The Role of Packaging in Marketing Communication: an Explorative Study of the Italian Wine Business

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Introduction

The objective of this paper is to examine the role of wine packaging in the context of marketing communication. Current Marketing literature already addresses the different functions of packaging, and highlights the fact that every business presents its own specific characteristics. These, in turn, influence both the producer's strategy and consumer behavior.

In the wine sector, new Marketing knowledge is imperative. Structural and competitive factors such as a high level of fragmentation, the growing role of modern distribution systems, new tendencies in purchasing and consumer behavior, growing international competition, and packaging innovation make it ideal for analyzing the role of packaging as a communication tool.

In order to achieve this goal, work was divided into two steps:

- desk research was used as an opportunity to analyze the wine business in general, and literature on packaging and its role in communication in particular in order to develop a theoretical model to apply to empirical research.
- field research was conducted with explorative aim, to study important aspects of the role of wine packaging in the communication process.

The Wine Industry in Italy

The wine industry in Italy is prevalently characterized by high levels of production, export, and fragmentation. More recently, it has also been characterized by relevant changes in the national and international contexts.

Traditionally, Italy has had a dominant position in the wine business in Europe and all over the world. To illustrate this point, we offer some figures.

Italy produces about 5 billion liters of wine per year, with a negative variation in 2004-2005 (Table 1).

Table 1 – Italian Wine Production

Area	2004 Volume (100,000 liters)	2005 Volume (100,000 liters)	Variation 04-05
northwest	4,545	4,034	- 11%
northeast	18,612	15,350	- 18%
central	7,984	6,761	- 15%
south	22,135	22,929	+ 4%
Total Italy	53,275	49,074	- 8%

Source: Dossier Vini, in Food, N. 12, December, 2005

Italian wine production, in volume, covers about 21% of the world market and about 34% of the European Union market. Italy, together with France, is one of the two largest wine-producing countries in the world.

Italian turnover from wine is roughly 8 billion Euro, a quarter of which is from exports.

Italian wine production, depending on harvests (Wine News, 2005), is generally divided between [1]:

- 60% quality wines, which are subdivided into:
  - 6% DOCG (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita* - Controlled and Guaranteed Origin Denomination);
  - 18% DOC (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata* - Controlled Origin Denomination);
  - 36% IGT (*Indicazione Geografica Tipica* - Typical Geographical Indication)
- and 40% table wine.

Producers need information about the market and consumer behavior in order to compete successfully in the international context. Nevertheless, being a fragmented industry characterized by several small and familiar firms, it is difficult to invest in marketing research. Data indicate that in Italy there are over 600,000 wine producers, of which only about 33,000 bottle and only 1,500 regularly export (Istat, 2003). The Italian wine industry has the lowest concentration rate among producer countries. Considering the turnover of the top five firms in every country, Italy is near the bottom of the list, followed by only Argentina and Chile (Table 2).

Table 2 - Concentration Rate of the Wine Industry in Countries of Old and New World (2000)

Countries	**Share of production and turnover of first 5 firms (2000)**	
	Share of production %	**Turnover MIO $**
Old World		
France (without Champagne)	13	330
Italy	5	125
Spain	10	190
New World		
USA	73	750
Australia	68	310
New Zealand	80	Na
Argentina	50	97
Chile	47	90

Source: Nomisma (2003)

Other data show that in Italy the 71 largest companies have 34% of turnover and 51% of wine exports (Mediobanca, 2005). While in California E&J Gallo has a turnover of over 1,500 billion euros and in France Castel has a turnover of 979 million euros, in Italy each of the top two firms, Caviro Faenza and GIV (Gruppo Italiano Vini), has a turnover of less than 240 million euros. About 80% of the companies have a turnover of just over 2 million euros

[1] The qualitative hierarchy of Italian wines, defined by the production regulations, is divided in some levels: at the first level the generic table wines; at the second level the wines with a Typical Geographical Indication (IGT); at the higher levels the wines with Controlled Denomination of Origin (DOC) and with Denomination of Origin Controlled and Guaranteed (DOCG). (Federdoc, 2006).

(Biga and Brotto, 2006).

The Italian wine industry is currently undergoing a major transformation due to changes in the national and international context: globalization of consumer behavior, the transformation of products from commodity to having relevant immaterial aspects, the decrease of product life cycles, increasing competition from emerging producer countries, new opportunities in distribution, e-commerce, food & wine tourism, and so on.

