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# Young Generation Consumption Behaviour in Organic Wine Markets: A preliminary analysis

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**Framing of the research.** *Worldwide, exponentially increasing numbers of people are becoming aware of the environmental (Paul et al., 2016) and social (Pfajfar et al., 2022) consequences of their consumption behavior and are displaying a heightened interest in solving the problems that result from unsustainable behavior. Simultaneously, among the main goals of many national, regional, and international organizations and institutions in recent years are sustainable development due to the increasing consciousness regarding the ecological ramifications of human actions (Mensah, 2019). Furthermore, the pandemic period has worked toward a broadening of the importance of the concepts of a shorter supply chain (Casalegno et al., 2020), respect for the environment, and respect for health (Forman et al., 2022), and this has led to an increase in more responsible and, therefore, sustainable consumption of agri-food products (Ben Hassen et al., 2022), among which wine (Moscovici et al., 2022). Literature, indeed, has addressed specific attention to the wine industry in the last decades since its choice is more complex when comparing wine to other food products (Wright et al., 2023), brought not only by the significant number of perceived differences among products and brands but also by the importance of the country-of-origin and the region of production (Defrancesco et al., 2012; Jaeger et al., 2013; Yang & Paladino, 2015). The concept of country-of-origin image has been used to encompass various aspects related to a particular country, such as its identity, political environment, culture, population, history, and economic and technological development. However, it does not refer to the country's products themselves, according to Hamzaoui and Merunka (2006). Additionally, the country-of-origin image is recognized as a factor that influences consumers, simplifying their purchasing choices (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002) and helping them with the choice of a product with relevant, tangible, sustainable characteristics also highlighted by certifications that represent essential attributes for consumers' choice of wine (Klohr et al., 2013) nowadays.*

*Furthermore, the wine industry production has always faced a plethora of environmental challenges (Notarnicola et al., 2017), addressing environmental and social issues at both global and local levels that have been previously neglected, as noted by Christ and Burritt in their 2013 publication; however, in recent times, environmentally sustainable viticultural practices, such as biodynamic and organic methods, have become increasingly important for institutions, producers, and consumers. This has led to extensive research in this area, as highlighted by studies conducted by D'Amico et al. (2016) and Nassivera et al. (2020).*

*What is said above represents why understanding how internal factors such as perception and motivation affect more sustainable buying behaviors and consumption has strategic importance for firms, particularly wine producers. Among the most crucial consumer models often used in the agri-food marketing literature, there is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein et al., 1980) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). In keeping with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), an individual's behavioral intention is determined by the information they have about a specific behavior and the expected outcome. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) expands on TRA by examining a broader range of behaviors based on consumer intentions. As noted by Ajzen (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, an individual's intention to engage in a particular behavior is influenced by three primary factors. These factors are: their attitude toward the behavior, which is their subjective evaluation of the behavior based on perceived advantages or disadvantages; social norms, which are the perceived social pressure to perform or avoid the behavior based on the belief that others would approve or disapprove of it; and perceived behavioral control, which refers to the individual's subjective assessment of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior based on perceived facilitators or obstacles. During the last ten years, the application of the TBP theory and its models on sustainable behavior has led to the emerging importance of environmental and social issues (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2015; Boncinelli et al., 2019; Caliskan et al., 2021), and several academic studies have highlighted consumers' "pro-environmental behavior" as the main theme (Markle, 2013), also known as "green behavior" (Kaiser et al., 1999).*

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Since the TPB seeks to explain all behavior of individuals acting of their own free will (Campos-Arteaga et al., 2022), this theoretical model is also valid for the analysis of organic wine consumption behavior (Canova et al., 2020; Taghikhah F. et al. (2021); Caliskan et al., 2021). For this reason, the TPB model (Ajzen, 1991) has been chosen as the theoretical framework for examining predictors of consumer behavior towards organic wine consumption since 2002 with Thøgersen.

