

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

**Digital, environmental, and social transformation:
challenges and perspectives**

September 28th – 29th, 2023 - University of Messina



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**GREEN TRANSITION IN THE WINE INDUSTRY:
ECO-PACKAGING AND ECO-LABELS AS TOOLS
TO PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE OBJECTIVES**

Veronica Marozzo

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Abstract

Sustainability is a pivotal concern for both businesses and consumers, encompassing production, packaging, and responsible consumption. Companies are compelled by global regulations to adopt innovative practices that support the environment within the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. This has led to a transition towards more sustainable products across various sectors. Green innovations such as recycling, eco-design, and eco-labeling are increasingly embraced, enhancing enterprise value while minimizing environmental harm. In the food industry, particular attention is given to sustainable packaging and green certifications on labels. This study delves into the propensity of food companies, focusing on an Italian wine producer, to adopt eco-packaging and eco-labels. Although these are valuable tools for sustainability communication, constraints exist in the wine sector. The findings emphasize the need to educate consumers on these concepts and revise industry regulations to facilitate sustainable packaging choices.

1. INTRODUCTION

The production, packaging, and consumption practices that support sustainability are relevant topics for both businesses and consumers as they represent critical aspects of quality and safety (Verbeke, 2005). According to Kim et al. (2015), sustainability can be understood through three important dimensions: i) economic, ii) social, and iii) environmental. The economic dimension considers the company's activities related to value creation and improvement of financial performance (Bansal, 2005).

The social dimension focuses on the company's impact on society and social issues (Wood, 1991). The environmental dimension encourages businesses to engage in activities related to the environment and its natural resources (Kim and Ma, 2014). Based on these three pillars of sustainability, the international community has been compelled (e.g., regulations and protocols) to urge companies to consider innovative approaches and practices that support the environment (Aboelmaged, 2018). In this direction, sustainable products, through their characteristics, attributes, and consequences, are products that contribute to one or a combination of the aforementioned dimensions (Reheul et al., 2001).

In order to protect the aspects of product's sustainability and authenticity, various certifications for food production have been introduced globally (e.g., the Safe Food Certification¹, and the Organic Food Certification²). According to Ingrassia et al. (2017), the use of labels on food packaging is a tool that enables consumers to make informed and conscious choices while certifying the presence of specific product characteristics. In particular, these certifications regulate inputs, such as reducing the use of pesticides, to ensure production control and analyze product residues, and represent just some sustainability elements that highlight companies' efforts toward this transition to green practices. The same attention has been given to product packaging, increasingly focusing on sustainable packaging. According to Magnier and Crié (2015), product packaging is of fundamental importance in consumers' purchasing

¹ <https://safefoodalliance.com/safe-food-certifications/>

² <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification>

decision-making process, especially in situations with a wide range of choices or time constraints. In sum, thanks to the growing awareness of sustainability, more and more companies are moving in a green direction through the adoption of green innovation approaches and practices (including recycling, re-use, eco-design, eco-packaging, and eco-labeling), which add value to the company while minimizing negative environmental impact and promoting sustainable goals (Oltra and Saint Jean, 2009).

From this point of view, the wine sector stands as a paradigmatic case in the investigation of eco-packaging and eco-labeling, as it represents a fertile ground in which to examine the interplay between environmental sustainability, business activities, and economic performance. The wine industry, in addition to being a cultural and economic pillar in many regions, has traditionally been linked to production processes that can generate a significant impact on the environment.

From the research point of view, the literature reports numerous studies highlighting the importance of these aspects (i.e., eco-packaging and eco-labels) in the wine industry (e.g., Sogari et al., 2017; Delmas and Lessem, 2017; Delmas and Grant, 2014), by suggesting to deeper investigate these topics in this specific industry. Therefore, the work performs a single-case study methodology by focusing on an Italian wine producer (Cantine Bonfiglio) to explore green transition in the wine domain. Specifically, it aims to explore the wine company's inclination to adopt green practices, with a specific focus on eco-packaging and eco-labels.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 ECO-PACKAGING RESEARCH

Despite being developed to address environmental concerns, sustainable packaging has sparked a substantial and noteworthy body of literature on its effects on consumers (e.g., Granato et al., 2022; Vila-Lopez and Küster-Boluda, 2021).

