

Editorial *

The new dynamics of the food and wine industry needs reconsideration in the light of the consumer behaviour of younger generations. This perspective poses a significant, cultural challenge, especially because of its cross-disciplinary nature: youngsters, wine, and the interaction between the two, demand that the technical, scientific, humanistic and communication areas of knowledge be linked to each other. This motivates a line of reasoning that, in consideration of the overall development of the food and wine industries, may break traditional, disciplinary and geographical boundaries, and call for cross-disciplinary analysis of such a complex system as the one at issue, so as to coalesce the diverse traditions of the food and wine industries and encourage appreciation of different approaches and converging views.

Faced with the complexity of the magic drink called wine, youngsters appear very knowledgeable: they are tasters par excellence, and are unexpectedly critical, inventive and selective about their consumer choices, which they consider to be an integral part of their life styles and plans. These are the findings of a survey conducted in 2003 by the Department of Sociology and Communication at La Sapienza University in Rome¹ which investigated youngsters' views also through qualitative analysis techniques such as focus groups – as documented in the final part of the survey. Evidence from the data collected suggest that consumer voice can be summarized in a strong, yet apparently simple, social imperative: *We need more information . . .* This straightforward request comes from the young in particular, as they are more open to tasting new foods and drinks, more affected by market trends but extremely exacting in requiring quality in food information, both for ethical reasons and to monitor production cycles. In doing so, they

* *Fragments of the future. Youngsters, new ethics and consumer behaviour*, by Mario Morcellini. The author is the Dean of the faculty of Communication Sciences at University of Rome "La Sapienza".

¹This is the First Food Outlook in Italy released by the Department of Sociology and Communication at "La Sapienza" University on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour, and INDICOD (Italian EAN coding authority). Reference is made to 2003 data. The main objective of the survey was to compare the information and communication campaigns produced by companies and the mass media in the food and drink sector with the satisfaction and expectations expressed by consumers. Since the strategic alliance between media logic and food and drink marketing was at an early stage, the planning of future strategies aimed at favouring manufacturers and distributors, as well as consumers, appeared to be more interesting than the sheer analysis of previous communication efforts. Food and drink manufacturers, distributors, institutions, consumer unions, industrial guilds and the main media (TV, newspapers, magazines) were all monitored in the research. The study was also conducted on how consumers perceived information, thus complementing the quantitative approach with investigation conducted through focus groups.

mainly express their wish for more consumer “awareness” in life, as a reaction to superimposed models of consumer behaviour.

End users’ need for deeper knowledge of foods and drinks confirms an increasing trend in this attitude among educated and “connected” consumers, as a richer media diet can drive emulation in their choices.

It is exactly those categories of consumers who are more open to knowledge and more affected by market trends that are suggesting a new level of appreciation of the food and drink industries: consumers need to be reassured of the “social legitimacy” of food and drink companies, and this need entails certainty about all steps in the production chains, the regular employment of the labour force and a fair attitude towards the least developed countries, to the benefit of fair trade.

This demand is so strong that consumers are willing to spend more on “ethical” products; which is another sign of how consumption has changed and of how food and wine information is becoming pervasive in the lifestyle of modern consumers, especially the young. Although apparently distant from the set of received values, youngsters are actually adopting a new, self-made ethic which makes them more inclined to appreciate evidence from experience and modes of interaction among kin generations, the state of things and everyday practice, thus standing out as a real “daily life generation”². Features of the young are therefore a keen taste for experimenting, and the art of being flexible, as a remedy, to stay afloat today. They are said to be ethically neutral and are often labelled as anti-religious, yet they reveal a strong sense of religiosity, linked to their hope for a future³. The young behave as they were the holders of today’s “wealth” demand, a politically revolutionary issue which is more widespread than thought, and can be found in the pursuit of new lifestyles, new forms of democracy, a different local sustainable development⁴. In other words, they are becoming the bearers of some interesting “ethics” of life and daily values.

In a way, these dimensions can indirectly be observed in consumer behaviour and in the relationship with a product of tradition such as wine.

Again, it is the youngsters who will endeavour to find an answer to one of the unsolved questions of wine communication: will this rich market let even small wine producers, who are undoubtedly less prepared and willing to incur communication and marketing expenses, gain a foothold⁵?

²Garelli G. (1983) *La generazione della vita quotidiana*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

³Donati P. Colozzi I. (1997) (edited by) *Giovani e generazioni. Quando si cresce in una società eticamente neutra*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

⁴Bauman Z. (2000) *La solitudine del cittadino globale*, Feltrinelli, Milano.

⁵The Italian scientific production on wine marketing, however, lacks references. Of great relevance is the scientific commitment of Alberto Mattiacci and Andrea Rea with their contributions in conferences and scientific journals. Also worth mentioning is Rouzet, E., Seguin,

An interesting solution can be found in web marketing strategies. Besides being wine consumers and connoisseurs, youngsters are the driving force behind technological and communicative innovation within their own families and communities. Their daily life somehow becomes the metaphor for a momentous *generational watershed*: new technologies mark the boundaries of some sort of a “no trespass area” in their homes, to which parents do not have easy cognitive access. Teenagers’ life appears like a privileged space for computer literacy within the family; some sort of “free zone” where different generations meet and old and new communicative universes mingle. Essentially, technological networks offer youngsters and adults looking for information the chance to broaden their vital worlds and the potential contact with other people’s universe of meaning. *Social values and relationships are expressed in this new communication.*

The tendency of adults’ and youngsters’ cultural and technological clusters to mingle lays the foundations for a *new world*, based on the quality of interactions among people, in a time when technological networks have become essential to build dynamic “syntheses” of knowledge, values and relationships.

The world of the young is a place where “landless communities” are also effectively developed and experimented: such communities are restricted in time but expand in space – just like web communities do – and are built around attending an event, sharing a passion or cultivating an interest in a product...; communities inducing identification, engagement, interaction. Modern society is witnessing a gradual revival of memory which is once again playing its crucial role as the cultural, emotional, and imaginative heritage one can draw upon: from food (traditional food and revaluation of wine-producing areas) to aesthetic values (retro-style cars, the success of vintage modern), from clothing to cultural products (literature, music, films) or tourism (historic villages, archaeology, air quality).

These undoubtedly interesting issues converge in planning and experimenting new relationships between products of tradition and communicative innovation, but also in effectively and successfully promoting wine inside and outside the new cultures of the young, with a view to enhance the quality of their relationship with the future, thanks to their pursuit of true knowledge and appreciation of the links with the past, its customs and places, where the old and new world can really get together.

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G., (2004) *Il marketing del vino. Il mercato. Le strategie commerciali. La distribuzione*, ed. Edagricole, Bologna e Pastore, R., (2002) *Il marketing del vino e del territorio: istruzioni per l’uso*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, and Ciaschini, M., Socci, C., (2008) *Economia del vino. Tradizione e Comunicazione* FrancoAngeli Milano.