



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA



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Wine Branding and Consumer Behaviour

Font and quality perception in the wine market

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by

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to explore the role of font's choice in shaping consumers' quality perception of wine quality, with a specific focus on the Italian market. This research investigates whether serif fonts, traditionally associated with elegance and refinement, lead to a perception of higher quality than sans-serif fonts, generally linked to modernity and simplicity. From the survey made for this paper, serif font, traditionally linked with elegance and refinement, were consistently associated with higher quality by respondents, especially for less expert customers, suggesting that traditional aesthetics are very important for individuals who rely more on visual cues rather than product knowledge. Conversely, sans-serif fonts did not yield a significant effect on perceived quality, even among northern Italian consumers, countering initial hypotheses about regional preferences. Furthermore, font choice did not significantly influence purchasing decisions based on the occasion for which the wine was purchased, such as casual versus formal use.

These findings provide useful indications for wine producers and marketers, suggesting aligning font choices with broader cultural and aesthetic expectations while maintain brand consistency and appealing to the target audience's preference. Serif fonts can be used strategically to convey tradition and high quality, whereas sans-serif fonts may be better suited for products aimed at younger, experimental consumers or modern market segments.

Key words: Wine brands, visual identity, font design, label design, consumer behavior.

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo é explorar o papel da escolha da fonte na formação da percepção de qualidade do vinho pelos consumidores, com foco específico no mercado italiano. Esta pesquisa investiga se as fontes serifadas, tradicionalmente associadas à elegância e ao requinte, levam a uma percepção de qualidade superior às fontes sem serifa, geralmente ligadas à modernidade e à simplicidade. A partir da pesquisa realizada para este artigo, as fontes serifadas, tradicionalmente ligadas à elegância e ao refinamento, foram consistentemente associadas a maior qualidade pelos entrevistados, especialmente para clientes menos experientes, sugerindo que a estética tradicional é muito importante para indivíduos que confiam mais em sugestões visuais do que em fontes serifadas. conhecimento do produto. Por outro lado, as fontes sem serifa não produziram um efeito significativo na qualidade percebida, mesmo entre os consumidores do norte da Itália, contrariando as hipóteses iniciais sobre as preferências regionais. Além disso, a escolha da fonte não influenciou significativamente as decisões de compra com base na ocasião para a qual o vinho foi adquirido, como uso casual versus uso formal.

Estas descobertas fornecem indicações úteis para produtores e comerciantes de vinho, sugerindo alinhar as escolhas de fontes com expectativas culturais e estéticas mais amplas, mantendo a consistência da marca e apelando à preferência do público-alvo. As fontes com serifa podem ser usadas estrategicamente para transmitir tradição e alta qualidade, enquanto as fontes sem serifa podem ser mais adequadas para produtos destinados a consumidores mais jovens e experimentais ou a segmentos de mercado modernos.

Palavras-chave: Marcas de vinho, identidade visual, design de fontes, design de rótulos, comportamento do consumidor.

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Introduction

The label is the primary visual feature that stands out on a bottle of wine. Many customers rely on the label to decide whether to purchase a bottle of wine because it is the first thing they notice. It is a fundamental source of information as it provides details and information about both the intrinsic and extrinsic quality signals of the product (Chaney, 2000; Thomas & Pickering, 2003). Consumers prefer to evaluate wines personally, reading labels and analysing the possible choices (Barber and Almanza, 2006). There are several aspects that may influence the wine consumer decision-making process and one of them, often perceived on an unconscious level, is the font present on a label. As highlighted by Piovesan (2023) fonts can evoke specific emotions and feelings, and, thereby, influence consumers expectations. These subtle design choices may impact how consumers perceive the quality and character of a wine.

The aim of this study is therefore to investigate the role that the design of the font presented in the label plays in the moment of purchasing a bottle of wine. We, want to investigate the relationship that the font, a single but relevant dimension of the label, has within the sensorial experience and final quality perception of a bottle.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Do serif fonts convey a perception of higher quality compared to sans-serif fonts?
2. How does the consumer's level of expertise in wine influence the impact of font choice on quality perception?
3. Are there regional differences within Italy in how fonts influence quality perception?

4. Does the occasion for purchasing wine (e.g., casual vs. formal use) change the effect of font choice on quality perception?

The findings of this research should be useful for wine producers and marketers seeking to align label design with target audience expectations and cultural preferences.

Chapter 1

Literature review

1.1 Wine branding, brand identity and brand visual identity

A brand is not just “A name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination thereof, intended to identify the goods or services of a seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Wood , 2000, p. 664), but contains intangible aspects, fundamental in creating a relationship with consumers, such as the meanings and perceptions aroused in them through the communication and marketing strategies adopted by companies (Avis, 2009, page 2). It is therefore possible to define the brand as a set of promises aimed at consumers (Pomiato, 2022).

Branding is the process that gives products and services the power of a brand (Kotler & Keller, 2015), creating a sort of "emotional relationship" between the company itself and its customers: it is the tool for transmitting trust, creating recognition for consumers and to obtain a lasting competitive advantage, improving positioning and promoting the achievement of objectives (Joshi & Nema, 2015). It is therefore the visual, verbal and sensorial expression of the brand, it is what makes a company, a product or a service unique (Hales, 2012). Through these intangible aspects, marketers can differentiate their brands from those of their competitors and position their products in the minds of consumers, using cognitive and emotional levers (Phillips et al, 2014).

In the wine sector, where competition is becoming increasingly intense, it is fundamental to develop an effective branding strategy to ensure that the brand

wines will be chosen by the buyers (Hussain & al, 2008). Producers must be able to convey to consumers not only the characteristics of the product in an abstract sense but also its history, the vines, the origin (DOC), the production techniques or the gastronomic combinations (Pontalti & Aragrande 2013). Hence wine branding has assumed an increasing relevance in recent years. Indeed, it is essential that brands are able not only able to differentiate their products, but also to support the long-term value of the brand in an increasingly competitive sector (Harvey et al, 2014).

The wine branding literature makes an important distinction between wine brand identity and wine brand image, each of which contributes uniquely to the brand's presence in the marketplace.