As for consumerism, we note two tendencies: on the one hand, pro-capita consumption (49.8 liters in a year in 2004) continues to decrease as daily use, or wine as "food," loses importance, while social consumption is on the increase, both outside the home, as in happy hours, wine bars, etc, and in the home on special occasions (Wine News, 2006).

In recent years, the Italian economic crisis has led consumers to pay more attention to price. Consumer expenditure on wine is limited, consequently price becomes the most important factor in choice. Only 14% of Italians choose bottles costing over 5 euros because of the prevailing perception that it is possible to find quality wines at lower prices. Consumers are willing to pay high prices (maximum 30€/bottle) only on special occasions and for an excellent wine (Eurisko, 2003).

Further, we note a progressive polarization of consumers into two groups: those who do not buy wines priced over 3 euros, and those interested mainly in wines over 10€. In other words, the middle segment is progressively disappearing.

The globalization process in consumerism that is causing a concentration process in the wine industry (less quickly in Italy than in other countries), is also causing change in consumerism. A positive interest in food and its territory leads to food and wine tourism, for example. As a result, the so-called "economy of taste," is developing.

Innovation and the role of modern distribution are important in the wine industry, especially given data which indicates that Italian families often buy in super and hypermarkets, where 60% of all wine in Italy is sold at an average price of € 2.31 and a maximum price also of 40€ per bottle (Table 3).

Table 3 – Distribution Channel of Wine in Italy (2004)

Point-of-Sale	**% of turnover in value (total 1,478 mio €)**	**% of turnover in volume (total 6.40 mio hl)**
Hyper – Super	60,5	61,9
Minimarkets	15,9	18,4
Wine-tasting bars	15,8	6,1
Discount	7,8	13,6

Source: Federvini (2004)

Shelves where wine bottles are displayed tend to be crowded, both in terms of space and number of units with different types of packaging (Table 4). Therefore, a consumer can expect to find roughly 150 units in supermarkets and up to 800 units in hypermarkets.

As a result, without previous information, the consumer may have some difficulty in choosing wine. In fact, 58% of those buying wine in super and hypermarkets do not seek a specific bottle, and rely solely on emotion to guide their choices. This behavior permits producers to compete using packaging as a communication tool.

As regards the type of packaging, we note the prominent role of glass, which covers over 60% of all wine turnover led by the .75 liter glass bottle (Table 5), and a growing trend toward innovative packaging, prevalently the tetrapak brick, bag-in-a-box, and P.E.T. [2] (Table 6).

Table 4 – Display Space and Average Number of Units of Different Types of Wine Packaging in Minimarkets, Supermarkets, and Hypermarkets (Italy, 2004)

Type of packaging	Display space %	Average Number of units
Glass bottles up to 0,75 lt	32,9	199
Glass bottles from 0,76 to 2 lt	22,4	21
Brick (tetrapak) up to 1 lt	31,9	11
B.I.B. (bag-in-a-box)	2,1	7
P.E.T.	1,5	3
Other	9,2	n.d.

Source: AC Nielsen, ScanTrack, year ending October-November, 2004

Table 5 – Wine Sales in Supermarkets, Minimarkets, Hypermarkets According to Packaging (Italy, 2004)

Type of packaging	%
Glass	64,0
Brick (tetrapak)	32,0
B.I.B (bag-in-a-box)	2,1
P.E.T.	1,9

Source: adapted from Corzani and Siboni, pp. 87-88

Table 6 – Wine Packaging Trends in Supermarkets, Minimarkets, Hypermarkets (Italy, 2004)

Type of packaging	Trend in volume %	Trend in value %
Glass bottles up to 0,75 lt	+ 10,0	+ 17,1
Glass bottles from 0,76 to 2 lt	- 3,7	+ 0,7
Brick up to 1 lt	+ 2,4	+ 2,7
B.I.B. (bag-in-a-box)	+ 12,9	+ 12,3
P.E.T.	+ 70,2	+ 59,3
Other	n.d.	n.d.

Source: AC Nielsen ScanTrack, year ending October-November, 2004

[2] A "brick" is a carton packaging used for milk, fruit juice, wine, and other liquid products. A "bag-in-a-box" (B.I.B.), is a container for storage and transportation of liquids and consists of a strong plastic bag inside a cardboard box. P.E.T., polyethylene terephthalate, is a resin used to make beverage, food and other liquids containers. (www.wikipedia.org)

The Role of Packaging as a Communication Tool

The role of packaging as a communication tool is becoming more and more important due to factors including the increase in self-service at the point-of-sale and the more complex needs of service related to the product (Kotler, 2004; Kotler et al., 2001).

