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The Market of Ecological Wine Products. A Literature Review

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Abstract

In recent decades, the organic wine market has seen significant growth due to the rising interest in sustainable and environmentally friendly products. This paper analyzes the evolution of the organic wine market, consumption trends, consumer preferences, and challenges faced by producers based on a thorough review of the relevant literature. Since the 1970s, organic viticulture has developed as an agricultural method promoting environmental protection and human health by avoiding synthetic chemical use. Europe, one of the largest wine producers, has implemented policies and regulations supporting this type of production, including through the European Green Deal.

The growing interest in organic wines has created significant challenges for producers, such as the high certification costs of maintaining organic standards and the perception of premium prices as a barrier for consumers. Despite this, organic labels positively influence purchasing decisions, being regarded as indicators of trust and quality. Research indicates that in Europe, organic wine consumers value the transparency of the production process and the minimal negative impact on the environment, viewing these products as healthier and more authentic. However, in Romania, the organic wine market remains underdeveloped, with low consumer awareness limiting its broader acceptance.

This analysis emphasizes the importance of effective marketing strategies and consumer education to support the expansion of the organic wine market. At the same time, it highlights the need for policy support and eco-labels to promote sustainability in the global viticulture industry.

Keywords: organic wine, wine market trends, sustainable viticulture, consumer behavior in organic wine markets

I. Introduction

In 1974, organic agriculture began to be studied in the U.S., specifically in Oregon, and later in 1979 in California. In Europe, this concept of organic agriculture was introduced by the French four years after its initial appearance. It wasn't until the early 20th century that the first theories on organic agriculture were formulated. Federal institutions issued new regulations following the adoption of organic farming legislation in these three states, yet at the international level, there is still no unanimous definition accepted by producer federations for these practices. [1]

Organic viticulture refers to a sustainable agricultural method for cultivating grapes that avoids the use of synthetic chemicals, with the primary goal of reducing the negative impact on the environment and human health. Organic viticulture uses sustainable resources, such as water and energy, promotes biodiversity, and conserves soil, representing a practice that collaborates with nature to produce high-quality wines in a sustainable way. In contrast, conventional viticulture prioritizes maximizing production and profit through methods less environmentally friendly. [2]

According to OIV-ECO Resolution 460-2012, organic viticulture is a production system that:

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1. Aims to conserve ecosystems and soil fertility over the long term,
2. Targets biodiversity growth and natural resource protection,
3. Encourages the use of ecological processes and cycles,
4. Seeks to reduce or even eliminate practices involving synthetic chemicals,
5. Supports the use of organic products and methods at all production and processing stages, avoiding environmentally harmful techniques,
6. Prohibits the use of genetically modified organisms and their derivatives.

According to this resolution, organic viticulture is based on three essential elements:

1. Soil fertility
2. Biodiversity protection
3. Pest management through natural processes

In 2019, the total certified organic area reached 454 kg/ha, representing only 6.2% of the global area dedicated to vineyards across the 63 countries applying this technology. The conversion rate of vineyards to organic methods has grown significantly since the early 2000s. The certified organic vineyard area saw an average annual growth of 13%, while conventional vineyard areas declined by an average of 0.4% per year between 2005 and 2019. This rapid growth is largely because certified organic viticulture is still a relatively new field. [3]

According to a 2018 study by Francesca V. and collaborators, the European Parliament and the EU Council adopted Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on organic production and labeling, replacing Regulation (EC) No 834/2007. This regulation aims to incorporate organic production objectives into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and to ensure fair compensation for farmers. The increased demand for organic products is expected to support market development and enhance farmers' profitability. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of this regulation was postponed until January 1, 2022, allowing time to prepare administrative systems and necessary procedures. Organic production has become a central element of the new CAP, included in options like “eco-schemes” and the CAP’s Pillar II, which support ecological farming practices. Additionally, organic farming has been selected as a primary measure for implementing the European Green Deal and the EU's biodiversity and sustainability strategies. [4]

Unfortunately, information regarding the impact of transitioning to more sustainable production processes on production costs and profitability, as well as wineries’ challenges in reconciling ecological and social objectives with economic sustainability, is limited. A 2019 study by Pomarici et al. indicates that when wineries have specific capacities to manage sustainability-related obligations, adopting these practices does not negatively affect costs and profitability. The same conclusion applies to organic production, particularly in cool and humid regions where fungal disease control is more challenging. [5]

