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The Development of Italian Food and Wine Tourism

An analysis of digital technologies' impact on tourist behaviour

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To my family, whose love and support
made this goal possible.

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Introduction

When we hear about food and wine tourism, the first thing that comes to mind is the food. Through it, one can discover the production processes and cultural traditions of a place, thereby enriching the overall travel experience.
In this context, Italy stands out as one of the most sought-after destinations, appreciated by both local and international tourists.
It is no surprise, then, that our country is a leader in food and wine tourism, with food often being the primary reason for choosing a travel destination.

It is essential to study this phenomenon because it is a form of tourism that is becoming increasingly important.
In particular, besides enhancing the culture and local traditions of a specific territory, food and wine tourism offers numerous benefits.
From an economic perspective, for instance, if a food and wine destination (such as a restaurant or winery) is properly promoted, its attractiveness will increase, encouraging numerous tourists to discover it and thus generating significant revenue for local businesses.

In this regard, the role of digital comes into play: an indispendable tool for effectively enhancing and promoting a destination.
Nowadays, having social media platforms and websites is crucial to gain visibility and differentiate oneself in the market.

All generations, but especially Millennials and Generation Z, known as digital natives, tend to gather information online before visiting a specific destination.

In particular, they search for information related to the food and wine experiences offered, consult reviews written by other visitors regarding the quality of the food and service and pay attention to the images and videos posted.
All of this makes digital a key component to leverage in order to ensure the success of a food and wine destination.

Companies in the sector, such as restaurant, wineries and agritourisms, must therefore be able to promote their businesses through the tools offered by digital platforms, highlighting their distinctive characteristics, the uniqueness of the area, the food and wine experiences available and local typical products, thus contributing to the economic development of the territory.

For this reason, the following master's thesis aims to thoroughly examine the evolution of food and wine tourism in Italy, focusing on the importance of digital technologies and how they can be used to foster the economic development of a region and influence tourist behavior.

The first chapter of the thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the topic, starting with the definition and evolution of food and wine tourism. This section analyzes the key factors in choosing a travel destination, the benefits derived from such tourism and the main trends and scenarios characterizing the Italian food and wine tourism.
Additionally, it outlines a detailed profile of the Italian food and wine tourist, higlighting the main differences between enogastronomic tourists and generalist tourists. Susequently, the features of food and wine tourist demand are analyzed as well as the expenditures incurred by these types of

tourists.

This chapter also examines the high-quality production and the several sectors that make up the Italian food and wine offer, such as restaurants, agritourisms, viticulture, olive cultivation, micro-breweries, museum of taste and wine and flavor roads. It highlights both positive and negative trends, challenges and any economic losses that characterized the 2020-2021 biennium due to the pandemic.

Furthermore, a focus on veneto region is provided, highlighting data regarding tourist flows and its agri-food excellences.

Finally, the theme of sustainable food and wine tourism is explored in depth, emphasizing its importance since sustainability has become a crucial consideration in today's world.

The second chapter focuses on the literature review, analyzing papers identified from the Scopus database.

Specifically, this chapter explores the crucial role of digital technologies in promoting food and wine tourism, and how they can be leveraged to boost economic growth and attract potential visitors to a specific territory.

It examines the contributions of social media, highlighting the impact of Instagram, that is, the most widely used platform, and the strategic role of corporate websites, as well as web portals in promoting food and wine Italian regions.

Then, the role of influencers in promoting a specific place or product such as wine is described, highlighting their characteristics and abilities in influencing the behavior of tourist-consumers. The critical issues and challenges these figures are called upon to face will also be listed.

Furthermore, the chapter analyzes how digital storytelling and technological innovation, such as the Metaverse, can enhance the attractiveness of food and wine destinations.

Finally, the third chapter focuses on the analysis of data collected through an online survey designed to investigate the impact of digital technologies on food and wine tourism, and to understand how these technologies influence the behavior of tourist-consumers.
This chapter is essential for evaluating emerging trends and preferences among Italian tourists, offering valuable insights for businesses involved in this sector in order to enhance its future development.
After describing the structure of the questionnarie, the methodology and the characteristics of the sample, two types of analysis will be conducted to analyze the answers of participants: univariate and bivariate analysis. This will be followed by comments and considerations.

Italian regions must be aware of the power of digital technologies.
Nowadays, technology is highly pervasive and, for this reason, represents an important opportunity to leverage in order to enhance the attractiveness of the destinations.
For a business that sells local products, having a strong online presence is essential. This includes not only utilizing social media, given its growing use, but also the management of a well-structured website that provides constantly updated information.

Restaurants, wineries, agritourisms and, in general, all establishments involved in food and wine tourism should maintain a strong presence on social media, as this is the key to the sector's development, gaining visibility and attracting more tourists.
What is posted on social media is crucial because, for instance, the more a

food and wine experience is promoted on social media, the more it becomes viral and, consequently, the more it will attract visitors.

Through a combination of theoretical and empirical analysis, this study aims to provide an integrated view of Italian food and wine tourism, highlighting the challenges and opportunities arising from the interaction between tradition and digital technology.

Chapter 1 “The development of Italian Food and Wine Tourism”

1.1 Food and wine tourism: definition and evolution

Food and wine tourism, also known as enotourism, represents a phenomenon with the ability to connect people with the nature, history and communities of a specific territory.

According to Croce and Perri (2008), this type of tourism emerged due to the changes that affected the territory, society and Italian food culture starting from the 1920s.

More precisely, during those years, the need emerged to reconnect with one’s traditions and cultural heritage, especially in terms of food and wine and typical products.

However, the real turning point occurred in the 1980s with the growing focus on healthier and higher-quality nutrition, accompanied by the pleasure and enjoyment associated with food, the discovery of territory and the pursuit of overall well-being.

All these factors have aroused a growing interest among consumers in food production, prompting companies and producers to understand the importance of catering to an interested audience.

Thus, food and wine tourism not only encourages tourists to explore new places, but also invite them to immerse themselves in local traditions and understand the deep connection between the surrounding environment and the typical dishes that derive from it (the so-called product-territory combination).

Therefore, it can be stated that “food and wine tourism is a journey dedicated to discovering local flavors that leads to acquiring a sense of place”(Garibaldi, 2019, p.8).
This statement clearly highlights how this tourism practice goes beyond simple enjoyment of food; indeed, it is a journey that provides a complete experience.
In particular, the use of local products allows tourists to appreciate the essence and peculiarities of the visited place. This type of tourism is in fact defined as “experiential tourism, which from food, wine, beer, ... lead to a greater awareness of the place and its identity” (Garibaldi, 2019, p.8).

Thanks to its ability to connect territory and tourist, food and wine tourism has been officially recognized by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)[1] as part of cultural tourism.
In addition, according to the UNWTO, it is noted that this phenomenon is growing rapidly, emerging as one of the most dynamic sectors within the tourism industry.
This trend is also supported by the 2020 State of the Food Travel Industry Report, published by the World Food Travel association.
The study, which counts among its authors Garibaldi (2019), an Italian expert in the field, analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of this sector, highlighting its growing global importance. In this regard, it is useful to mention the following statement: “the prognosis for food tourism to grow remains quite strong. There is tremendous opportunity to continue to grow this industry” (Wolf et al., 2020, p.40). This quote, clearly positive about the future of the sector, can be considered as an encouragement to further

[1] The United Nations World Tourism Organization, headquartered in Madrid, is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for the coordination of tourism policies and the promotion of sustainable and responsible tourism development. Since 2015, it has been organizing annual conferences with the aim of delving into the multiple facets of this tourism practice.

invest in this form of tourism and to develop strategies that promote its growth. Furthermore, to address the ongoing evolution of this tourism segment, “it becomes increasingly essential to understand the dynamics of both demand and supply, and to equip oneself with tools capable of capturing changes and indicating the possible strategies”(Garibaldi, 2019, p.7). It is clear that nowadays, the needs and preferences of tourists have changed.

For this reason, businesses involved in food and wine tourism need to take these trends into account and consider using other tools, such as social media, to examine the behaviour of consumers and offer better experiences tailored to their needs.

First, it is fundamental to understand the main elements that influence the choice of a travel destination. Among these, food and wine emerges as one of the most important factors of attraction, often representing the main travel motivation.

Food and wine includes a variety of activities that stimulate interest and fully engage tourists. These include: tasting traditional local dishes, seeking unique culinary experiences and visiting production sites (for example wineries, breweries, cheese factories etc.). This concept is also reiterated by Hall and Sharples (2003) who state that: “the food and wine tourism is an experiential journey to a gastronomy region for recreational or entertainment purposes, which includes visits to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, food fairs, events, farmers markets, cooking shows and demonstrations, tastings of quality food products, or any food-related tourist activity”.

It was precisely these food and wine experiences that represented the main travel motivations. These are several activities “where sensory involvement is qualifying, through which to enjoy the cultural heritage of the place in an active and engaging way, enriching oneself with value in sharing" (Garibaldi, 2020, p.14).

Thus, food and wine emerges as a cross-cutting element of interest, with its own attractive potential capable of influencing the travel decisions of Italian tourists (Garibaldi, 2019).

The variety and richness of our country, which boasts an extensive heritage of products, landscapes and cultures, has allowed Italy to emerge as a leader in food and wine tourism sector.

Thanks to the ability to combine two of Italy's main excellences: tourism and agrifood, it is possible to generate economic value and new opportunities for our country's tourist destinations (Garibaldi, 2022).

To conclude, it can be stated that food and wine tourism is a form of tourism whose purpose is to get to know an area through the local products it offers, thus discovering new traditions and cultures.

1.1.1 Key factors in choosing a travel destination

In the previous subchapter, the importance of food and wine and how it represents one of the main factors of attraction for tourists when choosing a travel destination, was anticipated.

Basically, according to the report authored by Garibaldi (2021), the elements considered when deciding on a travel destination are: clearly the presence of food and wine offerings and themed experiences, the sustainability of events and facilities, the quality of the production and the availability of organic products. The latter are the most sought-after products because they are considered to be of higher quality compared to non-organic products.

However, these factors are considered and evaluated along with other elements. The most significant ones turn out to be: the beauty of the destination to visit, its rich culture and local traditions.

Additionally, the presence of natural attractions and the quality of the landscape are also taken into consideration. It is crucial to note that visitors show particular interest in destinations that offer authentic culinary experiences, visits to local production sites and diverse thematic itineraries (Garibaldi, 2021).

According to recent surveys, a large percentage of tourists show a strong interest in learning about the local culinary culture during their visit.

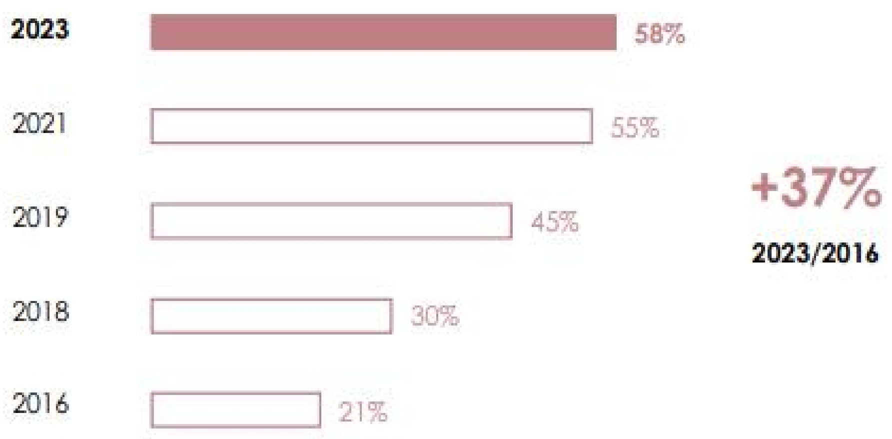
In particular, as can be seen from figure 1, 76% of travelers express a strong interest in learning more about the local food and wine culture of the places they are exploring, while 69% are eager to discover and taste local specialties in dining establishments. Furthermore, a significant 35% of visitors are attracted to exploring small artisanal speciality shops.

Figure 1: The aspects of Food and Wine Tourism appreciated by tourists in Italy.

Source: The following table is a translation from Italian to English based on the data provided by the European House - Ambrosetti, Turismo Sostenibile e Patrimonio del Territorio, 2023, p.54 (graphic elaboration by the author).

The data presented highlight the crucial role of food and wine in the Italian tourism sector, emphasizing that tourists in Italy greatly appreciate the local food and wine culture and enjoy exploring typical culinary destinations.
It is important to underline that, according to the perceptions of foreign tourists, agrifood production and the rich culinary tradition, represent the main attractions of Italy. Morever, the *Made in Italy* brand in the agrifood sector is universally recognized as a distinctive symbol of quality worldwide (The European House Ambrosetti, 2023).
It is clear, therefore, that visitors driven by curiosity are constantly seeking food and wine experiences during their travels.
In particular, in 2022, 67% of Italian tourists participated in at least 5 food and wine experiences[2]. This figure represents a rise compared to the 42% recorded in 2021 (representing a 25% increase) and a recovery from the 86% in 2019 (Garibaldi, 2023).

Figure 2: Growth of italian gastronomy-motivated tourists. % value on the total amount of Italian travellers.
Source: Garibaldi R., Report on Gastronomy Tourism in Italy - Trends & Scenarios, 2023, p.21.



[2] LASTAMPA, Settore food, in Italia aumenta interesse per prodotti DOP e formula anti-spreco, 2023. https://finanza.lastampa.it/News/2023/08/21/settore-food-in-italia-aumenta-interesse-per-prodotti-dop-e-formule-anti-spreco/MzNfMjAyMy0wOC0yMV9UTEI

The figure 2 highlights the steady growth of Italian tourists motivated by gastronomy from 2016 to 2023. Specifically, in 2023, 58% of tourists showed particular interest, recording a 37 percentage point increase compared to 2016 and specifically, this would amount to approximately 9.6 million people[3]. Additionally, the report compiled by Garibaldi, sheds light on changes in demand and the opportunities arising for tourism operators and destinations, charged with capturing emerging trends.

Figure 3: Participation rates in gastronomic experiences in the past three years. Typology of experiences.
Source: Garibaldi R., Report on Gastronomy Tourism in Italy - Trends & Scenarios, 2023, p.22.

	Gastronomy-motivated tourists	All Italian travellers
Dining experiences at restaurants	97%	94%
Visits to local producers	85%	74%
Gastronomic events	70%	60%
Active gastronomic experiences	68%	53%
Themed routes and itineraries	63%	48%
Other gastronomic experiences	68%	65%

As evidenced by figure 3, there is a high level of participation in various activities, such as dining experiences at restaurants, engaging 94% of all Italian travelers, visits to local producers involving 74% of travelers, gastronomic events (60%), active gastronomic experiences (53%) and themed routes (48%). This suggests that the majority of Italian tourists, even if not specifically motivated by gastronomy, still participate in these activities demonstrating interest and curiosity.

Furthermore, it is observed that despite the slow down, about 1 in 3 Italian tourists claim to have a higher budget than in 2022 for the purchase of food

[3] Tgcom24|Economia, *Boom di turismo enogastronomico: è motivo di viaggio per il 58% degli italiani*, 2023, https://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/economia/boom-di-turismo-enogastronomico_65732824-202302k.shtml

and wine offerings. In this regard, in the following chapters, we will delve into the expenditure incurred by both Italian and foreign food and wine tourists in order to understand its evolution more thoroughly.

In conclusion, according to Garibaldi, the high interest of tourists in Italy, along with the excellence of the tourism offer and the expected growth of the tourism sector, represents a significant opportunity for the country's future.

However, Garibaldi emphasizes that the current challenge is to translate this potential into concrete results by focusing on various factors to maximize the attractiveness of Italian tourism experiences.

Her analysis indicates a discrepancy between tourists' interest in experiences and their actual participation. Each Italian region possesses a rich heritage that can be further enhanced. She also stresses the importance of preserving and enhancing Italy's culinary heritage, natural landscapes, small shops.

According to the expert, this strategy will help ensure sustainable long-term growth while maintaining a balance between well-known tourist destinations and lesser-known ones.

1.1.2 Benefits of food and wine tourism

Based on Garibaldi's 2023 Report, it is essential to consider the benefits that can arise from the growth of this form of tourism.

The first type of benefit is economic.

Specifically, the development of food and wine tourism contributes to increasing the number of arrivals and stays at the destination, generating additional economic income through travelers' spending in the short term.

More precisely, it results in increased revenue for local businesses, such as restaurants and wineries. This supports the local economy and promotes job creation.
Such growth is the result of the development of thematic tourism products (such as food and wine tours, culinary events, etc.) that enhance and showcase local products, thereby improving the destination's image and reputation. The passion for food encourages travelers to explore local food and wine and share their travel experiences, contributing to a positive word-of-mouth effect that benefits the destination. In the medium-long term, this ongoing interest leads to the creation of innovative and aggregative formats focused on food and wine, enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the destination's offerings. This process also supports the diversification of the rural economy and agricultural enterprises, encouraging them to invest in tourism in order to benefit from the resulting advantages.

