

An analysis of consumers' perception of the quality of the Etna DOC wine*

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Jel classification: Q110

1. Perception of the quality of "Etna DOC" wine

In Sicily, over the last decade, there has been increasing interest in the quality-wine industry and consumers have paid more attention to wines produced in the areas at the foothills of the volcano Etna, where the "Etna DOC" wine is produced.

It is often difficult to define the concept of quality in a clear, unequivocal way. Quality is a complex concept that can be studied from different points of view and presents numerous facets.

In general, quality can be defined as "the totality of those attributes a product possesses that make it satisfactory for the consumers' needs" (De Stefano, 2000).

On the other hand, the ISO 8402 standard defines quality as "the totality of those properties and characteristics of a product or a service that are able to grant it the capacity of satisfying explicit or implicit needs. Recent research highlighted the importance of quality

Abstract

In advanced societies, the behaviour of consumers is very variable and produces continuous change. This is mainly due to socio-economic changes and to modifications in the modern style of living. These evolutionary processes brought about a different "approach" to the consumption of alcoholic drinks, in particular wine. With reference to wine, two diametrically opposed phenomena have been observed over the last decade. Actually, if on the one hand there has been a reduction in consumption of table wine, on the other hand there has been greater demand for quality wines. Over the last few years, indeed, an increasing attention has been paid to DOC, DOCG and IGT wines (registered designation of origin, registered and guaranteed designation of origin and typical geographical indication, respectively), gathering together elements of quality and of regional specificity.

Hence, wine became a source of pleasure with a strong high hedonistic character that is increasingly destined to stir up "emotions".

In the context of the new food consumption trends, the educated, aware, informed, careful and selective consumer looks for quality as a means of ensuring differentiation, and for those traditions that only a "quality" product coming from small areas is able to produce. The present paper aims at analysing the perception of the wine quality (Etna DOC) through the application of a conjoint analysis.

Keywords: wine demand, consumer behavior, quality, conjoint analysis.

Résumé

Dans les sociétés avancées, le comportement des consommateurs présente des caractéristiques qui changent sans cesse. Les causes peuvent s'apparenter tant aux changements à caractère socio-économique qu'aux changements qui sont intervenus dans les styles de vie modernes. De tels processus d'évolution ont déterminé une approche différente à la consommation des boissons alcoolisées et du vin en particulier. En se référant à ce dernier, ces dix dernières années, nous avons enregistré deux phénomènes diamétralement opposés. De fait, si d'un côté on a relevé une diminution de la consommation de vin de table, de l'autre on aperçoit une attention croissante aux vins DOC, DOCG, IGT, qui renferment des éléments de qualité et des connotations territoriales bien spécifiques.

Le vin devient donc une véritable source de plaisir à fort contenu hédoniste et de plus en plus souvent destiné à susciter des "émotions".

Dans le cadre des nouvelles tendances des consommations alimentaires, le consommateur instruit, conscient, informé, attentif et sélectif va à la recherche de la qualité, qui est vue comme un instrument de différenciation, et des traditions que seul un produit de "qualité", provenant de territoires de petite dimension, est capable de créer. Le présent travail se donne comme objectif d'analyser la perception de la qualité du vin (Etna D.O.C.) grâce à une application d'une méthode d'analyse conjointe.

Mots-clés: demande de vin, comportement des consommateurs, qualité, analyse conjointe.

perception: it is the quest for quality that sets in motion the mechanisms governing purchases.

Considering quality as perceived by the consumer means abandoning the possibility of measuring quality in an objective manner, because the act of perceiving is subjective and it is therefore influenced by psychological and sociological factors.

For the consumer, quality can be defined as a series of material and immaterial attributes (brand reliability, nutritional capacity, seasonality, duration, healthiness, ease of consumption, aesthetics, etc.), which orientate him or her in the quest for maximum utility.

The quest for quality resulted in the creation of products that are evermore prized and of products that effectively interpret and fulfil the expectations of different consumers groups requiring products of differing value (Pomarici, 1999).

In the case of wine, quality is an important aspect that means not only processing good grapes and producing a good wine,

but also arranging all the other physical and immaterial product components. This means that a quality wine depends not only on the physical properties of the product or its correspondence to existing norms, but also on a sum of other characteristics such as its belonging to the DOC cate-

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gories, which are guarantees of authenticity and typicality, the non-material components of the product (service incorporated, company image, etc.).