With specific reference to the wine industry, Barber (2010) has conducted research to identify the consumer profile who expressed an intention to pay more for environmentally friendly wine packaging. The author provided evidence that the consumers' willingness to pay extra for eco-friendly wine packaging is strongly influenced by their concern for the environment, their consideration of environmental factors when making purchases, and their collective mindset. With the aim to explore the consumers' attitudes and willingness to purchase wine in packaging alternatives (e.g., bag-in-box, aseptic carton, or PET bottles) that are more sustainable than glass bottles, Ferrara et al. (2020), on a sample of 1000 wine consumers, have shown that approximately 91% of the respondents expressed their unwillingness to explore alternative wine packaging options, insisting on purchasing wine packaged solely in glass bottles. Their preference for glass bottles primarily stems from the belief that other packaging alternatives are unsuitable. Additionally, the authors have shown that, even with their strong preference for glass bottle packaging, approximately 62% of these individuals indicate a willingness to reconsider their stance. As stated by Ferrara et al. (2020), this shift in perspective occurs after being informed that, for most wines, the quality

remains unchanged in alternative packaging and that such choices could contribute to the overall sustainability of the wine industry.

Therefore, the literature review shows the considerable attention of scholars on the topic from the perspective of consumers by highlighting that little is known in terms of perceptions from the supply side, an aspect that pushes the present work to deepen.

2.2 ECO-LABEL RESEARCH

The labeling schemes show great potential as effective tools for encouraging more sustainable consumption habits (Majer et al., 2022). Specifically, labeling schemes offer a reliable means of informing consumers about a product's performance concerning various environmental, ethical, and social aspects.

Compared to the diffusion of eco-labels in other industries, the diffusion of eco-labels in the wine industry is still lagging. As highlighted by Jones and Grandjean (2018) the organic wine market remained quite small (in 2017 organic wine accounts for only 5% of the global market). To investigate and understand this scenario, several studies focused attention on the eco-labeled wine product. Although Berghoef and Dodds (2011) reported that consumers were willing to pay a premium of 0.51\$ or more (until 65 percent) for eco-labeled wine, as well as D'Amico et al. (2016) reported that consumers are more willing to pay a higher price by showing a higher purchase intention for organic wines, several studies provided evidence that consumers are unwilling to pay a premium price for organic labeled wines (e.g., Delmas and Lessem, 2017; Delmas and Grant, 2014). Building upon the existence of a perceived trade-off between the sustainable

characteristics indicated by the eco-labels and the product's quality and efficacy (e.g., Lin and Chang, 2012; Luchs et al., 2010), Delmas and Gergaud (2021), by adopting a matching technique methodology, have shown that biodynamic and organic labels lead to improved ratings in terms of quality (+5.6 and +6.2 percentage points respectively) respected to conventional wines. Other studies (e.g., Fotopoulos et al., 2003; Barreiro-Hurlé et al., 2008) provided evidence that consumers perceived organic wines as health-promoting by highlighting that consumers with high health-conscious are mainly interested in marketing campaigns promoting organic wines (Goode and Harrop, 2011). By examining the consumers' attitudes toward organic wines, Olsen et al. (2012) have shown that the environmental protection and hedonistic values of the product play a relevant role in the consumers' purchase intention of organic wine. Since the organic wine production protocol forbids sulfites, low-sulfite winemaking is often considered organic production's synonymous. From this perspective, Costanigro et al. (2014) have shown that individuals who are allergic to sulfites state that organic-labeled wines, thanks to their lower content of sulfites, are better for them than conventional wines. Specifically, the authors reported that consumers with headache syndrome suffer after consuming moderate amounts of certain wines and were willing to pay a *ceteris paribus* premium price of 1.23\$ to avoid sulfites in wine.