The benefits arising from this type of tourism go beyond just food and wine tourism, but also encompass the entire territory, strengthening the destination's capacity to attract private investments in sectors such as agrifood and tourism. Therefore, it can be stated that, when food and wine tourism thrives, the whole territory benefits from it.
Attracting a greater number of tourists to our local cuisine and fine wines not only results in increased restaurant reservations, but also leads to a higher demand for local agricultural products to meet the need for high-quality, fresh ingredients. In addition, the increase in travelers entails a greater demand for accommodation, transportation and other tourism activities, thus creating new opportunities for investment and growth in these sectors.

Finally, there is the opportunity to obtain public funding that can be used to improve infrastructure for the benefit of the community, such as network infrastructure, the road system and mobility. In this way, according to the expert: “food and wine tourism becomes a catalyst for the growth of the competitiveness of the economic system” (Garibaldi, 2023, p.20) leading to a number of benefits in both the short and long term.

The second benefit addressed in the report is the sociocultural aspect.
As previously mentioned, the increasing interest of tourists towards local food and wine has favoured the creation of new jobs. A careful management of this process can lead to medium to long-term improvements in the well-being of the local community, generating prosperity and helping to reduce socioeconomic disparities.
In addition, the development of food and wine tourism promotes the enhancement of the local heritage by the community, allowing the revival of traditions that represent the territory’s identity. This process gradually leads to the planning and implementation of strategies for the safeguarding of tangible and intangible resources, ensuring their preservation for future generations and contributing to the creation of sustainable value for all involved parties.
In this regard, Garibaldi states that: “this process of “reacquisition” brings with it a greater awareness of the value of food, which is not only cultural”(Garibaldi, 2023, p.21). Specifically, Garibaldi emphasizes that the value of food goes beyond mere cultural aspects, as it also involves the sphere of individual and collective health. In particular, people are educated on concepts such as the food pyramid, healthy eating and nutrition, encouraging them to adopt healthier eating habits.
This positive impact is reflected both in individual well-being and in society

as a whole, as the adoption of incorrect eating behaviors can pose health risks and affect public health spending.

The third, but equally important benefit, is the environmental one.
According to the 2023 Report, food and wine tourism promotes the use of local production, as it is what tourists seek.
This contributes to creating a virtuous cycle: to meet this demand, local supply chains are created or strengthened, often accompanied by certifications that ensure quality to the tourist. These supply chains generate economic value that stays within the local area, benefiting all involved parties.
Moreover, by shortening the supply chain, there is a positive impact on the environment, leading to improved quality and safety of products.
This long-term approach can lead to the development of smart farming strategies, using new technologies for more efficient and sustainable agriculture.

Simultaneously, the development of food and wine tourism brings greater attention to, and protection of, rural landscapes, which represent the territory's identity.
Their degradation or loss would result in a decrease or even disappearance of biodiversity and increase the risk of hydrogeological disasters.

Furthermore, Garibaldi (2023) concludes by emphasizing that, to maximize the benefits of food and wine tourism, it is necessary to develop a strategic plan involving all stakeholders, both public and private, in order to create lasting and sustainable value.

Table 1: The benefits arising from Food and Wine Tourism.

Source: The following table is a translation from Italian to English based on the data provided by Roberta Garibaldi in her 2023 Report.

TYPES OF BENEFITS	SHORT-TERM BENEFITS	MEDIUM TO LONG-TERM BENEFITS
ECONOMIC	Tourist flows and additional spending	Diversification/enrichment of the tourism offer
	Development of related economic activities	Diversification of agricultural activities
	Greater visibility of local agri-food and wine productions	Enhanced capacity to attract public/private investments
	Improvement of image and destination	Growth of competitiveness
SOCIO-CULTURAL	Creation of new job positions	Increase in the well-being level of the community
	Rediscovery/valorization of local food and wine heritage	Greater and more effective protection of cultural resources
ENVIRONMENTAL	New models of production and consumption with short supply chains	Increase in investments towards smart farming practices
	Greater attention to and protection of the food and wine landscape	Reduction of the gap between urban and rural areas

1.1.3 Main trends and scenarios in Italian food and wine tourism

The main trends for this year involve a sustained interest in combining travel with experiences related to nature, food and wine, regardless of the season[4]. Essentially, tourists prioritize these two elements even during the winter months.

In fact, one of the main trends that emerged from the Italian Food and Wine Tourism Report (Garibaldi, 2023) is variety, namely the search for 360-degree experiences.

In particular, 63% of Italian tourists desire to discover new destinations and diversify their experiences. It can thus be noted how the preferences of Italian tourists are evolving. Specifically, in addition to tastings in vineyards and olive groves (as activities closely connected with nature), there are other proposals that are gaining popularity, for example: foraging, survival courses and recreational activities like treasure hunts and escape rooms. Furthermore, attention is also shifting towards different production locations, such as cheese factories.

Food and wine tourism is thus recognized as a "strategic asset for the

[4] Wine News, *Food and wine tourism: craving for nature and food and wine 12 months a year, trends 2024*, 2024, https://winenews.it/en/food-and-wine-tourism-craving-for-nature-and-food-and-wine-12-months-a-year-trends-2024_514717/

Belpaese", making it a crucial resource for our country. Typically, it draws in around 14 million visitors, generating a significant revenue of 2.5 billion euros (Wine News, 2024).

In the article, it is reported that "2023 was supposed to be for wine and food tourism the year of overtaking 2019".

Therefore, considering that 2021 was still influenced by the Covid emergency and that 2022 had been the first year of return to normality, the sector had set the goal of surpassing the results achieved in 2019.

As highlighted in the article (Wine News, 2024), 2023 has emerged as a significant year for various areas. Indeed, it is described as an important year for many territories but the trend is characterized as patchy.

More precisely, on the one hand, there was a significant increase in international tourists, leading to positive results for the most sought-after destinations.

On the other hand, there was a percentage of Italians who were unable to travel due to inflation, rising costs and other economic difficulties. These financial constraints posed significant barriers, limiting their ability to participate in leisure activities.

According to Garibaldi, the key priority for the sector's future "must be shifted to the issue of human resources" (Wine News, 2024) defined as a strategic asset of Italian tourism.

It is therefore necessary to better define professional roles, enhancing talents and attracting them to the sector through appropriate training paths. Thus, a new professional figure who accompanies tourists in Food and Wine Museums would be needed, as they offer cultural insights linked to local traditions (and this is what the majority of visitors demand).

In this regard, it is stated that "there is an incresing desire for culture and knowledge" and that "the food and wine trip is seen, by most italians, as cultural deepening" (Wine News, 2024).

Therefore, it is through specialized personnel that this thirst for knowledge can be satisfied.

Considering the 2023 Report on Italian Food and Wine Tourism drawn up by Garibaldi, it is possible to identify three additional major trends.

The first one is called frictionless, a term used to describe experiences and/or processes that occur smoothly and therefore, without particular difficulties.

In this regard, the professor states that tourist experiences must be accessible and easily obtainable for travelers.

As mentioned in previous chapters, there is a significant gap between the interest in an experience and its actual fruition. For this reason, travelers must be able to easily access information, choose and book available offerings. It is interesting to note that, although 63% of respondents stated their intention to book visits to production companies online, only 23% actually purchased them from the website, and 20% through online intermediaries (such as GetYourGuide, Viator etc.).

Despite the many sources of information available to tourists when choosing their destination, they tend to primarily trust recommendations from relatives and friends (as indicated by 54% of Italian travelers).

Consequently, the use of online platforms that discuss food and wine tourism, has seen a decline from 33% in 2018 to 28% in 2023.

By contrast, the influence of social media has increased significantly especially for young people, with Facebook being popular among Millennials (25%) and Instagram being preferred by Generation Z (47%).

Additionally, it is noteworthy to observe a particular phenomenon called

"The White Lotus" effect, where television series and movies set in a particular location influence the choice of tourist destination. According to the international study conducted by Basis on behalf of Netflix-Enit, individuals who have engaged with Italian content in television series are twice as likely to consider Italy as their next destination than those who have not visited. Among respondents who have not previously visited Italy, 87% of those who have consumed Italian content expressed interest in visiting the country, compared to 67% of those who have not enjoyed "*Made in Italy*" content (Garibaldi, 2023).

The second trend identified by Garibaldi is called Green & Social.
Tourists' attention to sustainability is increasingly evident, and this can be inferred from the behaviors they adopt. In general, there is a tendency to avoid wasting food at restaurants (indicated by 65%), and during vacations, people behave more responsibly towards the environment (indicated by 54%).
Moreover, the destagionalization of the experience is becoming more widespread[5], seen not only as a way to save money and enjoy places during less crowded periods, but also as a responsible choice to ensure a steady flow of tourism to chosen destination throughout the year.

The latest trend is called Longevity. Garibaldi states that the food and wine journey offers the opportunity to take care of one's well-being and learn to adopt a healthier lifestyle. In fact, 71% of Italian tourists want to find menus with nutritious and beneficial recipes for health. This is where the Mediterranean diet comes into play, considered a valuable resource to improve and define the tourism offerings (Garibaldi, 2023).

[5] In particular, as indicated by Garibaldi (2023) "54% of Italian tourists want to go on vacation during the low season" p.37.

The rural environment represents the ideal place to break away from daily routine and technology (the author indicates that 62% of respondents want to take food and wine trips where it is possible to do a digital detox). Furthermore, the rural environment represents the perfect place to relax and be with one's relatives and friends, away from the typical confusion of cities (almost 6 out of 10 tourists are interested in discovering travel options in rural areas to enjoy quality time with their family and friends).

1.2 Profile of the Italian enogastronomic tourist

After illustrating the concept of food and wine tourism, it is essential to define the profile of the Italian enogastronomic tourist.

He is described as “a tourist who has undertaken at least one overnight trip where food and wine have been the main reason for traveling” (Garibaldi, 2019, p.7). Consequently, these individuals choose travel destinations according to the culinary and wine experiences they offer.

More precisely, it is a segment that is “composed of a category of tourists with a high cultural level, able and willing to spend more than average, and who see food and wine as an opportunity to learn more about the destination and its people” (Garibaldi, 2019, p.3).

In addition to these definitions, there is also one proposed by Croce and Perri (2008), which describes the enogastronomic tourist as someone who is “willing to travel from their place of residence in order to reach and understand the culture of a destination known for its high-quality food production, come into direct contact with the producer, visit the area dedicated to the processing of raw materials and subsequent packaging, taste on site, and possibly personally source the specialty and then return home” (Croce and Perri, 2008, p.11).

It is interesting to note how this trend is gaining increasingly popularity, indicating that the modern traveler is not only interested in natural beauty or historical monuments, but also desires to experience directly through food and wine.

Meeting local producers and experiencing the food preparation process directly on site, represent opportunities that invite and motivate tourists to visit that particular place.

In addition, the opportunity to come into direct contact with companies or agri-food producers, represents a crucial and distinctive element of food and wine tourism (Croce and Perri, 2008). Markets, for example, being meeting places with local producers, represent one of the main attractions for the Italian food and wine tourist (Garibaldi, 2020).

It is evident, therefore, that activities in the food and wine tourism sector develop through a series of practices that connect products to their territorial origin.

But what is the distinguishing factor between the enogastronomic tourist and the generalist tourist? The answer lies in the reason for the trip.

Specifically, "for the former, such experiences will represent the core of the trip; for the latter, instead, they will be ancillary activities that will enrich the vacation" (Garibaldi, 2020, p.17).

According to the 2020 Report, initially food and wine tourism primarily interested Boomers and Generation X tourists[6], namely older individuals with higher incomes and greater financial security.

Subsequently, the sector was able to engage various generations, including

[6] Specifically, Boomers are individuals born between 1946 and 1964, while Generation X comprises those born between 1965 and 1980.

Millennials and Generation Z[7].

Millennials, in particular, were identified as a segment of significant importance and therefore played a key role in the development of food and wine tourism globally.

Their widespread passion for food prompted them to seek information and develop greater awareness, influencing their consumption habits.

In fact, they began to pay more attention to the healthiness and quality of purchased products and actively engaged in exploring local food and wine traditions by participating in thematic experiences.

Compared to 2015, food and wine tourism has gained greater significance, as evidenced by research conducted in 2020, where 72% of respondents recognized this sector as a fundamental component to consider when choosing their travel destination (Garibaldi, 2020).

Furthermore, as highlighted by Professor Garibaldi, Generation Z emerges as the "super foodies" of the future. They have shown a remarkable inclination for travel, with 79% stating they are attracted to food and wine holidays. The web 2.0 plays an even more significant role in this generation compared to previous ones. Specifically, 80% have stated being influenced in choosing a destination or participating in a themed experience by reviews, videos, and posts published online (Garibaldi, 2020).

For this generation, therefore, it is crucial to play close attention to the use of new technologies.

In conclusion, it can be stated that food and wine tourism has become a significant factor in travel preferences, appealing to a wide range of generations. From Boomers to Generation Z, tourists are looking for

[7] Specifically, Millennials are individuals born between 1981 and 1996, while Generation Z comprises those born after 1997.

immersive culinary experiences that go beyond traditional sightseeing. Moreover, since digital platforms play an increasingly important role in travel decisions, the future of food and wine tourism looks promising, driven by the evolving preferences of modern travelers.

1.2.1 Characteristics of enogastronomic tourist demand

After the Covid-19 pandemic, attention towards healthier eating has notably surged.

In particular, there has been an increase in awareness regarding the importance of diet for individual health and the environmental impact of dietary choices[8].

Among the various characteristics of the demand of the Italian enogastronomic tourist, product quality stands out as an increasingly relevant criterion during purchases.

Specifically, particular attention is paid to the presence of claims such as "Made in Italy" or "100% Italian".

Among consumers, it is mainly the younger ones (Millennials and Generation Z) who recognize the importance of Made in Italy as synonymous with product quality and traceability.

The article (LA STAMPA, 2023) highlights that, according to the Report on Italian enogastronomic tourism in 2023, the gastronomic interests in typical products and Made in Italy agri-food have alone attracted 22.3% of Italian tourists and 29.9% of foreigners, thus representing a significant boost to the tourism sector. During 2022, the 10.188 products with this

[8] LASTAMPA, Settore food, in Italia aumenta interesse per prodotti DOP e formula anti-spreco, 2023. https://finanza.lastampa.it/News/2023/08/21/settore-food-in-italia-aumenta-interesse-per-prodotti-dop-e-formule-anti-spreco/MzNfMjAyMy0wOC0yMV9UTEI

claim recorded an increase of +1.7%, bringing the total sales to nearly 2.9 billion euros (Mondin et al., 2023).
There is also a growing interest and strong demand for products labeled with quality marks such as: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), Specificity Certificate or Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG).
In 2022, these products represented 7.9% of the total turnover in the food sector (Mondin et al., 2023).

In addition to product quality, the enogastronomic tourist shows a greater focus on sustainability, demanding increasingly shorter supply chains and preferring natural foods.
Environmental sustainability plays a fundamental role, with 23.6% of tourists attaching great importance to the environmental context during enogastronomic tourism experiences (ISNART, 2023).

In the article LA STAMPA (2023), a study conducted by Cortilia[9] on a sample of 2.872 customers aged between 25 and 64 is considered. This research demonstrates that, within the entire sample, 82% expressed a preference for artisanal foods, 89% opted for anti-waste purchasing formulas, and 66% chose organic products.
In this regard, the importance of the latter is emphasized, perceived not only as tastier and healthier but also as "synonymous with greater quality and safety" (Mondin et al., 2023, p.21).

These insights indicate a shifting trend in consumer behavior. They show that individuals are not only focused on the taste and health benefits of

[9] Cortilia is an online marketplace for fresh and genuine food from farmers.

their food, but also prioritize values such as sustainability and ensuring high quality standards.

According to the article LaStampa (2023), there has been a 3% increase in vegan products. In this regard, the Rome Business School Research Center (2023) emphasizes the increasing adoption of plant-based diets, highlighting how they represent not just dietary choices but actual life philosophies.

Moreover, the preference for these products allows for a lower environmental impact, often referred to as a low footprint (Mondin et al., 2023).

Hence, the adoption of a diet primarily based on vegetables and legumes (thereby decreasing the consumption of meat and processed foods), can lead to significant benefits both for individual health and for the environment, contributing to the reduction of CO2 emissions (Mondin et al., 2023).

Despite the growing number of people choosing to adopt a vegan or vegetarian diet, the culinary offerings in Italy frequently fail to meet the needs of these consumers.

For example, the culinary offerings of Venice, such as cicchetti, often pose a challenge for these individuals. This is an important issue to address because those following these diets, are faced with limited food options when visiting this city. Therefore, it is crucial to review and expand Venice's culinary offerings to ensure solutions that meet the needs of all visitors, including vegans and vegetarians.

Tourists are also eager to explore the local flavors of the area and seek out restaurants that showcase the region's specialties. These elements are the fundamental pillars of a complete enogastronomic tourist destination, accompanied by a wide range of services that allow visitors to fully immerse themselves in the local experience[10].

