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Development of the Italian hunted wild game sector: Profiling consumers of a novel red deer cured meat

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Abstract

In the recent years, there has been a rapprochement of the modern consumer to venison (Hoffman & Wilkund, 2006). Wild game meat, in fact, if produced under strict and regulated hunting practices, is characterized by quality features that may attract modern consumers when purchasing animal-based products. This is particularly reflected by the increasing number of emerging markets of wild game meat in several European Countries. In fact, although European Union statistical data concerning the large wild game meat sector are not available, the last European Commission's study about minor meats reports that in some member States there is a well-established market of wild game meat. For instance, in France, about half of the game meat processors promote a "Game from French Hunters" brand. Similarly, in Spain, game production comes mostly from hunting (EC, 2014). However, despite the potential of its hunting activity in terms of amount of available large wild game meat (Gaviglio et al., 2017; Ramanzin et al., 2010), Italy lacks a professional supply chain for the hunting game meat.

Consumers' choice behavior towards wild game meat is not easily predictable. Consumer beliefs related to the wild game meat consumption involve not only health and nutritional factors but also concerns related with ethical sustainability, animal welfare, and value of the wildlife aspects. Moreover, consumer preferences for venison are strongly related with individual attitudes toward hunting. While a consistent literature focuses on the consumer choice behavior and preferences for meat, only a few studies to date discuss the case of the wild game meat (Ljung et al., 2012; Hoffman et al., 2003; Hoffman et al., 2005), and none of them takes into consideration the Italian context.

In this study, we address the need to broaden knowledge on Italian consumers' attitudes toward wild game meat. In particular, this paper will examine the effect of demographic and individual characteristics on consumers' decisions for the novel product "red deer bresaola" obtained through an ethically certified local hunting supply chain. We will profile the potential purchasers through a segmentation of the demand by using multivariate statistics and cluster analysis.

Material and methods - Data were collected by using an on-line survey that was sent to a random sample of Italian consumers in 2017. The data collection was carried out by using the Qualtrics online survey platform. Only meat and bresaola consumers were selected. The questionnaire consisted of different sections related to purchase and consumption habits, attitudes and feelings towards a novel wild game meat product, knowledge and experience related to hunted wild game meat, purchase behaviour and willingness to pay regarding red deer bresaola. Questions aimed at capturing the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants were also included.

Results - The results of this study may be useful for the positioning and pricing of novel game meat products. Knowledge about the socio-demographic and attitudinal profiles of consumers in relation to how they perceive wild game meat may in fact allow marketers to better target their novel game meat products, improving the effectiveness of the future marketing strategies. Most importantly, results from this study could provide a contribution to the development of a new Italian wild game meat supply chain.

Keyword: Novel products, Consumer preferences, Wild game meat

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