

# Reducing Information Gap and Increasing Market Orientation in the Agribusiness Sector: Some Evidences from Apulia Region

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**Abstract: Background:** Market orientation plays a crucial role in reinforcing firm's competitive advantage; nevertheless, marketing myopia can negatively affect a clear perception of the market.

**Methods:** An organization that defines itself by product rather than by market terms is probably affected by marketing myopia, a narrowness of mind towards any newness – newness respect to firms' convincement and routines - coming from the external environment. In that context some scientific relevant developments that comes from recent patents have been considered. This paper explores the determinants of marketing myopia in the Apulia wine business (South Italy).

**Results:** The aim of this paper is to describe how experiential research based on Consumer Science research tools, can facilitate a better market knowledge. Experimental sessions carried out in 2013 in Apulia with a group of professionals from the oil and wine sectors clearly demonstrate how country of origin effect can improve marketing myopia.

**Conclusion:** Through a protocol based on an "academicians - practitioners" model, professionals can be facilitated in their strategy formulation.



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**Keywords:** Apulian wine business, consumer science, country of origin, marketing myopia, market orientation, SMEs.

## INTRODUCTION

The food and beverage industry is experiencing a growth in competition and several changes in business settings. The competitive environment warmly suggests to adopt a market oriented approach in strategy making – or, in other words, to avoid marketing myopia – since it strongly contributes to the achievement of success. In the last years Institutions have encouraged firms to adopt a market oriented perspective: they have underlined the strategic role covered by quality and consumers' needs through policy planning and they have reformulated interventions and supports to firms as it appears from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) strategy. The most recent reforms of the CAP have stimulated a new entrepreneurial approach to farm management that focuses on the most profitable market segments [1] by means of funds promoting internationally competitive quality food-stuffs, innovation in farming and food processing. In a recent public consultation on agri-food product quality policy, EU farmers have identified in meeting consumer demand the next key business challenges ([http://europa.eu/pol/agr/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/pol/agr/index_en.htm)).

Due to the attention paid by Institutions and the renewed interest of scholars, the issues of market orientation and marketing myopia come to the fore, although they are not new to academics: since the early sixties some academicians have warned firms about the negative consequences of

marketing myopia for firms but it is hard to find academicians - practitioners collaboration especially in management [2]. The aim of this explorative work is twofold: the first is to follow the hint of a research approach that link both academic and practitioner perspectives according to the model developed by Cavicchi *et al.* [3]; the second objective is to present a case study. In particular, this work presents the results of two experimental sessions carried in Apulia region with the aim of communicating the risks of Marketing Myopia to small firms by using combined methods of sensory analysis and marketing research techniques.

This paper aims to answer to the following research questions: 'how academicians and practitioners can actively collaborate to support SMEs (Small Medium Enterprises) in strategic planning?'; 'how a multidisciplinary approach can help companies in their race to competitiveness?'; 'how SMEs can enhance their competitiveness when avoiding Marketing Myopia?'. The work is structured as follows: firstly authors provide background literature on Marketing myopia and on tools employed in order to solve this problem; then, the method adopted to carry out on this research is described and two case studies are depicted. Finally, some conclusions and further research steps are discussed.

## BACKGROUND LITERATURE AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

There is a wide debate on market orientation. Since its first appearance in the early 1990s the concept of market orientation has evolved; the works from Narver and Slater [4] and Kohli and Jaworski [5], can be considered as mile-

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stones for the knowledge development. In particular, as noted by Verhees [6], the approach theorized by Narver and Slater [4] embodies the “cultural perspective on market orientation”: the authors focus on the importance of behavioral components (customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interfunctional coordination) for enhancing or reducing market orientation. Kohli and Jaworski [5] discuss about market intelligence rather than orientation and they enlarge the borders of the issue under investigation, since they consider “exogenous market factors that affect customer needs and preferences and current as well as future needs of customers” [5, p. 3].