In 2022, tourists were driven to visit renowned places not only for the quality of their restaurants (a determining factor for 21.3% of Italians and 25.7% of foreigners), but also for the enogastronomic productions (appreciated by 19.9% of Italians and 22.3% of foreigners).

However, in addition to gastronomy, visitors consider the presence of a rich artistic and cultural heritage essential (evaluated by 36% of Italians and 41.9% of foreigners), as well as being attracted by the "Italian lifestyle" (8.8%) and opportunities for unique experiences (9.7%) and exclusive destinations (10.3%) (ISNART, 2023).

These statistics reflect the diverse array of interests that drive tourists when selecting their destinations. While gastronomy plays a significant role, it is worth noting that visitors also take into account other aspects.

In conclusion, it is evident that the food industry is evolving to accomodate new consumption trends. The quality and origin of food products remain crucial for both consumers and tourists, reflecting an increasing demand for safe and authentic products.

Italian food and wine tourism continues to play a significant role in the

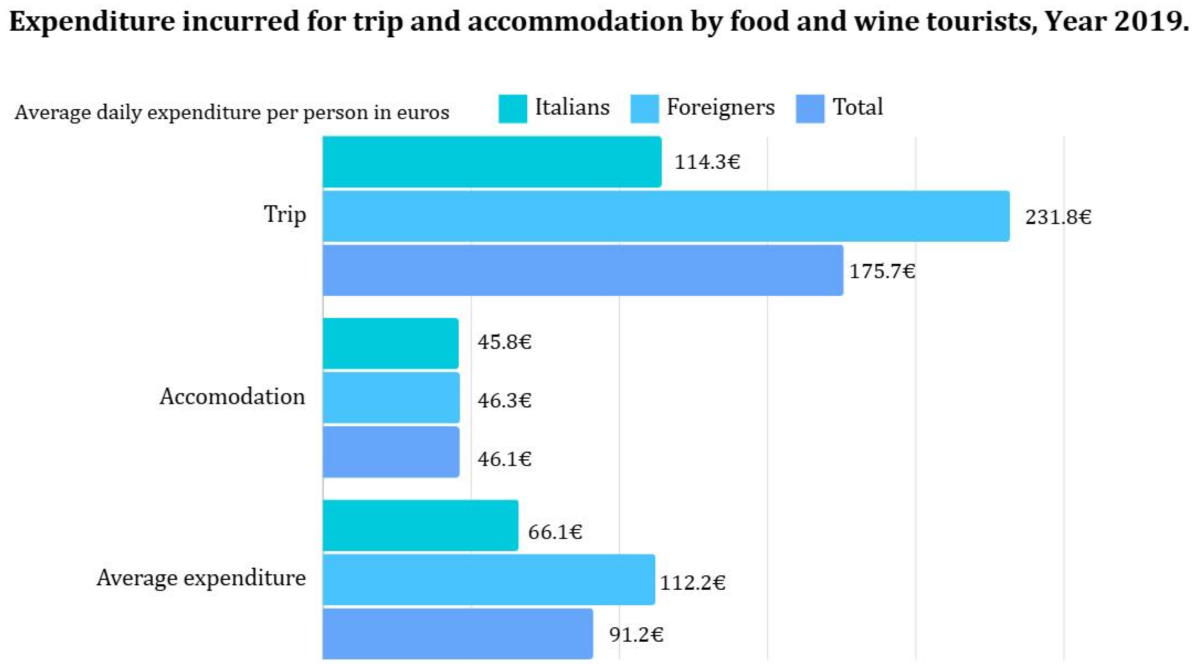
[10] This range of services encompasses: visits to wineries, breweries, pasta factories, pastry shops, olive oil mills, and cheese factories, tastings in gourmet restaurants, gastronomic tours, cooking classes, and events dedicated to local specialties (ISNART, 2023).

country's economy, contributing to the promotion of national cultural identity.

1.2.2 Expenditure incurred by enogastronomic tourists

The following charts provide a detailed overview of the expenditures incurred by food and wine tourists, both Italians and foreigners, during the periods 2019, 2021 and 2022.

Figure 4: expenditure incurred by food and wine tourists in 2019 (translated from Italian to English).
Source: ISNART, Turismo Enogastronomico Report 2019, 2020.



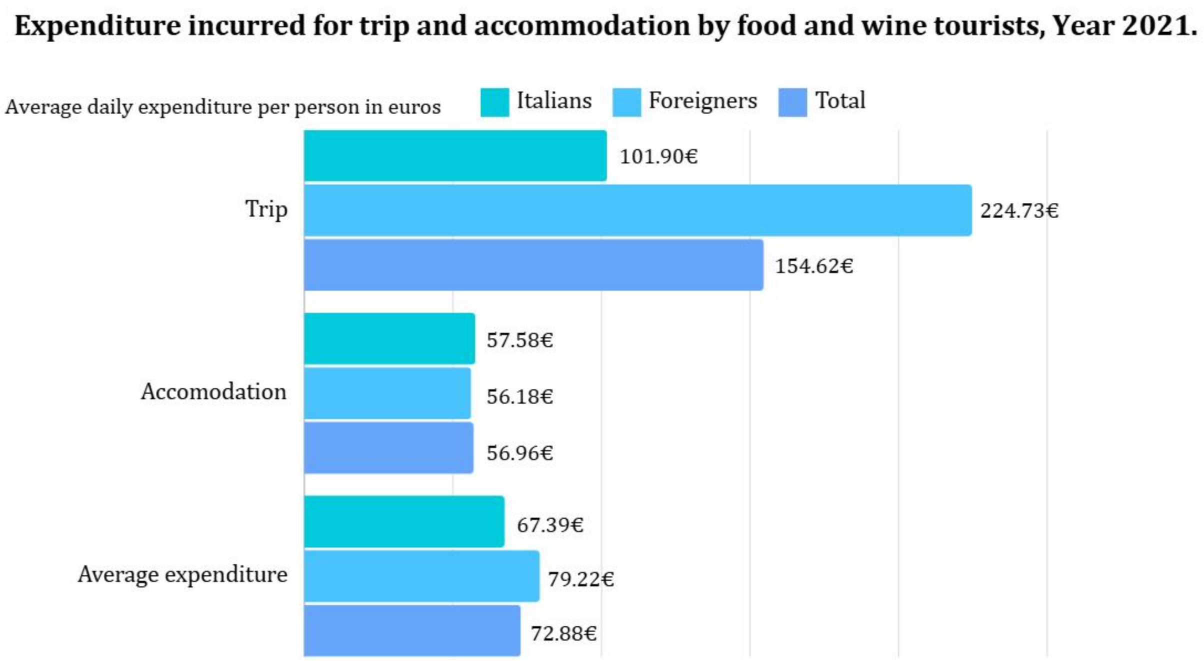
During 2019 (figure 4), the average daily travel expenses were significantly higher for foreigners compared to Italians, with a difference of €117.5. This could be attributed to the need for foreigners to cover additional costs such as international transportation. By contrast, Italians may opt for nearer travel solutions.

Regarding accomodation expenses, the difference between Italians and foreigners is minimal (€0.5), thus indicating a similar choice of accomodation options.

However, concerning the average expenditure on goods and services, foreigners recorded a significantly higher figure compared to Italians, with a difference of €46. This indicates a greater propensity of foreigners for consumption (perhaps motivated by the exploration of gastronomic and cultural experiences).

Figure 5: expenditure incurred by food and wine tourists in 2021 (translated from Italian to English)

Source: ISNART, Turismo Enogastronomico Report 2021, 2022.



In 2021 (figure 5), travel expenses decreased slightly compared to 2019, both for Italians and foreigners, with a more pronounced decrease for the former (-€12.4 and - €7.07 respectively).

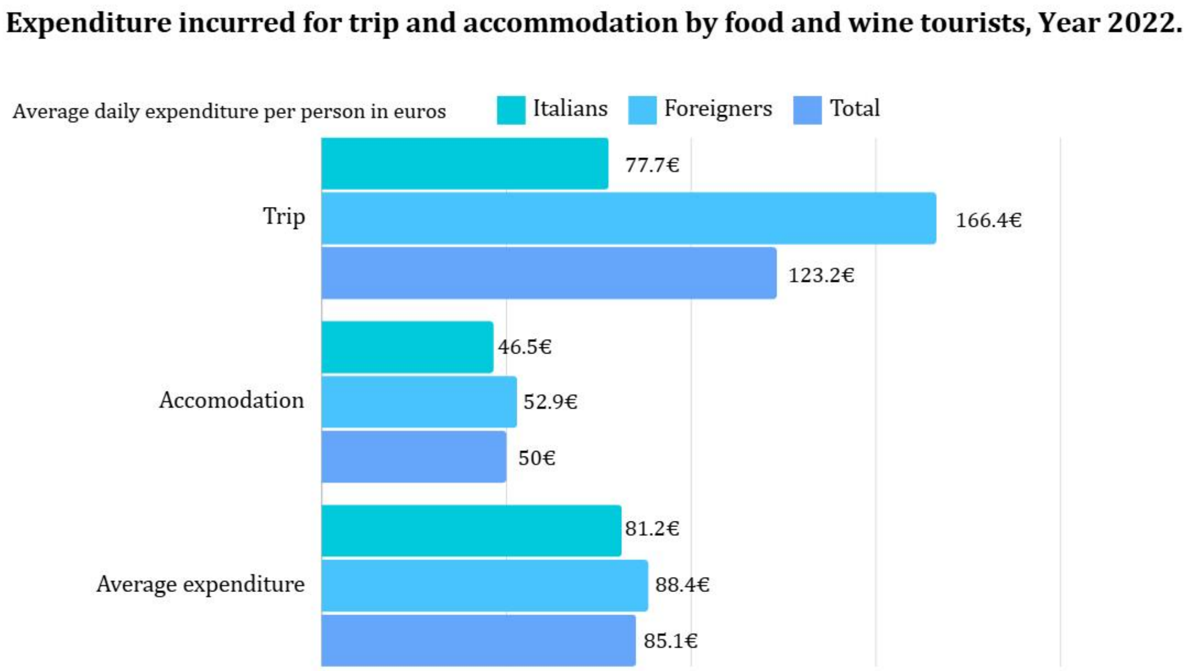
However, foreigners continue to spend more than Italians on travel, with a difference of €122.83.

The average daily expenditure per capita is €56.96 for accomodation, representing an increase of €10.86 compared to 2019. This increase, although slight, could indicate a search for more comfortable accomodation solutions.

Moreover, this rise could also be attributed to the search for safer and more hygienic accomodation options, necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the difference between Italians and foreigners remains minimal, with Italians spending slightly more (+ €1.4).

The average daily expenditure per capita on goods and services is lower compared to two years prior (- €18.32), and this is due to the health emergency that has greatly affected travel and tourism. However, even in 2021, foreigners exhibit a higher average expenditure compared to Italians (+ €11.83).

Figure 6: expenditure incurred by food and wine tourists in 2022 (translated from Italian to English).
Source: ISNART, Turismo Enogastronomico Report 2022, 2023.



In 2022 (figure 6), there is a significant decrease in travel expenditures compared to 2021, with a difference of €24.2 for Italians and €58.33 for foreigners. This could be attributed to a series of factors, including greater post-pandemic economic prudence or even, changes in consumer preferences. The average per capita expenditure is €50 for accommodation, representing a decrease of €6.96 compared to 2021.

Furthermore, the differences between Italians and foreigners are still minimal, with foreigners spending slightly more (+ €6.4).

Finally, for average expenditures on goods and services, foreigners exhibit a higher overall expenditure compared to Italians, with a difference of €7.2. It is observed that, the average per capita expenditure is €85.1, an increase of + €12.22 compared to 2021. This rise could indicate a post-pandemic economic recovery.

In conclusion, the data analysis highlights a trend of decreasing travel expenses (€175.7 in 2019, €154.62 in 2021, and €123.2 in 2022), attributed to travel restrictions due to the pandemic, economic uncertainty, and/or changes in consumer preferences.

However, there are also signs of adaptation from tourists, especially foreigners, who continue to maintain relatively stable spending levels despite the challenges encountered.

1.3 Analysis of the Italian enogastronomic tourism offer

"Italy is the European country with the highest number of agri-food products recognized by the European Union with designation of origin and geographical indication"[11].

This statement highlights not only the high quality of Italian products, but also the deep connection between agri-food excellences and their respective territories of origin.

[11] https://www.politicheagricole.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/309

Furthermore, EU certifications provide consumers with greater guarantees in terms of traceability and food safety, thus promoting increased confidence in the consumption of Italian food products.
In particular, Italy holds the world record for the number of certifications, which has 845 recognitions. These recognitions include: 319 agri-food products and 526 wines, covering more than a fifth of the total value of agro-food production (Ismea-Qualivita, 2022). Overall, this represents more than €19 billion in production value at origin, of which €11 billion comes from quality wines and €8 billion from certified foods (De Filippis et al., 2023).

Every Italian region and province can boast at least one certified production. Specifically, Emilia-Romagna stands out as the region with the highest number of certified agri-food products, counting 47 among PDO, PGI, and TSG, followed by Sicily and Veneto, both with 39 certifications. Regarding IG wines, Piedmont ranks first nationally with 59 recognitions, followed by Tuscany with 58 and Veneto with 53 (Garibaldi, 2022).

During 2020, the economic value of certified productions reached €16.6 billion, recording a modest decrease of 2.0% compared to the previous year.

Despite this slight decline and the challenges associated with the health emergency, "the resilience of a quality system spread throughout the national territory is confirmed"[12].

In this regard, thanks to large certified productions “the DOP economy represents 19% of the total turnover of the national agri-food sector” (Buonocore at al., 2022).

[12] La Repubblica, La Dop economy nel 2020 vale 16,6 miliardi di euro: in calo del 2% rispetto al 2019, 2022. https://www.repubblica.it/economia/rapporti/osservaitalia/mercati/2022/02/14/news/la_dop_economy_nel_2020_vale_166_miliardi_di_euro_in_calo_del_2_rispetto_al_2019-337719667/

The exports of Italian agri-food and wine products with Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) maintained a stable value compared to 2019, reaching €9.5 billion, with a marginal negative variation of 0.1%.

This result was influenced by the impact of the pandemic on markets outside the European Union, which experienced a contraction, but was offset by an increase in exports to European destinations.

The overall value of exports is the result of divergent trends between the two sectors: the agri-food sector, with export value of €3.92 billion, recorded an increase of +1.6%, while the wine sector, with €5.57 billion, experienced a decrease of -1.3% (la Repubblica, 2022).

According to the Report on Italian food and wine tourism drafted by Garibaldi, at the territorial level, the Northeast region contributes more than half (53%) of the national value[13], while Southern Italy is the only region showing positive growth compared to 2019, with an increase of 7.5% (with significant growth especially for Puglia and Sardinia). The extensive spread of Traditional Agri-food Productions (PAT) is highlighted by the growing number of products included in the official list of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food, and Forestry Policies.

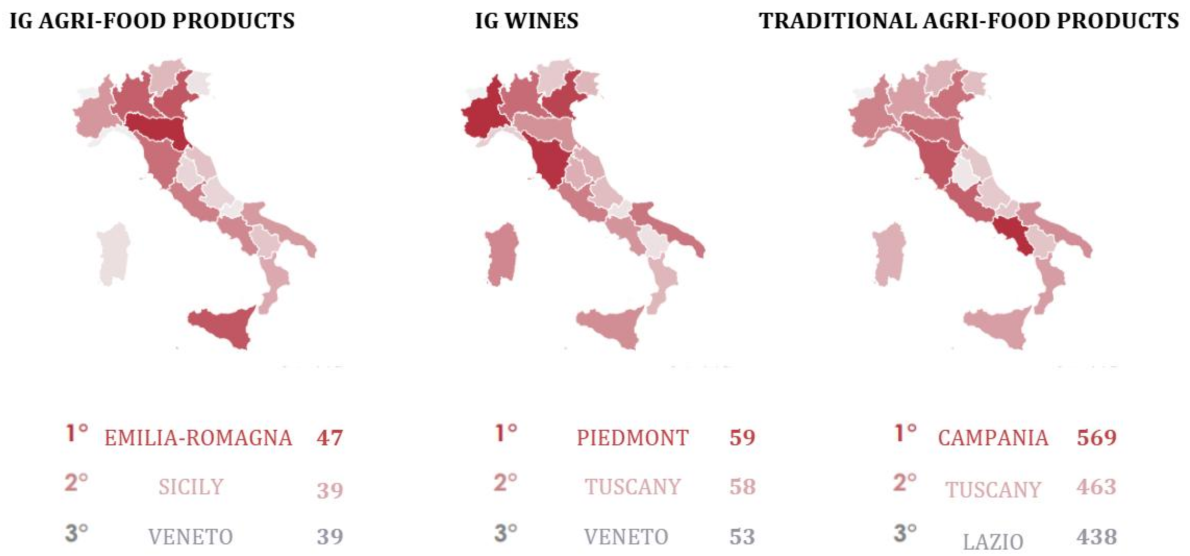
As of March 2021, a total of 5.333 products were registered, representing an increase of 107 compared to 2019. Campania, Tuscany, and Lazio stand out as the regions with the highest number of PAT, with 569, 463, and 438 respectively (Garibaldi, 2022). Furthermore, Italy stands out for its extensive adoption of organic farming practices, with over 2 million hectares cultivated and more than 71.000 operators, a trend that has been

[13] In particular "among the top twenty provinces by value, eleven are from the Northeast regions, starting with the top three - Treviso, Parma and Verona - which record a territorial impact of over one billion" (Buonocore et al, 2022).

steadily growing since 2010. This preference for organic products is also reflected in consumption, with a 4% share of total expenditure on agri-food, amounting to approximately €3.3 billion in the first half of 2020.

