per i prodotti che le offrono. Dalla loro analisi emerge come la classificazione italiana dei vini che vede in cima alla piramide i vini DOCG, DOC e IGT sia uno strumento efficace per segnalare la qualità, dato che a fronte di tali certificazioni aumenta la disponibilità a pagare dei consumatori. Moschini *et al.* (2007) presentano un modello in cui mostrano come le certificazioni territoriali consentano una differenziazione verticale dei prodotti alimentari: i consumatori riconoscono i prodotti certificati come prodotti di qualità superiore e, consci del fatto che la certificazione comporta dei costi volti appunto a garantire la maggiore qualità dei prodotti, sono disposti a riconoscere un incremento di prezzo.

Da queste considerazioni emerge la nostra seconda ipotesi (HP2): nel nostro studio vogliamo quantificare la *willingness to pay* (WTP) dei consumatori per presenza della certificazione nel prodotto oggetto di analisi.

Infine, ad eccezione di alcune ricerche (Van Der Lans *et al.*, 2001), la letteratura presenta una certa carenza nell'indagare le differenze territoriali nelle preferenze dei consumatori. Van Der Lans *et al.* (2001), ad esempio, studiano le preferenze dei consumatori italiani per le caratteristiche dell'olio extra vergine di oliva: i consumatori residenti nella regione in cui l'olio oggetto di analisi è prodotto appaiono più sensibili all'origine del prodotto rispetto ai consumatori residenti in altre regioni. La nostra terza ipotesi (HP 3) è volta ad approfondire questo aspetto, fornendo uno studio su come la Fontina e le sue caratteristiche siano diversamente valutate dai consumatori residenti nel luogo di produzione (Valle d'Aosta) e altrove (Milano).

In conclusione, la presente indagine è volta ad analizzare le preferenze dei consumatori nel caso della Fontina e sottopone a verifica empirica le tre seguenti ipotesi:

- HP1) La certificazione DOP influenza le preferenze dei consumatori.
- (HP2) Un prodotto con certificazione DOP determina un incremento della WTP dei consumatori.
- (HP3) Esistono differenze territoriali nelle preferenze dei consumatori per le certificazioni DOP.

L'analisi empirica è realizzata mediante la raccolta di dati originali e la loro elaborazione con tecniche di analisi statistica.

Testando la nostra prima ipotesi (HP1), intendiamo misurare il peso effettivo esercitato sulle preferenze dei consumatori di Fontina. Intendiamo quindi verificare che alla presenza di certificazione corrisponda un incremento nella WTP dei consumatori (HP2) e controllare se esistono differenze territoriali nella manifestazione di tali fenomeni (HP3). L'obiettivo del presente lavoro e il contributo che intendiamo apportare consiste nel comprendere in che modo alcuni attributi "*credence*" contribuiscano alla percezione complessiva del valore dell'offerta e come tale percezione vari in funzione delle differenze territoriali.

2. Metodologia

Dopo aver redatto un questionario di analisi al fine di individuare gli attributi rilevanti dei formaggi e in particolar modo della Fontina (Lawlor e Delahunty, 2000; Harrington *et al*., 2010; Mathiou, 1974), abbiamo strutturato un primo questionario pilota, successivamente modificato e validato attraverso un'analisi qualitativa, svolta effettuando otto interviste in profondità di circa 30 minuti l'una. Due interviste sono state fatte a produttori di Fontina; due a membri dell'ONAF (Organizzazione Nazionale Assaggiatori di Formaggi); due a rivenditori valdostani e due a rivenditori di Milano. Abbiamo chiesto agli esperti quali fossero le caratteristiche in base a cui la Fontina si differenzia, abbiamo presentato loro il nostro questionario, chiedendo di compilarlo e commentarlo, con particolare attenzione gli attributi selezionati per definire i profili della *conjoint analysis* (Tabella 1). Le interviste sono state utili per redigere il questionario definitivo.