The registered designation of origin (*DOC*) is made up of a series of norms and disciplines advising producers on how to produce the wines that result in a relatively high level of quality and on the clearest possible marking of this quality, so that many excellent productions are easily distinguished.

The process of quality perception of a product is rather complex, since each individual is daily subjected to a considerable mass of information. Only part of this information, the closest to the consumer's needs and desires, plays a role in the process that leads to the choice of one product rather than another.

2. Research method

The present study, with reference to the Etna *DOC* wine, was carried out between May and July 2004. Research was performed by collecting from "the universe" of consumers a random sample consisting of 500 units, extracted from 570 interviews. The administration of the questionnaire was carried out in a hypermarket belonging to the "Auchan" (Gruppo Rinascente) chain, in Palermo, and at "Le Zagare" shopping mall, in Catania, because they are the two most important shopping centres in terms of numbers of users and surface area. An *ad hoc* pre-prepared questionnaire was used.

Research was conducted using the face-to-face method, aiming at acquiring information on the various socio-economic and cultural aspects of the interviewed subjects, on their behaviour during purchase, on their perception of quality and the price of the product, as well as on the characteristics of the commercial distribution.

By means of the questionnaire, information of qualitative and quantitative nature regarding the various aspects that research aimed at analysing was gathered. The questions in the questionnaire were "closed" or multiple-choice, thus offering respondents a series of codified options, from which they were called to choose the most suitable for their position, opinion or way of behaving (Berni and Begalli, 1995). The questionnaire was organized in four sections, the first of which was dedicated to the general characteristics of wine consumption (frequency, type of consumed wine, consumed quantities, consumption time, factors that influence the purchasing moment, attributes associated with the wine); to the specific characteristics (preference regarding the area of provenance, knowledge of the certifying bodies, etc.) and level of knowledge and consumption of Etna *DOC* wine.

The second part of the questionnaire allowed us to collect information on the characteristics of the commercial distribution of the wine (place of purchase, expense that the consumer is prepared to bear for the purchase of a litre of *DOC* wine, differences in the prices of *DOC* wine compared to common table wines).

The third section allowed us to obtain information on the socio-economic characteristics of the respondent. The analysis thus provided a profile of the Catanese wine consumer (age, number of members in the family, level of education, profession and income of the family unit).

The fourth section was dedicated to the analysis of the perception of quality, making use of conjoint analysis. The conjoint analysis is aimed at measuring the consumers' preferences relative to a selected group of attributes of the product being under analysis. This is done to identify the attributes of goods that generate maximum utility and to establish what is the incidence of each (utility) with respect to the total utility attributed by the consumer.

This research tool was developed in the early 1960s (Luce and Tukey, 1964) in the field of mathematical psychology and psychometrics and it was successfully applied in market research above all else (Green and Rao, 1971; Green and Srinivasan, 1978).

Over the last few years, in Italy, this analysis tool for the perception of quality in agricultural food produce has been applied to various products and in particular to perishable produce (D'Amico and Pecorino, 2001; D'Amico, La Via and Pecorino, 2002) and to industrial processed products such as wine, oil, etc. (Loseby and Brinchi, 1996; Cicia and Perla, 2000).

The technique allows us to describe through utility and value indicators the preferences of interviewed consumers towards product's attributes and levels.

The main feature of the analysis is to ask interviewees to make their choice like they would do when purchasing goods or in other words comparing different features and deciding how far they are willing to give up a certain attribute to obtain a given quantity of another attribute.

The basis of this analytical process is the identification of a series of factors, called attributes, which determine the product's overall utility (De Rosa, 2001).

The individuation of a "relevant"¹ group of attributes is the premise to implement a conjoint analysis.

The identification of such attributes may happen either through "quantitative" research on a consumers sample or through "focus groups" involving experts in this sector (Molteni, 1993).

For this study, regarding the perception of quality that consumers associate with the consumption of Etna *DOC* wine, the selected features and the corresponding levels, as previously identified through a focus group, we used a group of habitual wine consumers in a well-known winery in Catania.

The attributes considered to be relevant by above-mentioned focus group, and that are reported in Table 1, were subsequently used for the conjoint questionnaire.

Such procedures usually lead to obtaining an elevated number of attributes being valued as relevant; hence, the most important moment during this process phase is the reduction of these attributes to avoid any possible problem in

Features	Levels	Features	Levels
Color	Red White Rosé	Method of production	Organic Conventional
Price	< 4,00 euro from 4,00 to 8,00 euro > 8,00 euro	Known brand	Yes No

evaluation data gathering and model estimation.