At the point-of-sale in supermarkets and hypermarkets where people buy large quantities of groceries, as well as in specialized chains with more assortment, the uninformed consumer chooses prevalently on the basis of packaging (Popai, 1998):

- 48% of point-of-sale purchases were based on packaging, regardless of what induced the customer to make the purchase.
- Where purchase decisions were based solely on brand name, variations at the point-of-sale were due to packaging in 48% of cases.
- Where purchases were based on product rather than brand name, the choice was driven by packaging in 43% of cases.

Consumers derive the perceived value of a product from a set of intangible elements: information, service (recyclable packaging after use, single portions in a larger pack, etc.), and brand name.

The role of packaging as a communication tool can be analyzed from different perspectives. Marketing based on the idea that packaging is the “clothing” of the product highlights its logistic (containment, protection, fragmentation, transportation) and communicative functions (Collesei and Ravà, 2004).

The fundamental communicative function of packaging is evident in its very existence on the pages of magazines, on TV, in shop windows, at points-of-sale, at home, etc., where it communicates merely by being on display (Watzlavick and Jackson, 1967). Packaging may also present elements with essentially informative and communicative power as well: words, images, colors, shapes, etc, which communicate to the consumer in various ways and places, both before and after the shopping experience.

In Table 7 we find articulated tools with which packaging can inform and communicate.

Marketing recognizes consumerism as a form of language. From an anthropological perspective (Mauss, 1985; Levi-Strauss, 1969, 1992), consumerism aims to satisfy not only individual need, but also to create, maintain, and control social relationships. In this sense, packaging becomes a tool of communication (Douglas and Isherwood, 1984; Di Nallo,1984; Paltrinieri, 1998; Parmigiani, 1997; Floch, 1992, 1997; Codeluppi, 1992, 2002). An important contribution to this concept comes from Semiotics, which studies signs and related communication processes (Eco, 1975; Ferraresi, 1999; Pastore e Vernuccio, 2003). The application of Semiotics to packaging has developed recently both in theoretical and in working contexts (marketing research and advertising agencies). Packaging permits multi-sensory and bi-directional communication to the receiver, who consumes signs and symbols in order to produce individual and social meaning. We have already seen cases of packaging analyzed using Semiotics in different sectors such as tobacco (Musini, 2005) and wine (Violoni, 2004). With regard to wine, for example, Semiotics says that a bottle contains at least five narrative programs: individuation on display, reading in hand, purchase, consumption, and post-consumption.

Table 7 – Elements of Packaging Relevant to the Communicative Function

Type of Elements	**Main Characteristics**	**Attributes: first level**	**Attributes: second level**
Package	Shape	Size	
		Manageability	
		Storageability	
		Cleanability	
		Reusability	
		Dimensional Impression	
		Service	
		Portions	
	Materials	Durability	
		Recycleability	
		Pleasingness	
Labelling “clothing”	Textual Elements	Names	Company Name
			Product Line
			Name of Market Sector
			Product Name
			Name of Variant
		Information	Instructions and Suggested Uses
			Ingredients
			Nutritional Information
			Preview of Contents
			History/Product Description
			Service Information
		Recall and Repetition	New Products
			Advertising Slogans
			Testimonials
			Extension of Line
			Special Offers
		Information Required by Law	Alpha-numeric Codes
			Production and Expiration Dates
			Weights and Measures
			Plant and Producer
			Specific Sectorial Information
	Iconic Elements	Lettering	Logo
			Functional Text
			Persuasive Text
		Background	Uniform Color
			Decorative Pattern
			Transparent
		Images	Product Representations
			Secondary Images
			Informative and Graphic Images

Source: adapted from Collesei and Ravà (2004), pp. 164-178

An Explorative Study of the Communication Role of Packaging in the Wine Business

We chose the wine industry for an applied research study because of its bold and continuing innovation in packaging. Besides the traditional 0.75-liter bottles with corks, several innovative solutions have appeared in the fields of stoppers (crown caps, glass caps, screw plugs) and containers (brick, bag-in-a-box, polyethylene, etc).

These innovations respond to the overall business needs of savings and practicality, but they limit long-term preservation, opening up two schools of thought for debate.

There are those, for example, who refuse alternative solutions to glass and cork for quality products. Others, however, consider change and adaptation to demand through innovation and service to the customer important tools for competitive advantage.