Nella struttura del questionario si distinguono tre parti. La prima consiste in otto diversi profili di offerta relativi ad una fetta di Fontina che agli intervistati è stato chiesto di valutare su una scala da 0 a 100. La seconda parte analizza le abitudini di acquisto, relativamente a: quantità media, luogo di acquisto e driver di scelta. Infine la terza parte presenta domande incentrate sulle caratteristiche anagrafiche dei soggetti intervistati.

Occorre precisare sin d'ora che il prodotto caseario denominato "Fontina" è un prodotto che necessariamente, per poter avere tale denominazione, deve essere realizzato in Valle d'Aosta e possedere il marchio DOP. Nel nostro lavoro abbiamo ipotizzato l'esistenza di un prodotto denominato Fontina senza certificazione DOP, al fine di quantificare la valutazione, in termini di preferenze dei consumatori, della presenza o meno di tale marchio.

Il questionario finale è stato sottoposto ad un campione casuale di 200 individui maggiorenni, consumatori di Fontina. La dimensione del campione rispetta il campionamento minimo (100-200 interviste) indicato da Quester and Smart (1998) per ottenere risultati affidabili dalla *conjoint analysis*. Il questionario prevede una prima domanda di sbarramento con cui si chiede esplicitamente all'intervistato se è un consumatore di Fontina. Solo in caso di risposta positiva l'intervista prosegue.

Cento questionari sono stati somministrati ad Aosta, provincia in cui la Fontina è prodotta, e cento a Milano. La Lombardia è la regione che acquista più Fontina (il 38% della produzione destinata al mercato italiano), seguita dalla Valle d'Aosta (20%)[3]. Abbiamo quindi deciso di studiare le differenze territoriali nelle preferenze dei consumatori focalizzando le nostre ricerche sulla provincia di produzione (Aosta) e sul capoluogo lombardo, dove la Fontina è ampiamente conosciuta e diffusa.

Il 34,5% delle rilevazioni è avvenuta all'interno di punti vendita della grande distribuzione organizzata (supermercati, ipermercati e discount), il 21% all'ingresso di negozi tradizionali specializzati, il 25% on-line e il restante 19,5% altrove. I punti vendita sono stati scelti casualmente al fine di limitare l'impiego di risorse temporali ed economiche.

Le informazioni contenute nei questionari sono state codificate con l'ausilio del software SPSS, applicando analisi univariate, bivariate e multivariate, utilizzando le tecniche di *conjoint* e *cluster analysis*.

La *conjoint analysis* è ampiamente utilizzata negli studi di marketing per valutare le preferenze dei consumatori (Hair *et al*., 1998). Numerosi autori utilizzano tale tecnica per esaminare le preferenze relative agli attributi di prodotti alimentari (Bernabéu *et al.*, 2008 e 2010; Darby *et al*., 2008; Kim, 2008; Veale e Quester, 2009). Nel nostro lavoro, con la *conjoint analysis*, stimiamo i valori di utilità associati ai diversi livelli degli attributi di un prodotto, disaggregando il giudizio globale espresso dai consumatori su un insieme di profili opportunamente selezionati. L'analisi congiunta consente di scindere tale giudizio e ricondurlo alle preferenze individuali per i singoli attributi e livelli esaminati.

Sono stati prese in esame 4 caratteristiche salienti del prodotto Fontina: stagionatura, certificazione DOP, origine e prezzo. Murphy *et al*. (2000) evidenziano come gli attributi della *conjoint analysis* dovrebbero includere gli attributi più rilevanti per il consumatore e quelli su cui il produttore abbia modo di intervenire. Sulla base di tali caratteristiche, tramite il disegno ortogonale, sono stati creati 8 profili da sottoporre ai consumatori (Tabella 1), relativi ciascuno ad una fetta di Fontina da 300 grammi.

3. *Fonte*: Cooperativa Produttori Latte e Fontina Società Cooperativa s.r.l. (2010).