Useful insights emerge from the observation of the drivers of orientation and openness to market: It emerges, as noted by Day [7], a strong relationship between being market-oriented and learning oriented: firms who are posed in the conditions *to learn* about markets are more likely to adopt a market driven approach [8]. Thus, organizational learning is the foundation for a market-oriented or market-driven strategic orientation. The work by Lindgreen *et al.* [9] about market orientation in the food industry provides some interesting points: From the cases presented in the book, it emerges that the pursuing of market orientation implies a cultural change within the organization and a deep knowledge about customers and the understanding of their needs. Firms should also undertake educational activity towards their employees and this might bring, as a consequence, significant changes to the production process. Theodor Levitt can be considered as the “father” of Marketing Myopia; in the 1960 [10], he observed that the success of a company depends more on its ability to capitalize opportunity rather than being a growing industry. Latterly Porter and other scholars [11] that adopt a Resource Based View of the firm have remarked the importance of being proactive for firms and the strategic relevance of implementing resources coherently to environmental challenges [12].

A firm who is affected by marketing myopia usually defines itself in terms of product rather than in terms of markets [13]. Therefore, marketing myopia is a consequence of a cultural predisposition that limits managers’ opening attitude towards what comes from the external environment and it is perceived as newness with respect to firms’ convincement and routines. Marketing Myopia brings consequences on firms’ strategy formulation [14] and the urgency of reducing is further suggested by the diffusion of what has been called “customer-driven capitalism” [15] that cries for an improvement of firms’ market orientation. Thus, one of the main responsibilities of academicians is to make firms aware about the riskiness of Marketing Myopia. Also managers are asked to spend efforts to promote a market oriented corporate culture that is required for achieving a competitive advantage.

Thus, academicians and practitioners seem often to belong to two different worlds [11, 16, 17]; from the literature the need for reinforcing the academic – practitioners collaborations emerges [3, 18] especially in some fields, such as the marketing one [19]: some scholars have investigated how this collaboration can be facilitated [2], whilst others have focused on knowledge diffusion and improvement in academics-practitioners networks [20]. Marketing Myopia can

easily affect Small Firms (SMEs) [21] who recognize in marketing a critical area for their strategic development [22].

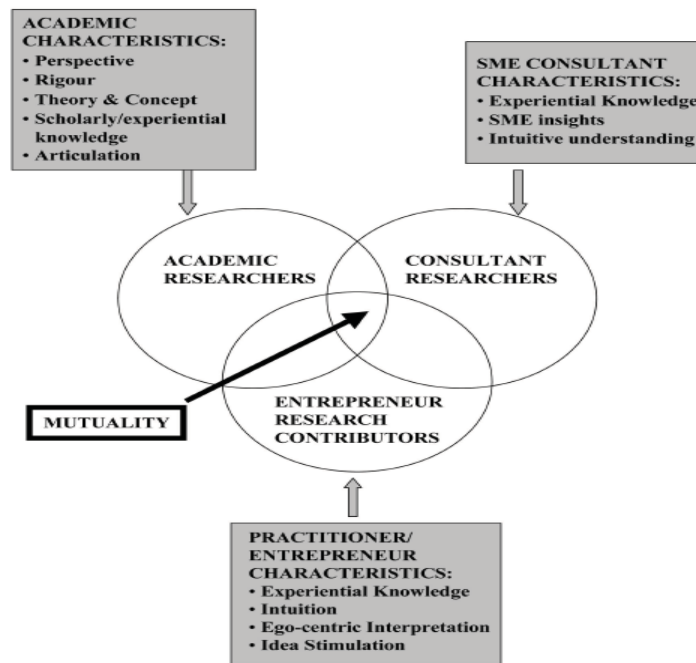
## USEFUL TOOLS FOR ACHIEVING COMPETITIVENESS

In light of the complexity of market orientation, a multidisciplinary approach can have a positive impact on the process that leads firms to achieving a competitive advantage. Background research underlines the challenges and opportunities emerging from multidisciplinary approach. Strategic Management is particularly susceptible of fertilization from other related disciplines [11]; The implementation of analytical tools within the decision making process are recognized useful in achieving competitive advantage and in exploiting information [23]. An analytical approach based on qualitative or quantitative analysis is usually taken into account for helping managers with the management of information (internal or external to the firm) during the strategic planning process; therefore, applied qualitative and quantitative analysis could also create new information and knowledge if they are integrated in a proper organizational function. By exploring the field of product development and consumer research [24] some works highlights the involvement of the academia in interacting with practitioners in the field of marketing and management.