When it comes to labelling, there are also various innovative solutions. The following examples give an idea of the vast landscape of innovation:

- The label for Mar de Frades 2003 Albariño, a white wine from the northwest coast of Spain, added a stamp to its label with heat-sensitive ink only visible when the wine reaches its ideal temperature. At 11°C / 13°C (52°F / 55°F), the temperature suggested by the producer, a small blue ship appears on the already-visible waves printed in visible ink. This label was introduced to the American market by William Grant & Sons, importers of Mar de Frades wines, and appeared for the first time on the 2003 Albariño. (ABC Vino, 2005, www.abcvino/articles04/temperatura.html).
- There is also a talking wine label, which explains, among other information normally available only through an experienced sommelier, how to taste the wine and where it is from. The new "label," which was to be officially launched in the Italian market at the end of 2005, has a microchip with information that can be listened to using a special player the size of a pack of cigarettes (ABC Vino, 2005, www.abcvino.com/articles05/parlante.html).
- Using the slogan "no corkscrew is better" the Virgin group (which includes the airline, telephones, drinks, hotels, radio…) along with the California wine-producing group, Brown-Forman, launched Virgin Wines, a new line of Chardonnay and Shiraz wines from the Brown-Forman vineyards with eye-catching packaging aimed primarily at young people. All elements of packaging, from the plastic bottle to the screw-off cap and trendy label were studied to tempt consumers in the 20 to 30-year age range.

Consumers have different needs, benefits, subjective characteristics, information, habits, and shopping situations, all of which make consumerism complex. When considering the communicative function of packaging in Marketing, then, it is important to understand what, how, when, and where packaging talks to its target market, through shape, color, size, lettering, signs, etc.

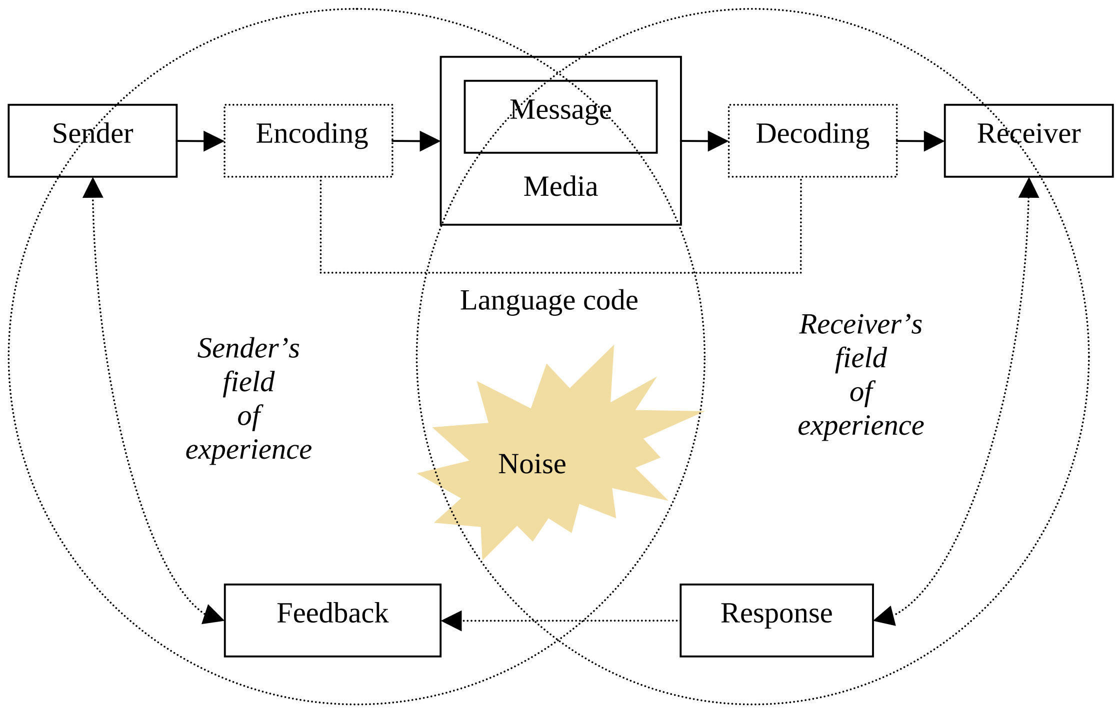
Previous studies have pointed out some aspects of the communicative role of packaging in the food industry (National Honey Board, 2003; Pomarici, 2003; Bland, 2004). A signicant example of which is the qualitative research on the English market (Halstead, 2002), which analyzed factors influencing wine shopping and the decision-making process. The importance of packaging and design was clearly illustrated. Some consumers expressed their opinion about a specific wine: "*The best match that I had was the Pinot Grigio because I put it first, I thought the bottle was horrible so I gave it five, then on the first description I gave it four, then on the detailed description I gave it a one and then on tasting I gave it one.*" The Pinot Grigio was the last choice for several of the respondents, due to the fact that "*it's totally unknown to me, none of the words mean anything and it does look incredibly cheap.*"

