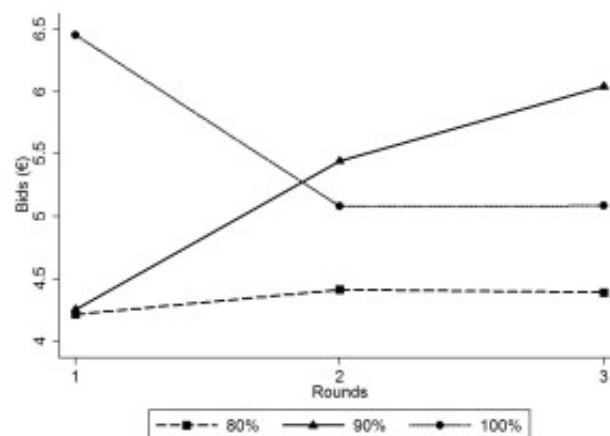


Typical vine or international taste: wine consumers' dilemma between beliefs and preferences

Although typicality is important to increase the added value of wine products, several winegrowers have started to make wine using blends with higher percentages of non-typical vines. The aim is to produce wine with a more international taste to increase their market share, sacrificing the “level” of the typicality of their products. This can be an interesting strategy but it might also constitute a risk in terms of wine's reduced differentiability. The purpose of this paper is test if there is a trade-off between preference for typicality and more popular taste. The method adopted was an experimental auction with blind tasting of products. The case study involved three wines with the CHIANTI CLASSICO DOCG certification with a share of autochthonous grapes varying from 80% to 90% to 100%.



The auction was conducted in a computer lab with 66 individuals recruited by a marketing research company. The experiment concerned three different bottles of Chianti Classico DOCG, which fall in the same price range (average 13 euros) and differ by blend of autochthonous grapes. The auction unfolded in three rounds, each of which ended with the participants formulating their bids for each bottle. In the first round, participants placed their bids only on information about the blend's typicality. In the second round, participants placed their bids after a blind tasting. No other information was provided. In the final round, participants tasted the three wines again, knowing the percentage of autochthonous vines. The purpose of the first round is to test consumers' preference for vine typicality. In the second round, we investigated the impact of taste. Finally, we tested the joint effect of typicality and taste.

The figure shows the bids in the different rounds. The information about blend typicality has a relevant impact. Indeed, in the first round, when only this information was provided to the consumers, the average bid for the autochthonous product was 34% higher than for the other wines that instead showed no substantial difference amongst them. In the second round when the consumers bid exclusively based on taste, only the bid for the wine with 20% of an international

grape variety remains essentially unvaried; the wine with 10% of a non-autochthonous variety sees its value increase by 27%, becoming the most prized wine; the wine with a 100% local blend loses about 15% of its value. The effect of the last round had less influence on the values attributed to the wines after tasting. In fact, the values attributed during tasting are confirmed for the blended autochthonous wine and for the wine with 20% of an international grape variety, and only the wine with 10% of a non-autochthonous grape variety sees its value increase. One possible interpretation of this result could be that the consumer does not feel a 10% cut of an international variety an important alteration of the product's typicality and therefore, having verified the best taste, further increases his/her willingness to pay (WTP) for that wine. Therefore, this product is the best compromise in terms of taste and typicality. These results show how the consumer shows a preference for typical wines. However, consumers appear to appreciate the introduction of international vines within certain limits as the taste meets their liking. Indeed, the increase of WTP for wine with a 90% content of an autochthonous grape variety points out that consumers have considered the wine they tasted as an acceptable compromise between the value associated to typicality and taste.

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