Cavicchi *et al.* [3] have described how sensory analysis can be effectively implemented by firms for the definition of food products quality attributes or for designing food product innovations. Bogue and Ritson [25] have shown the positive impact that sensory analysis can have in new product development and, when combined to marketing, can reduce the distance between the firm and the consumer: the authors observe “combined sensory and marketing analysis has been used to generate *voice of the end-user information*” (p.45) that, in other words, it means reducing marketing myopia.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

One of the main challenges for academicians is to gain a meaningful understanding of SMEs and of entrepreneurial phenomena; the dialogue with practitioners who work with the entrepreneurs together with the sharing of information could be particularly helpful although the well-known collaboration difficulties between thinkers and doers. Among the various contributions within the literature, also research in the field of Joint Learning could provide useful insights; in particular, the work by Grant *et al.* [26] highlights an original and interesting framework for studying the characteristics of SMEs’ entrepreneurs. The authors suggest that the research approach for a successful joint learning should consider both academic and practitioner perspectives and the contributions that they bring to entrepreneurial research as shown in Fig. (1). The aim of the proposed framework is to learn by combining the respective strengths and to enrich each other's overall perspective through the development of compatible strengths. Joint learning brings some benefits; it is less resource intensive and it helps on one hand to overcome the limitations of both parties and on the other, to reinforce their respective strengths. Joint learning can be also employed to reduce the contrast between formal marketing



**Fig. (1).** Researchers' characteristics and strengths (Grant *et al.*, 2001).

and entrepreneurs and it can be considered as a valid opportunity to combine education and training.

This research approach fully motivates the implementation of a variety of research methods. Background research shows successful attempt to combine together different tools and methodologies. Gilmore and Carson [27] develop a protocol for investigating entrepreneurial decisional process and they include a series of in-depth interviews, case studies, longitudinal ethnographic consultations and focus group evaluation. These latter are organized in two steps: stage 1 sees initial in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs following a protocol based on a comprehensive background research and combined with experiential knowledge of the research team. At stage 2 the entrepreneurs that took part to the in-depth interviews are invited to attend the presentation of the study findings and they can debate with consultants and academicians.

Scholars have reflected upon the wide potentialities of the model proposed by Gilmore and Carson [28]; a further step has been carried out by Cavicchi *et al.* [3] who have improved the initial model by introducing sensory analysis tools and techniques together with other research tools based on qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The authors have shown that the proposed research protocol can be successfully employed to gain knowledge about the competitive environment. Cavicchi *et al.* [3] propose a model divided into three steps named as *pre-experiential*, *experiential* and *rethinking*. The pre-experiential focuses on the problem; initially researchers are asked to carry out a diagnosis of the problem to be considered by collecting primary and secondary data from various sources. Academicians gain a deep understanding of the business environment that is of primary importance when studying firms (Gilmore and Carson, 2008) [28]. After having defined the problem under investigation, researchers have to define the target for their message and

the contents of the message to be delivered. Then, in order to perform a research, scholars are asked to define a detailed research protocol.

The second phase, that is the experiential phase, takes place. In this phase, researchers have to understand what the participants think about a certain issue. Researcher then create a set of conditions – by using the appropriate research tools – for involving participants into an active experimentation or a reflective observation, as suggested by Kolb [28]. This phase is extremely important, because participants are asked to change their point of view by interacting as consumers and this enables a measurement of the User Experience<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore this phase provides the insights for confirming or disconfirming the opinions previously expressed by participants. Several techniques can be employed: Cardello [29] provides a comprehensive review of methods that can be employed for modifying consumers' expectations and quality perception by handling the information context. Useful tools are borrowed by sensory science<sup>2</sup>: in particular, there are methods that investigate consumer ratings about sensory, hedonic, ideational or cognitive expectations with blind and fully informed trials in order to assess the disconfirmation (positive or negative) created by products [29]. Also preference tests, triadic tests, experimental auctions, conjoint analysis or discrete choice models can be employed for achieving the research Fig. (2).

