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Consumer Emotions and Preferences an empirical Analysis in two Italian Denomination of Origin Wines

Lara AGNOLI, Diego BEGALLI, Stefano CODURRI

Università degli Studi di Verona - Italia

lara.agnoli@univr.it, diego.begalli@univr.it, stefano.codurri@univr.it

The intangible factors are becoming more and more relevant in the consumer purchasing processes for premium and top wines. Old world wineries consider terroir as one of most sustainable competitive factors to gain commercial advantages in the global wine market. The consumers' willingness to pay is motivated by the selective characteristics and emotions connected to drinking.

This study tries to understand how emotions interact with preferences in the consumer choice process for two Italian denomination of origin wines: Amarone of Valpolicella DOC and Soave DOC. It tests a first-trial tasting method to quantify the weight of intrinsic factors considering consumer preferences.

The data were gathered through four focus groups involving 50 people. They were selected by age, sex, education and family characteristics. The focus groups were structured in two parts. In the first part, people were given a questionnaire to complete concerning: a) social-demographic characteristics; b) wine knowledge; c) consumption frequency of the surveyed wines; d) purchasing criteria. In the second part were collected information about: i) perceptions linked to wine; ii) associations between immaterial factors, consumption memory and product features; iii) a sensory evaluation test regarding six Amarone and six Soave DOC wines.

The data elaboration was conducted by the nonlinear principal components analysis to highlight hidden dimensions that summarize consumer behaviour and preferences. The cluster analysis was used to characterize homogeneous typologies of the consumers.

The main results of the research are summarized in the following points:

* The traditional parameters for market segmentation influence the wine knowledge, consumption frequency and wine purchasing criteria, but they are not able to clearly differentiate consumers in relation to emotions derived from the drinking of wine. In fact, there are common characteristics linked to the territory of origin and to the specific wine features.

* Brand reputation proves to be a major intrinsic factor which influences the choice of the consumers in buying Amarone and Soave wines. The greater the knowledge of the consumer the less they are influenced by the brand reputation and viceversa. At the same time consumers are conscious of being influenced by brand marketing.

* Contemplating the consumption memory, the objective characteristics of a wine (smell, colour, taste) have appeared more important than the immaterial components linked to wine denomination of origin (countryside, farming of the vines, culture, etc).

Although the results were similar to those foreseen at the birth of the concept of trial test tasting the study has also highlighted relevant points to take into consideration for future works.