Despite the effects of the pandemic, purchases of organic products, especially in large-scale retail, continue to grow at rates higher than other products, even during lockdown periods (Garibaldi, 2022).

Figure 7: High-quality production - Number of certified products per region. Year 2021.
Source: Garibaldi R., Rapporto sul Turismo Enogastronomico Italiano. L'offerta, 2022, p.8 (translated from Italian to English).



After listing the high-quality production (figure 7), it is useful to mention the various sectors that make up the Italian food and wine offer.

Garibaldi refers to restaurants and agritourisms, the wine and olive oil sector, micro-breweries, and captivating gastronomic museums, along with wine and flavour routes.

First and foremost, the restaurant industry, through which one can discover dishes from other countries and regions, is defined as "one of the cornerstone of Italy's food and wine offering" (Garibaldi, 2022, p.9).

However, during the biennium 2020-2021, significant economic losses occurred due to lockdowns and the consequent decrease in out-of-home food consumption. Consequently, the sector faced an extremely negative situation. Indeed, the turnover reached its lowest point during the months of April to June 2020 and in the period between January and March 2021. Moreover, the number of new businesses was significantly lower compared to closures, resulting in a negative balance of -13.060 and -13.952 fiscal years (Garibaldi, 2022).

Despite the challenges and economic uncertainty that characterized that period, the sector demonstrated adaptability and inventiveness, generating innovative formats such as in-person dinners, home delivery services, virtual tastings, chef video recipes and more (Garibaldi, 2022).

At the end of 2021, there were more than 339.000 businesses in the sector, of which 58% were restaurants and mobile food service activities. Compared to 2019, there was a modest growth of 1%.

In particular, from 2018 to 2022, there was a steady increase in the number of restaurants: 731 in 2018, 875 in 2019, 976 in 2020, and 1.062 in the biennium 2021-2022.

These data clearly highlight how Italian gastronomic excellence has continued to thrive despite the challenges encountered.

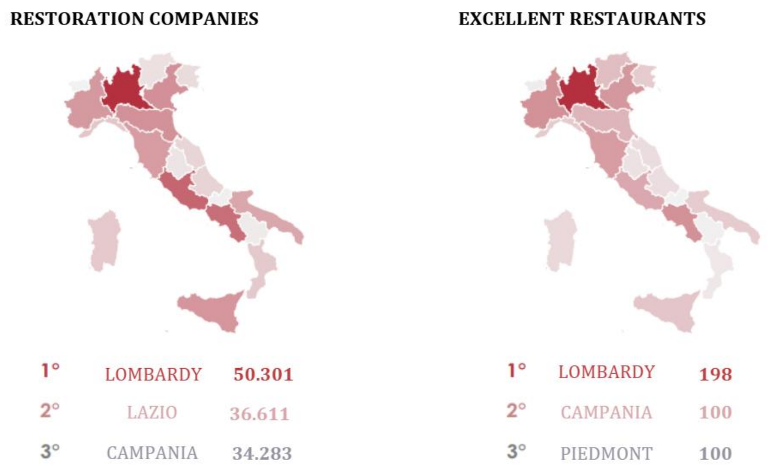
In this regard, it is stated that "one of the strengths of the Italian restaurant offer lies in its capillarity, with a heritage that is spread throughout the Peninsula, in major cities as well as smaller towns"(Garibaldi, 2022, p.9).

This means that, the Italian restaurant offer, extends across the entire national territory, confirming itself as a fundamental sector both from a tourist and economic perspective.

As can be seen from figure 8, Lombardy stands out for its high concentration of activities in the restaurant sector.

At the end of 2021, the region counted the highest number of businesses (equal to 50.301), representing 15% of the total national.

Figure 8: The restaurant Industry - Number of active Restaurant Businesses by Region. Year 2021.
Source: *Garibaldi R., Rapporto sul Turismo Enogastronomico Italiano. L'offerta, 2022, p.11 (translated from Italian to English).*



The second sector that Garibaldi refers to is the Italian agritourism network, which demonstrated remarkable resilience during the health emergency.
In fact, the negative impacts of the pandemic were mitigated thanks to the wide diversification of agritourism offerings.

Specifically, companies offered tasting services and other activities such as sports and excursion. These, have grown more rapidly than average, with respective increases of 8% and 10% compared to 2019.

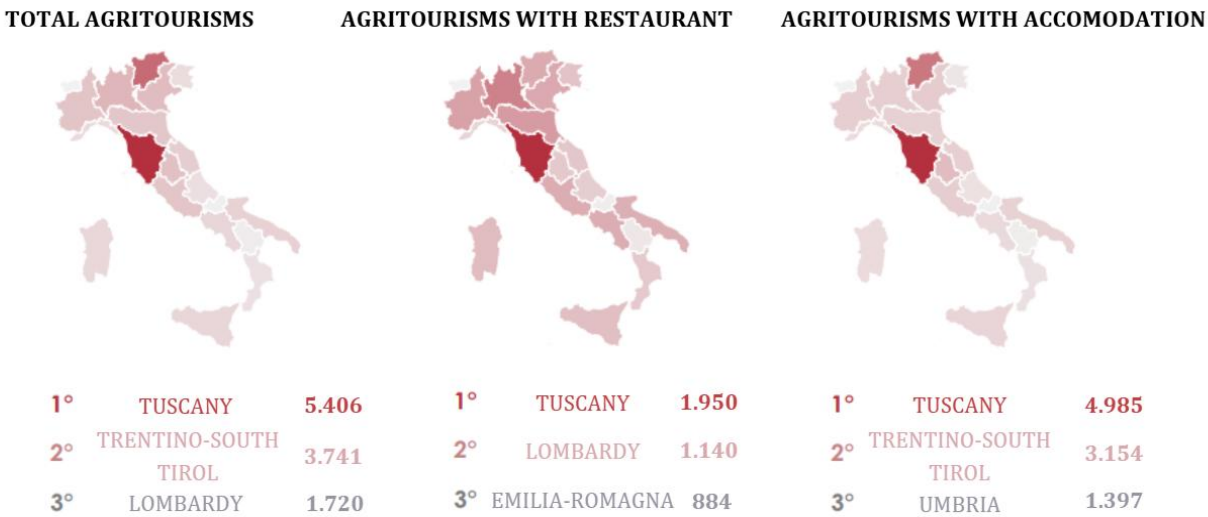
However, the lockdowns and restrictions that occured during 2020, strongly affected the economy. In particular, the value of agritourism production decreased by 48.9% compared to 2019, reaching 802 million euros (ISTAT, 2021).

In addition, tourist flows have experienced a sharp contraction in both arrivals (- 41%) and presences (- 34%), with a significant decrease in foreign demand compared to domestic demand (Garibaldi, 2022).

The figure 9 shows that Tuscany is the region with the highest concentration of agritourism businesses (5.406 in 2020), accounting for 22% of the national total.

The region excels in all types of services offered, from dining to accomodation to tastings and other experiences.

Figure 9: Agritourisms - Agritourism Businesses by Region. Year 2020.
Source: *Garibaldi R., Rapporto sul Turismo Enogastronomico Italiano. L'offerta, 2022, p.14 (translated from Italian to English).*



The third sector is the viticulture and olive cultivation.

These two products represent two important pillars of the Italian agri-food heritage and they are defined as "two major attractors for tourism" (Garibaldi, 2022, p.16).

Despite the health emergency, the production system has maintained a solid consistency, even recording an increase in the number of wine (+2%) and olive farms (+5%) from 2019 (Garibaldi, 2022).

Our country has 87.741 wineries, mainly concentrated in Veneto, Sicily and Puglia (which respectively account for 16.4%, 15.9% and 13.5% of the total national).

As for the cultivation of oil fruits, out of 51.857 active companies, over half are located in Puglia (31.5% of the total national), Calabria (18.3% of the total national), and Tuscany (11.4% of the total national), with Puglia also having the highest number of oil mills (18% of the total national) (Garibaldi, 2022).

The wine sector has managed the negative effects of the pandemic well, with an overall increase in production (+3.2% compared to 2019).

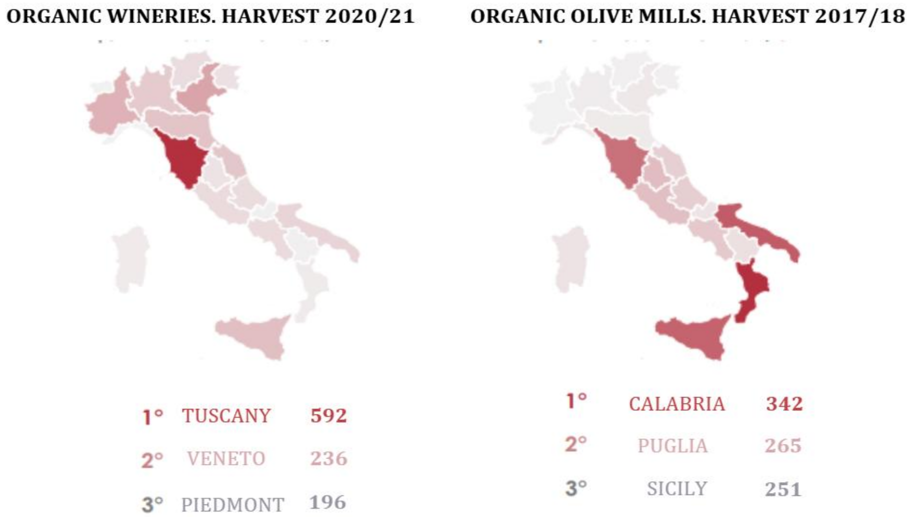
However, there was a reduction in overall turnover, decreasing from 13.4 to 11.5 million euros (-3.6%). Nevertheless, online sales and home delivery were able to mitigate these losses.

The situation for olive oil is more complex, with a slight growth in turnover (+3% in the 2019/2020 biennium) but a contraction in overall production (by about a quarter) due to the decrease in domestic demand and the increase in production costs (Garibaldi, 2022).

It is Tuscany that has the highest number of wineries (amounting to 592 representing 28% of the national total), while Calabria is the region with the highest number of organic oil mills (amounting to 858, representing 40% of the national total).

Figure 10: Wine and Oil - Organic Wineries and Olive Mills

Source: *Garibaldi R., Rapporto sul Turismo Enogastronomico Italiano. L'offerta, 2022, p.17 (translated from Italian to English).*



The penultimate sector that Garibaldi refers to is that of micro-breweries. In 2020, the number of microbreweries in Italy was 624, to which 132 brewpubs were added, totaling 756 businesses.

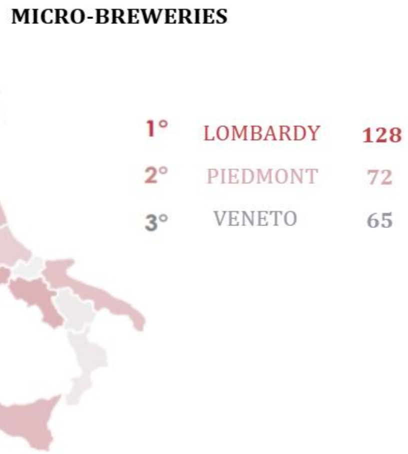
Even in the brewing sector, 2020 was a particularly difficult year due to the closure of restaurants, which represented the main sales channel.

This led to a reduction in beer production, with a decrease in turnover ranging from 70% to 80% and consequent closures of artisanal businesses in the country.

In this case as well, home delivery and e-commerce have made it possible to mitigate, albeit partially, these losses (Garibaldi, 2022).

Lombardy is the region hosting the highest number of these establishments (amounting to 128, representing 17% of the national total), followed by Piedmont (amounting to 72), Veneto, and Tuscany (both at 65).

Figure 11: Micro-Breweries - Micro-Breweries by Region. Year 2020.
Source: *Garibaldi R., Rapporto sul Turismo Enogastronomico Italiano. L'offerta, 2022, p.20 (translated from Italian to English).*



The last sector that makes up Italy's wide range of food and wine offerings is the one that includes gastronomic museums and wine and flavor routes.

In 2021, 129 gastronomic museums are recorded, spread across the national territory, with Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna, and Veneto hosting the largest number. Garibaldi (2022) states that assessing the impact of the health emergency on these structures is quite complex. Although there has been an increase in the number of museums, it is still likely that all the facilities have heavily suffered from forced closures and reduced tourist flows. Statistics indicate a drastic decrease in visitors (amounting to 75.7% in the 2019-2020 biennium) and therefore also in revenues (decreased by about 79%). Gastronomic museums, despite representing a significant cultural heritage, may suffer from poor attractiveness due to their small size and lack of digital presence.

As for the wine and flavor routes, as many as 103 routes are recorded in 2021. The health emergency, in this case, has led to a rediscovery of these routes. Tourists, being more selective, pay attention not only to attractions and product quality but also to the surrounding landscape. Proposed itineraries such as wine and flavor roads can meet these needs, especially if they are accessible on foot and by bicycle, offering them an outdoor experience and a connection with rural areas.

Figure 12: Gastronomic Museums and Wine and Flavor Routes . Year 2021.
Source: *Garibaldi R., Rapporto sul Turismo Enogastronomico Italiano. L'offerta, 2022, p.23 (translated from Italian to English).*

1.3.1 Analysis of territory and competitiveness in the Italian enogastronomic tourism

According to the "Italian Food and Wine Tourism Report" edited by Garibaldi (2022), the statistical data presented offer an idea of the regions that possess the most substantial offer, but do not allow for evaluating their position within the national context.

In this regard, the Report adopts an interesting approach to assess and analyze the competitiveness of territories in the food and wine sector.

This involves the so-called "competitiveness maps", which "relate the number of products/businesses linked (directly or indirectly) to food and wine tourism and the competitive level of the territory in which they are

located (measured through the Regional Competitiveness Index of the European Commission)" (Garibaldi, 2022, p.24).
More precisely, the Regional Competitiveness Index of the European Commission "is a composite indicator which provides a synthetic picture of territorial competitiveness (the ability of a region to offer an attractive environment for firms and residents to live and work) for each of the regions of the 27 EU Member States" (European Commitee of the Regions, 2023).

In the productive regions of central and northern Italy[14], where there is high entrepreneurship and food and wine resources are valued, an highly competitive territorial context is observed.
Therefore, it is presumed that there is great potential for growth in terms of the number of businesses; however, it is essential to intervene in order to maintain high levels of competitiveness, both within the sector and the overall context.
Conversely, in the southern regions[15], the entrepreneurial enthusiasm evidenced by a high number of companies in sectors related to food and wine tourism is correlated with a less favorable territorial context.
The agro-food production in these regions shows smaller sizes and profitability compared to the national average, suggesting limited growth potential requiring targeted actions to create a more favorable environment for businesses (Garibaldi, 2022).

These targeted actions might include financial incentives that could be offered in the form of tax breaks or subsidized financing to agricultural and food businesses, aiming to stimulate investments and enhance profitability.

[14] Such as Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Lazio.
[15] Such as Puglia, Sicily and Campania.

Regarding the restaurant sector, Campania, Puglia and Sicily, being among the most populous Italian regions, have a relatively high market due to their touristic attractiveness.
This might imply a positive relationship between the territorial competitiveness index and the number of businesses, with the sector likely to achieve very positive performance.

The "minor" regions in central and southern Italy[16] are characterized by low competitiveness levels and a reduced number of companies in the considered sectors.

This represents the most critical situation because "the potential is low, and the development of supply in numerical terms can be achieved through a mix of sector-specific actions (for example, in the restaurant sector, wine production, olive oil production etc.) and broader actions aimed at creating a more favorable economic and social environment for businesses and residents" (Garibaldi, 2022, p.25).

Lastly, in other regions like Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Valle d'Aosta, Umbria and Marche, despite a competitive territorial context, entrepreneurship in individual sectors may be lower.

This could be due to infrastructural challenges, making numerical business growth more difficult.

However, Liguria and Friuli-Venezia Giulia might have growth potential due to the absence of infrastructural issues (Garibaldi, 2022).

[16] Such as Abruzzo, Molise, Basilicata, Calabria and Sardinia.

Figure 13: The positioning of the supply in the regions - “Competitiveness Map” for IG productions.