After the experience, researchers are asked to drive participants into an evaluation of the experience; Cavicchi *et al.*,

<sup>1</sup> ISO 9241-210 defines user experience as "a person's perceptions and responses that result from the use or anticipated use of a product, system or service". (<http://www.nngroup.com/articles/definition-user-experience/>).

<sup>2</sup> According to Stone and Sidel [30] sensory evaluation is the "scientific method used to evoke, measure, analyze, and interpret those responses to products as perceived through the senses of sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing"

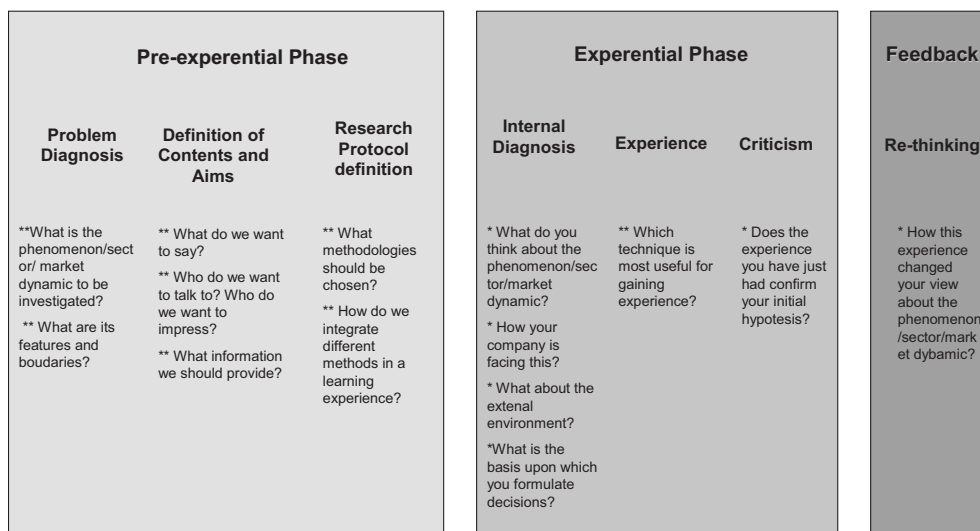


Fig. (2). The Academic-Practitioner collaboration model.

Source: our processing

\*Questions addressed to involved professionals, \*\*Questions addressed to researchers

The specific methodology used in this work will be described through the two following case studies.

[3] call this step *criticism* in order to underline the importance of a reflection over what has been experienced. To support this step, researchers are asked to elaborate the data collected – sometimes if the lower complexity of the experiments allows it, data analysis is performed in real time – and then to show it to the participants.

The last phase is the “rethinking” one. A reflection on the experiential experiment is carried out and a comparison with the initial information collected from participants is performed. The aim is to understand whether the initial opinion and the set of beliefs has changed due to experience. Longitudinal observation can be carried out. Researchers gain information about the efficacy of their communication process, of the tools employed and on the effectiveness of the research questions that have been identified at the early beginning of the research project.

**A CASE STUDY IN APULIA REGION: GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION, INDIGENOUS VARIETIES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR BUILDING A STRONG TERRITORIAL BRAND REPUTATION**

In agribusiness, managers perceive quality as a key factor of success, and firms often build their relative competitive advantage on the characteristics of home country: in the wine business, location is a strategic resource. Firms that are settled in a certain area have an easier access to sales turnover since they can benefit from a sort of short-term rent. Background research has shown that country of origin can be considered as a brand and a tool for achieving an effective product positioning (Beverland *et al.*, 2002) [31].

