

## Understanding the wine consumption behaviour of Generation Y in Italy

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### Abstract

#### ◦Purpose

*The study aims to gain a better understanding of the wine consumption behaviour by the Italian Generation Y. The theory of planned behaviour as formulated by Ajzen (1991) is applied to evaluate the cognitive factors determining the decision-making process in wine choice. Four research hypotheses are tested and positively confirmed. The study advances in the knowledge of wine drinking behaviour, because it includes the psychological construct of perceived behavioural control in the model.*

#### ◦Design/methodology/approach

*The analysis was divided into two phases: an exploratory phase and a phase of survey by questionnaire. The questionnaire was online submitted by 140 young people from Veneto and Tuscany, two of the main traditional Italian wine producing regions.*

#### ◦Findings

*The TPB framework showed a good correlation between behaviour and behavioural intention. Attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control influence the intention to consume wine with almost equal power. The favourable predisposition towards wine comes from its healthy, hedonistic, relaxing and cultural connotations rather than from fun, celebrations, food matching or production process. The family contexts and the partner company generate positive situations, and young consumers partially perceive difficulties in wine choice, without being able to identify the causes.*

#### ◦Practical implications

*The results of this study allow for the identification of the psychological traits to be actioned by wineries to improve the communication with young individuals. The deepening of the cognitive dynamics of young individuals in the decision-making process can provide educators and public decision-makers with helpful information to counter high-risk alcoholic beverage consumption patterns.*

Key words: Generation Y, theory of planned behaviour, consumption behaviour, behavioural intention, young consumer

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The decline of wine consumption in traditional consumer countries drives new dynamics in the international market, and the continuing search for new markets and new consumers by producers of the Old World of wine. This search is twofold: on the one hand, wineries adopt strategies to enter foreign markets; on the other hand they are trying to stimulate the attention of new consumer targets in domestic market.

Changes in contemporary society have caused a different relation between young people and wine than the past, and young people from the Old World represent a novice market segment for wine industry. This segment shows different consumption behaviours and attitudes towards the product from the previous generations; these peculiarities have not been well investigated yet, and their future predictions are uncertain. Since wine consumption behaviour by young people from Mediterranean countries, such as Italy, has been converging towards less healthy pattern and the consumption of alcoholic beverages is increasing, wine choices have become a social concern. This translates into subjective norms that influence the individual decision-making process (Calafat et al., 2011; Graziano et al., 2012). As consequence, product familiarity, risk sensitivity and motivations of young people are strongly different from those of the previous generations.

As synthesized by Valentine and Power (2013), young consumers of the so called “Generation Y” are trustful, more tolerant and better travelled than their parents, supportive of social causes, individualistic, technologically savvy, sophisticated, group-oriented and consider themselves to be “cool”, with a strong sense of identity.

Concerning wine purchasing, research about Generation Y mainly comes from the New World. Treloar et al. (2004) point out that wine consumption is limited within young consumers, and other alcoholic beverages, like beer and spirits, are considered easier and cheaper alternatives. Thach and Olsen (2006) highlight the need of a greater wine advertising to this group, using fun, social, and relaxed settings; they recommend innovative packaging and the focus on “value” wines, taste and environmental cues as pull factors. Young consumers of the Old World mainly drink wine in social occasions with friends, during the meal time; conversely in the New World, wine consumption outside meal is preferred (Agnoli et al., 2011; Teagle et al., 2010). Inexperience leads them to seek information from friends or family and to choose on the basis of the advice of other people, the label or the shelf talkers (Atkin and Thach, 2012; Chrysochou et al., 2012).

According to Chrysochou et al. (2012), Generation Y lacks of subjective knowledge, experience and involvement about wine. However, Generation Y from traditional producing countries is often introduced to wine consumption by family in tender age and seems to be more product conscious than that of the New World, ascribing more importance to the designation of origin (de Magistris et al., 2011).

The current paper aims to gain a better understanding of the wine consumption behaviour by the Italian Generation Y. The theory of planned behaviour as formulated by Ajzen (1991) is applied to evaluate the cognitive factors determining the decision-making process in the wine choice. This research attempts to give new insights into the psychological construct of perceived behavioural control, for the first time to our knowledge.

Four research hypotheses are tested by applying the theory of planned behaviour.

H1: Attitudes influence the intention to consume wine.