Wine brand identity refers to how the brand defines itself and the core characteristics it embodies (Eloyan, 2015). This concept includes core values, ideals and a sense of exclusivity, along with the emotional ties and historical legacy that distinguish the brand as a premium product (Kapferer, 2008). Some authors extend this definition to include regionality as a key element, recognizing that the reputation and characteristics of the region of origin play a crucial role in the formation of a wine's identity (Harvey et al., 2014).

The image of the wine brand, on the contrary, represents the perceptions and associations that individuals attribute to the brand. Image is the external impression formed by consumers through interactions with the brand and it is often influenced by factors beyond the brand's direct control, such as expert reviews and public recommendations. For example, in the case of sparkling wines, brand image has a significant impact on consumer purchasing decisions, shaped by endorsements and expert opinions (Verdonk et al., 2017). While brand identity reflects the underlying message of the brand, brand image reveals how effectively that message reaches consumers. In other words, brand image serves as a mirror through which the success of a brand's identity can be evaluated.

This correlation underlines the importance of coordinating the brand identity with consumers' perceptions, to ensure the different brand pillars are coherent and increase consumers' trust (Kapferer, 2000). Both concepts - brand identity and visual brand identity - in the wine sector are also closely linked to regional provenance and the prestige perceived in the origin of the wine, underlining the interaction between heritage, authenticity and consumer expectations (Aranda, 2015).

1.1.1 Packaging, labels and fonts

The visual identity includes the visual elements perceived by the consumers, such as packaging, label, logo, colors, fonts, figures, website design, newsletter layout or social media graphics media (Livanainen, 2017). These elements not only provide information about the product but have the purpose of characterizing the brand and making it unique. The visual identity signs, in fact, should capture the attention of the target audience and convey the values of the brand to consumers (Faro, 2021). If designed correctly, visual elements can positively influence consumers' perceptions of the product (Underwood & Klein, 2002).

In the wine sector particularly, the strong symbolic, emotional and psychological characteristics that the product possesses should be exploited by brands to convey the immaterial meaning, in addition to the purely organoleptic and gustatory one (Khan, 2023). Studies such as that of Tang (2015) show that most wine consumers decide which bottle to buy based on its external characteristics. On the shelf, where a multitude of products are positioned (perhaps with the same characteristics), a bottle will have to capture target consumers' attention and arouse their curiosity, also through its distinctive visual signs (Callegari & Perna, 2020).

Regarding packaging, its symbolic quality is of great importance for the brand because a mismatch between consumer expectations and the meaning communicated by the packaging could damage the value and reputation of a brand (Machiels et al., 2019).

In wine, packaging and more particularly the label are considered a key aspect of the branding strategy (Deliza & MacFie, 2001). Often consumers buy a bottle of wine based on the label alone (Barsotti, 2010). The label placed on the bottle, in addition to informing on the organoleptic qualities of the product, communicates aspects that make that wine unique (Thomas & Pickering, 2003). Labels are the second most important predictor of intention to purchase wine, after price (Mello and Pires, 2009). Williams (2018) studied how Millennials perceive various design elements on wine labels, highlighting the subconscious influence of icons, symbols, fonts, and colors on their evaluation of the value and quality of wine.

It is therefore necessary that the wine label is consistent with the brand desired positioning, the values and, more generally, the image that the producer wants to communicate. In visual terms, the label can include several graphic elements, including a logo, images, a color palette, fonts and other characters that should be consistent with the desired positioning of the brand. Consumers appreciate the consistency between the label and the product itself. If the sensory inputs are congruent, it will be easier for consumers to evaluate the product, and this should lead to a more favourable affective response: consumers tend to favour products whose labels are consistent with the unique characteristics of the product and communicate a similar message (Li et al. 2020; Li et al., 2019).

Fonts were born with "mechanical" writing, and then with typographic writing, developing and enriching themselves in number and appearance over the years (Tselentis et al, 2012). Some companies have designed specific typefaces

so that their brands can be conceived as unique (BMW and YouTube), carrying the manufacturer's brand image (Wang et al., 2019).

The personality of a font can communicate different sensations and feelings, and it also plays a relevant role in consumer choice. Li and colleagues (2020), tried to understand whether, in the food market, perceived congruence between the product and the characters used on the label influence individuals' purchasing decisions. The authors found that preference for congruence, which translates into a higher probability of purchasing, is more relevant for hedonic products than for utilitarian ones, because congruence increases cognitive fluidity. When evaluating the purchase of a non-hedonic product (for example salt and bread) consumers should not be significantly influenced by sensory factors and will value more product performance (Li et al., 2020).

1.1.2 Graphic signs and character associations: Serif vs. Sans Serif in the perception of quality

The different types of fonts can be grouped into several intersecting categories: serif and sans serif, classic and modern, uppercase and italic, geometric, grotesque and so on. When choosing a font, it is important to analyze if the font conveys associations which are congruent with the desired brand image. Dyson and Beier (2016), in a study on cursive characters, managed to demonstrate that a simple inclination of the letters can increase the urgency of reacting to a certain "call to action" at a non-conscious level. A "round" font is perceived as friendly, while one with straight lines or angles is more appropriate for demonstrating authority. The fonts that reproduce handwriting, however, are more suitable for conveying familiarity. Different fonts are attributed to different psychological meanings: for example, the Times New Roman font has been found to increase

the sense of irony and fun in a comic text, while Arial attenuates it (Juni & Gross, 2008; Gasser et al, 2005).

Communicating through “classic” typographical characters can have a positive effect on the evaluation of a product, to the point of strengthening consumer's emotional attachment (Tan & Ming, 2003). This type of font, in fact, recalls tradition and seriousness, bringing the consumer emotionally closer to the product, and, thereby, leading to a more positive product evaluation (Barsotti, 2010). On the other hand, it is necessary to observe how the use of a modern and refined font can make the perception of the product more unique, innovative and exclusive. The study conducted by Chaney (2000) also found an interesting correlation between whether a uniform font is used on the bottle label: higher-priced wines are labeled with a uniform font or with only one small change in label font style.

The most used categorization divides the various fonts into two main subgroups (Tab.1): Serif fonts (or serif) and Sans Serif fonts (or sans serif or stick) (Fig.1). The term comes from the French word *sans*, meaning "without" and "serif" of uncertain origin, probably from the Dutch word *schreef* meaning "line" or pen stroke (Tselentis et al 2012).