Source: Garibaldi R., Rapporto sul Turismo Enogastronomico Italiano. L’offerta, 2022, p.26 (translated from Italian to English).

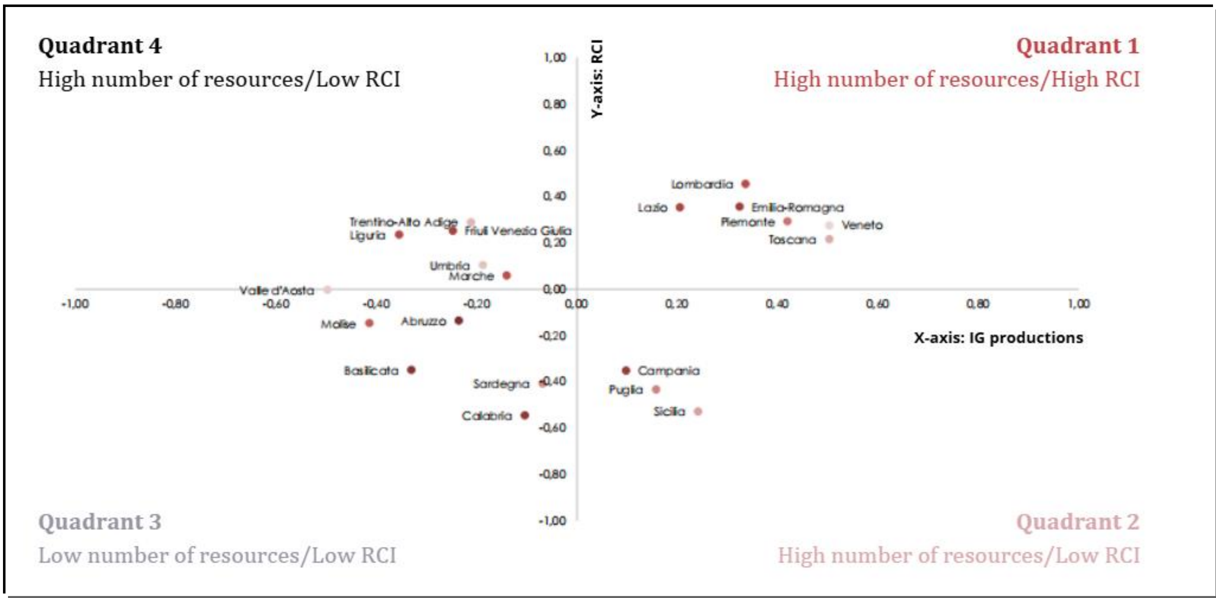
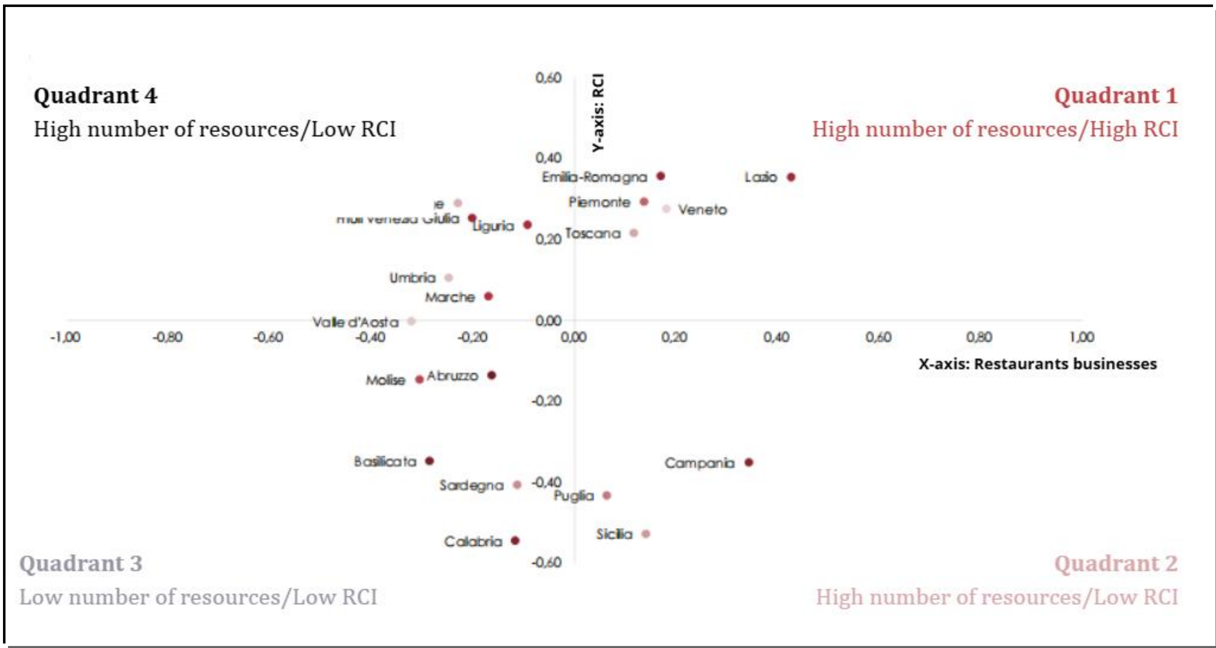


Figure 14: The positioning of the supply in the regions - “Competitiveness Map” for restaurant businesses.

Source: Garibaldi R., Rapporto sul Turismo Enogastronomico Italiano. L’offerta, 2022, p.27 (translated from Italian to English).



1.3.2 Focus on Veneto: data and offer

During 2023, the Veneto region achieved a new record in terms of tourist flows.

Specifically, the figures surpassed those reached in 2019[17], which was the period before the pandemic, with 21.1 million arrivals and 71.9 million presences (overnight stays).

In fact, compared to 2019, there has been an increase in the number of tourists choosing to stay in Veneto (+4.3% in arrivals) as well as the number of overnight stays (+0.9%).

The recovery in 2023 was also aided by the significant return of foreign visitors. In particular, considering the variations between 2023 and 2022, there was an increase of 16.1% in arrivals and a 9.1% increase in overnight stays (SISTAR, 2023).

In order to provide a more comprehensive overview, the figure 15 presents data regarding tourist flows in 2023, compared to those of the previous year (2022) and those of the pre-pandemic year (2019).

Figure 15: Tourist flows in 2023 compared to the previous year and the pre-pandemic year.

Source: *statistiche_flash_marzo_2024.pdf (regione.veneto.it), 2024 *(translated from Italian to English).*

	Arrivals (million)	Presences (million)	Arrivals Var.% 2023/22	Presences Var.% 2023/22	Arrivals Var.% 2023/19	Presences Var.% 2023/19
Veneto	21,1	71,9	+16,1	+9,1	+4,3	+0,9

Furthermore, the attractiveness of Veneto has particularly drawn regular visitors, as evidenced by an 11.4% increase in German overnight stays,

[17] It is important to highlight that Veneto had very positive results in 2019. Specifically, there were 71,2 million overnight stays (an increase of 2.9% compared to 2018) and 20,2 million arrivals (an increase of 3.2% compared to the previous year). Furthermore, the total turnover of the sector reached 18 billion euros, while the turnover for the food and wine sector amounted to 6 billion euros (*Source: statistica.regione.veneto.it*).

8,2% in Austrian stays and 5.3% in Dutch stays, with a significant return also from Americans (+16.5%). However, there is still a noticeable absence of several English, Asian and Russian tourists. All tourist areas in the region have recorded significant flows. Regarding overnight stays, such as the most relevant economic indicator, there is a good performance in coastal areas (+2.4% compared to 2019) and in lake and mountain areas (+6.9% for both). However, art cities (Venice for instance), despite a strong recovery compared to the previous year (+17.1%), still have a number of overnight stays below pre-Covid levels (-3.3%) (SISTAR, 2023).

Regarding 2024, in the first two months, there is a significantly higher number of arrivals compared to the same period in 2023, with an increase of 6.8%. Also, in terms of presences, a 6% increase is observed (figure 16). Additionally, the figures show a significant rise in tourists from Germany, the United States and Spain (SISTAR, 2024).

Figure 16: Tourist Movement per month - Period January-February 2024 and comparison with the same period of the previous year.

Source: https://statistica.regione.veneto.it/novita/novita_20240411.jsp, *2024 (translated from Italian to English).*

	Arrivals (thousands)			Presences (thousands)		
	2023	2024	Var% 2024/23	2023	2024	Var% 2024/23
January	759	788	3,8	1.954	2.022	3,5
February	855	937	9,5	2.110	2.288	8,4
Total period	**1.615**	**1.725**	**6,8**	**4.064**	**4.310**	**6,0**

Our region, renowned for its famous tourist destinations, is also well-known for its charming villages. In this regard, according to a survey conducted in the summer of 2023, among the main motivations in choosing villages, food and wine emerges as a primary factor, followed by local events and the curiosity to explore previously unvisited places.

Furthermore, the food and wine sector in Veneto receives an average satisfaction score of 8.7 out of 10 from tourists (Unioncamere Veneto, 2023).

The same survey addresses cyclists, highlighting their main motivations for traveling in Veneto. Specifically, it is found that 31.7% of them are attracted by the richness of the artistic and monumental heritage, while 24% show interest in enogastronomy and local typical food products.

According to data from July and August 2023, food and wine tourists have shown significant interest in discovering the city of Valdobbiadene (TV), thus contributing to its emergence as one of the main destinations in Veneto[18].

It can be stated that the rich variety and quality of typical productions in our territory represent one of the main drivers as far as the food and wine tourism is concerned. As a matter of fact, Veneto stands out thanks to numerous firsts in the sphere of quality agri-food products.
In particular, among agricultural and food products, Veneto boasts a total of 18 Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), 18 Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), and 4 Traditional Guaranteed Specialties (TGS).
Alongside these, there are 14 Controlled and Guaranteed Designation of Origin (DOCG), 29 Controlled Designation of Origin (CDO) and 10 Typical Geographical Indications (TGI) in the wine sector.

To complete the panorama of agri-food excellences in the regional territory, mention should also be made of agricultural products recognized with the

[18] This municipality ranks fifth among all Italian municipalities.

optional indication “mountain product”, in addition to the 403 traditional agri-food products of Veneto included in the National List[19].

1.4 Sustainable food and wine tourism

Before examining the concept of sustainable food and wine tourism, it is useful to define the notion of Sustainable Development (SD).

The Bruntland Commission[20], in 1987, released its report named “Our Common Future”. This report introduced the widely referenced concept of sustainable development, defining it as the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”[21]. This definition encompasses two fundamental notions: the notion of “needs”, specifically the crucial needs of impoverished individuals worldwide, which must be prioritized above all else; and the concept of constraints (or limitations) imposed by the current state of technology and social organization on the environment’s capacity to fulfill both current and future requirements.

It is essential to highlight that, when economies grow, there is always a risk of environmental degradation due to increased pressure. This pressure arises from the heightened demand for resources such as water, energy and space.

In order to address the demands of the present while safeguarding the requirements of the future, it is fundamental to reconsider our current

[19] Regione del Veneto, Prodotti agroalimentari di qualità, 2023. https://www.regione.veneto.it/web/agricoltura-e-foreste/qualita-prodotti
[20] Also known as “The World Commission on Environment and Development, was a sub-organization of the United Nations (UN) with the objective of fostering global cooperation among nations to achieve sustainable development.
[21] United Nations, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*, New York, 1987.

resource consumption.

Sustaining and lowering carbon emissions plays a crucial role as it contributes significantly to improving our quality of life.

Furthermore, being sustainable offers a multitude of benefits, including environmental preservation, societal support, economic enhancement, improved health, increased safety, and financial savings.

In this regard “the overall goal of sustainable development (SD) is the long-term stability of the economy and environment; this is only achievable through the integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision making process” (Emas, 2015, p.2).

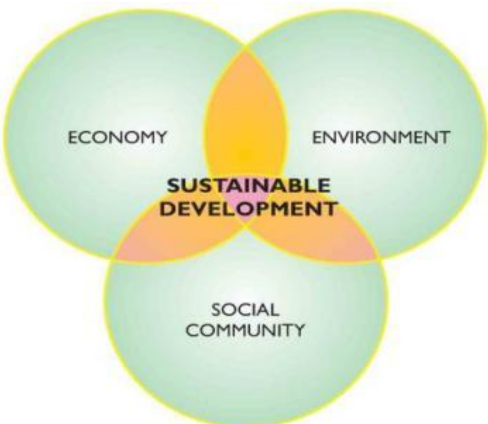
Frequently, when the topic of Sustainable Development is brought up, the focus is solely on the environmental aspect.

Nevertheless, this idea is much broader and also takes into consideration social and economic factors (as can be seen in figure 17).

This integration is the only way to go for real, long-lasting sustainable development.

Figure 17: Triple Bottom Lines of Sustainability

Source: https://envirotaqa.com/sustainable-development/



In recent years, there has been a growing global interest in sustainable development and sustainability.

This phenomenon has also involved the tourism sector, especially concerning food and wine.

In this regard, it is claimed that “sustainability is now a central element in tourism” (Garibaldi, 2023, p.7).

It represents a key element that is pushing sector operators to invest in sustainable solutions and practices to meet and increasingly demanding and sophisticated market demand.

Food and wine tourism is defined as sustainable when “it contributes to increasing the attractiveness of the destination and the reputation of local productions.
It creates widespread wealth and new opportunities for tourism and agricultural sectors, rediscovers and enhances the Italian food and wine heritage and finally increases the quality and safety of food by promoting a carbon-neutral approach” (Lanaro, 2023).

Food and wine tourism can therefore represent an important means to promote the sustainable development of destinations and surrounding rural areas, facilitating collaboration among producers, restaurateurs, tourism operators and consumers, thus promoting a shorter agri-food supply chain (Piatti, 2021).

1.4.1 Levers for preserving the food and wine heritage

The Italian food and wine heritage is unique, it represents a global excellence and an attraction for travelers who wish to explore our country. Therefore, its protection is of fundamental importance.

In promoting the safeguarding of Italy's food and wine heritage, an essential contribution has been and continues to be provided by supranational organizations.

The European Union, for instance, has established legal protection labels for agri-food and wine designations, while UNESCO has introduced both material and immaterial assets related to food and wine in the World Heritage list (Garibaldi, 2023).

However, to prevent the loss of this valuable heritage, it is fundamental to act on several fronts.

Foremost among these is nutrition education. According to the 2023 Report written by Garibaldi, "improper nutrition represents, after smoking, the main behavioral risk factor causing death, with 145 deaths per 100.000 inhabitants and an incidence of 23.1% of total deaths in the country"(Garibaldi, 2023, p.68).

In addition, there are general trends concerning food consumption behavior.

Fistly, the fast-paced lifestyle of today's world has led more people to prefer eating out. Secondly, there is a decline in culinary practices, often due to lack of time and skills.

To counteract these trends, which could have serious long-term consequences on public health and the preservation of the Italian culinary heritage, it is essential to educate the new generations.
One of the proposed solutions is to implement educational programs aimed at increasing awareness and skills related to sustainable agriculture, food production and safety, responsible food choices, fair distribution of food products and conscious consumption. All of this should be accompanied by mandatory practical activities such as cooking courses and visits to small local producers.

In accordance with this perspective, the Report on Italian food and wine tourism, highlights that 76% of Italians believe it is important for students to have the opportunity to visit local producers and/or food artisans during their school years, while 74% want them to acquire knowledge about Italian food and wine culture. Moreover, 69% want students to learn how to grow a vegetable garden and 57% to develop culinary skills (Garibaldi, 2023).

A second lever on which to act to preserve our heritage concerns the redevelopment of agri-food markets. These places, which are gaining increasingly popularity among tourists, offer them the opportunity to experience local enogastronomy and come into direct contact with producers.

To enhance these markets, there are two distinct approaches: one that is primarily tourist-oriented, with innovative formats that offer visitor experiences, entertainment and education; the other emphasizes the social and economic role of markets for the local community (Garibaldi, 2023, p.77).

In other words, this second approach primarily focuses on the needs of the local community rather than the interests of visitors, thereby limiting tourist flows[22].

The third lever to act upon involves the touristic enhancement of artisans, restaurants and historic taste stores.

Despite playing different roles and operating in entirely different ways, they serve as custodians of Italian food and wine. Specifically, "the former, through their work, keep alive the traditions, customs, and knowledge that characterize local productions (the intangible dimension).

The latter, on the other hand, characterize the economic and social fabric of the country"(Garibaldi, 2023, p.78).

As Garibaldi states, there is currently a continuous increase in the closure of these activities, resulting in the loss of associated traditions.

There are several reasons for this, including reduced competitiveness and economic difficulties, along with a lack of personnel.

It is therefore urgent to find solutions to ensure the survival of these historic places, and tourism may be the most suitable solution, restoring importance to this heritage.