Furthermore many of the respondents commented on the fact that the wine descriptions did not help them understand what the wine actually tasted like. The importance of content and the design of product packaging was highlighted in all of the groups under consideration, which is evident in comments like, *"I always go by the label, that's because I don't know much about wines,"* and "*It all goes back to the aesthetics of the bottle*." The findings of this study were that consumers give importance to labels with words such as "premium," "classical," "modern," "trendy," and "contemporary." However, there was disagreement amongst the respondents as to which style of label they liked the most. In general, labels that were perceived by their design as looking "cheap" were disliked and gave a negative impression of the wine. Furthermore, the issue of label design becomes even more complex if the profile of consumers of a particular product change according to occasion-based usage.

Theoretical Framework

In order to analyze the communication role of wine packaging in a marketing perspective we may opportunely refer to the model of the communication process (Figure 1). To communicate effectively, marketers need to know how communication works. In the communication process there are two major parties: the sender and the receiver, and two major communication tools: the message and the media. Further, there are four primary communications functions: encoding, decoding, response, and feedback. The last element we consider noise in the system.

Figure 1 - The Communication Process

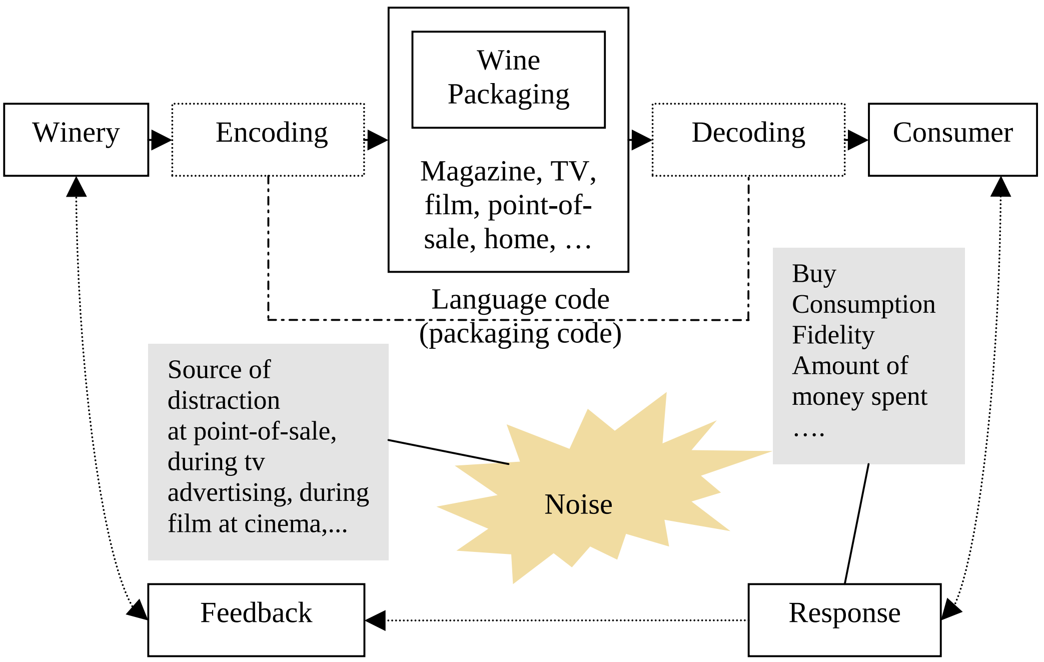


Source: adapted from Shannon and Weaver (1971) and Kotler et al. (2005).

In the case of wine communication through packaging (Figure 2), a sender (winery), using a code, transmits a message to another party, a receiver, in this case the consumer or shopper. Encoding is the process of putting the intended message into symbolic form through different aspects of wine packaging. The message is the set of words, pictures and symbols that the sender decides to transmit (label, color, lettering, and so on). The message moves from sender to receiver through communication channels: in this specific case, packaging could appear, for example, in a magazine, on TV, on display at a point-of-sale, in a film, on the table at home, or in a restaurant. The receiver, by decoding, assigns meaning to the symbols encoded by the sender through the wine packaging. Then, he or she decides the reaction in terms of behavioral answer (to buy or not to buy, consumption, fidelity, and so on). Feedback is the part of the response that the receiver communicates back to the sender. In this system, noise is unplanned distortion during the communication process from different sources, resulting, for example, in a consumer being distracted at the point-of-sale or while watching TV.