As seen for the eco-packaging literature, also in this case the literature review shows the considerable attention of scholars on the eco-labels from the perspective of consumers by highlighting that little is known in terms of perceptions from the supply side, an aspect that pushes the present work to deepen.

3. METHODOLOGY

As stated by Stake (2003) case study research is an exploration and examination of individual or group instances, to comprehend the intricacies of the subject of inquiry. Case study methodology upholds profound associations with fundamental principles and aspirations, embodying particularized, illustrative, and exploratory characteristics (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). As stated by previous literature (e.g., Siggelkow, 2007; Thomas, 2011), case studies are valuable for inspiring new ideas.

This research employs a single case study approach, combining qualitative data through multiple sources, such as primary (i.e., semi-structured interviews) and secondary data (i.e., from the company website, social media, YouTube, press releases, and news reports collected via the web) that were triangulated for ensuring internal validity of the results. The single-case approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the chosen case by examining it from various angles and perspectives, therefore, it provides an in-depth exploration of a specific case, offering rich insights that can contribute to theoretical advancements and practical applications within a given field of study.

4. THE CASE STUDY

The wine industry represents a fascinating field of study in which to analyze how companies use eco-packaging and eco-labeling as tools for their transition to green. The interaction between these sustainability strategies and consumer behavior can provide valuable insights into how

wine businesses can adapt to changing market and public needs while ensuring environmental protection and long-term value creation. With this in mind, the “Cantine Bonfiglio” was chosen as the unit of analysis. The Bonfiglio Agricultural Company was officially established in 1986. In the early 2000s, a conversion took place. The citrus grove was uprooted, the land was prepared again, and vineyards were established, including the addition of the property in Piano Cuturi (Giampileri). In 2015, the commercial name “Cantine Bonfiglio” was born and in the same year, when the first plants reached maturity, the company decided to make its ideals of valorization and respect for the territory effective, thus initiating the process of conversion from conventional agriculture to organic farming. In 2018, the “Suolo e Salute” control and certification body³, came with the first organic certification for the grapes and the production in the winery.

4.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the triangulation of the primary and secondary data on the case study, the results show that the concept of excellence and, above all, the quality of the product are the main foundations that guide all the activities of Cantine Bonfiglio all in full compliance with sustainability objectives “our spirit is that of trying to make a quality product respecting the environment. Since 2018 our products have become organic. The company has embraced a path. Electrification system with photovoltaic, low consumption machinery and total abolition of pesticides, herbicides and

³ *Suolo e Salute is the first control and certification body for organic in Italy.*

chemicals” (Biagio Bonfiglio)⁴. This result underlines how important is the use new green practices to aim for a quality product that is also able to transmit the uniqueness and authenticity of the wine. Concerning the latter topic, findings suggest that it goes well with the concept of sustainability as one incorporates the other “a product is all the more authentic the more it manages to preserve its intrinsic characteristics ... then, ensure the authenticity of the product allow to preserve the territory and the nature in which it is produced and, implicitly, pursue sustainability objectives” (Antonio Bonfiglio)⁵.

In terms of eco-label, as declared by Antonio “the best way to communicate sustainability through wine is the adoption of organic farming techniques and we have been doing this for years through the use of the certification “Suolo e salute”. Also in this case, the concept of quality continues to play a key role by highlighting that the adoption of sustainable practices, not only allows for respect and preservation of nature but also ensures a high-quality product “organic wine is positively influenced by organic cultivation as it is the result of this attitude of respect for nature and is affected, therefore, in terms of better quality”. Moreover, findings highlight the relevant role of marketing which is an activity fundamental for the enterprise as specified by Antonio “telling your story is fundamental in terms of product transparency and ethics ... the ability to tell a story both in terms of refined quality and in terms of ethics is for us a way to give the customer the idea that we want to make quality our cornerstone and focus”. Finally, consistent with previous

⁴ *Founder of Cantine Bonfiglio*

⁵ *Chief Executive of Cantine Bonfiglio*

literature (e.g., Berghoef and Dodds, 2011; D’Amico et al., 2016) the results confirm that although “organic production requires higher costs, it is more attentive to natural timing and with a final product of higher quality, for which customers are willing to spend even more and this is precisely our target: customers attentive to content and environmentally friendly” (Antonio).