Tab. 1 – Profili sottoposti al campione per una fetta di Fontina da trecento grammi

Profilo	Stagionatura	Certificazione DOP	Origine	Prezzo
1	vecchia	assente	alpeggio di alta montagna	4,2 euro
2	vecchia	presente	caseificio	5,1 euro
3	vecchia	presente	alpeggio di alta montagna	2,7 euro
4	giovane	presente	caseificio	4,2 euro
5	giovane	assente	caseificio	2,7 euro
6	giovane	assente	alpeggio di alta montagna	5,1 euro
7	giovane	presente	alpeggio di alta montagna	2,7 euro
8	vecchia	Assente	caseificio	2,7 euro

L'applicazione della *cluster analysis* consente infine di verificare se è possibile individuare segmenti omogenei di individui per dividere i consumatori in *n cluster* rilevanti. I cluster selezionati sono stati sottoposti a una profilazione, con riferimento alle variabili socio-demografiche e di consumo ritenute più rilevanti. L'algoritmo utilizzato è quello delle k-medie e gli input forniti per realizzare la *cluster analysis* sono i risultati precedentemente ottenuti con la *conjoint*, procedura utilizzata anche da altri autori in precedenti ricerche sulle preferenze dei consumatori (Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2003; Veale, 2008). Il metodo utilizzato è quello della segmentazione flessibile, che offre un vantaggio rispetto alla segmentazione classica: l'iter procedurale dell'analisi congiunta è più vicino al processo mentale che il consumatore segue nelle fasi di scelta.

3. Il campione

L'analisi descrittiva del campione fa riferimento alle caratteristiche degli intervistati in base a: sesso, età, professione e livello di istruzione.

Il 50% degli intervistati è di Aosta e il restante 50% di Milano. Il 45% del campione è di sesso maschile e il restante 55% di sesso femminile. Entrambi i sessi sono stati presi in considerazione dal momento che, come sottolineato da Belletti e Marescotti (1996), l'incremento del lavoro femminile ha comportato una deresponsabilizzazione delle donne circa l'approvvigionamento alimentare. Gli uomini sono quindi stati intervistati non solo in qualità di consumatori, ma anche in quanto acquirenti.

L'età degli intervistati varia tra i 19 e gli 80 anni e il livello di istruzione risulta elevato. In riferimento alle professioni svolte, i gruppi più rappresentativi sono quelli di impiegati/insegnanti (25%), studenti (18%) e casalinghe (15,5%).

4. Risultati dell'analisi multivariata: *conjoint analysis* e *cluster analysis*

I risultati della *conjoint analysis*, condotta in riferimento all'intero campione, evidenziano in Tabella 2 l'utilità[4] che deriva al consumatore da ciascun livello degli attributi considerati e, in Tabella 3, l'importanza relativa dei singoli attributi. Dai dati si evince che gli attributi che maggiormente determinano la scelta dei soggetti sono la presenza di certificazione DOP e l'origine del prodotto, dando così conferma alla nostra prima ipotesi (H1) di lavoro in base alla quale la presenza di una certificazione DOP influenza positivamente le preferenze dei consumatori: il consumatore considera la certificazione come un segnale di qualità, cercando di dedurre le proprietà intrinseche della Fontina a partire da quelle che Von Alvensleben (1989) definisce "informazioni chiave". I risultati, inoltre, mostrano come i consumatori preferiscano il prodotto realizzato in alpeggio, nei confronti del quale si manifesta un effetto *made in* positivo. Alpeggio e alti pascoli sono, infatti, associati alla tradizione, alla genuinità e salubrità dei prodotti, facendosi quindi portatori di significati che il consumatore desidera riscoprire attraverso il consumo di questo formaggio tipico. L'utilità del prezzo risulta inversamente proporzionale all'ammontare del prezzo stesso, il che indica la ricerca di convenienza e la predilezione, a parità di altre condizioni, del prezzo più basso. La stagionatura non incide profondamente sulla scelta, ma, complessivamente, risulta preferita la Fontina dalla stagionatura vecchia, tipicamente dal gusto più intenso.