[22]In this regard, one issue to be addressed concerns overtourism. In 2022, in fact, 49% of the 118 thousands arrivals were concentrated in four regions: Veneto (15%), Lombardy (12%), Tuscany (11%) and Trentino-Alto Adige (10%). Furthermore, 47% of international traveler arrivals were concentrated in 6 provinces: Venice (12%), Bolzano and Rome (9%), Milan (6%), Verona and Florence (5%). This phenomenon, in the long term, could deteriorate resources and cause problems of coexistence between residents and tourists (Garibaldi, 2023).

1.4.2 Environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability, whose main goal is to prevent natural resources from being permanently damaged, represents a reason for choice for at least 50% of tourists.

In general, there is a growing trend among tourists towards the appreciation of local and organic products, which are considered to be of high quality and have a reduced environmental impact.

For this reason, the opportunity to enjoy dishes prepared with local ingredients is the most coveted and appreciated element. Such experiences have been considered essential by 75% of Italians and 77% of food and wine tourists.

Equally important is the consideration of using local suppliers with environmental certifications and adopting organic farming practices (Garibaldi, 2023). This represents a further step towards a more responsible and environmentally respectful tourism.

However, to ensure a lower environmental impact, it is necessary to carefully consider meat consumption. Although meat constitutes a fundamental element of the local gastronomic tradition in many regions, its impact on the environment and climate is significantly negative. The consumption of meat-based dishes, in fact, has a climate impact ten to fifteen times higher than that of vegan products (Pezzano, 2023).

The concept of environmental sustainability translates into specific tourism proposals. In particular, the growing interest in the environment has enabled the development of activities in contact with nature such as food/wine trekking or bike tours (preferred by 54% of Italians and 62% of food and wine tourists) (Garibaldi, 2023).

In essence, tourists' preferences are evolving as they increasingly seek experiences that respect and preserve the surrounding environment.
The interest in local and organic products reflects both a desire for health and a commitment to conserving natural resources.

1.4.3 Economic and social sustainability

The topic of economic and social sustainability is attracting increasing attention from tourists, regardless of their motivation or destination of the trip.
Today, there is a growing desire to respect local communities and make vacations beneficial for both the area and its inhabitants. This interest is also reflected in enogastronomic tourism, where engaging in food and wine experiences becomes a way to support this process.

Economic and social sustainability influence the travel decisions of nearly six out of ten italians.
One aspect receiving particular attention among travelers is social ethics. Specifically, 68% of Italian travelers (72% of food and wine tourists) indicate a greater willingness to participate in tourism experiences if the operator offers projects or initiatives supporting the local community.

Furthermore, there is a growing preference for purchasing products from small local producers (such as artisanal shops and agricultural businesses, 71% and 67% respectively) and participating in experiences that contribute directly to the local economy, such as grape harvesting and olive picking (Garibaldi, 2023).

This trend thus highlights a significant shift in how tourists approach their travel experiences, focusing not only on destinations and attractions, but also on the social and economic implications of their choices.

1.4.4 The role of demand and supply strategies for an eco-responsible destination

As the title suggests, there are two key aspects to consider: from the demand perspective, what is the role of sustainability in choosing the travel destination; and from the supply perspective, what strategies can be adopted locally to promote the sustainable development of food and wine tourism offerings.

Regarding the first aspect, there is a growing attention towards specific services, reflecting the increasing importance that sustainability is assuming for modern travelers.

As highlighted by statistics, many people consider the presence of eco-friendly hotels and accomodations essential. Specifically, 77% of Italians (and 83% of food and wine tourists), believe this is crucial in choosing their travel destination.

Moreover, many travelers aim to reach their destination using environmentally friendly modes of transportation, such as trains or bicycles.

Additionally, Italian travelers also value destinations that are less crowded. This characteristic, deemed important by nearly 8 out of 10 Italians, is common in food and wine tourism, as many producers and related experiences are often located in rural areas. It is essential to appropriately promote this characteristic to gain a competitive advantage (Garibaldi, 2023).

Regarding the second aspect, it is crucial to examine the actions that destinations can undertake to promote sustainability.

According to Garibaldi's Report (2023), three strategies emerge: supporting the sustainable development of the offerings, implementing sustainability measurement systems and finally, promoting and communicating sustainability.

Firstly, to support the sustainable development of the offerings, it is important for destinations to adopt measures that promote the use of sustainable practices in food and wine products, services and experiences. This could include implementing transportation systems that reduce the use of private vehicles, creating outdoor activity infrastructure in rural areas and supporting the dissemination of sustainability standards among businesses.

It is important to mention the "Sustainable Tourism Fund", a recently established initiative in Italy with three main objectives.

The first one aims to enhance major cultural destinations by promoting forms of sustainable tourism, reducing tourism overcrowding and developing tourist itineraries.

The second one seeks to promote ecological transition in the tourism sector by encouraging practices that reduce emissions.

The last one aims to support accomodation facilites and tourism businesses in obtaining sustainability certifications.

These measures target both tourism businesses and accomodation facilities, including non-profit ones, and have a total budget of 25 million euros for the triennium 2023-2025 (Garibaldi, 2023).

Regarding the second strategy, overseeing the tourism sector involves directing and facilitating sustainable development, acting as a mediator between the public and private sectors[23]. It is advisable to establish measurement systems to assess progress toward these sustainability objectives.

However, creating appropriate indicators is complex and costly, often requiring specialized expertise that many destinations lack internally. Therefore, the World Tourism Organization and the European Commission are working to develop a set of efficient and effective indicators.

In the meantime, destinations can adopt monitoring systems provided by third parties, such as the "Sustainable Tourism Index" from The Economist[24] and other instruments that assess sustainability at the local level.

Although these tools may have limitations, they can still represent a first step towards evaluating and focusing on sustainability issues (Garibaldi, 2023).

Finally, alongside supply development and monitoring actions, it is crucial to promote and communicate the strategy (third strategy).

In response to growing public interest, numerous national tourism entities

[23] This approach, known as "Destination Stewardship" and promoted by global organizations like the World Tourism and Travel Council, aims to establish shared goals and actions to support tourism offerings in the short and long term (Garibaldi, 2023).

[24] "The Sustainable Tourism Index assesses countries on their commitment to develop and promote sustainable practices in tourism" (Economist Impact, *The Sustainable Tourism Index: Enhancing the global travel environment*, 2017. https://impact.economist.com/sustainability/circular-economies/the-sustainable-tourism-index-enhancing-the-global-travel-environment).

have focused their campaigns on this topic.

In order to increase visibility as a sustainable destination, various actions can be implemented:

- conducting advertising campaigns that highlight the destination’s rural areas;
- establishing new awards or enhancing existing ones that recognize sustainable practices in tourism and emphasize the destination’s commitment to environmental stewardship;
- implementing communication projects that showcase successful sustainability initiatives in the tourism and food and wine sectors can inspire others and cultivate a culture of eco-responsibility;
- establishing a dedicated page on the destination’s website to illustrate sustainability efforts and promote sustainable offerings;
- fostering collaborations with operators and platforms that encourage more sustainable tourism choices;
- actively participating in national and international partnerships focused on sustainability in order to demonstrate the dedication to global sustainability initiatives.

Although the 2023 Report highlights an increase in foreign tourists and a decrease in domestic ones due to the erosion of purchasing power caused by inflation, sustainability remains a fundamental reference point for travel choices.

In particular, food and wine tourism emerges as a strategic lever, enhancing the reputation of local products and the destination’s attractiveness.

Chapter 2 "Literature Review: the importance of digital technologies in Food and Wine tourism"

2.1 The role of social media in tourism promotion and consumer behavior

Nowadays, social media are an integral part of our lives. Their use allows people to communicate, shop, share experiences such as travel moments and obtain various kinds of information.

In fact, according to a recent article: "thanks to the diffusion of smartphones, people are able to search the web for all information and news needed: from choosing a touristic destination to selecting a restaurant, from food to fashion, from religion to ethical isses" (Ingrassia et al., 2022, p.1).

This immediate access to information has profoundly transformed consumer behavior, with individuals being continuously influenced by everything they find online. This is particularly significant in tourism where "social media affects tourist's emotions, experiences and overall behavior" (Gon, 2020, p.3).

The shift in consumption patterns can be attributed to at least three factors.

Firstly, a new group of wine consumers has emerged, consisting of Millennials and Zoomers, also known as "digital natives" (such as the first generation to grow up with Internet access and portable digital technology).

Secondly, the proliferation of the Internet, social media and other digital platforms (e-commerce) has significantly influenced the communication and purchasing behaviors related to products, including food and wine.

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the use of Internet and social media for food communication and purchasing due to concerns and restrictions, such as lockdowns (Bellia, 2022).

From the reading of the sources, it is evident that social media represent an essential tool for promoting a food and wine destination.

By sharing images, videos and reviews on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, it is possible to spark tourists' interest, encouraging them to visit that specific destination and taste local dishes and fine wines.

According to the article, indeed, "the use of reviews and images (photographs or pictures) is extremely relevant to the success of a tourist destination or a tourism service". In the context of food and wine, a comparable trend is evident across various restaurants and lounge bars (Ingrassia, 2022, p.5).
The importance of images on social media platforms is also highlighted in a study conducted by Bellio et al. (2021).
These are the so-called visual social media platforms that have completely revolutionized the manner in which consumers discover brands and products, evolving traditional transactions into interactive and enduring relationships between customers and businesses though a constant exchange of visual contents.

In addition to this, another study has highlighted the central role of social media in promoting a tourist destination. Specifically, Italian regions are fully aware of the essential role of social media in promoting tourist attractions, especially those related to food and wine.

The results of the analysis indeed demonstrate that promotional strategies are no longer limited solely to traditional websites, but also focus on social media platforms (Gattullo, 2015).

It is therefore interesting to note how Italian regions are actively striving to make the most of these digital tools.
They recognize the potential to reach a wider audience and engage them more directly and effectively.

The use of social media has experienced a significant increase, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic due to social distancing directives and lockdowns.

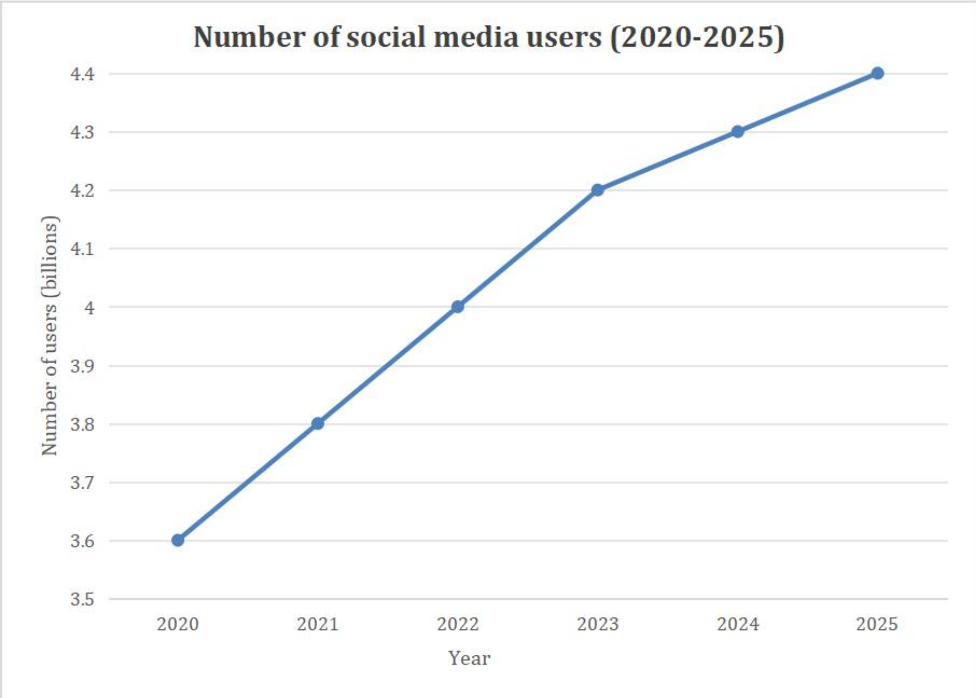
Specifically, according to an opinion paper, "social media platforms have seen a 61% increase in usage as people use the platforms to stay connected with family, friends, and colleagues (Holmes, 2020).

Facebook and Instagram saw more than a 40% increase worldwide from February to March 2020; messaging on Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Instagram increased 70% during this period, and views on live streams doubled" (Nabity-Grover, 2020, p.1).

Furthermore, according to the previously cited article, in 2020 the number of social media users amounted to approximately 3.6 billion, with projections indicating a rise to 4.4 billion by 2025 (Ingrassia, 2022). This development has made social media an increasingly relevant communication channel.

Figure 18: Number of social media users (2020-2025)

Source: Data from Ingrassia (2022) adapted for this study.



For this reason, it is crucial to consider what web users share online, as it has been demonstrated that, throughout every phase of the travel experience, tourists rely more on online reviews written by fellow travelers than those provided by tourism operators (Ingrassia, 2022).

This concept also applies to so-called "smart tourists" such as independent travelers who are used to managing their trips on their own. They too do not rely on tour operators because they prefer to use their mobile devices to search for information online.

In this way, they can quickly access updated reviews, comments and photos uploaded by other travelers, making it easier to choose their next destination, such as restaurant or a wine cellar (Sigala et al., 2019).
This once again indicates that tourists prefer to rely on reviews generated by other users, social media and websites, rather than on tour operators.

Equally significant is the so-called Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM), considered the most important aspect of digital communication. More precisely, it "refers to any product information communicated by potential consumers via the Internet" (Djafarova et al., 2017, p.1).
Such concept is also evident in the wine sector, as it becomes increasingly important for wine producers to take into account what users discuss in their online conversations about wine[25].

Here, dialogues assume a crucial role, as tourists and consumers have the opportunity to initiate and participate in online conversations and interactions through social media. By doing so, such discussions in turn affect the decision-making processes of others (Sigala, 2019).
In this way, utilizing social media platforms and actively engaging in online discussions enables businesses to meet consumers' needs and preferences and fullfill the growing demand for healthier and sustainable products.

Moreover, it is essential to highlight that social media platforms collect and showcase people's experiences, making them a valuable source of insights.

These insights can aid tourism experts in enhancing local experiences, as these latter represent the main attractions of destinations (Gon, 2021).
This is particularly relevant for food and wine tourism, where understanding travelers' tastes and desires can guide the development of more captivating and satisfying food and wine experiences.

One of the main challenges for companies is figuring out how to best

[25] In this regard, it seems that today's consumers are becoming increasingly aware of new regulations on food quality and safety. They are more health-conscious, pay attention to the alcohol content in bevergaes, especially wines and increasingly prefer wines with lower alcohol content and organic options (Ingrassia, 2020).

leverage social media to achieve tangible results in their revenue.
This concept is also reiterated in the article written by Ingrassia (2020), where it is stated that "like other types of companies, wine businesses also face the challenge to find a successful way to use social media with tangible results to their income" (Ingrassia, 2020, p.4).

In the food and wine sector, this means carefully evaluating how to strategically use social platforms to engage customers and boost sales.

One potential solution to this challenge could include collaborating with specific figures known as influencers, in order to reach new potential clients.

2.2 The role of influencers in food and wine tourism

According to the literature review conducted, recent research has highlighted the role of influencers and their ability to shape consumer behavior and preferences, through content sharing.

First of all, it is useful to start with the definition of this figure, described as a professional who possesses a "high potential to influence other due to such attributes as frequency of communication, personal persuasiveness or size and centrality to a social network" (Ingrassia, 2020, p.4).

In order to have a comprehensive understanding of this profession, another definition is provided, describing the influencer "as a source of information recognized by the public as an opinion leader since he or she gives advice able to greatly influence other people's purchasing decisions" (Ingrassia, 2022, p.3).

Additionally, their use of social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, enables them to reach millions of followers worldwide.

In contrast to traditional celebrities, social influencers are often viewed as more relatable and accessible, almost like a close friend who is far away. The primary distinction between celebrities and influencers lies in how they achieve fame.
Celebrities typically gain recognition through traditional channels like television, radio and magazines, whereas influencers attain fame through social media platforms. Influencers often directly engage with their followers in their posts, creating a sense of closeness and making followers view them as equals.
The possiblity to comment on influencers' posts and and interact with them makes these figures seem more relatable and authentic.

Overall, unlike celebrities, influencers present themselves as ordinary, approachable and genuine individuals, which can foster a sense of similarity among people (Ingrassia, 2022).
For this reason, as demonstrated in an article, influencers, as well as bloggers and YouTube personalities, are more powerful and capable of attracting a large audience.

Specifically, participants in the interviews conducted, consider them more credible and relatable compared to traditional celebrities.
Furthermore, this research revealed that participants aspire to the lifestyle of certain influencers.

In particular, they frequently emulate not just their fashion and makeup styles, but also their choices of restaurants and holiday destinations (Djafarova, 2017).