H2: Subjective norms influence the intention to consume wine.

H3: Perceived behavioural control influences the intention to consume wine.

H4: Perceived behavioural control influences the wine consumption behaviour.

The results of this study allow for the identification of the psychological traits to be actioned by wineries to improve the communication with young individuals.

## **2. THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR**

Many studies apply the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) to shed light on the individual behaviour. It was developed by Ajzen (1991, 2005) from the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The TPB analyses the behaviour and the underlying behavioural intention, namely the motivational factors of behaviour. Behavioural intention is determined by attitude, the degree to which a person positively or negatively assesses or qualifies a behaviour, and by subjective norm, which refers to the social pressure carried out by reference people or groups that a person perceives in performing or not performing the behaviour. Compared to the TRA, the TPB includes a predictor of intentions and behaviour: the perceived behavioural control (PBC) (Ajzen, 2012). This allows for the overcoming of a limitation of the TRA: it can only be applied to behaviours under people's volitional control. Many behaviours, although under volitional control in principle, can present serious difficulties in their execution that are related to non-motivational factors, such as the availability of opportunities and resources, in terms of time, money, skills or the cooperation of others (Ajzen, 2005, 2012).

Salient information, or beliefs, explains behaviour at a more basic level than that of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control. Many beliefs are available to people for all behaviours, but only a relatively small number of them is readily accessible when people choose to perform that particular behaviour. These salient beliefs are the dominant determinants of behavioural intention and behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

TRA and TPB models have been broadly applied in various domains, especially in the past decade. Investigations have just begun in food and drink choice analysis. Much research has aimed at explaining and predicting the individual's decision-making process in situations involving risky behaviour, food safety, healthy eating, dietary changes from a medical, sociological or psychological point of view. To date, few studies have assumed a marketing perspective.

In the domain of beverage consumption, TRA and TPB models have investigated risky situations, such as the binge drinking phenomenon, especially in young generations. With respect to wine, only a few studies have applied the reasoned action approach to consumption behaviour (Thompson and Vourvachis, 1995; van Zanten, 2005; St James and Christodoulidou, 2011). Thompson and Vourvachis (1995) investigated the British wine drinker, van Zanten (2005) the Australian one, and St James and Christodoulidou (2011) the Californian one. They obtained different results in relation to the weight exerted by subjective norms and attitudes in influencing behavioural intention and behaviour; they are in agreement in omitting PBC in explaining wine consumption behaviour. These results initiated a debate in the *International Journal of Wine Business Research*, to which this paper aims to contribute with further insights into the analysis of the wine consumer's decision-making process.

## **3. METHOD**

As proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), the analysis was divided into two phases: an exploratory phase and a phase of survey by questionnaire.

The exploratory phase aimed to elicit the salient beliefs, the reference people and groups and the control factors in wine consumption behaviour, which were useful for carrying out the second phase. The elicitation involved 20 respondents. As in the studies of Thompson and Vourvachis (1995), van Zanten (2005) and St James and Christodoulidou (2011), open-ended questions were used to discover (i) advantages and disadvantages in drinking wine; (ii) free associations with the action of drinking wine; (iii) people or groups that would approve or disapprove of the respondent's wine drinking; and (iv) people or groups that come to mind when thinking about drinking wine. In order to identify the salient control factors, some specific questions have been included to elicit the difficulties in wine choice and consumption. Salient information collected in the exploratory phase is listed in Table 1.

Table 1 – Salient beliefs, referents and control factors in drinking wine

Salient beliefs	Salient referents	Salient control beliefs
Wine is good for health	Family	Expensive product
Wine is sociable	Partner	Lack in product knowledge
Wine is fun	Friends	Other alcoholic beverages as alternatives
Wine is a bottle to uncork or a cup to drink		
Wine helps to relax		
Wine is a cultural product		
Wine is good with food		
Wine is pleasure		
Wine is vineyards and cellars		

The results of the exploratory phase were used to build the survey questionnaire in the second phase of analysis (Table 2).