Using this methodology, for each single subject and for the whole sample, it is possible to estimate the relative importance of any attribute being present in alternative types of products, their partial utility associated to any diverse level through which products show themselves, and any single product's total utility (Cattin and Wittink, 1989).

Therefore, a conjoint analysis aims at identifying those attributes of a product that generate the maximum utility and establishing which is the incidence of each one (utility) in relation to the overall utility assigned by consumers.

It is important that all main attributes are taken into account, because the exclusion of one key attribute could compromise the reliability of this analysis.

Besides the choice of these attributes, it is also necessary to identify their related levels. Levels may be both quantitative and qualitative and their number influences the length of the data gathering questionnaire chart. Depending on the number of levels being available for each attribute, it is possible to obtain different product profiles.

This choice will produce combinations of different realistic attributes thus allowing us to understand the consumers' way of thinking during the purchase phase.

Regarding the choice of the number of profiles, the full-profile procedure has been used in this work; indeed, after having identified attributes and their related levels (Table 1), it was necessary to use the orthogonalization procedure, performed by using the SPSS 12.0 software for Windows (Green and Wind, 1975), which allowed us to obtain an orthogonal array, or a subset of combinations from which it was possible to proceed to the utility estimation. We thus

Combination	Price	Colour	Method of production	Brand notoriety
1	> than 8.00 euro	White	Organic	yes
2	> than 8.00 euro	Rosé	Organic	no
3	from 4.00 to 8.00 euro	Red	Organic	no
4	from 4.00 to 8.00 euro	Rosé	Conventional	yes
5	from 4.00 to 8.00 euro	White	Organic	yes
6	< than 4.00 euro	Rosé	Organic	yes
7	< than 4.00 euro	Red	Organic	yes
8	> than 8.00 euro	Red	Conventional	yes
9	< than 4.00 euro	White	Conventional	no

moved from 36 profiles containing all of the combinations, to a limited but fully significant number of combinations, to be administered to the respondent (Table 2).

Concerning the price, it is necessary to emphasize that the minimum limit of 4.00 € derives from a preliminary price verification of all "Etna DOC" wines being on the market. This check established that on the Sicilian market there is no wine of the above-mentioned typology having lower prices.

A total of nine charts containing different attribute and level combinations were given to the interviewed person.

The features and the relative levels considered to be significant for the research purposes were the colour (red, white, rosé), the price in euros per 0.75 l bottle (< 4.00, from 4.00 to 8.00, > than 8.00), the method of production (organic, conventional) and whether or not it is a known brand (yes, no).

Once the data was gathered, we proceeded to an estimate of the weight assigned by the consumers to the various attributes, and the utility associated with the various levels of these. It was necessary, however, to choose preliminarily the type of functional relationship between utility and preselected levels.

For the aims of the present analysis, the choice was to use the rule of the additive linear composition, in relation to which, the total utility of a product is equal to the arithmetic sum of the utility that each consumer associates with the considered attributes and which he/she therefore considers as substitutable among each other, in the context of the preselected levels,

$$U_i = \sum_{k=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^m u_{kj} x_{kj}$$

In this case, U_i represents the utility assigned by the consumer to the combination of attributes i-nth, u_{kj} is the partial utility assigned to the level j-nth of the attribute k-nth, while x_{kj} is a binary variable that assumes the value zero in absence of the attribute and one in its presence. Therefore, the value of a product, in terms of utility, is equal to the arithmetic sum of the utility that the individual consumer associates with the attributes it possesses.

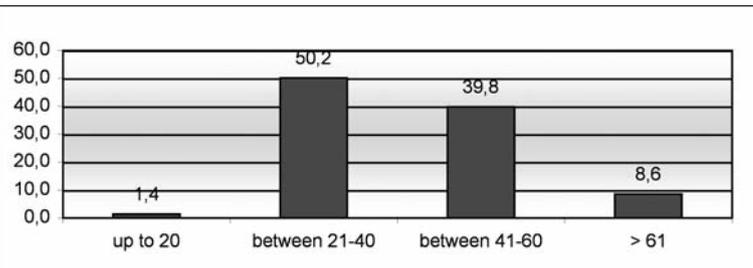
Results obtained applying the OLS method are confirmed by Kendall's Pearson and Tau's R indicators values giving an indication concerning the model's adjustment degree in relation to observed data, thus in fact representing the correlation between estimated and observed preferences.