Tab. 2 – Conjoint analysis applicata ai dati relativi all'intero campione

	UTILITIES	Utility Estimate	Std. Error
stagionatura	vecchia	0,417	0,178
	giovane	-0,417	0,178
certificazioneDOP	presente	17,862	0,178
	assente	-17,862	0,178
Origine	alpeggio di alta montagna	10,047	0,178
	caseificio	-10,047	0,178
Prezzo	2,7 euro	2,737	0,238
	4,2 euro	-0,114	0,279
	5,1 euro	-2,624	0,279
(Constant)		53,511	0,188

4. Applicando la *conjoint* è importante ricordare che i valori dei coefficienti riportati devono essere interpretati in senso relativo (come utilità maggiore o minore) e non in senso assoluto (un valore negativo non implica quindi "disutilità", ma significa che l'utilità in questione è più bassa rispetto ad un valore positivo o meno negativo).

Tab. 3 – Importanza degli items

IMPORTANCE VALUES	
stagionatura	1,344
certificazione DOP	57,607
Origine	32,403
Prezzo	8,645

Approfondendo l'analisi discriminando in riferimento alle variabili età, punto di vendita della Fontina, luogo di residenza emergono ulteriori interessanti risultati.

Relativamente all'età si nota come anche i più giovani attribuiscano alla presenza di certificazione DOP l'importanza relativa maggiore rispetto a quella riconosciuta alle altre caratteristiche del prodotto. Essi però traggono da questa caratteristica un'utilità significativamente più bassa rispetto agli individui di maggiore età. La fascia d'età più bassa è relativamente meno sensibile alla presenza della certificazione DOP: questi soggetti, probabilmente, sono coloro che necessitano di meno di essere rassicurati circa la qualità dei prodotti alimentari che consumano e non si curano molto della differenza tra origine e certificazione, considerandole come indicatori tra loro sostituibili. È, infatti, con l'avanzare dell'età che il consumatore diventa più esigente e sensibile alla sicurezza degli alimenti che consuma.

L'analisi incentrata sui diversi canali d'acquisto evidenzia come la presenza di certificazione sia l'attributo di gran lunga più importante per i consumatori che acquistano la Fontina nei supermercati, ai mercati e nei negozi specializzati. Il prezzo ha un peso rilevante per i primi due canali menzionati e decisamente più contenuto per coloro che acquistano abitualmente nei negozi specializzati, ma l'utilità di tutti questi consumatori risulta sempre inversamente proporzionale all'ammontare del prezzo. Diversa è la situazione per coloro che acquistano abitualmente la Fontina direttamente presso i produttori. La certificazione DOP ha un'importanza secondaria rispetto all'origine e il prezzo risulta direttamente proporzionale all'utilità tratta dai consumatori. La spiegazione di questo fenomeno è piuttosto semplice: i soggetti che utilizzano questo specifico canale d'acquisto sono quasi tutti residenti in Aosta. Essi, quindi, spesso conoscono di persona i produttori e la fiducia derivante dal rapporto interpersonale appare superiore a quella riposta nella certificazione DOP. In tale contesto, il prezzo diventa un indicatore di qualità, che contribuisce ad orientare le scelte di consumo (Milgrom e Roberts, 1986; Plassmann *et al.*, 2008).

Infine, un risultato interessante emerge facendo una distinzione per luogo di residenza. I residenti a Milano assegnano importanza massima alla presenza di certificazione DOP, mentre ad Aosta questa caratteristica, che è pur sempre rilevante, passa in secondo piano rispetto all'origine del prodotto. Si manifesta chiaramente un effetto *made in:* la qualità del prodotto è in Aosta associata principalmente al luogo di produzione, a Milano questa caratteristica è percepita in misura differente, considerata secondaria, e la qualità è, invece, ricondotta principalmente alla presenza di certificazione DOP. I residenti a Milano ripongono nella presenza di una certificazione DOP importanza primaria, come indicatore di qualità del prodotto. La differenza nel valore riconosciuto alla certificazione dagli abitanti di Aosta e Milano è a supporto della nostra terza ipotesi (HP3): differenze territoriali nella residenza dei consumatori si traducono in differenze percettive. In particolare la certificazione DOP diviene secondaria per i consumatori residenti nella regione di produzione. Tale risultato riveste una chiara importanza nelle scelte di marketing dei produttori, come sottolineiamo nelle conclusioni del lavoro. La Tabella 4 riporta le utilità relative a ciascun livello degli attributi presi in esame, e la Tabella 5 riassume l'importanza complessivamente attribuita agli attributi stessi.