**Purpose of the paper.** Under the lens of TPB, this study examines the possible antecedents of consumers' attitudes of purchasing behavior toward organic wine, which represents an interesting area of research since the economic slowdown caused by the Covid-19 outbreak restricted the demand for organic wine while this market was growing and expected to grow more (Organic Wine Market Forecast to 2028, 2022; Pagliarini et al., 2013).

Furthermore, this analysis is a first step in broader reasoning about post-pandemic organic wine consumption. It considers a sample of young wine consumers belonging to the Z generation (going from 1998 to 2010, according to Kotler et al., 2013), which on the one hand, is approaching the wine market with interest (Casalegno et al., 2019; Castellini & Samoggia, 2018; Radovanović et al., 2017) and, on the other hand, appears to be very sensitive to sustainable issues (Gencoglu & Yarkin, 2019). In addition, the study is focused on Italian wine consumers, given their accentuated wine culture (Casalegno et al., 2019) and deep involvement in their Country of origin (Foroudi et al., 2020). More specifically, the goal of this research is twofold: 1) to isolate factors that can affect the TPB theory determinants (attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control) to understand deeper sustainable Z generation purchase behaviors in the organic wine market (Caliskan A. et al., 2021; Campos-Arteaga, N. et al., 2022); 2) to analyze whether and if young consumers are affected by the country-of-origin effect in choosing organic wine.

**Methodology.** To the best of our knowledge, no research has been published using a mixed (qualitative-quantitative) methodology which will instead be used in the present study for investigating the factors that would promote the purchase of organic wine by shedding light on the possible gap between intentions and behavior purchase in generation Z (also called digital natives, people born between 1998 and 2010 (Kotler et al., 2013)).

The explorative nature of this study required, at the first stage, the use of qualitative methods (i.e., focus groups) to understand the possible determinants of purchase intention -Zikmund et al., (2013) summarized the advantages of such group discussions as Synergy; Snowballing; Serendipity; Stimulation; Security; Spontaneity; Specialisation; Structure; Speed; Scrutiny-

Then, to empirically estimate the impact of these determinants, an online survey of a sample of Italian consumers was carried out (Wright, 2005). Another aim of this focus group was to identify the items related to Ajzen's (1991) determinants to be included in the quantitative analysis. The focus group interview lasted about 60 minutes and involved individuals with different social backgrounds belonging to Generation Z. In the focus group, all participants were asked about the factors that could promote the intention to purchase organic wine. Participants were chosen according to their ability to make a specific contribution to the research; their voluntary availability; and whether they had something in common with the research topic (i.e., respondents had a particular connection to the wine sector, and all participants stated that they were regular wine drinkers). Accordingly, the participants were chosen randomly but with some homogeneity (Kitzinger, 1995). The list of topics included in the schedule was mainly based on Ajzen's determinants (attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control).

The topics proposed by the moderator of the focus group included: (i) the attitude towards respectful wine, and in particular, the concept of supply and demand encompasses several factors, including the perceived benefits or drawbacks of consuming different types of wine; (ii) social norms that influence whether individuals choose to engage in such behavior based on the perceived approval or disapproval of others; (iii) perceived behavioral control, which refers to an individual's subjective assessment of the ease or difficulty of using organic wine based on perceived facilitators or obstacles. The results of the focus group served to structure the quantitative analysis by administering a questionnaire. It is worth noting that this is a research in progress in which we collect data for quantitative analysis. Therefore, the next section will offer a presentation and discussion of the results deriving from the focus groups.

**Results.** The results of the focus groups provide some insights into the three determinants of TPB (Ajzen, 1991). Concerning attitudes, the focus group participants identified some common advantages or disadvantages of organic wine consumption. First, most were concerned that these kinds of wines might have a higher price than traditional ones. Indeed, many said they should consider buying organic wine only if the price is comparable to a traditional one. Participants who declared having a certain experience in the wine market expressed another issue: taste. However, other participants showed a favorable attitude toward sustainably grown wine for its capacity to improve health and preserve nature, partially confirming the emergence of environmental concerns among attitudes affecting factors, as Caliskan et al. (2021) stated.