Concerning eco-packaging, the results corroborate the evidence of the previous research (e.g., Ferrara et al., 2020) stressing that this is an important but difficult issue for wineries to manage. As stated by Antonio “as for the possibility of using a different packaging than the classic glass bottle, there is a lot to discuss. For example, recently we often talk about aluminum as an alternative product to glass for wine packaging, but some disciplinary such as DOC Faro categorically prohibit the use of alternative containers”. These results show that, while wanting to pursue sustainability objectives, it is difficult to implement sustainable practices in terms of packaging due to regulations and disciplinary follow.

Additionally, findings show the relevant role of innovation as well as of the new technologies in the wine industry. Specifically, thanks to the adoption of sustainable agriculture techniques such as, for example, the non-mechanization of grape harvesting (which therefore involves very little stress on plants), the use of a photovoltaic system that allows for generation and use of clean energy, as well as the use of an artesian well that allows water to be obtained for use both for crops and cellar work (e.g., cleaning) Cantine Bonfiglio pays considerable attention to the concept of sustainability, which seems to guide the company’s activities.

5. CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

From the findings of the analysis of the role of eco-labels and eco-packaging in the wine sector, it is possible to highlight their potential effectiveness in communicating sustainability to consumers. In particular, eco-labels (e.g., organic label) are good tools to convey clear and tangible messages of environmentally friendly farming and production practices. Furthermore, organic labeling, thanks to the total abolition of pesticides, herbicides, and chemicals, as well as communicating messages of environmental sustainability, also allows the communication of a healthier product that is not contaminated by elements harmful to the health of the consumer. However, the widespread adoption of eco-packaging in the wine sector is constrained by several challenges, mainly due to the predominance of glass as a packaging material. The traditions and regulatory restrictions that impose the exclusive use of glass for some types of wine represent a significant obstacle to the adoption of more sustainable alternative packaging solutions. Despite this, the growing interest in eco-sustainability could stimulate further research and innovation in the field of packaging, paving the way for solutions that can balance the wine tradition with the imperative of reducing environmental impact.

From a theoretical point of view, this study represents an important contribution to the wide literature concerning the concepts of eco-labels and eco-packaging in the wine industry. By examining the challenges and opportunities that wine companies face in adopting eco-labels and eco-packaging, the analysis goes beyond mere external perception, shedding light on the internal factors that influence sustainable labels and packaging choices. Furthermore, by exploring the restrictions imposed by

wine disciplinary that often promote the exclusive use of glass, the article sheds light on structural obstacles that can limit the adoption of alternative packaging solutions.

From a managerial point of view, wine companies could consider investing in targeted communication strategies to educate consumers with regard to both eco-labels and eco-packaging. Companies can play an active role in informing consumers about the differences between various labels and certifications, highlighting the real commitment to sustainability. Concerning eco-packaging, wine companies should educate consumers about the environmental and quality benefits of glass alternatives such as PET or aluminum packaging. It is essential to reduce the negative association between non-traditional packaging and low quality, through information campaigns that emphasize the characteristics of preservation, practicality, and reduction of the environmental impact offered by these solutions. Moreover, considering the restrictions imposed by wine disciplinary, companies can actively act in the revision and adaptation of regulations to allow greater flexibility in the use of more sustainable packaging materials. Working with regulatory bodies and industry associations could lead to a revision of the rules that currently restrict packaging choices, paving the way for the adoption of environmentally friendly solutions without compromising the integrity and tradition of wines.

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