Tab. 4 – Conjoint analysis split per luogo di residenza

			UTILITIES	
Luogo			**Utility Estimate**	**Std. Error**
Milano	stagionatura	vecchia	0,098	0,379
		giovane	-0,098	0,379
	certificazione DOP	presente	22,86	0,379
		assente	-22,86	0,379
	origine	alpeggio di alta montagna	6,283	0,379
		caseificio	-6,283	0,379
	prezzo	2,7 euro	4,193	0,506
		4,2 euro	-0,124	0,593
		5,1 euro	-4,069	0,593
	(Constant)		55,529	0,4
Aosta	stagionatura	vecchia	0,736	0,428
		giovane	-0,736	0,428
	certificazione DOP	presente	12,864	0,428
		assente	-12,864	0,428
	origine	alpeggio di alta montagna	13,811	0,428
		caseificio	-13,811	0,428
	prezzo	2,7 euro	1,282	0,571
		4,2 euro	-0,103	0,669
		5,1 euro	-1,178	0,669
	(Constant)		51,493	0,451

Tab. 5 – Importanza items split per luogo di residenza

IMPORTANCE VALUES		
Milano	stagionatura	0,292
	certificazione DOP	68,502
	origine	18,826
	prezzo	12,38
Aosta	stagionatura	2,571
	certificazione DOP	44,913
	origine	48,222
	prezzo	4,295

In conclusione possiamo rilevare come l'analisi metta in luce chiaramente che, nonostante esistano effettivamente importanti differenze nel modo in cui diversi individui percepiscono la qualità di uno stesso prodotto, i consumatori oggi necessitino di essere rassicurati in merito a ciò che consumano. Questa costante ricerca di garanzie si manifesta in diversi modi: nell'elevata importanza attribuita alla certificazione DOP (in quanto imparziale e ufficiale), nella preferenza per la Fontina realizzata negli alpeggi (fiducia riposta nei produttori) o nella predilezione per prezzi non troppo contenuti, che possono rispecchiare l'elevata qualità del prodotto. Queste caratteristiche estrinseche svolgono quindi un ruolo di primo piano nel segnalare proprietà intrinseche dei prodotti, aiutando i consumatori a ridurre i costi di ricerca necessari all'acquisto (Belletti e Marescotti, 1996).

4.1. Un approfondimento tramite la cluster analysis

Per un ulteriore approfondimento, i risultati ottenuti dalla *conjoint* sono stati utilizzati quali input per una *cluster analysis*, al fine di individuare segmenti omogenei di individui.

L'analisi individua 4 *cluster* e mette in luce come numericamente prevalgano i consumatori (il primo *cluster* raggruppa il 49,5% dei soggetti intervistati) che considerano la presenza di certificazione DOP l'attributo più importante. Risulta quindi evidente la generale attenzione rivolta alla ricerca di prodotti di qualità, di cui la certificazione DOP fa da segnale, seguita dall'origine del prodotto. Infatti, il secondo *cluster* per numerosità di individui è quello che vede prevalere l'origine tra i criteri di scelta e raggruppa il 33,5% dei soggetti. Di dimensioni significativamente più contenute risultano infine essere i restanti due *cluster*, che scelgono in base alla stagionatura (10% degli intervistati) o al prezzo (7%).

Questa ulteriore analisi conferma e rafforza quanto emerso in precedenza relativamente alle HP1 e HP3.

5. Disponibilità a pagare per la certificazione DOP

Determinato che i consumatori, globalmente considerati, valutano la presenza di certificazione DOP come la caratteristica più rilevante nell'influire sui loro processi di scelta, è importante ora stimare la disponibilità a pagare (WTP) dei consumatori per la presenza o meno di tale caratteristica in un prodotto, come evidenziato nella nostra ipotesi di lavoro HP2.