The graceful serif fonts are enriched with those "serifs", elongations of the letters, which make them more refined, giving a touch of elegance, tradition and classicism. These fonts convey a sense of reliability and allow the development of a relationship of trust with the reader (Minakata & Beier, 2022). On the other hand, sans-serif fonts, characterized by a clean and simple design without decorative extensions, are perceived as more modern and innovative than serif fonts. They are "punchy" and effective fonts, making them more appropriate than serifs to convey messages clearly (Minakata & Beier, 2022).

Fig. 1: serif - sans serif comparison

font serif A B C D E a b c d e
font sans serif A B C D E a b c d e

Tab 1: brief resume of serif and sans serif differences and examples.

<p>Serif</p>	<p>Extension at the end of the character</p>	<p>More elegant and graceful</p>	<p>Bodoni Cambria Garamond <i>Lobster</i> <i>Pacifico</i> Times new roman</p>	<p>Historical categories: 1-Old style 2-transitional (more geometrical) 3-Bodoni or Didionan (fine and thin serif) 4-Slab serif or Egyptian (born with the printing techniques)</p>
<p>Sans Serif (or stick fonts)</p>	<p>Doesn't have extending features</p>	<p>More clean and modern Born alongside the birth of slab serif fonts</p>	<p>Arial Calibri <i>Comic sans</i> Helvetica Tahoma Verdana</p>	<p>Historical categories: 1-Grotesque sans serif 2-Neo grotesque (more modern and digital prone) 3-Geometric (following the artistic Bauhaus revolution)</p>

1.2 Serif and sans serif practical use

Serif fonts are predominantly used in the luxury and hedonic goods sector. In general, in the luxury sector, which includes quality wines, the serif font is used to convey elegance, history, character and tradition (Hermes, Armani, Tiffany & Co. (Bazzani et al, 2024)). Sans-serif fonts, stripped of decorative "serifs", are associated with a bold, modern image that conveys simplicity and confidence (Versace, Gucci, Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent) (Doyle & Bottomley, 2004).

Fine wines and the most important wine brands use serif fonts on their labels to recall the classicism, elegance and refinement that go well with the image they want to convey. In fact, the labels of Champagne brands are printed with serif fonts, for example Moët & Chandon (Fig.2), Veuve Clicquot (Fig.3), Ruinart, Dom Pérignon, Armand de Brignac, Louis Roderer (Polidoro, 2019). The same is found for the majority of sparkling white wine labels. The exception that confirms the rule is the choice of Santero sparkling wine (Fig.4), which, mainly addressing a young and dynamic audience, presents itself on the market with an extremely modern and lively packaging and label. The fonts used in the Santero label are all sans serif.

Fig. 2: Moët & Chandon label



Fig. 3: Veuve Clicquot label



Fig. 4: Santero's labels and photos



Previous studies highlight that the use of a particular type of font is a relevant tool for communicating a message about the unique characteristics of the product, and the font should be consistent with the brand's desired positioning. Research shows that, for example, the choice of a serif instead of non-serif font can influence the purchase of a specific bottle of wine, and express affinity with the organoleptic characteristics offered by the wine (Duff & Faber, 2011).

Celhay and Remaud (2017) created a semiotic analysis of Bordeaux wine labels, examining how codes and visual elements convey authenticity and quality to consumers. Their study on authenticity reveals that conventional components, such as castle images and classic serif fonts, reinforce perceptions of heritage and excellence. This supports the idea that conventional designs and classic fonts can convey a sense of history and excellence, appealing to a wide range of people.

This study also indicates that these visual codes remain consistent across different consumer demographics, underscoring their relevance in communicating cultural authenticity. The age of the consumer, therefore, is not a variable that interferes in the relationship between font and perceived quality. These findings are illustrated by Amarone della Valpolicella DOCG, one of the most famous Italian wines, which is recognized internationally for its elegance, complexity and great aging potential.

The main wine companies on the market, large and small, such as Masi, Pasqua, Cantine Santa Sofia, Tommasi, Zenato, Sartori, almost exclusively use serif fonts (mostly classic) on their labels (Fig.5), to communicate associations linked with tradition, security and importance (Zhang, 2019), because when faced with the purchase of a more well-known and expensive wine, consumers seek security and reassurance (Mehta et al, 2022).

Fig. 5: Pasqua, Santa Sofia and Masi bottles. All of them show a very classic serif font.



An example that differs from what has been illustrated so far, is Secondo Marco's Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Riserva Fumetto (Fig.6). The entry of the new generations into this historic winery has led to a "modernization" of the appearance of this classic wine. The objective is to make the wine stand out and increase its market, aiming more at young people, which until now are not included in the traditional target of this wine, which due to its prestige and high price is purchased above all by people over the age of 35 (Unione Italiana Vini, 2024). The sans serif font used in the label of this wine is extremely modern and almost revolutionary when compared to that used by competing brands. In this case, which represents an exception, the choice of the font was not made to induce a sensorial experience which is consistent with the content of the bottle, but to convey the freshness of this wine and its innovative features, and, consequently, to communicate the high quality of the product.

Fig. 6: An Amarone by Secondo Marco, very unusual for a classical wine.



Based on the findings of previous studies, we may, therefore, assume that the use of a serif font on the label of a bottle of wine, when compared to the use of a sans serif font, will more likely lead consumers to perceive the quality of the wine as superior. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: A bottle of wine will be perceived as having a higher quality if a serif font used in the label instead of a sans serif font.

1.3 Relationship between the use of serif fonts and perceived wine quality: moderating factors.

There are many factors that can moderate the effects of that the font used in the wine label can have on wine quality perceptions.

In a situation where a choice must be made between many options, a consumer (especially the less experienced one) will try to focus on the aspects that are most familiar to him/her to ensure he/she will make the right decision despite the little time available (Mello & Pires, 2009). This is particularly true for infrequent wine drinkers, who are more likely to purchase a bottle of wine based mainly on the aesthetics of the label (Chaney, 2000). Several studies have shown that an individual's passion for the world of wine significantly influences the attention given to a bottle's aesthetic aspects, with less passionate consumers placing greater emphasis on these elements. This, in turn, impacts their perception of the quality conveyed by the bottle's design (Chaney, 2000; Yang & Choi, 2022). This said, given that serif fonts are commonly associated with luxury and premium wine bottles, it can be expected that they will have a greater influence on quality perceptions among less knowledgeable consumers, who tend to rely more on visual cues, compared to more informed consumers.