3. Results of the study

3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

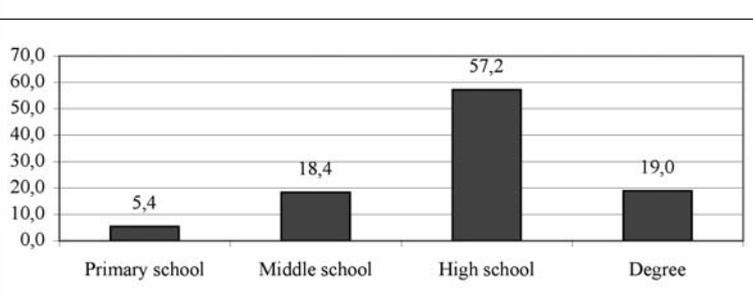
In this first phase, that is considered to be useful to outline the profile of the consumer, we highlighted the age, sex,

Figure 1 – Subdivision of the sample by age range.



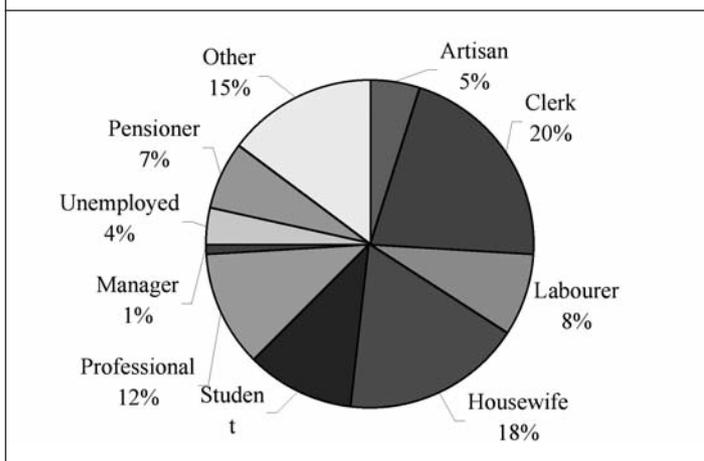
education, profession and income of the family unit. Indeed, from research, it emerged that 51.6% of consumers (258 units) are male, of which 50.2% are between 21 and 40 years in age and 38.8% between 41 and 60 years in age (Figure 1). As for education (Figure 2), interviewed con-

Figure 2 – Subdivision of the sample by educational qualifications.



sumers have an intermediate to high cultural level, indeed 19% hold a university degree, 57.2% have a high school qualification, 18.4% attended the middle school and 5.4% the primary school. In examining the employment of the

Figure 3 – Profession of the.



sample (Figure 3), we found a varied socio-economic pattern; nine categories were considered (craftsmen, housewives, managers, unemployed, clerks, self-employed, labourers, pensioners, students), plus the field “other” including those professional activities that are not ascribable to those listed above. The most popular category was that of clerks with 21.2%, followed by the housewives with 17.8%

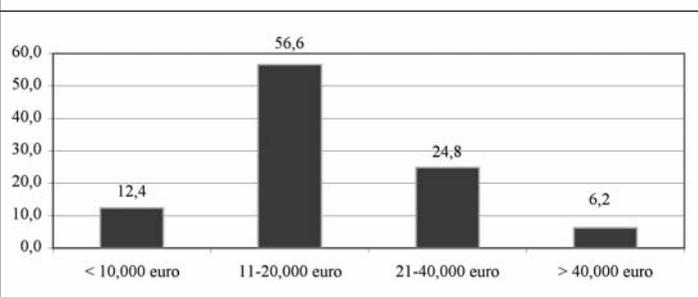
and those who declared a profession different from those provided in the questionnaire with 14.6%, then the self-employed with 11.6%, students with 10.4%, labourers with 8.00%, pensioners with 6.8%, craftsmen with 5.0%, unemployed 3.6% and managers with 1.0%. The level of family income (Figure 4) was the last investigated element that allowed us to complete the reference picture of the sample. Indeed, research showed that the interviewed sample generally has an intermediate to high income. Only 12.4% have an income below 10,000 Euros, 56.6% have an income between 11,000 and 20,000 Euros, 24.8% have an income between 21,000 and 40,000 Euros and 6.4% have an income above 40,000 euros.

3.2 General features of wine consumption

The present paper aims at analysing the perception of the wine quality (Etna DOC) through the application of a conjoint analysis.