Table 2 – Survey components and items

Theory components	Items (7-point uni-polar Likert scale)
Behaviour (B)	Wine drinking frequency
Behavioural Intention (BI)	Intention to drink wine sometime in the next month
Attitude (A)	Drinking wine characteristics Consequences of drinking wine Feelings from drinking wine
Subjective Norm (SN)	Thinking of reference people or group concerning the respondent's drinking wine Reference people or group's drinking wine in the next month
Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)	Perception of the difficulty in buying wine
Behavioural Beliefs (b)	Perception of salient beliefs (e.g. Wine is good for health)
Outcome Evaluations (e)	Importance of each salient belief in drinking wine
Normative Beliefs (n)	Opinion of reference people or group about the respondent's drinking wine in the next month
Motivations to Comply (m)	Respondent's general will to do what reference people or group want
Control Beliefs (c)	Perceptions of salient control factors (e.g. I will have difficulties in drinking wine in the next month, because it is too expensive)
Power of Control Factors (p)	Perception of the ability to manage the control factor (e.g. The price of wine would make it difficult for me to consume it in the next month)

The questionnaire was online submitted. This study analyses a sample of 140 young people from Veneto and Tuscany, two traditional Italian wine producing regions, contacted through the social networks in December 2013. It is a convenience sample consisting of the first 140 young individuals under 26 years old, who took part in the survey. Consequently, the sample is not intended to be representative. The purpose of this paper is to offer a snapshot of the results of the first step of data gathering within a wider survey plan involving Generation Y, including

people born between 1977 and 1995. This allows the paper to focus on the youngest segment of Generation Y and to analyse the age range recognised by scholars as the period that shape the individual personality and consumption choices, remaining stable thereafter. According to Szolnoki and Hoffman (2013), online surveys showed a much more biased result towards youngsters, with higher education and lower income than the rest of the population. Given that this study is focused on the young generation instead on the whole population, the bias problems highlighted by Szolnoki and Hoffman (2013) do not occur.

#### 4. RESULTS

The sample consists of males and females in almost equal proportion, it is mainly less than 22 years old, has a high school education and is still student (Table 3).

Table 3 – Characteristics of the sample (n=140)

Attributes	Levels	n	%
Gender	Males	68	48.6
	Females	72	51.4
Age class	Less than 18 years old	5	3.6
	18-21 years old	73	52.1
	More than 21 years old	62	44.3
Education level	High school	105	75.0
	Technical school	9	6.4
	College	26	18.6
Employment	Student	101	72.1
	Worker	34	24.3
	Unemployed	5	3.6

More than two third of the sample consumes wine in sporadic occasions or during the week end, in line with the recent consumption trend among young people, despite the respondents live in traditional producing wine regions.

The formulations proposed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) were applied to bring out the correlations among theory components. Each behavioural belief was multiplied by the corresponding outcome evaluation, and these products were summed. The same procedure was carried out for normative beliefs and motivations to comply, and for control beliefs and power of control factors. The items of attitude were summed instead, as were the items of subjective norm and perceived behavioural control.

Simple correlations were applied to estimate the relationships between the different theory components. As stated by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), a correlation level greater than 0.30 is considered acceptable in this type of study, and a correlation greater than 0.50 is considered a strong relation. In this application, most of the correlations are higher than 0.50, showing the strong link between the theory components.