La *conjoint analysis* ha permesso di ottenere i valori dell'utilità dei singoli attributi e le relative importanze. Tali risultati sono stati utilizzati come input nell'applicazione del modello elaborato da Mariani *et al.* (2011). L'utilità totale che il consumatore può trarre da un determinato profilo *j* è data dalla somma delle utilità riconducibili agli *n* attributi che lo caratterizzano:

$$\hat{p}_j = \beta_1\alpha_1 + \beta_2\alpha_2 + ... + \beta_i\alpha_i + \beta_n\alpha_n$$

dove β_i è l'utilità assegnata alla variabile α_i, la quale indica un dato livello di uno specifico attributo. È possibile definire un coefficiente per valutare economicamente i cambiamenti nella combinazione degli attributi, attraverso un confronto a coppie dell'utilità totale derivante da diversi profili. Sia $\hat{p}_b$ la somma degli *scores* di utilità assegnati al profilo base (*status quo*) del prodotto, sia $\hat{p}_j$ la somma degli *scores* di utilità relativi al prodotto con una modifica del livello dell'attributo *j* e sia imp_j l'importanza relativa riconosciuta all'attributo *j*. Si ottiene così l'indicatore M_j, pari a:

$$M_j = \left(\frac{\hat{p}_j}{\hat{p}_b}\right) \bullet imp_j$$

con $\hat{p}_b \neq 0$, da cui è possibile comprendere se la modifica allo *status quo* comporta una perdita o un guadagno in termini di utilità totale.

Il valore $M_j = 1$ rappresenta il livello di indifferenza in termini di guadagno e perdita di utilità totale.Se $\hat{p}_b > 0$, un valore $M_j < 0$ segnala una perdi utilità. Invece, se $\hat{p}_b < 0$, un valore $M_j > 0$ segnala una perdita di utilità, e $M_j < 0$ segnala un guadagno di utilità.

Questa espressione può essere utilizzata per stimare la variazione economica determinata dal cambiamento nel profilo rispetto allo *status quo.* Definendo π il valore economico del profilo allo *status quo,* è possibile inserire tale valore all'interno della formula del coefficiente di valutazione economica, così da ottenere la stima della variazione di valore, indicata con:

$$V_j = M_j * \pi$$

Il valore V_j rappresenta la WTP dei consumatori. Per stimare tale valore sono stati utilizzati i risultati della *conjoint analysis*. La Tabella 6 sintetizza tali valori medi[5] in relazione al campione in generale e agli *split* per le variabili di età, luogo di acquisto, luogo di residenza.

Tab. 6 – Disponibilità a pagare (WTP) per la certificazione DOP

DISPONIBILITÀ A PAGARE PER LA CERTIFICAZIONE DOP*		
	Variabile di split	**media**
Campione generale		€ 1,78
Età	24 anni o meno	€ 0,78
	da 25 a 32 anni	€ 1,35
	da 33 a 41 anni	€ 2,75
	da 42 a 48 anni	€ 2,27
	da 49 a 55 anni	€ 2,19
	56 anni e oltre	€ 1,62
Luogo di acquisto	supermercato	€ 1,84
	negozio tradizionale	€ 2,14
	mercato	€ 1,68
	produttore	€ 0,72
Luogo di residenza	Aosta	€ 1,04
	Milano	€ 2,68

* Incremento misurato in euro che il consumatore è disposto a pagare per una fetta di Fontina da 300g.

L'analisi permette di evidenziare un importante risultato: i consumatori sono disposti a riconoscere un incremento di prezzo per la presenza di certificazione DOP, supportando la nostra seconda ipotesi di lavoro (H2). Come evidenziato dagli studi di Cullen (1994), i consumatori risultano disposti a pagare un *premium price* per un prodotto in grado di offrire, grazie alla certificazione DOP che lo contraddistingue, un maggior valore in termini di servizio e significato. Il servizio è offerto grazie alle economie di fiducia, che riducono i costi emotivi e cognitivi legati all'acquisto, dato che la certificazione garantisce sicurezza e riduce il tempo necessario per la ricerca di informazioni, per la valutazione delle alternative e per la scelta finale. Il significato è invece racchiuso nell'insieme di ideali evocati dal prodotto, che richiama principalmente le antiche tradizioni, la genuinità, la sa-