Through this study, a considerable quantity of information has been gathered on the features of wine consumption in general and Etna DOC in particular. Due to two reasons, it was necessary to carry out the survey by considering aspects, wine consumption, in general, and quality wines consumption, in particular. After a preliminary survey, during which it was possible to establish that most of Etna DOC wines in the Catania

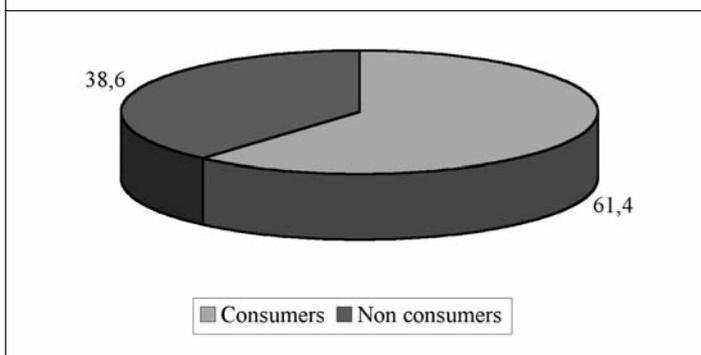
Figure 4 – Distribution of the sample by class of income.



province are prevalently available in LD supermarkets, it was decided to carry out this survey in the above-mentioned shopping centres. Then, being these centres non-specialized wine shops, a heterogeneous consumers sample was chosen to be interviewed. Given that we observed the gradual drop in consumption of table wines registered in the last decade, in Sicily and in Italy, compared to the increase recorded for quality wines – thus showing that consumers pay not only more attention to produce that they consume, but also recognize the quality of a product thanks to classifications (DOC, DOCG, IGT) – it was possible to determine a rate of quality wines’ consumption and, namely the Etna DOC rate compared to the overall consumption.

From the data analysis, we can see that 61.4% of interviewed consumers (Figure 5), i.e. 307 out of 500, declared that they frequently drink wine, while the remaining 38.6%, i.e. 193 interviewees, define themselves as non-consumers.

Figure 5 – Distribution of the sample of consumers wine.



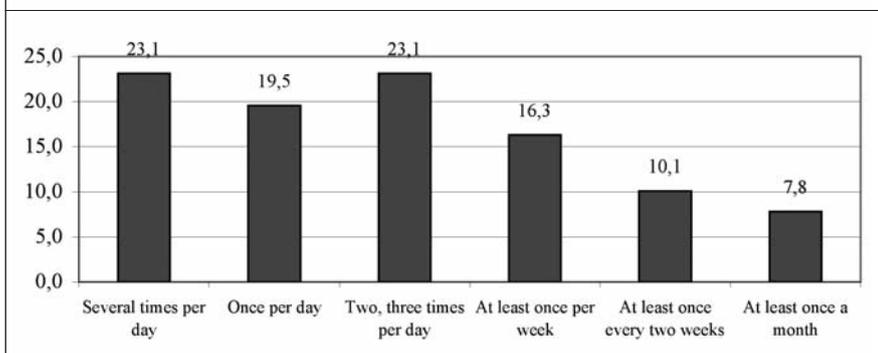
It is however necessary to underline that within the category of the interviewees who define themselves as non consumers, 26.9% (52 subjects) declare themselves to be purchasers but not consumers, while 73.1% (141 subjects) declare they have never purchased wine. Therefore, the reference sample consists of 359 subjects.

From the socio-demographic analysis, it emerges that the sample purchasing but not consuming wine (52 interviewees) is made up of women who buy the product for their partners or for special occasions (celebrations, parties, etc.).

Consumers who declared to be non-wine drinkers were asked to explain the reason why they do not consume such this product. 32.2% of non-consumers answered they do not appreciate the wine organoleptic qualities, 29.2% prefer other drinks, 18.5% are teetotal, while 18% state they do not drink wine for health reasons.

With regard to the frequency of wine consumption (Figure 6), from the carried out analysis it emerged that 42.6%, i.e. 131 out of 307 interviewees, declared they drink wine “once a day” or even “several times a day” (23.1% declared they drink wine more than once a day, while 19.5% de-

Figure 6 – Frequency of wine purchases.



clared they drink wine once a day); 23.1%, i.e. 71 interviewees, declared they drink wine “two or three times a week”, 16.3% “at least once a week”, 10.1% “at least once every two weeks”, while only 7.8% of consumers declared that they drink wine “at least once a month”.

Research also aims at identifying the main occasions on which wine is consumed and it allowed us to ascertain that wine plays an important role during meals, when it is drunk

by 47.3% of interviewed consumers; 25.7% declare they drink the product on holidays and 17.7% drink wine only in restaurants.

