

## Exploring the determinants of table grape purchases among Italian consumers: the roles of certification and brand attributes

Domenico Morrone<sup>\*1</sup>, Annunziata Tarulli<sup>2</sup>, Karolina Sallaku<sup>3</sup>, and Elisa Toma<sup>4</sup>

**Abstract:** *Table grapes play a crucial role in the global agricultural market, especially in Italy, where they significantly influence the economy. Valued for their taste, nutritional benefits, and versatility in various forms, including fresh consumption, drying, and culinary use, table grapes serve as a benchmark for quality and innovation in the fresh produce industry. Despite facing challenges such as the adverse impact of climate change on cultivation, market saturation, competition from other fruits, and limited consumer awareness of their unique benefits, the industry can embrace comprehensive marketing strategies centred on sustainability, innovation, and consumer engagement. By promoting the health and environmental benefits of table grapes and leveraging digital platforms to reach out to younger audiences, this industry can take proactive steps. Furthermore, focusing on differentiation and adding value to the product offerings can help the industry sustain its competitive edge and ensure long-term success. To contribute to the ongoing debate about consumer behaviour and the impact of product characteristics on purchasing decisions, this study uses data from an online questionnaire targeting Italian consumers. It aims to uncover crucial insights into their preferences and perceptions of table grapes, especially concerning the product's variety, quality and origin certifications, and sustainable commitment. By harnessing these insights, this industry can strengthen its appeal and resilience, paving the way for targeted marketing strategies and product differentiation across domestic and international markets, while effectively addressing global challenges.*

**Keyword:** table grapes, sustainability, certification, consumer behaviour, brand value.

### 1. Background

Table grapes play a strategic role in the global agricultural market, serving as a vital crop for many regions, above all Italy and its Southern areas. They are not only a popular fruit choice among consumers due to their taste and nutritional benefits (Seccia et al., 2019) but also a significant economic contributor for producers and exporters of various related industries, such as farming, logistics, and retail (Alston et

---

<sup>\*1</sup> (corresponding author) Full professor of *Management* – LUM University, Italy – e-mail: [morrone@lum.it](mailto:morrone@lum.it)

<sup>2</sup> Research fellow in *Management* – LUM University, Italy – e-mail: [tarulli@lum.it](mailto:tarulli@lum.it)

<sup>3</sup> PhD Candidate – LUM University, Italy – e-mail: [sallaku@lum.it](mailto:sallaku@lum.it)

<sup>4</sup> Research fellow in *Management* – LUM University, Italy – e-mail: [e.toma.adr@lum.it](mailto:e.toma.adr@lum.it)

al., 2019), with an increased trade competitiveness (Seccia et al., 2015). Table grapes are rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, which contribute to various health benefits, including cardiovascular protection and cancer prevention. Notably, polyphenols like resveratrol found in grapes have been extensively studied for their anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, which support long-term health (Imran et al., 2017; Dohadwala & Vita, 2009). Table grapes have a wide range of uses: they can be eaten fresh, dried, or used in various recipes. Their versatility significantly enhances their market value and demand, positioning them as a crucial component of the fresh produce industry and recognising them as a standard for quality and innovative farming practices. Despite their importance, the table grape industry faces a series of challenges that threaten its sustainability and growth. Climate change is a significant issue, as it affects grape production through unpredictable weather patterns, increased temperatures, and altered precipitation levels (Atak, 2023). These changes disrupt the delicate balance required for high-quality grape cultivation, leading to reduced yields and compromised fruit quality. Studies have shown that rising temperatures can accelerate grapevine phenology, causing earlier bud break and maturation, which can adversely impact the flavour profile and marketability of the grapes (Alikadic et al., 2019; Van Leeuwen et al., 2019). In addition to environmental challenges, the industry faces market-related difficulties. The global market for fresh produce is highly competitive, with table grapes contending against various other fruits that are equally convenient and nutritious. The saturation of traditional markets in Europe and North America further exacerbates these challenges. Moreover, the lack of innovative marketing strategies makes it difficult for table grapes to stand out from other fruits (Seccia et al., 2015). Research indicates that consumers are increasingly drawn to products that offer not only quality and health benefits but also align with their values, such as sustainability and social responsibility (Pomarici & Vecchio, 2014; Pomarici et al., 2017; Seccia et al., 2019). Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach to market strategy. Embracing sustainable agricultural practices is essential, as consumers are becoming more environmentally conscious and demanding eco-friendly and local products (Cranfield et al., 2012). Implementing methods such as organic farming, water conservation techniques, and the use of renewable energy sources can significantly reduce the environmental footprint of grape production while appealing to sustainability-minded consumers. These practices have been shown to not only mitigate the effects of climate change but also enhance the long-term viability of agricultural production (Bell & Giuliani, 2007; Nicholas & Durham, 2012). Certifications, eco-labels as well as a strong brand, can serve as powerful marketing tools, signalling a commitment to environmental stewardship and attracting a broader customer base (Barber et al. 2009; Delmas & Grant, 2014). Innovation is also critical for revitalizing the table grape industry. Developing new grape varieties that are more resilient to climate stressors and pests can help ensure consistent quality and supply in the face of environmental uncertainties. Additionally, exploring value-added products like grape-based snacks, beverages, and health supplements can open new market segments and revenue streams. Research has highlighted that diversification and product innovation are key to staying competitive in dynamic markets (Bisson et al., 2002). Enhancing consumer