Based on the findings of previous studies, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The use of serif font in the wine label will have a higher impact on wine quality perceptions for consumers who are less experts rather than for the more expert ones.

Cultural background plays a critical role in shaping how individuals evaluate the aesthetic aspects of products, as demonstrated by Tieskens et al. (2018). Their research highlights that exposure to specific forms of art, culture, and graphic design, characteristic of a particular region, can significantly influence aesthetic preferences. Familiarity with visual elements typical of one's region often fosters a stronger connection with products that reflect these familiar cues, enhancing their perceived quality. Ma et al. (2015) emphasize that familiarity reduces uncertainty by aligning consumer expectations with the product's attributes, thereby improving sensory evaluations and overall engagement. Conversely, unfamiliarity with certain aesthetic elements can lead to lower engagement, scepticism, or reduced purchase intention (Jamir et al., 2020; Tuorila et al., 1994).

In a country like Italy, where regional diversity is deeply rooted in culture, aesthetic preferences are likely influenced by these differences. Northern Italy, often associated with innovation, modernity, and progressive design trends, may be more receptive to contemporary visual elements like sans-serif fonts, which are typically linked to modernity and simplicity. By contrast, other regions with stronger ties to tradition may favor more classic and elaborate design cues. Investigating whether customers in northern Italy perceive sans-serif fonts as indicators of higher quality compared to other regions provides an opportunity to explore how regional dynamics shape consumer responses to label design. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: The use of serif font in the wine label will increase wine quality perceptions, particularly among consumers in northern Italy.

The occasion for purchasing wine can significantly influence the relationship between perceived quality and the font used on the label. Wine is often associated with various social contexts, whether shared during family gatherings, formal

dinners, or celebratory events. These settings shape consumer behavior, as individuals are likely to evaluate wines differently depending on the intended consumption occasion (Boncinelli et al., 2019). When purchasing wine for social settings, consumers may exhibit risk aversion, favoring options perceived as "safe" to avoid potential judgment from others. A well-known brand or a label that aligns with familiar visual cues can reduce perceived risk and provide reassurance in such contexts (Bruwer et al., 2013). Additionally, consumers may use wine as a tool to communicate personal identity, such as aligning with niche preferences like natural or organic wines.

On the other hand, when purchasing wine for more casual or personal use, consumers are often more open to experimentation and novelty. In familiar environments where choices are less scrutinized by others, individuals tend to prioritize personal preferences and may be more willing to explore unfamiliar labels or designs. These contrasting behaviors suggest that the purchase occasion moderates the influence of label design, including fonts, on wine quality perceptions.

Given that sans-serif fonts are often associated with modernity and approachability, they may be particularly appealing in casual purchasing scenarios where the consumer feels freer to explore and take risks. By contrast, serif fonts, with their traditional and sophisticated connotations, may align better with formal or social settings where consumers seek reassurance and perceived quality. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Consumers will be more attracted to sans-serif fonts when purchasing wine for casual occasions.

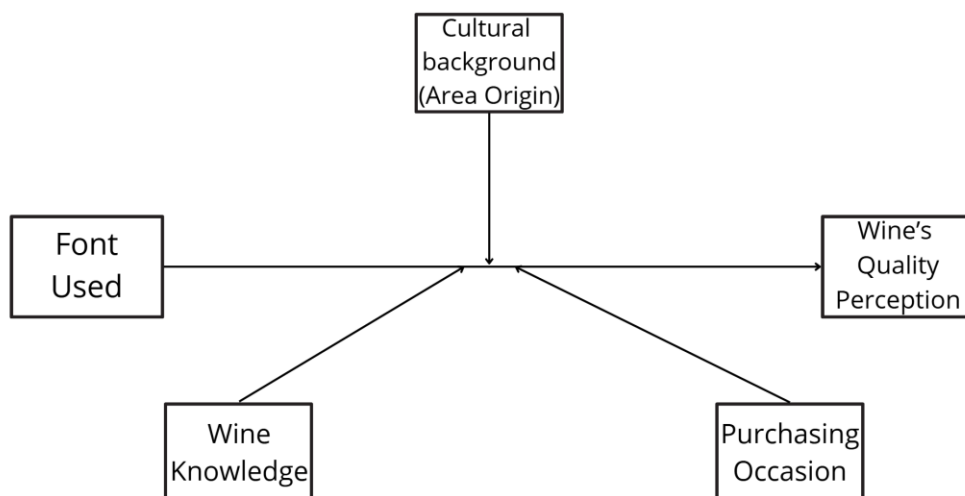
Chapter 2

Conceptual framework

The study aims to investigate the effects that the choice of a font can have on the wine quality perceptions and how other factors, such as the personal wine knowledge, the purchase occasion or the regional provenience can affect the relationship between the font used in the wine label, namely serif and sans serif fonts, and perceptions of wine quality (Fig. 7).

This research will be conducted referring to a purchase occasion where consumers see and interact directly with the bottles (like in a supermarket's shelf) and not where to a situation in which they are guided and advised in their choice by experts, such as at a restaurant or at a wine shop. Indeed, in these situations other variables can influence consumer wine quality perceptions, and font and label design may lose relevance when faced with the opinion of an expert person (Wilson et al., 2023).

Fig. 7 Research framework



Chapter 3

Methodology

This research aims to explore how font choice on wine labels affects consumers' perceptions of quality and how this relationship is moderated by factors such as wine knowledge, regional provenance, and purchase occasion. To achieve this, a quantitative approach was adopted, using an online survey (see Appendix I) to collect data and statistical analysis to evaluate the hypotheses.

The survey was designed to replicate a typical purchasing scenario, such as a consumer choosing a wine bottle from a supermarket shelf. The goal was to examine how participants, when presented with two different wine labels, would perceive and evaluate the quality of the wine based solely on the typography used on the label. This focus allowed the study to isolate the impact of font choice while minimizing interference from other design elements or external expert guidance.

The study employed a within-subject design, meaning that each participant evaluated both labels. This approach was chosen to control for individual differences in perception and judgment, allowing the focus to remain on the effect of the independent variable—font type. By having participants directly compare the two labels, the design reflects the real-world scenario of consumers comparing products side by side on a store shelf. Furthermore, this approach enhanced statistical power and reduced the number of participants required.