This result highlights that most consumers who declare to drink wine during meals prefer to purchase bulk wine with respects to the other consumers’ categories that, on the other hand, are more inclined to consume quality wines.

3.3 Features relating to the region of provenance, the certification and the consumption of Etna DOC wine

With reference to consumers’ attention for the region of provenance of the wine, 70.8% of the sample (254 consumers) declared they are interested in this feature, whilst the remaining 29.2% (105 consumers) showed no interest.

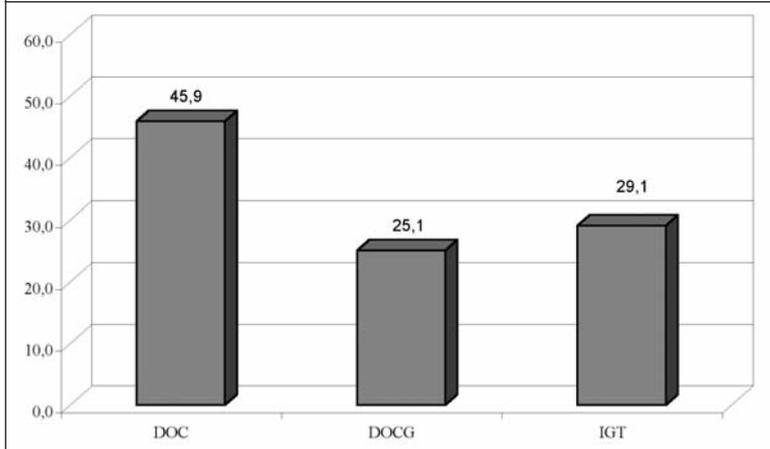
Among those who stated they were interested in the origin of the wine they buy, 64.2% prefer local wine, 29.5% declared that they consume wine of both local and non local wine, while the remaining 6.3% declared they prefer wine produced in other geographical areas or even extra-regional wines.

This result confirms the strong bond that a Sicilian consumer has with his territory and traditions. Far from being a mere product, for Sicilians wine also represents an emblem of their cultural tradition. In fact, consuming a “quality” product means purchasing a product being able to recall a *territory* (with respect to other regions, Sicily has just lately started valorising its products), its *traditions* and its *values*. In other words, it can be asserted that by purchasing products bearing a quality seal, the consumer buys a part of its “provenance”, its territory. Through this double role, wine distinguishes itself thus becoming an engine for the territory’s economic development.

Interests in certification and/or statements regarding the quality of wine are other elements to be taken into consideration since they are particularly important for the research outcome. The obtained results show that 52.1% of the interviewed sample declared to be interested in quality certification, while 47.9% declared not to be interested. These data made us think that the percentage of consumers who declared to be interested in certification belongs to that segment of consumers who are more inclined to purchase bottled wine rather than wine on tap.

Another element of important interest regards the level of reliability that consumers grant to the quality certification. From research it come out that 91.4% of the consumers interested in the quality certification believe it to be reliable, the remaining 8.6% think it is poorly reliable while none of them consider it to be unreliable. From the research results, it can be concluded that the sample’s most preferred certification system (Figure 7) is DOC, with 45.9% of preferences, followed by IGT (29.1% of preferences) and DOCG (25.1%). This result means we

Figure 7 – Preference regarding certifications and/or statements of quality of wine.



can state that the greater preference for the DOC wines on the consumers' part can be justified by the greater presence of this type of wine in the large distribution chain compared to other wines with other certification systems, and by the fact that the DOCG wines are not produced in Sicily.

This study is also aimed at identifying the level of knowledge and consumption of "Etna DOC" wines.

In the questionnaire used for the survey, a chart was inserted to help the interviewed person with the names of all produced Etna DOC wines.

The survey showed that 46% of the interviewed sample stated they knew the name of one or more wines, thus declaring that they are consumers of the above-mentioned wine typology, while 54% stated that they had never consumed this product.

Among the reasons that led the interviewees to the non-consumption of this wine, 37.6% declared they prefer another wine, 48.5% declared they did not know it, 6.7% declared they do not drink it because it costs too much, while the remaining 7.2% said that there were other reasons. This result can be traced back to the small size of the involved companies and the limited expenditure capacity of wine producers, which affects the companies' possibilities in terms of applying significant marketing strategies.