engagement is another crucial aspect of a successful modern marketing strategy. Digital platforms and social media provide opportunities for direct interaction with consumers, allowing companies to share compelling narratives about the journey from vineyard to table and the people behind the produce. Educational campaigns that inform consumers about the nutritional value and sustainable practices involved in grape production can also foster increased loyalty and preference for table grapes over competing fruits (Thach, 2009). Therefore, the need to adopt a multifaceted approach that prioritises sustainability, innovation, and consumer engagement. By aligning production and marketing strategies with up-to-date consumer values and environmental imperatives, this industry can secure its position in the global market and continue to thrive amid evolving challenges. This research focuses on Italy – a leading production territory – by examining consumers' attitudes and preferences towards table grapes to contribute to the ongoing literature debate and identify effective strategies for the product's market success. Specifically, we aimed to understand the importance Italian consumers place on grapes characteristics, quality and origin certifications, and brands' attributes and sustainable commitment. As such, our investigation was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: *What factors drive Italian consumers to purchase table grapes?*

RQ2: *Do certifications positively influence Italian consumers' purchases?*

RQ3: *Do brand-related attributes positively influence Italian consumers to purchase this product?*

After this background, the paper develops as follows: Section 2 presents the sample data and methodology, Section 3 outlines preliminary results, while Section 4 closes with the discussion and conclusion.

## **2. Methodology and data**

Based on the previous background and research objectives, an online questionnaire targeting Italian consumers was developed. After an initial pre-test, an preliminary sample of 121 respondents was reached through the Google Form platform from July to August 2024. To measure responses, some questions used a seven-point Likert scale (where '1' and '7' identified a poor or high match), while others included open-ended or multiple-choice answers. In detail, participants were 67% male and 33% female, mainly from Northern Italy (50%), with an average age of 36 and a high-school education (57%). As for occupation, half of the respondents were employed (51%), followed by students (27%), and entrepreneurs or self-employed (17%). This data is reflected in the average monthly income recorded, which stands at a medium-high level with an average of EUR 2.500,00.

## **3. Results**

IBM SPSS Statistics was used to perform the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). A correlation analysis confirmed the significance of all variables in explaining the phenomenon, showing positive low, medium, and high values. To ensure the analysis's robustness and test the sample's adequacy, we performed the KMO Test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, both of which yielded significant measures, allowing us to proceed with the analysis. Next, communalities were studied, showing noteworthy

values in terms of the variance explained by common factors. Specifically, seven factors were extracted, accounting for over half of the total variance (precisely, 70.98%), as briefly summarised in Table 1.

*Tab. 1: Summary of the latent factors*

	<i>Latent factor</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	<i>Sustainability and Social Responsibility</i>	It demonstrates the increasing importance of sustainability, social equity, and health in shaping consumer behaviour during purchases.
2	<i>Health and Wellness Motivations</i>	It presents the central role of fresh fruit consumption in promoting health and wellness in a natural and preventive way.
3	<i>Brand Influence on Consumer Behaviour</i>	It illustrates the critical role that brand-related elements (i.e., brand awareness, advertising, reputation, and loyalty) play in shaping consumer choices.
4	<i>Price, Promotions, and Product Attributes</i>	It focuses on the critical role of economic considerations and sensory attributes in consumer decision-making.
5	<i>Consumption Frequency and Preference</i>	It emphasises the significance of consumption habits and preferences for different grape types in shaping consumer behaviour.
6	<i>Certifications and Local Sourcing</i>	It underscores the significance of product credibility and local attributes in consumer decision-making.
7	<i>Product Attributes and Innovative Packaging</i>	It highlights the significance of grape shape, texture, and technological advancements in consumer decision-making.