For a message to be effective, the sender's encoding process must coincide with the receiver's decoding process, which is not always guaranteed. Encoding and decoding must be based on the same language code; if they are not, the communication process may fail.

Figure 2 – Application of the Communication Process Model to Wine Packaging



Purpose and Methodology of Research

We planned field research in order to verify correspondence between the coding and encoding processes. To this end, specific explorative objects were defined. In particular, it was important to identify:

- the main contents of the messages that senders intend to communicate
- the language code used by senders in the coding process

- the preferred media (place and time) of both senders and receivers
    - the main communication contents that receivers seek in packaging
    - the language code used by receivers in the decoding process

After literature analysis and secondary data collection, two methodological steps of field research on the Italian market were projected: qualitative and quantitative research (in progress). Among different types of packaging, the focus was on the 0,75-liter glass bottle, as this was the most common packaging in use.

The purpose of the first phase of field research was to understand and identify concepts connected with the coding and encoding of the communication process.

Qualitative research (Shaw and Clark, 1999; Troilo, 2003; Andreani and Conchon, 2004), was conducted using focus groups and in-depth interviews.

As regards focus groups, sessions (an average of two hours each) were conducted in person, by two moderators, one to elicit discussion and the other to observe and register all answers and reactions of interviewed consumers[3]. The moderators led the focus groups with partially-defined contents and collected data with tape recording and written notes. For discussion, three different bottles of wine were used.

In-depth interviews were done by phone and had semi-structured content, with pre-formulated and personalized questions.

We decided to use qualitative methodology to help us develop a hypothesis we could address in structured questionnaires in the respondent's language and establish parameters (i.e relevant questions, range of responses, etc.) for subsequent quantitative phases of research.

To assess the wineries' point of view, a focus group (November, 2005) and seven in-depth interviews (January, 2006) were held. Details about samples are presented in Table 8 and 9. Wineries had to represent the non-homogeneous context of Italian wine industry.

The choice of the consumer sample was guided by research results (sestopotere.com, 2006) which pointed out that traditional targets (households and elderly) are receding in importance, while new targets (young people and women) are emerging. In fact:

- household and elderly consumption[4] is on the downturn;
- individual and social consumption (especially "tribal" consumption) is increasing overall among:
    - o young people (82% claim strong propensity to consume wine and among them university students are the most critical consumers);
    - o women (32% say they enjoy drinking a bottle of wine with friends).

With this in mind, two focus groups were gathered (November and December, 2005) and included:

- 11 participants made up of students, both men and women, from the University of Trieste between the ages of 20 and 25 years old.;
- 9 participants made up of men and women between the ages of 29 and 37 years old.

[3] As regards the analysis of the texts, we considered all aspects that emerged during the discussion session, even if proposed by only one person. In this phase it was important to point out problems, topics, and issues spontaneously cited by the consumers rather than to conduct a data analysis from a quantitative perspective.

4 43% of Italian households buy wine, spending a monthly average of 32 euro. The contraction of elderly consumption (over 25%) is mostly due to low income or life-style and health care needs.

Table 8 – Composition of Focus Group with Wineries

Name	Location	Average Number of Bottles/Year	Name and Occupation of interviewee
Studio Bavetta	Agrigento – Sicily	Consultant	Domenico Bavetta, *Entrepreneur*
Az. Agr. Betti	Pistoia - Tuscany	30,000	Guido Betti, *Manager*
Az. Agr. Bracco	Cormons (GO) – Friuli-Venezia Giulia	30,000	Elisabetta Bracco, *Entrepreneur*
Baglio di Pianetto	Vicenza – Veneto	400,000	Alberto Buratto, *General Manager*
Commerciale Agricola Friulana	Buttrio (UD) – Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Consultant	Mària Croatto, *Entrepreneur*
Mottura Vini	Lecce - Puglia	2,000,000	Barbara Mottura, *Manager*
Pasqua Spa	Verona - Veneto	20,000.000	Carlotta Pasqua, PR *Manager*
Az. Agr. Penzo	Crespellano (BO) – Emilia Romagna	Grape grower	Guido Penzo, *Entrepreneur*
Primosic sas	Gorizia – Friuli-Venezia Giulia	350,000	Marko Primosic, *Sales&Marketing Manager*
Az. Agr. Venica & Venica	Dolegna del Collio (GO) – Friuli-Venezia Giulia	250,000	Giampaolo Venica, *Export Manager*
Vinška Klet Goriška Brda	Dobrovo – SLOVENIA*	7,000,000	Uroš Zorn, *Marketing Manager*

* This company is not in Italy but on the border between Italy and Slovenia.