Thus, although wine firms perceive location as a strategic resource, they encounter difficulties in objectively managing it. Background research [3] has depicted some examples of marketing myopia; in particular, from the literature emerges that sometimes managers that heavily rely on location as a leverage for product differentiation can underestimate competitors.

The issue of marketing myopia in relation to country of origin and competitors perception has been investigated through a field research in Apulia Region, in Southern Italy. A 2 days workshop was held in the town called Andria on 6-7<sup>th</sup> May 2013; the first day was dedicated to the Wine sector whilst the second was about Extra Virgin olive oil that can be considered two of the main assets of the agricultural sector in Apulia [32].

**a) Pre-experiential Phase**

The month before the workshop, researchers were involved in the definition of the problem by means of some meetings with the staff of the University of Foggia, local government representatives and stakeholders in charge of PDO ‘Castel del Monte Nero di Troia’ and other local PDOs wines.

In the area under investigation in 2011 a newer appellation, the PDO Castel del Monte Nero di Troia was created; this PDO encompasses only the northwestern corner of the PDO “Castel del Monte”, the previous appellation established 40 years earlier. The problem of a clear positioning of local wine and olive oil in the international market, as well as the importance of their differentiation to increase their market share, were considered the most important topic to be investigated (problem diagnosis). Thus, together with the Italian Center for Sensory Analysis and other experienced researchers with a background on consumer science, a research and showcase protocol was defined. Research field has collected data both on the olive oil and wine; this case focuses on wine.

At the beginning, researchers welcomed participants, presenting themselves and introducing the workshop program. Then a specific training and vocabulary development related to wine descriptors were preliminary to the actual experimental session. After the training, every session (white and red wines the first day, traditional cultivars and famous olive oil brands the second one) presented a seminar about

three different topics: the market data and international competitive environment, the role of brand and brand equity, the role of ethnocentrism and country of origin in the evaluation and perception of food and beverage product. The aim was to give a deeper and updated knowledge of the wine sector and its mechanisms that are boosting the competition at national and global level.

## b) Experiential Phase

### *Stage 1) Internal Diagnosis through Focus group/Brainstorming session*

A 90 minutes group interviews with 16 winemakers, experts and entrepreneurs was performed to elicit their views of the competitive environment, to understand their beliefs and perspectives about current and future trends and to get information about possible prejudice with regards to their competitors at national level. In considering the relationships between different stakeholders involved in the wine sector as a part of a unique local system, they were elicited in reflecting and formulating suitable collective strategies.

More specifically, during the focus group session, a protocol was followed and people were interviewed about the positioning of Apulia PDO wines, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the local wine industry. A SWOT analysis and a comparison between the local system and other competitors at national level was carried out.

According to many interviewees, Apulia wines are considered high quality products and the reason why they don't hold the same positioning in consumers' mind of other renewed wines (i.e. Tuscan wines) is addressed to powerful promotional strategies undertaken by wines who hold a consolidated reputation.

Concerning specific questions on intrinsic sensory attributes, the belief that other national wines, with similar characteristics like vintage, grape and price range were less palatable and of lower quality emerged. Moreover, the interviewees pointed out tradition as a key factor of success for their wines.

### *Stage 2) Experiential and Experimental Sessions*

In the second part of the workshop, whilst part of the research group was elaborating the content analysis of the focus group in real time, comparing the statements retrieved by participants with real data depicted on market reports and secondary sources previously prepared in light of the adopted interview protocol, the interviewees were asked to take part to a blind tasting session.

The experimental sessions were based on the classification provided by Schifferstein [33]. According to the author, three alternative methods to elicit sensory preferences can be identified depending on the information set available to individuals: blind taste, expectation (provision of non sensory information only) and labelled tests (provision of non sensory information such as a label and tasted samples). In the three cases, preferences can be measured through hedonic scores. Blind, expectation and labelled tests provide consumers with a mix of information about sensory characteristics, geographical origin/product's brand or a combination of the two characteristics [34].

