

Is the consumer ready for innovative fruit wines?

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INTRODUCTION

The consumption of traditional wine has decreased in Europe during the last fifteen years. In parallel, new wine alternatives obtained by blending wines and fruit juices or by flavoring wines with artificial or natural flavors have appeared on the market. Recently, an innovative fruit wine obtained by co-fermenting grape must and kiwi juice has been proposed [1] and its potential should be exploited, especially in terms of environmental, economic and social sustainability. Indeed, the novel fruit-based wine addresses the sustainable development in the fruit and wine sector through the development of processes to decrease both the fruit surplus and low-quality wines. Italy is the second kiwi producing country worldwide and has one of the largest vine-growing area and the greatest production and consumption of wine in Europe. However, about 3% of the agricultural products are not harvested (10% is fresh fruits), generating a surplus [2], and the wine sector finds itself facing relevant quantities of unsold wine, often with a low-quality. Specifically, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the wine industry underwent to a loss of about € 5.4 bn in the first quarter of 2020 due to the unsold products [3].

AIMS

The present study aims at assessing the attractiveness to consumers toward the innovative fruit-base wine in order to exploit its potential.

Differences in product acceptability and perception, as well as the individuals' willingness to consume and pay could change in function of socio-demographic characteristics of subjects. Thus, the study will contribute to the development of the novel product integrating environmental, economic and social dimensions and addressing mutually food innovation and sustainability in the fruit and wine chains.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Considering young consumers as a target more attracted and willing to taste new products [4,5], this research was based on the survey about young people's expectations (millennial and generation Y) and the evolution driving the acceptability and appreciation of fruit wines. To this purpose, a choice experiment was conducted by involving a sample of young consumers divided in "neophiles" (those who had already tried a fruit wine) and in "new-entry" (willing to taste the (fruit wine)). For each group, a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) was performed in order to determine the effect of expectations, perceptions and willingness to pay on different established consumption orientation patterns.

The data were collected through an online survey created with Google Forms and disseminated by e-mail and social networks. The questionnaire was structured by different sections as described in Figure 1.

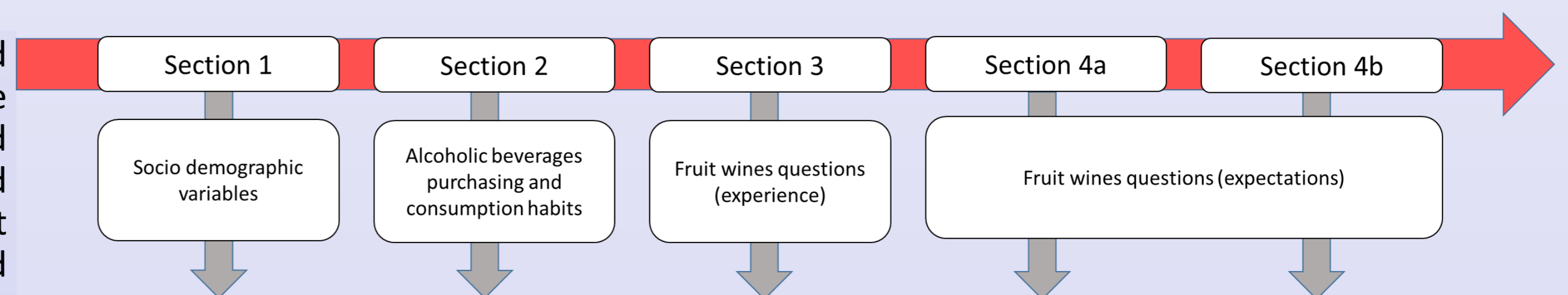


Figure 1. Questionnaire theoretical framework.

RESULTS

The interviewees were 118 "neophiles" and 253 individuals "new-entry" in function of the answers collected from the question "Have you ever consumed fruit wines?".

Sixty-eight % of individuals stated they would be willing to consume a fruit wine in the future, whereas 32% indicated they would not like to try this new product. Considering the latter consumers, the percentages of responses obtained regarding the reasons why they do not intend to approach this new product are shown in Figure 2. As reported in the graph also neophiles (9%) answers to the question "If no, why?" (answers: "I prefer only traditional drinks"; "I don't know how to combine it with food"; "I do not like it"; "I am not interested" and "I am not attracted by novelties"). On the contrary, the principal motivation was the individuals' preferences towards traditional products, followed by the absence of interest and attractiveness towards product innovation.