Table 9 – Composition of Sample for In-depth Interviews

Name	Location	Average Number of Bottles/Year	Name and Occupation of interwiewee
Carlo Pellegrino Spa	Marsala (TP)	7,300,000	Emilio Ridolfi, *Sales&Marketing Manager*
Zonin Spa	Gambellara (VI)	23,000,000	Fanco Zuffellato, *PR&Marketing Manager*
Gruppo Coltiva	Ravenna	72,000,000	Gian Paolo Gavioli, *Export Manager*
Felsina	Castelnuovo Berardenga (SI)	700,000	Chiara Leonini, *Export Manager*
Drei Donà	Massa di Vecchiazzano (FC)	130,000	Enrico Drei Donà, *General Manager*
Vinnaioli Jermann	Farra d'Isonzo (GO)	850,000	Andrea Carpi, *Sales&Marketing Manager*
Majolini	Ome (BS)	200,000	Simone Majolini, *Sales&Marketing Manager*

Main Results of Qualitative Research

From the qualitative research we can present the main results of the explorative part of the study. We can also organize them on the basis of pre-defined objectives.

From the producer's (sender) point of view we had to first identify the main messages to be communicated to the consumer (receiver) through the features of the packaging that the producer selects. These, in turn, make up the language code for the sender along with the media considered most important by the producer to communicate using packaging, meaning the time and space of the communication process.

We asked respondents if they collected information about the consumer in any form, if they used a professional agency to design packaging, and what were, in their opinion, the most prevalent problems in packaging for the Italian wine industry.

Analyzing both focus group and interview data, the messages that producers especially wanted to highlight about their products were:

- Geographical region (*terroire*)
- Brand identity
- Guarantees
- Safety
- Quality/price ratio
- Product quality
- Family tradition
- Product innovation
- Family values
- Continuity
- Internationalization
- History
- Emotions
- Grape identification
- Coherence with the positioning

Wineries would like to communicate a lot of meanings, as attributes (*terroire*, product quality, grapes, etc.), benefits (guarantees, safety, emotions, etc), and values (brand identity, family tradition, continuity, etc.). Are these the same messages perceived by consumers? Further, by which elements of packaging, wineries intend to communicate to consumers?

The features of the packaging (0.75 lt glass bottle) prevalently used to transmit the above messages are indicated in Table 10. Also considering these aspects, producers said to use a lot of packaging features, as shape materials and iconic elements. Regarding textual elements, wineries considered overall brand and multiple mention of it, while they did not consider other type of features, regarding information and service for customer (alcohol level, serving suggestions, readability).

All respondents said they did not usually collect data on consumer behavior directly from consumers, preferring to receive filtered information from sales force or retailers' opinions. This fact is related to the prevalent choice of using professional graphic agencies in order to design packaging, or at least labels.

As for the media, wineries usually considered the point-of-sale the most important factor, even when the potential role of other specific media vehicles was suggested, such as films with wine bottles in some scenes or on the table of a house or a restaurant.

Producers realized that there were general problems in packaging in the Italian wine industry. Increasing international competition is causing wineries to reflect on the use of all elements of communication, and, above all, packaging, and stressed the fact that it is not easy to function in such a fragmented industry.

From the consumer perspective, we first had to identify the main messages that they received from the sender (producer), the main features of the packaging that consumers usually selected in order to understand the communication or the language code for the receiver, and the media considered most important by consumers to receive the message through packaging at different times and spaces during the communication process.

During the focus groups, consumers pointed out that it was important to distinguish informed and uninformed consumers[5]. The respondents considered consumers informed when they knew different types of wine, grapes, brands, origin, terroir, characteristics, and so on. For this reason informed consumers know what they want and are not influenced by packaging. The role of packaging, therefore, appears relevant for only uninformed consumers, just as the participants of the focus groups were[6].

