What do wine consumers truly want?

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 24 Ottobre 2023



Gloomy reports continue to pour in from the markets, and it's never been more evident that many issues have reached a breaking point. **Notably, the post-Covid optimism, which once made us believe that everything would return to normal or even improve, now seems definitively extinguished.**

Furthermore, it's becoming apparent that wine, despite its reputation as a counter-cyclical product that performs well during crises, **is currently experiencing declines in consumption and sales worldwide due to economic difficulties.**

However, I believe it would be a mistake to merely observe this situation without attempting to interpret it **on one hand and identify potential solutions** and future scenarios on the other.

To achieve this, it is essential to gain a better

understanding of consumer choices, motivations, and expectations. **Unfortunately, as I have mentioned many times before,** our industry has historically been averse to analyzing wine consumers, and as a result, we know very little about them.

Therefore, we often rely on more general analyses that don't specifically focus on wine. In this context, a recent analysis by **Mintel, one of the world's leading companies specializing in assessing changes in consumption patterns,** provides valuable insights.

The title of **Mintel's study is indicative** and, I would even say prophetic: "How food and drink innovation will save the planet".

This title immediately highlights a crucial factor we often overlook, especially in the wine industry: that innovation is indispensable for a positive future. **Despite our industry's tendency to regard tradition as sacred,** it's clear that innovation is rarely given the attention it deserves.

So, what did Mintel's study reveal, specifically?

Firstly, it shed light on something that directly concerns Italian consumers, with a sample of 1,000 individuals aged 16 and above. **They were asked, "What are your priorities when purchasing food and beverages?".**

The results were as follows:

- 73% emphasized price.
- 63% valued flavor and taste.
- 46% prioritized healthiness.
- 46% sought products with natural ingredients.
- 32% considered the environmental impact.

Notably, 69% of the interviewed Italians believed that the simplest way to combat the climate crisis is through their choices in food and beverages, **indicating a high level of awareness about the role of food and drinks in the future of our planet.**

However, the study also revealed that 59% of Italian consumers who already purchase "sustainable" food and beverages felt that their current reduced **spending capacity might make product sustainability less of a priority**. These are qualitative surveys and don't provide statistical data, but they do offer important insights into emerging trends.

One such trend is the impact of the economic crisis and **consumers' reduced spending capacity on the purchase of "sustainable" products**. However, focusing solely on this aspect would be a mistake, as it would imply inaction while waiting for the economy to recover.

In reality, other analyses demonstrate that the demand for "sustainable" products is growing among consumers worldwide. Nonetheless, **the current economic situation is making consumers more discerning** in distinguishing genuine sustainability from misleading greenwashing.

Returning to Mintel's study findings, i**t's unsurprising that price is a critical factor (as it always has been and will continue to be)**. However, it's also important not to view "low" prices as the only strategy; we must convey the correct positioning to consumers. This is why I must emphasize my disagreement with the wine industry's communication strategy, which often conceals production issues and gives the impression that each vintage is the best one yet.

This approach ultimately leaves consumers unaware of the true value of our wines, **the costs involved, and the challenges that businesses face in production.**

Lastly, regarding innovation, **I draw inspiration from a**

conversation with my friend and producer, Mario Pojer. He pointed out that Solaris, the inter-specific resistant variety, had weathered one of the most challenging seasons in his history as a winemaker in Trentino perfectly. Mario emphasized that what's wrong is the perception of these resistant varieties as similar to Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay, trying to create blends that somewhat resemble traditional varieties. Instead, he believes that **we should study and interpret these varieties for the unique wines they can offer to meet new consumption trends and cater to new consumers.**

It's hard to disagree with the always innovative and visionary Mario Pojer.