The labels presented to participants were designed specifically for the study. Both labels contained identical content, including the fictional brand name

“Cantine Fratelli Maiolini” and the wine name “Terre Rosse.” These names were chosen to be neutral and unrelated to any existing brands, avoiding potential bias from brand recognition. The only difference between the two labels was the font used: one employed “Garamond” (Fig. 8), a serif font associated with tradition, elegance, and sophistication, while the other used “Helvetica World,” a sans-serif font characterized by modernity, simplicity, and approachability. Every other visual element, such as layout, color, and graphic elements, was held constant to ensure that any observed differences in perception could be attributed solely to the font type.

Fig. 8: The serif label seen in the survey



Fig. 9: The sans serif label seen in the survey



Participants were asked to evaluate each label in terms of the perceived quality of the wine, using a four-point ordinal scale ranging from “Very bad Quality” to “Very High Quality.” In addition, the survey gathered demographic data, including age, gender, education level, and regional provenance, as well as information about participants’ self-assessed wine knowledge and their frequency of wine purchases. These additional data points were included to investigate potential moderating effects on the relationship between font type and perceived quality.

The collected data were prepared for analysis in R software. Before proceeding with the analysis, the dataset was carefully cleaned to remove incomplete responses and ensure consistency.

The analysis used ordinal logistic regression, appropriate given the ordinal nature of the dependent variable. The dependent variable, perceived quality, was treated as an ordinal measure with five levels: very bad, bad, low, medium, and high, very high quality. The independent variable, font type, was coded as 1 for serif and 0 for sans-serif. Three moderator variables were included in the analysis: wine knowledge (binary, categorized as expert or non-expert), regional provenance (categorized as North, Central, or South Italy), and purchase occasion (categorized as casual or formal). Interaction terms were created to evaluate how these moderators influenced the relationship between font type and perceived quality.

Chapter 4

Results

The study involved a total of 240 respondents who fully completed the questionnaire. The sample represented a diverse demographic, with participants drawn from all major regions of Italy, ensuring the inclusion of varied perspectives. Specifically, 39.2% of respondents were from Northern Italy, including regions such as Aosta Valley, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto, and Trentino-Alto Adige. Another 32.1% of participants were from Central Italy, comprising Tuscany, Umbria, Marche, Lazio, Abruzzo, and Molise, while 28.7% were from Southern Italy and the islands, such as Campania, Basilicata, Puglia, Calabria, Sicily, and Sardinia.

The gender distribution of the sample was moderately unbalanced, with 58.3% identifying as male and 41.7% as female. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 66 years, though there was a notable concentration of participants in their mid-twenties. In fact, 55.4% of respondents were between 24 and 26 years old, which may reflect the demographic reach of the researcher's network. In terms of education, over 70% of participants were either pursuing or had completed a university-level education, indicating that the sample consisted predominantly of highly educated individuals. Regarding wine expertise, approximately one-fifth of the respondents identified as experts, while the remainder self-classified as beginners or intermediates. On average, participants reported purchasing two to three bottles of wine per month, with 30.4% indicating they typically purchased two bottles and 34.2% purchasing three bottles.

Before delving into the results, it is essential to present some descriptive statistics, particularly focusing on the dependent variable: the perceived quality of the two label types. This allows for a clearer comparison of respondents' evaluations.

For Label A, the average perceived quality score was 3.71, with a median value of 4.0, suggesting that most respondents rated the quality of this label favorably. The scores ranged from 3 to 5, with a standard deviation of 0.64, indicating relatively consistent evaluations among participants.

In contrast, Label B received a lower average quality score of 2.10, with a median value of 2.0. The quality ratings for this label were more dispersed, with a range from 1 to 4 and a standard deviation of 1.04. This broader variability suggests differing perceptions of quality for Label B among the sample.

The frequency distributions further highlight the preference for Label A over Label B. A significant portion of respondents rated Label A as 4 or higher, while ratings for Label B predominantly clustered around 1 and 2. These findings provide an initial indication of the differing impacts of label design on perceived quality, which will be explored further in the subsequent sections

To analyze the data, ordinal logistic regression was used, given that the dependent variable—perceived wine quality—was measured on a five-point ordinal scale ("Very Bad Quality", "Bad Quality", "Low Quality", "Quality", "High Quality", "Very High Quality").

Each hypothesis was tested using a separate ordinal logistic regression model. The independent variable was the font type used on the wine label, coded as 1 for serif fonts and 0 for sans-serif fonts. Three moderator variables were included in the analysis: wine knowledge, regional provenance, and purchase occasion. Interaction terms were created to explore the potential moderating effects of these variables on the relationship between font type and perceived wine quality.

The results of the ordinal logistic regression analysis are summarized in Table 2. For clarity and completeness, the table provides the estimated coefficients (β), standard errors, and p-values for each predictor and interaction term.

Tab 2: combined hypothesis results

Predictor	Estimate (β)	Std. Error	p-value
Serif (Yes=1)	1.1101	0.3387	0.0010
Knowledge (High=1)	-0.4937	0.2434	0.0425
Culture (Nord=1)	-0.1995	0.3132	0.5242
Occasion (Formal=1)	-0.3689	0.2614	0.1582
Serif \times Knowledge	0.5185	0.1716	0.0025
Serif \times Culture	0.3579	0.6497	0.5816
Serif \times Occasion	0.0215	0.6087	0.9718

Hypothesis 1: A bottle of wine will be perceived as having a higher quality if a serif font used in the label instead of a sans serif font.

The first hypothesis proposed that serif fonts would be perceived as indicators of higher quality compared to sans-serif fonts. The results strongly support this hypothesis, as the analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between the font type and perceived wine quality ($\beta = 1.1101$, $p = 0.0010$). This finding confirms that serif fonts, traditionally associated with elegance, sophistication, and timelessness, significantly enhance the perceived quality of wine. These associations, likely rooted in cultural and aesthetic conventions, appear to influence consumers' impressions, particularly in contexts such as wine, where notions of heritage and tradition play a vital role. Moreover, the goodness-of-fit measures indicate that the model effectively captures the relationship between font type and perceived quality, providing further confidence in the robustness of the results.