According to the collected data, consumers selected on the basis of certain decisions when shopping for wine. First, consumers decide the occasion (daily food, particular occasion, a gift, and so on), and then the price range. They may choose a specific wine at this point, but, without information at the point-of-sale they will most likely choose by packaging. All the respondents emphasized the role of the specific occasion: “If I have to give a present, I prefer a more elegant bottle, with a certain dimensional impression, with dark glass, with a black and gold label.” When presented packaging during the focus group, participants also pointed out that some packaging, usually because of the labelling, looked cheap and consequently influenced their perception of the wine’s quality. Another consumer said: “I like a particular pack, with a strange form, jumping out from the shelves.” All respondents said they wanted to receive more information about the wine and consumption advice through the packaging (food matching/pairings, for instance).

From the consumer’s point of view, wine packaging indicates certain characteristics:

- price level (cheap – expensive)
- quality (table wine – high quality wine)
- elegance (elegant – not elegant bottle)
- nobility (aristocratic – not aristocratic origin)
- tradition (traditional – innovative wine)

Therefore, it could inform use for different occasions, prevalently distinguishing itself between use as daily beverage and special occasions such as a present, special event, social occasion, and so on.

As you can note, some features that producers considered important did not always correspond with what consumers considered important. In fact, in order to decode the message, interviewed consumers paid attention to many features of packaging, but fewer than the producers, as illustrated in Table 10. Differing from producers, interviewed consumers demonstrated less consideration for iconic elements of packaging (back label color, size of back label, background images, image colors) and overall they did not consider the role of the brand (name of winery). That is, uninformed consumers usually do not know wine brands, and this aspect is particularly relevant for Italian wine business:. This problem is probably due to the high level of fragmentation, that limits the opportunity of investments in communication. Compared to the producers, consumers gave more relevance to information such as alcohol level, wine description, serving suggestions and readability of the label.

When considering the place and time of the communication process, the same consumers considered the point-of-sale the most important media to receive the message.

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[5] On information and knowledge about wine brand in the context of young consumers Mattiacci, Ceccotti, De Martino (2006).

[6] The answers of the two groups of consumers were similar.

Table 10 - Results of focus groups about features of packaging considered for coding and decoding messages

Wine Package	Main characteristics	Producers	Consumers
	Overall impression	●	●
Shape	Bottle shape	●	●
	Height	●	●
	Size impression	-	●
Materials	Glass color	●	●
	Weight of bottle	●	●
	Weight-size relationship	●	-
Labelling "clothing"			
Iconic elements	Label color	●	●
	Back-label color	●	-
	Size label	●	●
	Size back-label	●	-
	Images (content)	●	-
	Background images	●	-
	Image colors	●	-
	Collar color	●	●
	Type	●	●
	Type color	●	●
Textual elements	Brand	●	-
	Multiple mention of the brand	●	-
	Alcohol level	-	●
	Wine description	●	●
	Serving suggestions	-	●
	Readability	-	●

● Considered feature - Non-considered featured

Conclusions and Next Steps

We conclude with a proposal of a synthesis of the first results, managerial implications for the wine industry, and perspectives for future research.

The first step of the study was conducted with the aim of exploring the communication process through wine packaging. After this explorative phase of the study, we conclude that in the communication process there are some gaps between the sender and the receiver, in particular in the coding and encoding process. Both consider wine packaging a useful communication tool, but the producer would like to use it for transmitting the brand and value of the product, while the consumer would prefer to receive information for using the product better. Information, in all its dimensions, is the main tool for creating value for consumers.

For a message to be effective, encoding and decoding processes must be based on the same language code: if they are not, the communication process may fail. So, in an effort to improve the communication process in the future, the entire project could be useful for all involved in the wine system - producers, distributors, retailers – to better compete with long term advantages in an international context.

This first analysis will permit us to form the basis for a survey with a larger sample in order to provide a statistical foundation from which to derive broader inferences and generalizations.

On the basis of the results of this explorative study, we will analyze, using a semi-structured questionnaire, the different components of the illustrated model of the communication process:

- the main contents of the messages that senders intend to communicate;
- the language code used by senders in the coding process;
- the preferred media (place and time) of both senders and receivers;
- the main communication contents that receivers seek in packaging;
- the language code used by receivers in the decoding process.

For quantitative research, two questionnaires, one for wineries and one for consumers, will be developed. The questionnaire will contain three parts: general characteristics of the respondent (producer or consumer), elements used to code/encode packaging, and main contents of message in terms of attributes, benefits and values.

For the data elaboration process, factor analysis, correlation and regression analysis will be implemented.

In the future, it will also be useful to focus on other types of innovative packaging emerging in national and international markets, with strong influences on competitiveness of more traditional European wine producers.

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