Nowadays, there are various types of influencers who promote a wide range of products, and the more influential they are in the market, the greater their sales potential.
This reality extends beyond products like skincare, makeup or clothing, encompassing typical food and wine products from specific regions.
Therefore, the role of so-called food and wine influencers is equally significant, as they are increasingly gaining importance for consumers[26].
In this context, the figure of the “Wine Influencer” (WI) is emerging, taking on an increasingly important role in the world of social media.
This person is an influencer specialized in the wine industry and stands out for its in-depth knowledge of the field. Specifically, these professionals are capable of influencing the preferences of wine consumers. Similar to influencers in the fashion industry, a Wine Influencer is an expert in the “world of wine” encompassing wines, wineries and wine shops.

Overall, these figures constitute an essential tool for food and wine tourism. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that, sharing imaging depicting the territory of origin of a food or wine, helps provide information about the product and evoke positive emotions, thereby increasing purchase intent, especially concerning local and typical food and wine products of a specific region (Ingrassia, 2022).

In this regard, the food industry has been greatly impacted by the concepts of “Country of Origin” (CO) and “Made in”. Over time, awareness of the

[26] As stated by Ingrassia et al. (2022): “in the food industry, food and wine influencers are becoming more and more important for consumers to have an exchange information” p.3.

countries, regions and areas where a food or wine is produced, has become a key factor influencing consumers' purchasing decisions[27].

However, not all influencers are capable of positively influencing consumers, as it is a complex profession that entails risks and challenges.

In fact, they may fail to gain the complete trust of a particular audience.

For this reason, in the influencer selection process, it is crucial to consider various factors[28].

These factors include the level of awareness of the media used, namely how well the influencer understands and comprehends the platforms through which he or she will communicate the message; the influencer's own notoriety and perception by the audience; and finally, their ability to reach and influence potential customers on a large scale.

Concerning the food and wine tourism sector, it becomes essential to carefully select the most suitable influencer to promote a specific product and/or brand. This helps expand the visibility of local typical dishes and attract an audience interested in the culinary culture of the region.

To achieve this goal, it is essential to pay attention to the persuasive and managerial skills of the influencer, recognized as the most impactful aspects of communication (Ingrassia, 2022).

In addition to the previously mentioned factors, it is crucial to select an influencer with a substantial number of followers. The larger the number of followers, the greater the influencer's ability to reach a broad audience and

[27] Furthermore, "for some countries, for e.g. Italy, CO and "Made in" represent the stereotype that traders, producers, and consumers associate with quality of agro-food products" (Ingrassia, 2022, p.7).

[28] Factors that are provided in the article written by Ingrassia (2020), p.4.

enhance the visibility of the promoted content. Moreover, it is important to highlight that “consumers perceive individuals with a large number of subscribers as more attractive and trustworthy” (Djafarova, 2017).

This could positively impact food and wine tourism by drawing in more visitors interested in exploring local food and wine.

This is particularly true for the food and restaurant sector, where “the role of followers becomes relevant to empower the business value and increase desire to experience, common behavioral intentions, and purchase intention” (Ingrassia, 2022, p.6).

Therefore, it is essential to consider the number of followers that an influencer possesses, as it represents a powerful factor that can enhance business value, elevate customer engagement and boost sales and profitability.

Consequently, it is imperative to invest in a strong social media strategy in order to thrive in the current digital era.

Equally important is to choose an influencer who, in the eyes of their followers, appears credible, honest and thus authentic as much as possible.

They must be capable of engaging and attracting tourists and food lovers from all around the globe who appreciate food and wine.

When selected correctly, these figures can become a powerful marketing tool.

According to the findings outlined in “The Wine Influencer” (2020), this phenomenon extends to wineries as well, which can use influencers to increase brand awareness among consumers and cultivate a loyal customer base.

This approach may also foster the development of brand ambassadors and contribute to sales growth.
For this reason, it is important to state that “wine producers should consider the possibility to “use” Wine Influencers as spokespeople to communicate their brands and their wines” (Ingrassia, 2020, p.21).

Furthermore, according to the analysis conducted, influencers have been shown to exert significant influence on the choices and purchasing behaviors of wine consumers.
As a result, they possess the ability to play a crucial role in companies’ strategic planning.

Since influencers are gradually becoming a trusted source for both younger and older consumers, they represent a valuable asset for companies seeking to reposition their brands, products or services, viewing it as a new business opportunity (Ingrassia, 2020).
In this regard, leveraging strategic influencer partnerships can significantly boost sales, highlighting the concrete financial benefits that can be achieved through such collaboration.
As influencer outreach becomes an increasingly important focus in the future, it is fundamental that the influencer aligns with the brand and how it is presented to the audience (Djafarova, 2017).

In summary, incorporating these figures into marketing campaigns can offer wineries and other types of companies a cost-effective way to increase profits and strengthen their market position.

In this regard, numerous brands and marketers have discovered that leveraging influencer marketing is both effortless and economical[29].

A large number of them have noted a substantial return on investment (ROI) from their influencer initiatives.
This has led to the emergence of a profitable market for influencers over the past decade.

2.2.1 Critical issues and challenges

As stated earlier, gaining consumer trust and appearing credible to followers is not an easy task. There are influencers who promote products solely to earn economic gain from the company.

Consequently, it can happen that even if the influencer does not personally appreciate the product, he or she still sponsors and promotes it.

For this reason, many consumers do not trust the content promoted by influencers, suspecting that it is driven more by profit than by authenticity.

This phenomenon was also highlighted in a study conducted in India on a sample of 358 respondents (Asfaq, 2023).

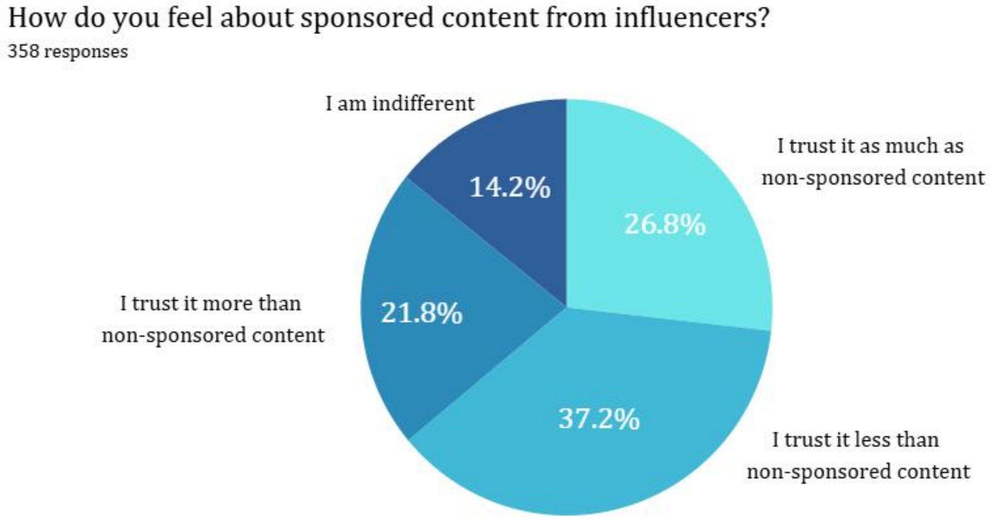
Specifically, a significant portion of them (37.2% - 133) believed that sponsored content is less reliable than non-sponsored content from influencers (figure 19).

This indicates that consumers perceive influencers as biased and not completely honest and transparent, as they are influenced by economic interests.

[29] Tourismtiger, Influencer Marketing for the Tourism Industry in 2023, 2023. https://www.tourismtiger.com/blog/influencer-marketing-for-the-tourism-industry-in-2023/.

Figure 19: Trust in Sponsored vs. Non-Sponsored content from influencers.

Source: Ashfaq R., Influencer Impact: Examining the Effect of Influencers on Consumer Behaviour and Purchase Decisions, 2023, p.62 (graphic elaboration by the author).

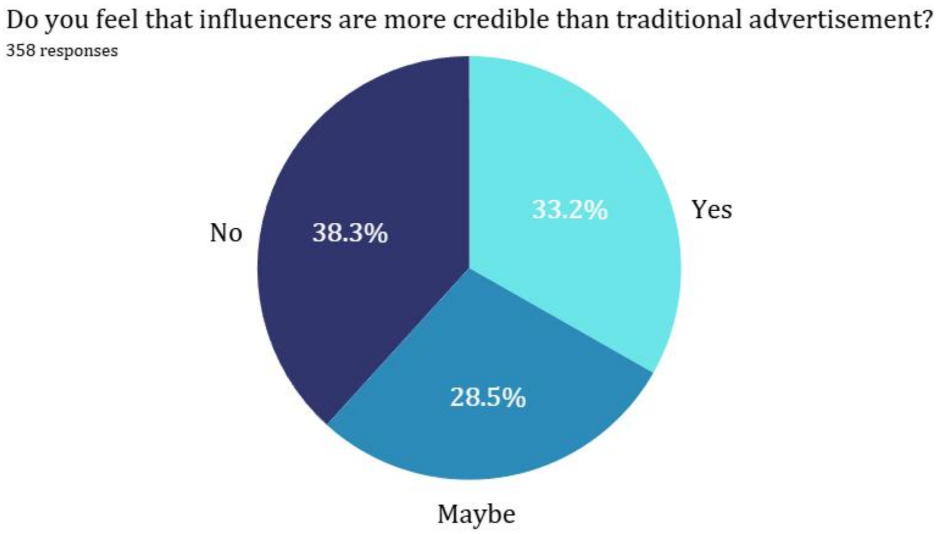


Moreover, the same study states that many people find traditional advertisements more transparent and clear compared to content promoted by influencers (38.3% - 137 respondents).

Therefore, it can be said that some individuals do not find influencers completely reliable, as they are compensated for sponsorhips, partnerships and recommendations (Ashfaq, 2023).

Figure 20: Perception of credibility: Influencers vs Traditional Advertisements.

Source: Ashfaq R., Influencer Impact: Examining the Effect of Influencers on Consumer Behaviour and Purchase Decisions, 2023, p.69 (graphic elaboration by the author).



This issue is particularly significant in the food and wine tourism sector, where experience and product quality are essential. Travelers and especially food and wine tourists, are constantly looking for authentic and reliable advice in order to better plan their vacations.

When influencers promote specific restaurants, wines, or food and wine experiences, it is fundamental that they are driven by genuine passion and have a deep knowledge of what they are endorsing. If this is not the case, there is a risk of compromising both their credibility and that of the promoted product and/or service.

Therefore, in food and wine tourism, it is crucial that influencers are authentic and transparent as much as possibile when sharing their experiences.

In addition to the issue of consumer trust towards influencers, there is another problem: impulsive purchases.

Specifically, social media platforms engage users in a way that prompts them to make immediate decisions without adequate reflection.

Since influencers are skilled at influencing sales and consumers' purchasing decisions, they can be particularly effective in promoting impulsive purchases.

Therefore, it is fundamental for consumers to be aware of the potential risks associated with such recommendations (Ashfaq, 2023).

This can also occur with food and wine experiences, as impulsive choices may not reflect real expectations, compromising the overall travel experience.

The emergence of such issues has sparked worries regarding the transparency and credibility within the influencer industry.

These challenges emphasize the necessity for ethical guidelines and greater transparency to uphold the integrity of influencer marketing and ensure that influencer-brand collaborations remain authentic[30].

Such measures are essential to ensure a trustworthy and genuin environment for both consumers and stakeholders in the sector.

2.3 Instagram as a tool for promoting food and wine tourism

As previously stated, social media represent a powerful tool capable of influencing consumer behavior.

Nowadays, there are many platforms to refer to, including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok and many others. Among these, Instagram (a term derived from the combination of "instant" and "telegram") stands out as the most widely used platform.
It is a free application and easily downloadable on any device "where people can share and visually interact with each other and with brands in a new way, broadcasting their opinions in a more direct, emotional, appealing, and democratic manner" (Ingrassia, 2020, p.3).

In the article authored by Ingrassia (2022), some data are reported, highlighting its exponential growth in terms of the number of users. Specifically, in 2021, it reached an estimated 1.074 billion users worldwide. This number represents an increase of 73.5 million compared to the number of users in 2020, the period when Instagram first exceeded one

[30]As stated in the article written by Ashfaq (2023). Furthermore, additional issues are listed, such as "influencer fraud, fake followers, and undisclosed sponsored content", p.70.

billion users.

Moreover, Instagram is a platform used to conduct various analytical studies as it “accounts for more than one billion monthly active users around the world and it is representative of worldwide population” (Gon, 2021, p.4).

It is important to underline that the introduction of the so-called “stories” on Instagram[31], played a key role in the development of this platform. In particular, this feature allowed users to share photos and videos that last only 24 hours.

Thanks to this innovation, people started posting more content on Instagram, thus contributing to its success.

This application, therefore, is a fundamental tool for promoting food and wine tourism, playing an essential role in the economic development of a territory.

Thanks to its large number of users, Instagram provides an effective channel through which businesses, wineries, restaurants, agritourism etc., can promote specific food and wine experiences by posting them on this platform.

In this regard, it is essential to highlight that, the ability to post and promote one’s own products and services can be further boosted by the phenomenon of “foodstagramming”, which refers to the sharing of food images on social media, particularly on Instagram.

In this case, it is not the companies that directly promote their producst and services, but the users themselves who use this platform.

[31]According to the article written by Ingrassia (2022) p.7, Instagram stories were introduced in August 2016.

This phenomenon, as stated by Hjalager (2022), represents an opportunity for restaurants and tourist destinations, as it allows them to expand their network of potential customers.
When these users, known as "foodstagrammers" share their photos, they are simultaneously promoting these places, which can help increase the visibility and reputation of a restaurant or another food and wine destination.

In recent years, social media marketing has gained increasing importance for companies in the food and wine sector, to the point of replacing traditional forms of sdvertising in some cases. For this reason, having a presence on social media is also crucial for small businesses, which can take advantage of this phenomenon, thereby increasing their visibility and attractiveness in the market (Hjalager, 2022).

The most popular age group using Instagram is between 25 and 34 years old, followed by users aged 18 to 24 (Ingrassia, 2022).
This demographic represents a young age group, typically more active and inclined towards travel. Additionally, market research and data indicate that Millennials are increasingly showing interest in food and wine tourism. Through sharing images and videos, this audience segment can contribute to increasing the attractiveness of a region, thereby potentially generating direct economic revenue for local businesses.
According to a study aimed at analyzing influencer profiles in the wine sector (Ingrassia, 2020), it emerged that the majority of them use Instagram to share wine-related content, engaging thousands of followers.
The platform, which allows the use of hashtags, emojis and images, has facilitated the communication of the distinctive characteristics of wines,

generating interest and influencing consumers' purchase choices.
In particular, the extensive use of hashtags on this app allows for the organization of various topics, making it easier to search. Furthermore, the use of emojis helps make the conversation more engaging and authentic.
For this reason, it can be said that "the combination of "visual" and "social" constitutes the perfect environment to tell a story and make it viral" (Ingrassia, 2020).

Therefore, the fusion of visual and social elements represents an innovative approach to storytelling and sharing stories. On the one hand, visual elements help capture attention and make content more engaging and memorable, while on the other hand, social elements, such as interaction and sharing, are the most important components for content to become viral.

Thanks to the use of this platform, individuals, and in particular influencers, are able to generate immediate interest in specific food and wine experiences, thus contributing to the development and growth of food and wine tourism.

Another fundamental aspect is that most posts on Instagram are written in both English and another language, sometimes only in English (Meluzzi et al., 2021). This is because English represents an international language, which allows business to reach a wider audience. For this reason, companies should promote their products and services by posting photos and videos including the description in English. This approach ensures reaching a larger public, boosting visibility and attracting the attention of both national and international customers.

In conclusion, it is imperative that companies must explore innovative approaches in order to connect with their customers, meaning that "companies have to find new ways to attract and communicate with their potential clients" (Meluzzi, 2021, p.8).

In this regard, social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook play a crucial role in capturing the attention of audiences.

2.4 The strategic role of websites in food and wine tourism

In an increasingly digital world, websites often serve as the primary point of contact between the company and potential customers. The latter can access the website at any time of the day, receive information before embarking on a trip and communicate with the company via email and social media.

Furthermore, websites enable the online sale of typical local products and gastronomic specialties through e-commerce, increasing sales and expanding the customer base. It is no coincidence, then, that today the website is considered "a primary tool for communicating with consumers, the market and the media" (Cerquetti et al., 2023, p.350).
For this reason, an online presence has become indispensable to ensure the success of companies operating in various sectors, including the food and wine industry.

Unfortunately, even today, we still encounter numerous small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that, despite offering excellent local products on the market, do not have a website. In other cases, as highlighted by a study conducted on small wineries in the Marche region[32], even when websites are present, they often fail to meet the expectations of visitors seeking a unique and complete wine tourism experience (Cerquetti, 2023).

To adress this issue, every company should be able to create and manage a website in order to increase the visibility of its products and/or services and gain a competitive advantage.
This is particularly important in the tourism sector because "tourists are not only attracted by the product itself, but also by the way it is presented and promoted" (Meluzzi, 2021, p.4).