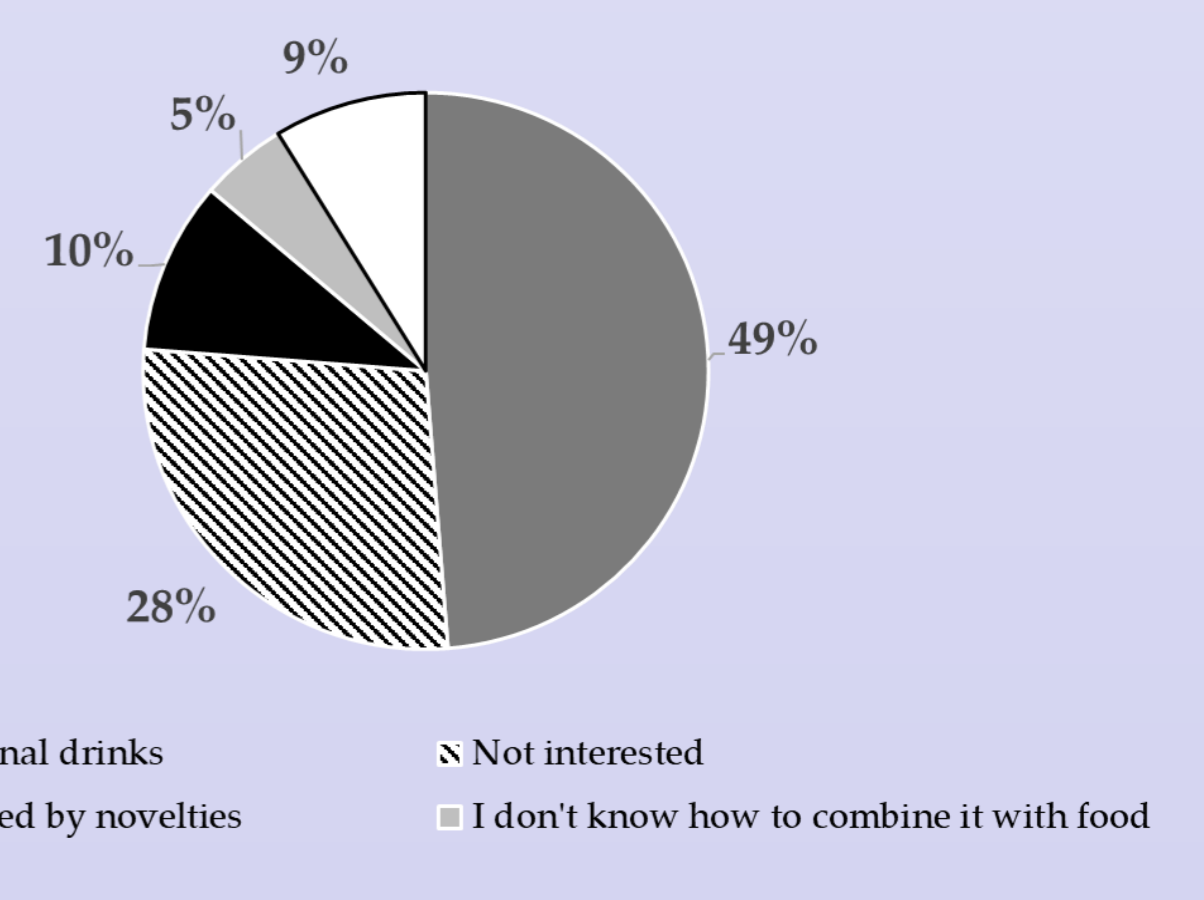


Figure 2. Consumers motivations for not consuming fruit wines.

The expectations about sensory characteristics of fruit wine changed comparing the two groups. In particular, if the neophiles, that already tried the product, did not expect a scent, color and taste corresponding to the original fruit, as well as a fresh beverage, these latter features were predictable by the new-entry.

- ✓ PCA results regarding the fruit wine expectations and perception profiles by neophiles consumers revealed that the first component (21.9% of the total explained variance) was positively correlated with the expectation to find the new product in bottle, as a format, and with the quality/price ratio. On the other hands, a negative correlation emerges with novelty and the known brand, since these individuals have already tested the product. This component defines a consumption model expectation towards a not sparkling product, for which is not important the alcoholic degree, with absence of sulfites, derived from quality fruit, not organic, but certified.
- ✓ In case of the consumers defined new-entry, the first component (17.8% of the total explained variance) defines an expectation model about fruit wine related above all to the type of product on the market (reassuring because of a well-known brand, with attractive packaging and good value for money).

CONCLUSIONS

The survey carried out on the consumer perception toward a novel fruit wine demonstrated that the marketplace could be attracted and potentially ready to this innovation. In fact, even though the product is still little known in Italy, 86% of positive responses were obtained by the question "Would you be willing to consume a fruit wine?"; in particular, negative answers were strongly due to respondents neophobia. Moreover, the sustainability aspects that distinguish this product along with the social impact of a low-alcohol drink, however obtained from a grape must, may represent a further economic fly-wheel in the alcoholic beverage market. The differences in consumer perception, considering gender and age, could represent a marketing tool to consider in the product communication strategies.

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