Hypothesis 2: The use of serif font in the wine label will have a higher impact on wine quality perceptions for consumers who are less experts rather than for the more expert ones.

The second hypothesis examined whether serif fonts would have a stronger impact on the perceived quality of wine among consumers with lower levels of wine expertise compared to those with higher expertise. The results provide robust support for this hypothesis. The interaction between font type and wine knowledge was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.5185$, $p = 0.0025$). This finding indicates that less knowledgeable consumers are more influenced by visual cues, such as typography, when evaluating wine quality. For these consumers, serif fonts may serve as a heuristic for quality, compensating for their limited familiarity with more intrinsic product attributes, such as grape variety or region of origin. Conversely, more knowledgeable consumers appear to rely less on these visual elements and base their evaluations on other factors, such as the wine's provenance or technical specifications. This reinforces the idea that effective label design can play a particularly important role in influencing novice consumers' perceptions and purchasing decisions.

Hypothesis 3: The use of serif font in the wine label will increase wine quality perceptions, particularly among consumers in northern Italy.

The third hypothesis proposed that sans-serif fonts would increase the perceived quality of wine among consumers from Northern Italy, given the region's potential association with more modern and innovative design preferences. However, this hypothesis was not supported by the data. The main effect of regional provenance was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.1995$, $p = 0.5242$), nor was the interaction between font type and Northern Italian

consumers ($\beta = 0.3579$, $p = 0.5816$). These results suggest that regional differences in aesthetic preferences did not significantly alter the relationship between font type and perceived wine quality. One possible explanation is that the cultural and historical associations tied to serif fonts may override any regional variations in design preferences. This finding challenges the initial assumption that Northern Italian consumers might exhibit a stronger preference for sans-serif fonts and highlights the need for further research to explore how regional and cultural factors influence consumer behavior in the wine industry.

Hypothesis 4: Consumers will be more attracted to sans-serif fonts when purchasing wine for casual occasions.

The fourth hypothesis suggested that sans-serif fonts would be more appealing when wine was purchased for casual occasions, as opposed to formal ones. This hypothesis was also not supported by the results. The interaction between font type and purchase occasion was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.0215$, $p = 0.9718$), nor was the main effect of purchase occasion ($\beta = -0.3689$, $p = 0.1582$). These findings indicate that the context in which the wine is consumed does not meaningfully influence the impact of font choice on perceived quality. Consumers seem to evaluate the label design and associated quality cues in a consistent manner, regardless of whether the wine is intended for formal or casual use. This suggests that while contextual factors such as purchase occasion may play a role in other aspects of decision-making, they do not appear to interact significantly with typography in shaping perceptions of quality.

Chapter 5

Discussion

By looking at the hypotheses, interesting information can be extracted even from those that are rejected. The first hypothesis and the answers relating to it highlight how a label containing a font with a more classic and graceful style, typical of serifs, is perceived as of higher quality compared to a modern and rounded font such as the sans serif used for Label A. To better interpret this result, we need to broaden the overall picture.

Italy, like many European wine-producing countries, has a wine culture that tends to associate the quality and importance of a wine with more classic and traditional characteristics. A traditional, serious aesthetic is most associated with a high-end product. Therefore, serif font is found to be more suitable for reflecting the general idea of high-quality wine in this country, recalling the cultural associations of elegance, refinement, and tradition. This result highlights how the cultural associations of a country are reflected in more unconscious ways, even in the evaluation of a brand or product.

Furthermore, we often tend to connect high-quality wine with the concept of aging. For this reason, fonts that can be associated with more ancient, classic times and with references to past eras could, unconsciously, lead a consumer to prefer a bottle with a more classic font. This association may stem from the perception that aged wines, particularly those matured over several years, embody values of tradition, heritage, and craftsmanship—qualities often reflected in serif fonts.

Conversely, modern and elaborate fonts may unintentionally communicate a sense of novelty or casualness, which can feel mismatched with the expectations surrounding premium wines. Such fonts might be more fitting for innovative or

experimental products but may struggle to resonate with the gravitas expected of wines with a long history or those marketed as prestigious. However, there are exceptions to this rule. Modern fonts might occasionally be accompanied by handwritten elements, such as the producer's signature, to evoke authenticity and a personal touch. These details can soften the modernity of the design, adding a layer of sophistication that resonates with consumers seeking both tradition and uniqueness (Cavaleri, 2024).

This could also bring an interesting reflection for the sans serif label: in fact, if serif font is associated with these aspects, probably sans serif fonts are more suitable for promoting wines with a fresh and younger flavor. Deeper studies on this topic can highlight this situation and reveal interesting insights.

Furthermore, considering the following hypothesis, it is possible to notice how this is true for people that have less knowledge about the topic. Logically, this can be justified by the fact that when someone is less prepared about something they will try to catch the insights from their personal experiences (Balenović et al., 2021). Therefore, the traditional aesthetic of serif font leads that label to be automatically associated with more "serious" and classic aspects and therefore in line with the idea of quality wine found in their images. At the same time, a more experienced wine customer, possessing greater knowledge and familiarity with this product, could be less influenced by the aesthetics of the font. His perception of quality could be based on other factors, such as the origin of the wine, the vintage or the grape variety rather than more purely instinctive and visual elements such as the appearance of the bottle or the label. It is therefore possible to deduce that the design of wine labels, and in this specific case the font, has a significant impact on the perception of quality, particularly among less experienced consumers. This also makes it clear that branding and packaging are

particularly useful aspects if the objective is to influence the perceptions of the mass market.

Going on with the analysis of the results, there are interesting aspects to evaluate. The hypothesis about the difference of perception of quality depending on the macro-regional provenience was made thinking about the possibility that people from different areas would be affected in different way by the same font: while in some zones can be associated with a kind of message, the things can change if another territory is studied. In this specific case, data don't support the perspective that in northern Italy customers find a sans serif font more related to a high-quality wine. While sans-serif fonts are perceived as modern and innovative, there was no significant interaction between geographic region and font type in influencing quality perception. This result suggests that regional preferences for fonts might not be as pronounced as initially hypothesized, or that the sans-serif design does not hold specific cultural or economic appeal in the context of wine labels. For wine producers, it is more important to associate their products with the labels trending in the market share they are aiming to conquer. At least for the Italian market, wine producers can adopt a standardized approach to label fonts without needing to heavily regionalize their designs.