Source: our elaboration with IBM SPSS Statistics

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

Table 1 outlines what motivates Italian consumers to purchase table grapes and examines the impact of certifications and brand-related attributes on their decision-making. The study reveals that consumer decision-making is multifaceted and influenced by various strategic factors. Consumers prioritise sustainability and social responsibility, emphasising ethical practices, environmental impact, and health benefits in their purchasing decisions. To adapt to this shift, table grape producers should focus on sustainable practices, obtain relevant certifications, and clearly communicate these efforts to build consumer trust and appeal. Brand influence, including brand awareness and reputation, plays a significant role in shaping consumer loyalty and purchasing decisions. Therefore, strategic branding and reputation management are crucial for achieving long-term consumer loyalty and market success. Economic factors, such as price and promotions, as well as sensory attributes like seedlessness and crunchiness, also have a considerable impact on consumer satisfaction and purchasing behaviour. Consequently, producers should optimise pricing strategies and enhance product features to meet consumer expectations. Furthermore, the consumption habits and preferences for grape varieties underscore the importance of aligning product offerings with market demands. Leveraging certifications, promoting local sourcing, and adopting innovative packaging solutions, such as freshness sensors, further enhance product appeal and consumer trust. By integrating these considerations, the table grape industry can effectively seize market opportunities, meet evolving consumer needs, and drive economic growth. Our preliminary findings are crucial as they pave the way for

further analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the future trajectory of the table grapes industry. Acknowledging that this study is just the beginning focused on uncovering consumer behaviour patterns before embarking on more comprehensive analyses is imperative. Indeed, a CFA and path analysis will soon be performed to understand the influence of certifications and brand-related attributes on Italian consumers' behaviour.

## References

- Alikadic, A., Pertot, I., Eccel, E., Dolci, C., Zarbo, C., Caffarra, A., ... & Furlanello, C. (2019). The impact of climate change on grapevine phenology and the influence of altitude: A regional study. *Agricultural and forest meteorology*, 271, 73-82.
- Alston, Julian M., and Olena Sambucci. "Grapes in the world economy." *The grape genome* (2019): 1-24.
- Atak, A. (2023, July). Challenges and strategies for table grape breeding in the face of global climate change. In *III International Symposium on Fruit Culture along Silk Road Countries 1401* (pp. 33-40).
- Barber, N., Taylor, C., & Strick, S. (2009). Wine consumers' environmental knowledge and attitudes: Influence on willingness to purchase. *International Journal of Wine Research*, 59-72.
- Bell, M., & Giuliani, E. (2007). Catching up in the global wine industry: innovation systems, cluster knowledge networks and firm-level capabilities in Italy and Chile. *International Journal of Technology and Globalisation*, 3(2-3), 197-223.
- Bisson, L. F., Waterhouse, A. L., Ebeler, S. E., Walker, M. A., & Lapsley, J. T. (2002). The present and future of the international wine industry. *Nature*, 418(6898), 696-699.
- Cranfield, J., Henson, S., & Blandon, J. (2012). The effect of attitudinal and sociodemographic factors on the likelihood of buying locally produced food. *Agribusiness*, 28(2), 205-221.
- Delmas, M. A., & Grant, L. E. (2014). Eco-labeling strategies and price-premium: the wine industry puzzle. *Business & Society*, 53(1), 6-44.
- Dohadwala, M. M., & Vita, J. A. (2009). Grapes and cardiovascular disease. *The Journal of nutrition*, 139(9), 1788S-1793S.
- Imran, M., Rauf, A., Imran, A., Nadeem, M., Ahmad, Z., Atif, M., ... & Waqar, B. A. (2017). Health benefits of grapes polyphenols. *J. Environ. Agric. Sci*, 10, 40-51.
- Nicholas, K. A., & Durham, W. H. (2012). Farm-scale adaptation and vulnerability to environmental stresses: Insights from winegrowing in Northern California. *Global Environmental Change*, 22(2), 483-494.
- Pomarici, E., & Vecchio, R. (2014). Millennial generation attitudes to sustainable wine: An exploratory study on Italian consumers. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 66, 537-545.
- Pomarici, E., Lerro, M., Chrysochou, P., Vecchio, R., & Krystallis, A. (2017). One size does (obviously not) fit all: Using product attributes for wine market segmentation. *Wine Economics and policy*, 6(2), 98-106.

- Seccia, A., Santeramo, F. G., & Nardone, G. (2015). Trade competitiveness in table grapes: a global view. *Outlook on AGRICULTURE*, 44(2), 127-134.
- Seccia, A., Viscecchia, R., & Nardone, G. (2019). Table grapes as functional food: Consumer preferences for health and environmental attributes. In *BIO web of conferences* (Vol. 15, p. 03011). EDP Sciences.
- Thach, L. (2009). Wine 2.0—The next phase of wine marketing? Exploring US winery adoption of wine 2.0 components. *Journal of wine research*, 20(2), 143-157.
- Van Leeuwen, C., Destrac-Irvine, A., Dubernet, M., Duchêne, E., Gowdy, M., Marguerit, E., ... & Ollat, N. (2019). An update on the impact of climate change in viticulture and potential adaptations. *Agronomy*, 9(9), 514.