3.4 Commercial distribution of wines and consumers' attitudes with regard to price

With regard to the preferred places where wine is purchased by the interviewed consumers, from a data analysis, it emerged that they favour purchase in supermarkets and hypermarkets (44.6%), an expected result if we consider that the interviews were carried out in selling points of the large distribution chain. A high number of consumers (21.3%), in search of difference and refinement, declared they purchase from wineries, especially when they wish to buy a wine of particular quality or when they want to enlarge their range of consumed wines.

Another category of consumers (20.7%) represents those who purchase directly on farm, including in this category

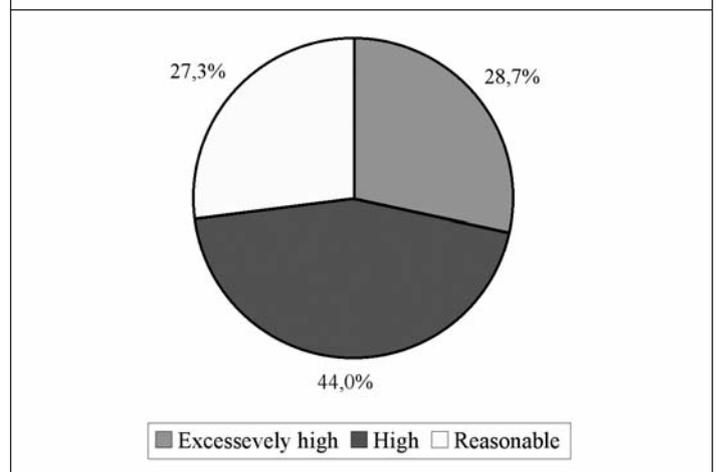
those who purchase from tourist farm houses and wine producers.

7% of consumers declared themselves not to be interested in the purchase of the product because they produce it on their own, and 6.5% declared they buy wine in restaurants or from small retailers.

As regards the consumers' perception of the DOC wines price (Figure 8), results showed that prices are considered to be "excessively high" by 28.7% of consumers, "high" by 44.0% and "reasonable" by 27.3% of interviewed consumers.

Furthermore, with the aim of testing which price band the consumer orientates towards in the moment of purchase, a question was included regarding the expenses they are prepared to bear for the purchase of a litre of DOC wine.

Figure 8 – Consumers perception of the price of DOC wines.



From processing the gathered data, it emerged that 28.7% of interviewees are prepared to pay up to 4.00 euros, 41.8% are orientated towards the middle band, which corresponds to an expense ranging from 4.00 to 8.00 euros, 16.4% are instead prepared to spend from 8.00 to 12.00 euros. In this case, we are dealing with individuals who consider the high price as an element of the wine quality; very often they are refined and habitual consumers who often buy in specialized shops in the quest for difference.

3.5 Analysis of the preference for Etna DOC wine through the use of "conjoint analysis"

The use of this technique of analysis has allowed us to present to the interviewees a series of tables carrying different combinations of attributes and relative levels.

Table 3 shows the main results of the conjoint analysis. From data processing, we can observe that all four of the analyzed attributes proved to be relevant, even though the colour and price have greater importance for the consumer in comparison with the name of the brand and the information on the production method, which proved to be the least relevant element.

Features	Levels	%	Coefficient
Color		44,73	
	Red		1,3939
	White		0,5152
	Rosé		-1,9091
Method of production		12,43	
Organic	Yes		0,5439
	No		-0,5439
Price		23,76	
	< 4,00 euro		-0,3899
	from 4,00 to 8,00 euro		0,4505
	> 8,00 euro		-0,0606
Known names		19,08	
	Yes		0,8909
	No		-0,8909
Constant = 5,522			
Pearson's R = 1,00			

From the complete analysis (Table 3), with regard to the features highlighted, the colour ranks first (44.73%) and influences more the consumer at the moment of purchase than the price (23.76%), the name of the brand (19.08%) and the production method (12.43%). This result is confirmed by another value obtained during the survey, when the interviewee was asked to indicate his favourite wine typology. In fact, interviewed “consumers” declared they prefer red wine, whereas other wine typologies are only consumed on certain occasions, often to accompany particular dishes.

As regards the utility values for each level, it is possible to note that the consumers at the moment of purchase showed themselves to be particularly careful with regard to colour, showing a clear preference for red wine, followed by white wine.

As for price, we underline that the level favoured by the consumer is represented by the intermediate one, from 4.00 to 8.00 euros, while higher prices lead the consumer to purchase types of wine different from the Etna DOC.