Other differentiators aspects could be leveraged to be more unique, such as bottle shape or color. Furthermore, while this hypothesis did not yield significant results, further qualitative research could explore subtle regional preferences or associations with font types that may not have emerged in this study.

Lastly, it is possible to see how the respondents of this questionnaire are not particularly influenced by the kind of font used on the label of the wine when they must choose for which occasion to purchase the wine. Clients don't look at the type of font when they are buying a wine for personal or casual use. In other

words, the choice between sans serif font or serif font is not affected by the consuming occasion. This can suggest that, in situations of purchasing for personal use, clients could be more interested in other aspects rather than the font, that could be something like price, recommendations, wine variety or geographical provenience. This aspect can maybe highlight a riskier prone behavior for this kind of situation, that is not convenient to maintain when someone else could “judge” the choice or is affected by it. Summing up, the data suggest that the purchasing occasion because the wine is bought (formal or casual) don't significantly affect the attraction to a specific font. This could convey the message that, for most consumers, the functionality of the occasion prevails over the aesthetics of design when it comes to choosing a wine. For wines marketed for informal occasions, producers might focus less on the label's font and more on communicating value, food pairings, or convenience.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study has analyzed the relation between fonts, and in particular sans serif font and serif font, and quality in consumers' perception of a wine's bottle. As consumers put a high value on the exterior aspect and the appearance of a bottle, this thesis aims to understand better how the quality perception of customers work and if calligraphy was a factor influencing it. This is the case, but the situation is more complex than what can appear: quality perception is a personal thing connected also with aspects hard to evaluate with a survey.

Personal background, inclinations, preferences, art influences, are all aspects that can modify the evaluation made by a single customer. The study confirmed that serif fonts are associated with higher-quality wines. This aligns with the cultural associations of serif fonts with tradition, elegance, and refinement, particularly in a country like Italy where wine culture is deeply rooted in these values. The evidence from the statistical analysis highlights the importance of using serif fonts, for branding premium wines. This effect is still moderated by different aspects and the same label can be perceived differently depending on the person: In general, serif fonts are associated with higher-quality wines, but this perception is not significantly influenced by regional differences, as the data showed no significant variation in how fonts are perceived across regions of Italy. While for some a more modern and agile font would be seen as a symbol of an easy to drink and cheaper wine, in other parts of the same nation it could be seen as a curious new interesting product that, more innovative but not for this reason of inferior quality, as the regression model showed.

Furthermore, the world of wine gives a particular attention to the concept of time: since most of the top bottles in the world pass through the aging process, giving the idea that a product is coming from a past time could convey the image of a higher quality bottle in the mind of a consumer. This concept is important also if we imagine the opposite: it is very rare that someone thinks about an old, prestigious and aged for a long time with a label containing round, modern fonts and shapes.

Moreover, this analysis highlights an aspect that could help many producers in the world: fonts have a higher impact on people less prepared on a specific topic. This concept is quite logical: if a consumer is in front of a shelf but he doesn't have knowledge about the specific topic will take whatever insights he can to make the best choice, so the aesthetic part of the bottle gains much more importance than when an expert chooses. The results indicate that less experienced consumers are more influenced by visual cues such as fonts, while experts rely more on intrinsic product details like origin, grape variety, or vintage. This suggests that producers targeting the mass market should prioritize traditional fonts that align with common perceptions of high-quality wine.

Additionally, there is no statistical evidence to suggest that the effect of a bottle's label font on perceived quality varies significantly depending on the specific consumption occasion. This may indicate that, when purchasing a bottle for familiar or informal situations, consumers are less likely to focus on the font style and may instead prioritize other factors, such as personal preferences, past experiences, recommendations, or commercial influences like price. Conversely, for more formal or special occasions, consumers might be more attentive to visual elements, including typography, as part of a broader evaluation of quality and suitability.

Chapter 7

Managerial Implications

This study can provide many interesting insights, particularly regarding marketing aspects in this sector. The results have shown that, at least for the Italian market, consumers associate serif font with higher quality wine. This suggests that Italian clients associate this with traditional and excellent products. This requires high quality wines to use a label in line with these aspects. Also, producers that want to segment their offer, could use serif fonts for the more prestigious production lines, targeting the public that appreciate the value of the traditions and, in the meantime, offer label with a sans serif font for wine designated to a younger, more dynamic public, more open to the experimentation. At the same time, it is fundamental that the label design, comprehending the font, is in line with the product positioning: for wines that want to communicate quality and prestige, the adoption of a more classic font could make this image stronger, while would be more appropriate a more agile font if a wine wants to be perceived as innovator. Additionally, in the case of a company that wants to push through a more modern and less traditional design (with the sans serif font used in label A for example), it could be necessary to educate the customers on what the new design represents, maybe with the use of storytelling to connect modern design with quality and innovation.

Going on, these results can be very useful to give the message that it is better to focus on a specific target of consumers: just segmenting the market between experts and beginners would suggest two totally different operations of branding and marketing strategy. Targeting fewer expert consumers would require a more traditional font, to convey a clearer message less far from the image they already

have in their mind, conveying a more quality and reliable message. On the other hand, expert consumers would not be affected in the same way: producers should explore more innovative or minimalist design that communicates a sophisticated experience without using traditional visual elements, leveraging more the strength of the wine itself and its particularities. To maximize the impact on the market, wine producers should put attention on how the customers perceive the label's design and adapt their strategies depending on that.

Another important consideration for wine marketers lies in understanding the cultural and geographical context where the product is distributed. However, contrary to the initial assumptions of this study, the data did not reveal significant regional differences in font perception. This suggests that, at least for the Italian market, the choice of font may not require heavy regional customization. Instead, producers might benefit more from adopting a consistent design strategy that communicates quality across different regions. That said, marketers could still explore subtle regional trends or preferences that go beyond fonts, such as variations in bottle shape, color schemes, or imagery. For example, tailoring advertising campaigns to highlight features that resonate culturally with specific regions—like tradition in the South or innovation in the North—might still create a competitive advantage. Even if the overall product remains the same, introducing region-specific packaging or limited-edition labels could help generate interest and strengthen local brand engagement. Regardless of regional adaptations, maintaining a perception of high quality remains essential for all markets, as it transcends geographical differences and reinforces the credibility of the product.