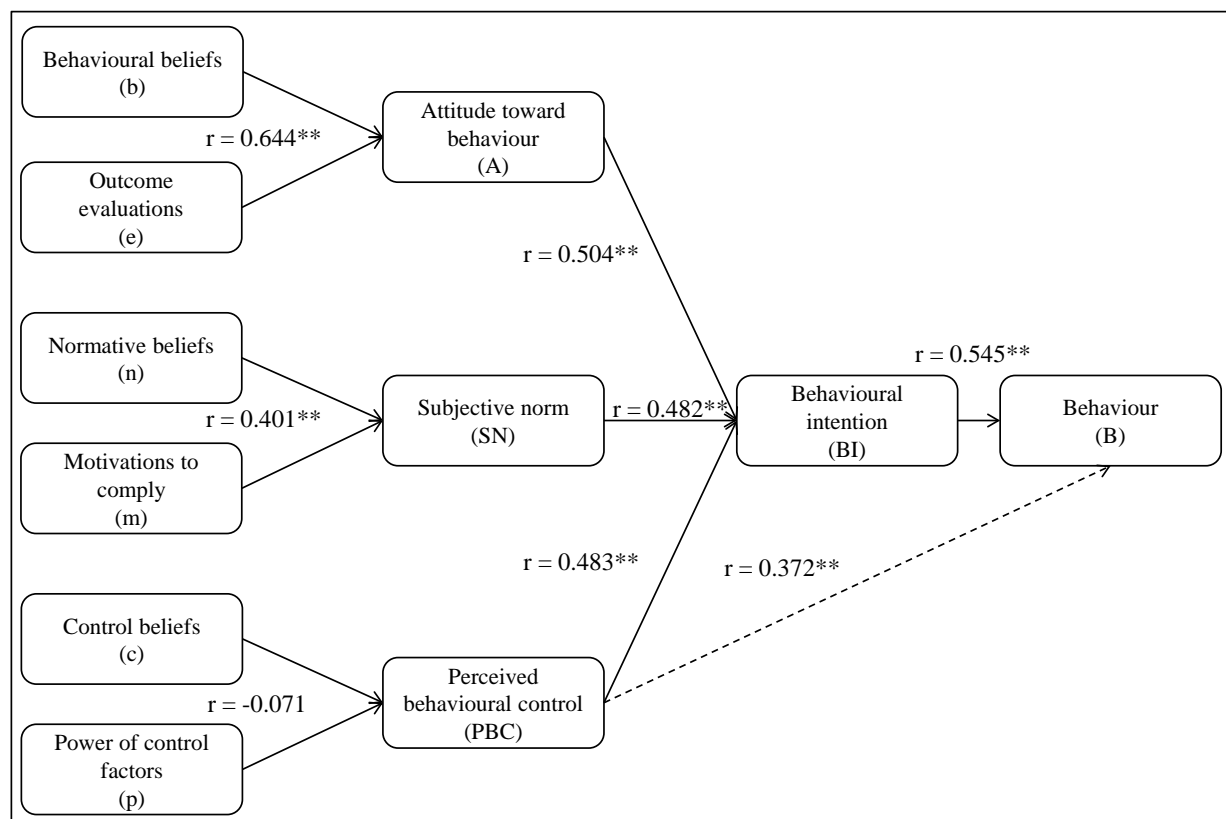
As in the other studies about wine consumption, both attitude and subjective norm influence behavioural intention to drink wine (Thompson and Vourvachis, 1995; van Zanten, 2005; St James and Christodoulidou, 2011) (Figure 1). Behavioural intention is influenced more by attitude than by subjective norm, in line with the two more recent studies. However, the power of the two theory components is not very different. This confirms that the relevance of attitude in determining behavioural intention is apparent in the personal evaluations about the behaviour, but the opinions of others in deciding to perform the behaviour is relevant as well.

The figure shows the advances proposed by this study in comparison with the previous ones, by introducing the perceived behavioural control. Perceived behavioural control has the same power as subjective norm in influencing behavioural intention for these consumers. This confirms the assumed hypothesis: also a behaviour that might seem under full individual's volitional control, like wine consumption, is affected by the control ability of choice

circumstances. Furthermore, the role of perceived behavioural control in the decision-making process is highlighted by its power to directly influence behaviour.

While attitude and subjective norm are determined by the background of elicited salient beliefs and referents, the link of perceived behavioural control with beliefs is not significant. The causes could come from a defective elicitation process by the young individuals, who are not able to identify their control factors.

Figure 1 – The determinants of wine consumption behaviour



\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Tables 4, 5 and 6 show the importance of the different beliefs concerning attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control in explaining the model components.

The correlation between attitude and salient beliefs is presented in Table 4.

Health results to be the most important factor in determining attitudes toward wine in young consumers. This finding is opposed to that of van Zanten’s research (2005), in which the health properties of wine appeared to be controversial and not significant in determining attitudes. In the Mediterranean countries, wine is part of the habits: its alcohol content is often underestimated, and transgressive behaviours are associated with other alcoholic beverages. The hedonistic, sensory and cultural aspects prevail over the social and entertainment functions, as confirmed by other scholars (Marinelli et al., 2014). The correlation between attitude and food matching is a sign of a shift in consumption patterns, from meal to outside meal time (Capitello et al., 2012).