5. Il metodo adottato per il calcolo dell'incremento di prezzo porta all'ottenimento di differenti risultati a seconda del profilo che si identifica come profilo base. Nella presente ricerca ogni profilo è stato assunto a turno come base; in seguito, a partire dai risultati ottenuti, sono stati calcolati i valori medi (riportati nella Tabella 6).

lubrità. Il contributo importante del nostro lavoro consiste, quindi, non solo nell'individuare la preferenza dei consumatori per la presenza dell'attributo DOP nel prodotto oggetto di analisi, ma anche e soprattutto nel quantificare quanto i consumatori siano disposti a pagare in aggiunta per avere tale certificazione nel prodotto scelto. Considerando i dati in senso relativo, dall'analisi emerge come gli abitanti di Milano siano disposti a pagare per la certificazione DOP un prezzo più che doppio rispetto a quelli di Aosta (2,68 € contro 1,04 € dei valdostani, per una fetta di Fontina da 300g). I consumatori a Milano sono, come già detto, molto più sensibili alla presenza di una certificazione. Ad Aosta invece i segnali grazie ai quali il consumatore si sente tutelato non si identificano in misura predominante con il marchio DOP, per il quale la disponibilità a pagare risulta più contenuta. Dall'analisi delle diverse fasce d'età si evince, infine, come la fascia con il maggior incremento di prezzo sia riconducibile agli individui tra i trentatre e i quarantuno anni, la cui disponibilità a pagare per la certificazione è pari a ben 2,75 € per una fetta di Fontina da 300g.

Lo studio del luogo prediletto per gli acquisti, infine, mette in luce altre evidenze interessanti. Dai risultati si evince come chi acquista abitualmente dal produttore non sia interessato ad un prodotto certificato, dal momento che ripone la sua fiducia principalmente nella conoscenza o nella reputazione del fornitore. La maggiore disponibilità a pagare per il marchio DOP è riscontrata presso i consumatori che comprano generalmente la Fontina nei negozi tradizionali specializzati. In particolare la loro disponibilità a pagare per la certificazione è tripla rispetto a chi acquista generalmente presso i produttori (2,14 € per i primi contro 0,72 € per i secondi). Si tratta di soggetti che investono risorse (tempo, energie e denaro) per acquistare il formaggio ed esigono, a fronte di questi sforzi, un prodotto certificato di cui non si possa dubitare dell'autenticità. Valori medi sono quelli riconosciuti alla presenza di certificazione da chi si approvvigiona soprattutto presso supermercati e mercati.

Conclusioni

La presenza della certificazione DOP rappresenta l'attributo che conferisce maggiore utilità e influisce sulle preferenze degli individui intervistati (HP1), mostrando che i consumatori sono alla ricerca di segnali che da un lato garantiscano la qualità e sicurezza dei prodotti e, dall'altro, siano veicolo e strumento di un significato edonistico e di differenziazione.

Come conseguenza, i risultati dell'analisi mostrano come il consumatore sia disposto a pagare un prezzo più alto a fronte di un prodotto certificato che lo rassicuri in merito alla qualità intrinseca dello stesso (HP2).