According to a study by Iordachescu A. and collaborators, the organic wine segment in Romania is underdeveloped and insufficiently promoted. The profitability of this sector is not significant due to high costs and the extended time needed for transitioning to organic viticulture. Organic grapes are challenging to maintain, leading only a small number of producers to focus exclusively on organic wines. Currently, only a few companies cautiously attempt to enter the organic wine market. Although industry leaders recognize the future potential of organic wines, they currently do not consider it profitable, mainly due to the lack of an ecological culture among Romanian consumers. Additionally, the high price of organic wines does not encourage local consumers to purchase them. Organic wines are likely to

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remain a niche product, but the market is yet to be fully explored in Romania. Romanian consumers need to develop a “greener” culture, and further steps are necessary to promote organic wines, particularly through mainstream media channels such as television and print publications. The authors conducted a quantitative study with 122 participants, of whom only 34% were aware of organic wines, with a distribution of 45% men and 55% women. This low awareness level may explain the general public's lack of information about organic wines. When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of organic wine, most respondents cited "a healthier wine" as an advantage and "price" as the main disadvantage. [6]

Analysis from Malgozzata Pink’s study shows that in Europe, conventional wine consumption is gradually declining, while organic viticulture continues to grow. Europe is one of the world’s largest wine producers, contributing 60% to global production. The countries with the largest organic wine markets are France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Austria. [7]

According to the study by Daniel Moscovici and collaborators, organic wine has a significant impact on marketing and management, as these are directly influenced by consumers. It is beneficial to use organic certifications and promote environmental practices, as the wine industry faces direct environmental, economic, and social challenges due to the rise in global wine trade. Competition between traditional wine-producing countries and new ones leads to a shift in the perception of vineyards and wine, seen as environmentally harmful. Another environmental disruptor is the evaluation of wines based on their carbon footprint due to the ambiguous presentation of information. [8]

This article aims to analye the evolution of the organic wine market through a review of specialized literature, focusing on consumption trends, consumer preferences, and the main challenges faced by organic wine producers. In the context of increasing demand for organic and sustainable products, the organic wine sector faces various obstacles, including high certification costs, market fluctuations, and consumer price sensitivity. This analysis seeks to provide an overview of the dynamics of the organic wine market and to identify strategies through which producers can respond to the challenges and demands of modern consumers.

The article will also address the impact of environmental regulations and policies on the production and distribution of organic wines, offering recommendations based on best practices and relevant case studies.

II. Materials and methods

The study for this article was based on a rigorous selection of academic articles and research papers obtained from recognized databases such as Google Scholar and Elsevier. The documentation process involved using specific search terms, such as “organic wine”, “wine market trends”, “sustainable viticulture”, and “consumer behavior in organic wine markets” to ensure a comprehensive coverage of existing literature. This approach facilitated the identification and selection of the most relevant sources that examine current trends in the organic wine market, consumer preferences, and adaptation strategies employed by organic wine producers in response to market challenges. The selected articles and studies provide a complex perspective on how the organic wine industry is evolving in the context of changing consumer preferences and increasingly strict sustainability requirements, thus offering a solid theoretical foundation for the proposed analysis.

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III. Results and discussions

The analysis of the literature on the organic wine market led to the identification of key trends and determining factors that influence consumer preferences and shape the specific challenges of this sector. Among the identified trends are the increasing consumer interest in sustainable and organic products, the emphasis on transparency and authenticity in the production process, and the preference for products with a reduced environmental impact. Additionally, the analysis reveals that the determining factors for choosing organic wines include consumer awareness of the ecological impact of products, the perceived quality of organic wine compared to conventional wines, and sensitivity to price. On the other hand, the challenges of the organic wine market include the additional costs associated with organic certification, difficulties in maintaining ecological production standards, and the ability to meet demand without compromising quality and sustainability. These trends and relevant factors provide a deeper understanding of the current context of the organic wine market and the directions of development and adaptation necessary for producers in this sector.

Regarding consumer preferences for wine, recent studies indicate an increasing openness to organic wines (Galati A., 2019), primarily driven by concerns about sustainability and environmental protection. Consumers perceive organic wines as not only more environmentally friendly but also healthier and more authentic, which contributes to building trust in these products. An important aspect highlighted by research is the role of eco-labels, which are seen by consumers as a trustworthy indicator of superior quality. This distinctive label not only certifies the compliance of products with organic standards but also significantly contributes to creating a positive brand image, strongly impacting purchasing decisions. Thus, organic products benefit from a competitive advantage in a market where consumers are increasingly concerned with purchasing sustainable and ecologically responsible products [9].