Lastly, if the label is not a decisive factor for the choice of the wine in specific usages, this could suggest to put the focus in other differentiating aspects, that

can be from the communication of the intrinsic value of the wine itself (quality, origin, tast, food pairing,...), to experiential marketing campaign that involve the customers through tasting, events and storytelling, or to modify using marketing campaign the consumer behavior and habits, pairing the wine we want to sell to specific situation, moments or place, to convince them to choose your bottle and not others for that moments. While, if the label is not an important factor during the choice for wine used for personal use, maybe the producers should put more effort only on the label of wines designed for specific, special occasions. To conclude, it is important to keep in mind that even if serif fonts are strongly associated with perceptions of quality and tradition, this does not automatically translate into purchase intent. Factors such as price-to-quality ratios, brand familiarity, and personal preferences often mediate purchasing decisions. Producers should consider these nuances when designing labels and targeting specific consumer segments

Chapter 8

Limitations and further studies

Although its results can still provide important insights and advice regarding how to strengthen the branding of a winery, this study is far from perfect, and some considerations deserve attention. First, despite the effort to make the sample as representative as possible, that is mostly a convenience sample, not particularly numerous, and made mainly by people connected to the author (friends, family, colleagues, ...). Therefore, there is a high risk that it does not accurately represent the population of interest and, consequently, the results are in some way biased. For example, most of the people answering are in their early twenties, therefore probably not the main target of wine's marketing and campaigns. This could also strongly affect the perception of the design that could vary between different generations. For example, younger generations are more open and used to all the internet's graphics rather than the precedents.

Another potential limitation that could affect the reliability of this study relates to the significant diversity of grape varieties and, consequently, wine types available in Italy. While this may not appear to be a major concern at first, it raises the possibility that respondents' evaluations and preferences may have been influenced by this extensive variability, thereby introducing an additional layer of complexity to the findings. For example, respondents from the northern part of Italy - since the majority of them are probably coming from Veneto (the author's region) - are possibly influenced by the Prosecco's imagery. Since, this is a cheaper, sparkling, fresh, not aged wine, that also target the new generations, all their graphics are typically younger and friendlier than, for example, most of wine from Piedmont, usually more luxury and robust wines linked with a whole different imagery, more traditional and robust.

Then the questionnaire was designed with the goal to recreate a “supermarket’s shelf” situation where a customer sees two wines and must take a decision analyzing the label of both, trying to put much emphasis possible on the font exclusively. This risks to be an extra simplification of the choosing process and doesn’t count of many other variables that could play an important role on the purchasing decision, from the price and the design of the single bottle and other aspects on the label (like images), to the environment where the consumer buy it and all the aspects that this comprehend (presence of other people, time available, music playing in background). There is space for many studies to dig more in the topic. In particular, sensorial marketing studies could make emerge some very interesting results. Furthermore, the fact that the two labels were presented side by side could bias the answerers feeling the need to identify “one better” or evidence the strengths and the weakness of a font or another, not representing the real mental process that happens in those moments.

In addition, these results could be strongly influenced by the Italian cultural preferences for serif or sans serif font, making the results hard to apply to other countries’ populations, with different style preferences and taste. It is suggested to make this kind of study suited for every specific country where a company wants to sell, if not even do them at a regional level.

In general, the study focused primarily on the effect of fonts on quality perception, which oversimplifies the multifaceted nature of purchasing decisions. Real-world decisions are influenced by numerous factors, such as price, bottle shape, imagery, and the purchasing environment. Future studies could incorporate these elements or explore how fonts interact with other design components in influencing consumer behavior.

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Appendices

Appendix I:

Survey (translated from the original seen by the participants).

15/12/24, 20:36 Font and wine's perceived quality

Font and wine's perceived quality

* Indica una domanda obbligatoria

Demography

1. Age:

2. Gender:

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

Male

Female

Other

I prefer not to respond

3. From which side of Italy are you from?

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

Nord (Valle d'Aosta, Piemonte, Liguria, Lombardia, Trentino, Veneto, Friuli, Emilia Romagna)

Center (Toscana, Umbria, Marche, Lazio, Abruzzo, Molise)

Sud or islands (Campania, Basilicata, Puglia, Calabria, Sicilia, Sardegna)

Other

4. If other, please specify

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1S8yqx6KFbTOVpwjEZiWn4jmsLjEAGncMFma0gCg/edit> 1/7

15/12/24, 20:36 Font and wine's perceived quality

8. How high quality do you think wine labeled A is? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Very high quality

9. How high quality do you think wine labeled B is? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Very high quality

10. How expensive do you think A-label wine is? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Very expensive

11. How expensive do you think B-label wine is? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Very expensive

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1S8yqx6KFbTOVpwjEZiWn4jmsLjEAGncMFma0gCg/edit>

15/12/24, 20:36 Font and wine's perceived quality

5. Education level:

This means the last one achieved or the highest in which one is still enrolled.

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

Middle school

High school

Bachelor

Laurea Magistrale/Master

Phd or superior

6. How often do you buy a bottle of wine?

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

Less than once per month

Once per month

Twice per month

Three times per month

Four times per month

More than four times per month

7. Wine knowledge:

How expert do you consider yourself to be when it comes to wine?

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

Beginner (I know very little or nothing about wine)

Intermediate (I know some wines, but not in depth)

Expert (I have good knowledge of wines)

Labels

Below we will show you some wine labels. Look carefully at each label and answer the questions that follow

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1S8yqx6KFbTOVpwjEZiWn4jmsLjEAGncMFma0gCg/edit> 2/7

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12. How likely are you to buy wine with the A label? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Very likely

13. How likely are you to buy wine with the B label? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Very likely

14. For which of the following occasions would you purchase the wine with label A? *

Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.

Important dinner

Gift

Personal use in a casual situation

Special event (wedding, anniversary, ecc)

Nothing of above

15. For which of the following occasions would you purchase the wine with label B? *

Seleziona tutte le voci applicabili.

Important dinner

Gift

Personal use in a casual situation

Special event (wedding, anniversary, ecc)

Nothing of above

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1S8yqx6KFbTOVpwjEZiWn4jmsLjEAGncMFma0gCg/edit> 5/7

LABEL A



LABEL B



Quality and cost