Un ulteriore importante risultato emerge dalla distinzione tra Aosta e Milano, tale per cui i valdostani considerano l'origine del prodotto come la migliore garanzia della sua qualità, mentre i milanesi, meno vicini ai luoghi di produzione, considerano la certificazione DOP come l'indicatore principe di qualità. Si evincono, quindi, differenze a livello territoriale di segnalazione nelle caratteristiche in grado di garantire la qualità (HP3), come già evidenziato da Van Der Lans *et al.* (2001). In entrambe le città, i consumatori ricercano un segnale che rassicuri circa la qualità del prodotto: ad Aosta, regione di origine produzione della Fontina, la possibilità di conoscere personalmente il produttore o comunque di poter verificare agevolmente la reputazione di cui esso gode fanno sì che si sviluppi una sorta di *interpersonal trust* che guida le scelte dei consumatori, attribuendo al luogo di produzione la primaria importanza nelle preferenze di consumo. L'assenza di un legame così diretto con chi realizza Fontina spinge, invece, il consumatore milanese a ricercare un segnale di garanzia diverso, che risulti facilmente comprensibile e agevolmente verificabile, come la certificazione DOP. Diversi segmenti di consumatori, quindi, attribuiscono un valore differente alla presenza di certificazioni di origine e all'origine stessa del prodotto, come evidenziato anche da Bernabéu *et al*. (2008); questo risultato sottolinea l'importanza per le imprese di tenere in considerazione tale eterogeneità per focalizzare al meglio le proprie strategie di marketing.

In conclusione, le dinamiche di consumo degli ultimi decenni sembrano mostrare una tendenza dei consumatori ad attribuire alle proprietà estrinseche dei prodotti un significato cruciale nelle scelte di acquisto: in tale contesto, le denominazioni di origine territoriale e la provenienza geografica dei prodotti assumono un importante ruolo strategico per le imprese. Oggi le imprese non possano prescindere dal considerare l'importanza dell'effetto *made in*, che può rivelarsi un'opportunità quanto, in determinate circostanze, un vincolo in grado di limitare le potenzialità di applicazione e di sviluppo del prodotto. L'analisi proposta riflette l'importanza per i produttori di definire e focalizzare policy di segnalazione della qualità dei propri prodotti, considerando le differenze territoriali nella percezione degli stessi. La Fontina è solo uno dei molteplici prodotti certificati realizzati in Italia e in Europa che potrebbero essere maggiormente valorizzati con specifiche azioni di marketing. Tra le possibili implicazioni manageriali si segnala la necessità e l'opportunità di realizzare per la Fontina campagne promozionali differenziate a seconda del target cui sono indirizzate. Potrebbe rivelarsi utile incrementare la conoscenza delle caratteristiche della Fontina al di fuori della Valle d'Aosta. Tali indicazioni possono essere utili anche per altri produttori di alimenti certificati che potrebbero studiare il reale valore aggiunto derivante dalla certificazione nei diversi mercati in cui operano e promuovere di conseguenza i propri prodotti.

La ricerca presenta alcuni limiti e possibili spazi per sviluppi e miglioramenti. I principali limiti della presente ricerca consistono nel numero limitato di interviste effettuate e nel focus su due sole città. Un ulteriore limite della nostra analisi consiste nel focus su un unico prodotto. I prodotti alimentari presentano svariate caratteristiche e peculiarità. Non è detto, quindi, che le conclusioni relative ad un prodotto siano valide anche per altri prodotti. Un possibile miglioramento dell'analisi dovrebbe prendere così in esame un paniere di prodotti tra loro eterogenei, la cui analisi congiunta fornirebbe risultati maggiormente generalizzabili e robusti.

Inoltre, sarebbe interessante organizzare sessioni di *experimental economics* dove gli stessi consumatori, a cui sia stato precedentemente sottoposto il questionario della presente analisi, siano chiamati a degustare i prodotti, con differenti caratteristiche, e in base a quanto preferito, chiamati ad acquistare un prodotto. La corrispondenza tra i risultati delle analisi di economia sperimentale e i risultati presentati nella *conjoint analysis* renderebbe le conclusioni del lavoro più robuste.

Un ulteriore interessante sviluppo del lavoro sarebbe legato ad un'ottica dinamica di analisi. Se è vero che le evidenze delle ricerche sottolineano come siano effettivamente cambiati i comportamenti di consumo dei prodotti alimentari negli ultimi decenni, diviene cruciale monitorare come tali cambiamenti avvengano, quanto veloce è il cambiamento, in base a quali indicatori prevedere in cambiamenti, quali segnali possono rivestire un ruolo di cambiamento. Risposte a tali quesiti si rivelerebbero sicuramente utili per implementare policy aziendali oculate.

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