As for social norms, the participants identified various factors that may affect their buying decision. One of the most mentioned categories was that of family members, as Gen Z individuals are still concerned about their opinions, confirming the Taghikhah et al. (2021) analysis of this determinant. A second category mentioned is represented by wine sellers, shop assistants, or people working directly in the cellar: more than one participant revealed their confidence in experts and their advice. On the other hand, there was no alignment for the category of friends because some participants cited friends as potential influencers for various reasons, including being experts; on the other hand, friends might also advise against buying an organic wine because they were skeptical about whether it met all the standards and products that would make it so.

In the last part of the focus group, the interviewed individuals identified as a subjective evaluation of which factors or circumstances might facilitate organic wine purchasing behavior (perceived behavioral control). Many of them, as

factors or circumstances that could influence their purchases, have mentioned experiences such as the opportunity to taste and thus try the product, discount vouchers, and hear the story of the winery from its foundation to the different characteristics of the products that allow you to create a different wine offer from the traditional one, strongly confirming something that the literature has already suggested in the past (Casalegno et al., 2019). As factors or circumstances that might not influence the choice to purchase organic wine, in common agreement, the difficulty of finding the product if the quantity produced is insufficient to satisfy the entire demand and the difference in taste to which the consumer is not accustomed was mentioned.

Eventually, from the conducted analysis, it emerges that consumers belonging to generation Z did not consider the country-of-origin as a factor that would facilitate organic wine purchasing behavior. This leads to directly testing them via a survey in the future.

**Research limitations.** Since the nature of the present research is a preliminary study, we need to highlight some limitations. Firstly, the sample of respondents will consist of Generation Z only. Future lines of research could examine different generational cohorts and compare them, extending the research to Generation Y -also known as millennials-, to be able to detect possible differences in factors that would lead to the choice of organic wine when comparing two generational cohorts (Kotler et al., 2013).

Secondly, although the three determinants of TPB might give a fair understanding of how sustainable factors affect organic wine buying behaviors, the present research focus group suggests that there are other factors influencing this kind of behavior as well as the main concepts and constructs leading to sustainable behavior and consumption that have been addressed in the marketing literature, beyond the already emerged environmental concerns (Caliskan et al., 2021), such as environmental citizenship (Markle, 2013, p. 908); collectivism (Pérez & Del Bosque, 2013); and consumer perceived effectiveness (PCE) (Ellen et al., 1991). Indeed, pilot analyses are necessary to improve the validity and reliability of the study instrument, and their purpose is to ensure high-quality research (Malmqvist et al., 2019). It would also be interesting to analyze all the different 'environmentally friendly' wine categories and see how much the consumer knows about them. Moreover, it would be interesting to analyze all the different 'environmentally friendly' wine categories -biodynamic wines, natural wines, regenerative wines- and to see how much the consumer knows about them.

**Managerial implications.** This research deepens the understanding of what motivates organic wine consumption by Generation Z, which undoubtedly represents the most interesting target market since its interest in wine is in an emerging phase. Indeed, literature suggests managers need to deepen their knowledge about young consumers' behaviors (Castellini & Samoggia, 2018; Lior et al., 2017; Thach & Olsen, 2006) since they do represent not only a critical target market but also can create trends and their potential impact on the wine market in the future. Furthermore, the knowledge of new purchase attitudes and concerns helps wine producers and wineries in general to adapt their offerings.

**Originality of the paper.** The originality of this study consists in the analysis of a generation (i.e., Generation Z) that, according to the existing literature (Castellini & Samoggia, 2018; Radovanović et al., 2017), represents a relevant segment of consumers who still are unknown under many aspects, but can be able to generate new trends and to impact both the traditional and organic wine markets, positively.

**Keywords:** Organic wine; sustainable behaviors; Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB); Country of Origin (CO); Z generation.

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