It is anyway necessary to highlight that this result may depend on the fact that this survey was carried out in selling points of large distribution chains. Indeed, in similar huge shopping centres, quality wines can be found, but at prices that are rarely higher than eight euros.

There does exist a group of interviewees who prefer wines at the higher level, underlining an association between price and poor wine quality.

The name of the wine is considered to be a relevant attribute by consumers. This result is confirmed by previous questions in the questionnaire in which the interviewee was asked to rank the five factors (price, name, label and presentation, others' advice and provenance) from the most to the least important of those having an influence at the mo-

ment of purchase. The name proved to be one of the factors considered as being a very important element even influencing the wine quality. Also in the case of the brand's notoriety, it is right to affirm that, in the chart, all the names of produced Etna DOC wines and all those ones related to the producing winegrowers had been inserted. Therefore, it was shown that the most well-known brands are those available in the large distribution chain.

Finally, with regard to the production method, research demonstrated that consumers consider the organic production method as an element of quality although they are less interested in this aspect than in the other attributes.

The obtained results are further confirmed by the value of Pearson's R, which provides an indication of the degree of model adaptation to the observed data.

From the analysis it therefore emerges that from the various combinations of attributes and levels available to the consumers, the ideal profile consists of a wine being red in colour, belonging to a price range between 4 and 8 euros, obtained through an organic production method and of a known name (Table 4).

Attributes	Levels
Colour	Red
Price	from 4.00 to 8.00 euros
Method of production	
Organic	Yes
Known name	Yes

4. Conclusions

The important changes in our society from the economic, demographic and cultural point of view led to a drastic reduction in the consumption of alcoholic drinks, such as wine, whose consumption is increasingly linked to special moments or events because it is able to satisfy less fundamental and more abstract needs.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to analyze consumption by distinguishing quality wines from other wines, this because over the last few years, if on the one hand there has been an overall reduction in the consumed quantities, on the other there has been a shift towards the consumption of DOC and DOCG wines due to an increase in the consumer's interest in quality. In general, this is the context of the present study aimed at understanding the reality of the Etna DOC wine.

Research carried out on the perception of quality allows us to make some interesting considerations.

An initial element of reflection regards the growing interest of consumers in quality wines, which explains the trend in consumption over recent decades towards a reduc-

tion in consumption of table wine and an increase in consumption of quality wine. We therefore note the tendency of consumers to perceive common wines and quality wines as being two very different categories, with quality wines being increasingly destined to particularly important situations in people's lives.

A second element emerging from research regards the attention that the consumer pays to the region of provenance of the consumed wine; indeed, the interviewed consumer prefers to drink local or regional wine. This result underlines the link that the Sicilian consumer has with his own territory and its traditions. Wine is more than just a product for the Sicilian consumer; it is a symbol and for Sicily represents an emblem of its traditional culture.

With regard to the factors that influence the consumer at the moment of purchase, above and beyond the region of provenance, another important factor is the price: 41.8% of interviewees are orientated towards a medium price band, between 4.00 and 8.00 euros.

As far as the main occasions on which wine is drunk are concerned, research carried out allowed us to ascertain that wine keeps playing an important role during meals, especially for the more adult subjects; instead younger people are more inclined to wine consumption especially on the occasion of holidays and anniversaries.

As regards certification and/or statements of wine quality, the sample declares its interest in quality certifications; this result makes us believe that the percentage of consumers who have declared an interest in certification belongs to that segment that is more inclined to the purchase of bottled wines rather than wines on tap.

As for the application of the conjoint analysis to the perception of quality, interesting results emerge. Data show that we can state that all the considered attributes proved to be relevant, even though the colour and the price have greater importance for the consumer than the name and the information on the production method.

Concerning the values of utility for each level, it is possible to note that, at the moment of purchase, the consumer proves to pay a particular attention to the colour, with a clear preference for red wine followed by white wine.

Eventually, as for the price, this analysis allowed us to ascertain that the price band favoured by the consumer is the intermediate one, between 4.00 and 8.00 euros, whereas the consumer is willing to pay a higher price for the purchase wines different from the Etna DOC. Through further research, it would be interesting to assess whether the same results are achieved by carrying out the same study in other areas.

Our results highlight how the Sicilian consumer is clearly tied to his land and traditions. For the Sicilian consumer, wine is a symbol and, for Sicily, it represents an emblem of the island's cultural tradition. This double role is a peculiar characteristic of the wine making it an engine of territorial and economic development.

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