Table 4 – Correlation between attitudes and salient beliefs

Salient beliefs	Attitude
Health	0.643 **
Pleasure	0.631 **
Relaxing	0.524 **

Cultural product	0.489 **
Sociable	0.439 **
Fun	0.403 **
Food matching	0.402 **
A bottle to uncork or a cup to drink	0.352 **
Vineyards and cellars	0.340 **

\*\* p<0.01

Significant correlations between subjective norm and the influence of reference people and groups emerged (Table 5). The judgement and behaviour of family members appears to be the most important factor for Italian young consumers. This confirms the findings of the previous studies (Thompson and Vourvachis, 1995; van Zanten, 2005; St James and Christodoulidou, 2011). The family mainly influences wine consumption, because it initiates the young individual to wine and it is the context where wine is consumed more than in other locations. The new situations experienced by young people today pose questions about the ability of the future family context to be able to transmit the interest in wine to the future generations. Friends do not influence wine consumption behaviour of young Italians, opposite of the partner. This would confirm different consumption situations for the youngest segment of Generation Y, compared to the previous generations. Wine consumption does not seem to be instigated by the company of friends as for the other alcoholic beverages (Agnoli et al., 2011), but close situations with family or the partner are preferred.

Table 5 – Correlation between subjective norms and salient referents

Salient referents	Subjective Norm
Family	0.463 **
Partner	0.356 **
Friends	0.128

\*\* p<0.01

The correlation between perceived behavioural control and salient control beliefs allows for a new insight in the psychology of the young consumers (Table 6).

They are aware to find difficulties in discerning the product characteristics, but they are not able to understand the causes of this lack. The elicited salient beliefs have not significant correlations with perceived behavioural control, except “Other alcoholic beverages as alternatives”. However, the negative sign highlights that with the increasing of the competition with the other alcoholic beverages, the perceived control does not decrease. This might suggest that the decisions concerning wine are separated from those about the other alcoholic beverages, satisfying different motivations, contexts and companies (mostly health, pleasure, culture, family and partner for wine, while fun, outside home and friends for the other alcoholic beverages)

Table 6 – Correlation between perceived behavioural control and salient control beliefs

Salient control beliefs	Perceived behavioural control
Other alcoholic beverages as alternatives	-0.315 *
Expensive product	0.108
Lack in product knowledge	0.223

\* p <0.05

## 6. CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes to give new insights into the analysis of the wine consumer’s decision-making process, considering the youngest segment of the Italian Generation Y. It includes the construct of perceived behavioural control in the analysis of wine consumption for the first

time, providing explicative results on intention and behaviour. The deepening of the cognitive dynamics of young individuals in the decision-making process can provide information that helps marketing strategies of wineries, educators and public decision-makers.

The TBP shows correlation between behaviour and behavioural intention by the surveyed sample. The four hypotheses have been positively verified, confirming that the theory of planned behaviour can be also applied to study wine consumption behaviour.

Attitude (H1), subjective norm (H2) and perceived behavioural control (H3) influence the intention to consume wine, with similar intensities. Therefore, the youngest Italians seem to be favourably involved in wine consumption through the equal action of the three constructs. The analysis of the specific theory components consistently explains the perception background of young consumers.

The favourable predisposition towards wine comes from its healthy, hedonistic, relaxing and cultural connotations, rather than from fun, celebrations, food matching or production process. The family contexts and the partner company generate positive situations, and young consumers do not perceive budget constraints, difficulty in choosing the right wine or competition with the other beverages. This volitional control is confirmed with the positive verification of H4; namely the perceived behavioural control also directly drives the action of drinking wine.

Even if findings should be confirmed by a larger sample size, the marketing framework outlined by this research highlights that the young individual gives a specific function to wine in their consumption choices and lifestyle.

Aware of these characteristics, wineries should act with an educational and social function. Drink in moderation, in a close context, as “adult” choice, seems to fascinate the young consumer. These elements are also in favour of a nutrition education that should make the young individual more conscious about the health diseases from high-risk consumption patterns.

Furthermore, wineries should gear up for a wine marketing able to reach young individuals in the occasions outside home and meal time, by leverage on intrinsic cues, on packaging and on the distribution.

Finally, the recognition of the cultural aspect, which is able to differentiate wine from the other beverages, could also be important in an experiential perspective, by promoting the relationship with the winemaker, the brand and origin saliences and the cellar door initiatives. This would be in line with the policy maker’s goals focused on the development of wine sector linked to the enhancement of territorial, natural and cultural resources.

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