Stefani *et al.* [34, pp.54-55] well explain the mechanisms related to this kind of experiments:

*Let be B, E and L the scores respectively measured in the blind, expectation and labeled tests. The differences between scores under different information regimes are denominated as follows [33]:*

*L – E = degree of disconfirmation;*

*E – B = degree of incongruence;*

*L – B = degree of response shift.*

*... Actual sensory perceptions are not independent from sensory expectations derived from extrinsic cues. When the process characteristics refer to the geographical origin of the product it has been reported that consumers indifferent between two product in the blind test showed a strong sensory preference for products produced in specific areas in the labeled test [34]"*

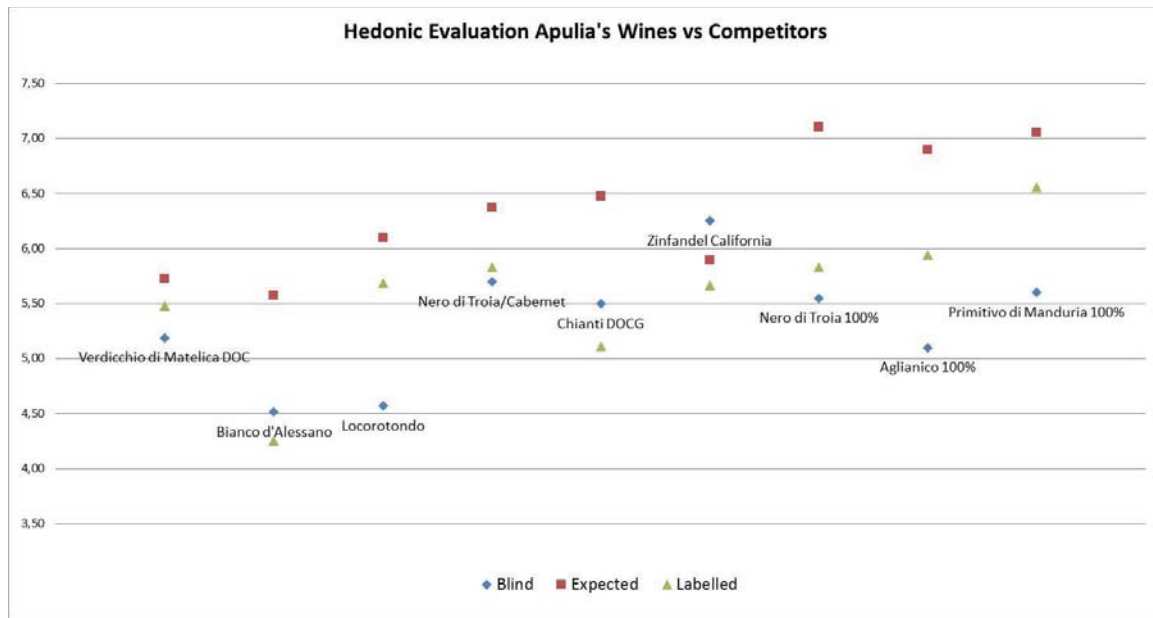
Assimilation theory is one of the theories explaining this pattern: disconfirmed expectations can cause a state of psychological pain in consumers when prior beliefs are contradicted by experience. Thus, consumers reduce their discomfort shifting their sensorial perception in the direction of previous expectations. Thus, according to assimilation theory, consumers during labelled test, may try to be consistent with the expectation they formed when rating the non-sensory (label) information. This situation is very close to what happens in everyday life where consumers are usually exposed to non-sensory information like advertising, suggestions of experts, wine guides, before trying the product itself.

Hedonic scores were elicited by asking participants to tick on a 10 cm linear scale anchored at the right end with "I like it very much" and at the left end with "I don't like it at all". In the case of expectation tests, these anchoring were replaced by "I would like it very much" and "I wouldn't like it at all". The treatments of experimental design were category of wines and information conditions (blind test, expectation test and labelled test). Within each session, subjects first participated in a blind test indicating their evaluation of the servings of oil from the different brands or areas.