The label plays a crucial role in consumer perceptions of the price of organic wines, as it, along with organic certifications, helps create an image of superior quality, often justifying the premium price associated with these products (Pomorici & Vecchio, 2019). In consumers' views, the label not only communicates information about the origin and sustainability of the wine but also signals adherence to strict ecological production standards, enhancing the perceived value of the product. Furthermore, certifications provided by trusted organizations play a crucial role in strengthening consumer trust in the quality of organic wine and the authenticity of the production process. As a result, the higher price of these wines is perceived by consumers as justified, reflecting not only quality and sustainability but also the producers' investment in meeting organic standards [10].

According to an online survey conducted by Castellini et al. on the organic, biodynamic, and natural wine sectors, key aspects regarding the profile of producers and production and marketing trends were highlighted. Approximately 70% of producers practice organic viticulture on areas ranging from 0.5 to 102 hectares, with an average of 10.4 hectares, showing significant diversity in vineyard sizes. Of these, 48 companies have adopted biodynamic techniques, but on smaller average areas of less than 3 hectares. The average annual production for organic wine is approximately 480 hectoliters, while biodynamic wines have a lower average production of 110 hectoliters.

The main motivations for adopting organic or biodynamic viticulture practices are ethical, with 89% of producers indicating this factor as a priority. However, only 23%

consider competitive advantage as a motivation, and only 13% are driven by market demand, suggesting that organic production remains more focused on sustainability values rather than purely commercial considerations.

Regarding distribution, the main sales channels are wholesalers and traders (33%) and direct sales (29%), with Italy being the primary market, followed by other EU countries, North America, and Asia. Although nearly half of wineries do not invest in traditional promotion methods, they gain international visibility by participating in renowned fairs such as Vinitaly and BioFach. Approximately 55% of producers have a website, but only 16.6% have implemented e-commerce, suggesting a limited use of online sales platforms. In contrast, direct interaction with consumers is common, with 70% of producers offering wine tastings and 90% organizing guided tours—activities that contribute to the experiential promotion of organic and biodynamic wines [11].

IV. Conclusions

The research conducted on the organic wine market has led to the following conclusions:

Organic agriculture has evolved significantly since its initial conceptualization in the United States (Oregon and California) and its subsequent introduction to Europe. Although the lack of a universally accepted global definition persists, resolutions such as the OIV - ECO highlight the importance of protecting biodiversity and soil fertility and avoiding the use of synthetic chemicals.

Organic viticulture is now recognized as a sustainable agricultural method and has seen an average annual increase of 13% in certified land area between 2005 and 2019. This indicates a shift in perception, with organic farming now viewed as an essential practice for sustainability.

Europe has implemented significant regulations to strengthen organic production, such as Regulation (EU) 2018/848, which supports farmers and aims to integrate organic agriculture into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The adoption of this regulation within the European Green Deal and strategies for biodiversity and sustainability underscores Europe’s commitment to ecological practices. However, its delayed implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the bureaucratic challenges of such a transition, highlighting the need for economic and logistical support for farmers during the conversion period.

In Romania, organic viticulture faces economic difficulties due to high costs and long transition periods. In a context where demand for organic wine is limited and local consumers are hesitant due to higher prices, there is a clear need for a promotion and consumer education strategy regarding the ecological benefits and quality of these products. In Europe, although conventional wine consumption is decreasing, organic wines are becoming increasingly sought after in markets such as France, Germany, and Italy, where the benefits of sustainability are better understood and appreciated.

Studies show that the organic label has a positive impact on consumer perception, being associated with high quality and a commitment to sustainability. However, the perception and demand for organic wine remain low in Romania, where consumers are less familiar with these products. This highlights the need for a promotional campaign to raise awareness and foster a "green culture" at the national level.

With increasing demand in European markets and policies that support organic farming practices, the future of organic viticulture looks promising. However, to stimulate this growth and attract consumers toward organic products, it is essential that the market be well-informed and supported. Additionally, there is a need for a strong economic infrastructure and clear policies that help producers maintain profitability without sacrificing ecological principles, especially in less developed regions such as Romania

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