Give me a Marketing Lever and I will Sustain my Wine: Sustainability and Marketing Mix in the Wine Business.

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In the last years the implementation of sustainable practices in the wine business has grown due to the growing interest shown by institutions (both locally and globally) towards the diffusion of principles and practices that can preserve and protect agricultural and environmental resources.

The interest in sustainability has also been fostered by a risen attention in consumers that are intrinsically motivated to buy organic and biodynamic products by opportunistic or altruistic drivers (Nielsen 2005; Torjusen et al., 2004).

The characteristics of the business itself make of wine a “fruitful” field of study (Orth et al., 2007), but the issue of sustainability contributed to enlarge the scope of research on wine, to introduce new topics to investigate on, and to attract new academics.

Most of research in this field has focused on describing how sustainable practices can be executed by wineries and the impact they would have on the entire “cluster”. Other part of the research has investigated consumer preferences towards organic or biodynamic wines, starting from the challenge of make wines be accepted by consumers after their launch on the market.

Eminent scholars (Porter, 1995) by underlining the strategic impact that managing resources sustainably could have on competitive dynamics, put the basis for a deeper investigation of sustainability as a lever for achieving a competitive advantage.

At a firm level, following the Porter’s framework of generic strategies (1985), implementing sustainable practices would help companies in achieving an effective differentiation; as a consequence for companies it would be easier pursuing a niche strategy and ask consumers to pay a premium price for their wines.

This paper wants to examine how “sustainability” can be effectively implemented by wineries to achieve a competitive advantage. The purpose of the paper is twofold: firstly we want to depict how the “extended” marketing mix framework can be implemented when dealing with sustainability; secondly we want to provide an extensive reasoned literature review in order to outline those academic contributions that gave an enlighten on the relation between sustainability and marketing management. Market data about customer orientation towards sustainability and information about consumers’ attitudes and preferences will be provided, in order to outline the relevance of this phenomenon for the wine industry.