Afterwards, participants were provided with labels of wines and expectations were elicited. Finally, a labeled test took place and concluded the experimental session. For blind and labeled tests the scorecard was integrated with a multiple choice aimed to understand the reasons of likes and dislikes: "Why do/don't you like this wine". The answer was a list of sensory descriptors to choose. With this second experiential stage, the arousal of participants increased and a particular attention was devoted to next stages.

### *Stage 3) Criticism - Exhibition of Results and Final Discussion*

In the third stage, firstly results about the focus groups integrated with real market data were reported. This is a first way through which participants can compare and broaden their views of competitive environment. Secondly, the revelation of the identity of tasted wines (in blind sessions), together with results on stated preferences and identification of Apulian and other Italian wines, were offered. Figure (3)



Source: our processing.

Fig. (3). Hedonic Evaluation of Apulia's vs Competitors' wines.

represents one of the data elaboration that were shown to participants.

Some interesting issues emerged from such results. First of all, it is clear that local wines and particularly Nero di Troia 100%, Aglianico and Primitivo di Manduria 100% received the highest evaluations when their identity was disclosure. All local wines, excepting Bianco d'Alessano, reveals results in line with assimilation theory where external cue (the brand) affects sensory evaluation.

The case of Zinfandel instead is particularly important because a reverse effect is evident: the knowledge about the brand generates a lower score, whilst the blind evaluation gives the highest. This is attributable to the prejudice towards American wines, considered by participants as easy to drink but not excellent wines.

In order to more in-depth understand the reasons for likes and dislikes preferences, a Correspondence Analysis was performed. Correspondence analysis is a descriptive/exploratory technique designed to analyze simple two-way and multi-way tables containing some measures of correspondence between the rows and columns. In a two-way contingency table, for instance, the observed association of two traits is summarized by the cell frequencies, and a typical inferential aspect is the study whether certain levels of one characteristic are associated with some levels of another characteristic. Correspondence allows to display the rows and columns of the contingency table as points in a low-dimensional space, such that the positions of the row and column points are consistent with their associations in the table and thus to picture associations in order to have a global view of the data that is useful for interpretation.

It is obvious that these results cannot be generalized because the experiments are not performed with a representative sample of consumers neither the involved selected group could be properly called a panel because they are not trained

according to every usually adopted sensory norm. Nevertheless, these results showed in "real time" give the chance to open a useful discussions with participants about the value of a brand (brand equity), firm's reputation, process characteristics and many other strategic issues. In this specific case the final discussion, conducted by one of the researchers is a sort of forum where the results are commented by participants.

Consequently, the strategic intent shared among stakeholders and participants – that can be summed up in the deep conviction of the superior competitive advantage of Apulian wine quality – often appears too general and built on weak or incomplete bases.

**c) Feedback: Anonymous Questionnaire on Learned Experience and Follow-up After 1 Month**

The final step had the objective to obtain feedbacks on learned experience and to follow-up the possible change in their entrepreneurial culture and attitudes. In many cases, participants were enthusiasts of a such innovative procedure of learning and some of them asked for new meetings to deeper their knowledge. For consultants this means increasing the loyalty of their customers towards their service.

**CURRENT & FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

By joining sensory analysis techniques to qualitative marketing research tools in different sessions of participated research approach, we have facilitated communication flows, and moved out most sources of possible misunderstanding based on a subjective idea of quality. We have encouraged a "learning through experience" process and under this perspective the hazard of self prejudice is reduced. The experience that the professional panels did, has generated some knowledge that can be used in the strategy formulation process.

Thus, we have found out that a participated approach, based mainly on a direct experience, fulfils the expectation and achieves remarkable results, giving to entrepreneurs and managers prompt and realistic answers to their questions about business strategy. Managers and entrepreneurs have shown an active involvement in the event and have appreciated the approach; thus, an experience based comparison is a condition for an effective and truly evaluation of product potentialities [35, 36]. This study shows that the combination of multidisciplinary knowledge can be successfully employed for gaining useful information for strategic planning.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that this article content has no conflict of interest.

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