For instance, a product like wine can be enhanced and promoted through a website that is able to "generate potential visitor's involvement with the winery and its wine, convey the winer's brand and role as a tourist attraction, sell the entire wine tourism destination, and increase the winery's regional, national and even global presence" (Cerquetti, 2023, p.350).
From this consideration, it can be said that a well-structured website is capable of providing information regarding the history of the winery, the wine production process, and the unique characteristics of the area of origin, which give specific peculiarities to the product.

These elements are crucial for enhancing the company's reputation and establishing lasting trust from customers towards a product or brand. Furthermore, communicating these factors increases brand recognition,

[32] It is noteworthy that in the Marche region, the wine industry holds significant importance with 1049 active companies. As highlighted in the study, in 2021, the top 53 companies in this sector generated €207 million in sales, with an added value per employees amounting to €70.800. This sector is composed of small enterprises, accounting for 55% of the total, followed by 30% medium-sized enterprises and 9% large enterprises.

attracting not only tourists, but also potential business partners.
Moreover, in the creation of a website, the choice of colors is of fundamental importance.
In the realm of modern tourism, colors play a crucial role in website design, brand identity and destination image, enhancing curiosity and increasing the probability of making purchases.
The use of colors and images greatly influences the communication of tourism experiences and has the power to inspire individuals to take trips. Travel photography, in particular, not only captures the beauty of destinations, but also provides an emotional journey, evoking feelings and promoting a distinct lifestyle.

For tourist destinations and food and wine brands, a website with attractive colors and design can influence users' perception of trust towards the sellers, thereby increasing their loyalty and satisfaction (Ingrassia, 2022).

In this regard, the importance of visual content, such as videos and images that should take priority over written texts, comes into play.
This is known as visual marketing, which is that part of modern marketing that focuses on the essential role of images in conveying an effective communication message. Since visual social media platforms have the potential to influence people's purchasing decisions (Meyerson, 2015), it is essential to consider the inclusion of images both on social media platforms and on websites.

Thanks to pictures depicting products, it is possible to capture consumers' attention because "images are able to create an intense and emotional bond with the observer, allowing the message to appear immediately and in an effective way” (Mauracher et al., 2021).

Compared to the past, today’s consumers are more informed and sophisticated, demonstrating a greater ability to recognize the quality of a particular product.

In addition to considering videos and images important, they consider it essential to access all necessary information through a well-designed website.
In this regard, as stated by Cerquetti and Romagnoli (2023), corporate websites have assumed a strategic role.

Specifically, these platforms not only allow for the acquisition of specific information, but are also “crucial tools for establishing and mantaining relationships with customers, providing an opportunity to create and strengthen new partnerships with stakeholders at different levels” (Cerquetti, 2023, p.349).

With the aim of establishing and mantaining strong relationship with customers, several studies have demonstrated that the creation of multilingual websites can represent an important marketing strategy to reach a broader audience.

A tangible example is found in the article compiled by Meluzzi and Balsamo (2021), which highlights how promotional texts in the food and wine tourism sector often include a variety of foreign terms, describing typical products and dishes.

Figure 21: Example of promotional texts in the food and wine tourism sector

Source: Meluzzi C. et al., The Language of Food and Wine Tourism on the Web, Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 2021, p.6.

Example (4)

(a) Among the classics in the excessively ample menu is the risotto, we tasted the pizzaiola version, with the bold acidity of the tomato is balanced by the Alaskan black cod with fermented soy: a dish is sharp and intense. Sweet endings shine thanks to the four-star light and fragrant Chiacchiere Napoletane.

(b) [...] succeeds in spite of the lack of more international proposals. One of these certainty is the spaghetti with sardines, lamb ravioli and the "chiaromontana piglet". In our visit we also had a fabolous palermo-style red mullet and some super thin and tasty tortelli filled with ricotta, tuma cheese, served with a lamb ragout and cime di rapa. And the cannoli, of course!

In this way, the use of multiple languages within a single text (figure 21) allows for engaging a wide range of potential customers, both national and international.

Another study (Gattullo et al., 2015) has highlighted the ability of Italian regions to meet the need of foreign users, through precisely, the creation of websites written in multiple languages. It has emerged that all institutional websites (except for Molise), offer the option to view tourism-related pages in languages other than Italian, clearly demonstrating an orientation towards the global context.

This result is particularly significant in promoting greater openness to the outside world, encouraging visits to our country and enhancing territorial competitiveness.

Moreover, in the previous chapters, it was stated that the development of food and wine tourism promotes greater attention to and protection of the rural landscape, which represents the identity of the territory.

In this context, it is interesting to note that, the analysis conducted in the latest study considered, highlighted that the products that appear most frequently within institutional sites are meats and cured meats.

However, there was a noticeable lack of attention to organic products: only two regions mentioned their presence within the regional territory. This is significant because organic products, although representing a niche markets, could be a key factor in the development of rural tourism.

In fact, nowadays, there is a growing trend towards the consumption of these products, which are considered healthier, of higher quality, more environmentally friendly and produced with more ethical animal husbandry practices.
With increasing awareness of health, environmental concerns, and dietary needs, there has been a notable rise in the popularity of organic and free-from foods.

The market for organic food in our country has experienced a substantial growth, with its value more than doubling in just over a decade, reaching approximately five billion euros as of 2022 (Statista, 2023).
For this reason, Italian regions should integrate these products into their tourism offerings, clearly presenting them on their institutional websites to highlight the rural landscape and attract a segment of tourists who are focused on sustainability, food quality and animal welfare.

In general, the examination of the sources leads to the conclusion that, despite the enormous potential offered by digital tools, many companies are still unable to take full advantage of them.

When referring to food and wine for tourism purposes, leveraging the visitor's emotional component is crucial because they "should be able to have a foretaste of the typical flavours and aromas of a certain area just by

reading an article or a post on their smartphone" (Meluzzi, 2021, p.9).
This is achievable through the development of a well-designed website and strategic utilization of social media platforms.

These platforms, encompassing both social media and websites, play a crucial role in engaging food and wine tourists.

Specifically, they can attract visitors by providing descriptions and videos of specific food and wine experiences, essential information and captivating images about local products and the territory.

2.5 The role of web portals in food and wine tourism

An important theme that emerged from the literature review is the role of web portals in promoting food and wine tourism.

Unlike websites, web portals require online registration to access them.
This is because they represent an innovative model capable of offering a wide range of services.

Thanks to a research paper written by Migliaccio et al. (2024), it is possible to better understand what is meant by a web portal.
Specifically, the case of the portal "lacucinacampana.it" is presented, which is able to enhance places both for their food and wine excellences and for their natural and cultural features (such as unique landscapes and local traditions).

The purpose of this project is to improve the attractiveness of certain territories, arousing the interest of those tourists who wish to discover new

areas, such as rural areas.
The latter, are less developed or disadvantaged areas that in the past had great difficulty selling local products due to the high cost of traditional advertising and/or because their geographical location.

However, the Internet offers an important solution to these complications by promoting rural tourism and local products. In this context, web portals are valuable tools that allows small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) to participate in e-commerce and, therefore, to competitively enter global markets, overcoming issues related to the lack of networking (Begalli et al., 2008).

But what are the services that the portal in question offers to food and wine tourists?

First of all, it allows them to find typical products and qualified suppliers, provides recipes for local dishes and indicates restaurants where they can be tasted, and finally, it lists the most interesting places that posses natural, cultural and artistic attractions.
In addition, the portal offers detailed food and wine itineraries and contains information on upcoming events and available food and wine experiences.

This model offers tourists with all the information they need, focusing on the food and wine offerings of the Campania region, satisfying their needs while simultaneously promoting the socio-economic development of the area.

It is important to highlight that the aforementioned portal is based on a

model defined as “exportable” and therefore easily adaptable to other regions, both Italian and foreign.
For this reason, as stated by Migliaccio (2024), web portals turn out to be fundamental for the development and growth of tourism.

2.6 Enhancing food and wine regions through digital storytelling

Digital storytelling represents a powerful tool capable of enhancing a specific territory and highlighting its food and wine excellences through the creation of photos, videos and blogs.

Therefore, it is an effective mode of communication that allows territories to tell their story, showcase their peculiarities and highlight their traditions through digital media.

This concept is further emphasized in the article written by Bassano et al. (2019), which highlights how this tool can improve the reputation of regions and encourage individuals to share their travel experiences.

In particular, the initiative “Umbria on the Blog” represents a tangible example of how digital storytelling can transform and enhance the identity of a region. Specifically, a team of bloggers visited Umbrian cities, sharing authentic stories of culinary and local traditions through articles and videos. As a result, this campaign not only increased tourist interest in the region, but also improved its reputation as a food and wine destination.

Another successful project that has effectively utilized this strategy is the so-called “Il Mangiastorie”. This initiative focused on describing wine, food and tourism in the Italian provinces of Avellino, Benevento and Caserta.

The aim of this project was to narrate the stories associated with the food and wine culture of these areas, highlighting culinary traditions, local products and tourist attractions, with the intention of promoting the territory and its excellences through an engaging narrative approach (Bassano, 2019).

These two case studies illustrate how digital storytelling facilitates strategic communication and aids in establishing a sustainable competitive advantage.

Telling stories using digital tools has thus become essential for promoting a region and enhancing its attractiveness.

Therefore, building a positive reputation around a specific territory is fundamental.

For this reason, in order to develop an effective reputation, it is crucial to create stories that meet the expectations of the audience, allowing stakeholders to identify with them and distinguish themselves from competitors to gain a competitive advantage.

The best approach for determining the success of a region is to involve customers "in the story-building process, constantly investigating their needs, their level of safistaction, and their complaints"(Bassano, 2019, p.12).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention the case of wineries. In particular, "storytelling allows wineries to shape narratives about wines and wineries to create an authenticity unique to the winery" (Sigala, 2019, p.238).

This means that the storytelling technique supports all those wineries that wish to tell the story of their company, communicate the distinctive characteristics of their wines and describe their production processes. In this way, an image of authenticiy is created, distinguighing themselves in the market with the aim of “attracting consumers to purchase their wine and to visit their tasting rooms” (Sigala, 2019, p.288).

In conclusion, the use of digital storytelling offers not only the opportunity to promote a region’s food and wine excellences, but also an effective way to build a positive reputation and stand out from competitors in the global tourism market.
Stories shared through digital media can attract the interest of not only food and wine tourists but also other visitors, thereby increasing the visibility of the destination and attracting those who wish to live authentic culinary experiences.

2.7 Digital innovation and food and wine Tourism: the role of the metaverse

The crucial role of digital technology in the food and wine tourism sector extends to an additional innovative and powerful tool: the Metaverse.

Specifically, “the Metaverse is a new way of interacting with reality, whether real, augmented, virtual, or mixed.

It is part of the so-called web 3.0, a new generation of the internet that also includes artificial intelligence, blockchain, and new frontiers of digital and phygital innovation.

Users access the Metaverse via 3D viewers and have virtual experiences connected to realistic avatars, other users, objects, concerts, events, travel, and more” (Monaco et al., 2023, p.1).

In other words, it is a virtual simulation of reality that offers users immersive and innovative experiences.

However, it is essential to note that not everyone has access to this technological innovation, leading to disparities among individuals, excluding those with limited access to technology or lacking digital skills.

As stated by Monaco and Sacchi (2023), some organizations and brands, interested in improving the positioning of their products and services, have already begun exploring the potential of the Metaverse through research.

In particular, the food marketing and tourism sectors are the main areas where companies are experimenting with targeted solutions to offer people the opportunity to experience a fully functional and engaging environment, bridging the virtual and real worlds.

According to the CEOs and top managers of some of the largest Italian and international companies, the Metaverse is on the rise. In fact, 40% of them predict that the average revenue growth rate related to the Metaverse will exceed 40% over the next ten years.

Additionally, 30% of companies have already invested or intend to invest in major emerging technologies, including the Metaverse (Annunziata, 2023).

Regarding the food and wine tourism sector, two companies have ventured into this new path.

On the one hand, the "Consorzio del Prosciutto San Daniele" has created a virtual space for the collection of multimedia resources, aiming to showcase the production chain and corporate values to consumers.

On the other hand, pOsti, an innovative startup in the Agrifoodtech sector, has committed to creating a virtual fair to host small local businesses related to Made in Italy food (Annunziata, 2023).

The development of the Metaverse was further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which people, unable to travel, had the opportunity to discover this new tool. For this reason, since numerous restaurants, wineries, hotels and bars were forced to shutter their operations, they had to find innovative solutions for promoting their offerings.

Consequently, the Metaverse, along with other digital tools, offers significant potential for destination promotion (Monaco, 2023).

In the Metaverse, food and wine tourists can explore wineries and farms, interact with renowned chefs and influencers, and discover local culinary traditions without needing to travel physically.

This approach has thus contributed to the reduction of CO2 emissions, promoting a healthier environment.

This is also stated in the previously mentioned article, which claims that "the Metaverse can help reduce carbon emissions by making travel by plane, train, and personal transportation unnecessary for activities that were previously only feasible in person" (Monaco, 2023, p.5).

However, even though the Metaverse represents an additional element capable of enriching the tourism offering, "gastronomy may sound paradoxical" (Monaco, 2023, p.4) since food and wine are products strongly connected with tangible experiences.

Therefore, it is extremely important to know how to leverage this powerful tool without neglecting the physical element and human contact, which are fundamental, especially in food and wine experiences such as tasting fine wines and local foods.

In this context, the Metaverse could be useful for illustrating specific production methods, communicating the company's history and presenting its products.

In this way, tourists have the possibility to see in advance how products are made, learn about the company's history and explore the range of available products.

Overall, it is necessary to use this tool consciously, as "testing vineries, hotels, and restaurants on the Metaverse might be different from the real experiences, generating a sense of dissatisfaction induced by the mediated simulation" (Monaco, 2023, p.5).

Furthermore, the expectations created could alter the authenticity of real destinations.

Consequently, the attractiveness of tourist destinations and real experiences could be compromised if users develop an excessive attachment to the Metaverse.

Although virtual reproduction is becoming increasingly sophisticated, it can be so fascinating as to induce a kind of addiction.

Hence, the integration of the Metaverse into the food and wine tourism industry requires a careful approach. More precisely, it should be seen as a means of enhancing and complementing real-world experiences, rather than replacing them.

In this way, there is an opportunity to create a harmonious equilibrium between virtual exploration and authentic experiences.

Chapter 3 “The impact of digital technologies on Food and Wine Tourism: empirical analysis”

3.1 Objective of the questionnaire

The questionnaire “survey on the impact of digital technologies on food and wine tourism” aims to assess the understanding of Italian food and wine tourism and analyze how digital technologies, including social media, websites and the Metaverse, can contribute to the development of this sector and influence tourist behavior.

Additionally, the questionnaire seeks to evaluate the impact of influencers on the decisions of Italian visitors.

These decisions include, for instance, the choice of food and wine destinations, local food products and wines.

This survey, therefore, aims to provide valuable insights into the extent and manner in which digital technologies and influencer recommendations affect the travel choices of Italian tourist-consumers.

The results obtained will provide valuable information for tourism operators and local producers, thereby helping to shape effective strategies to enhance the Italian food and wine tourism sector.

By optimizing the use of digital technologies, local businesses can improve their marketing strategies, attract more visitors and boost their financial performance and profitability.

Figure 22 represents the header of the online questionnaire, which further clarifies the purpose of the survey.

Figure 22: Questionnaire header. Personal elaboration.

SURVEY ON THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ON FOOD AND WINE TOURISM

Welcome!

My name is Aurora, and I am a student at Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

I am conducting a survey on food and wine tourism and how digital technologies can promote its development and influence consumer-tourist behavior.

Your participation is essential for the success of this research.

Completing the questionnaire will take only 5 minutes of your time.

Thank you very much for your valuable contribution!

In accordance with Legislative Decree No. 196 of June 30, 2003, on the processing of personal data, the data will be collected anonymously and in aggregate form, and will be used solely for research purposes. No data will be used for commercial purposes.

Do you consent to participate in this survey?

◯ Yes, I consent

◯ No, I do not consent

3.1.1 Creation and administration

In the previous chapter, a literature review on food and wine tourism and the importance of digital technologies in this sector was conducted.

For this reason, the questionnaire created is based on this literature to highlight the crucial role of digital tools in a field that, until recently, was primarily characterized by physical experiences capable of establishing real and authentic relationship between people.

However, the review of the sources reveals that technology has completely revolutionized the way people travel.

Consequently, the developed questionnaire can be useful for local businesses such as wineries, agritourisms and companies, helping them understand how to effectively leverage these tools to increase their visibility and boost economic growth.

The questionnaire was created using the Qualtrics platform[33], which allows it to be divided into various thematic blocks, making it more organized and easier to read.

The questionnaire was administrated exclusively online, with the link shared via Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. It was available from July 9, 2024 to July 18, 2024.

The target audience, as described in previous chapters, consisted of Italian tourists.
Additionally, the survey was conducted anonymously to ensure respondent privacy.

3.2 Structure of the questionnaire

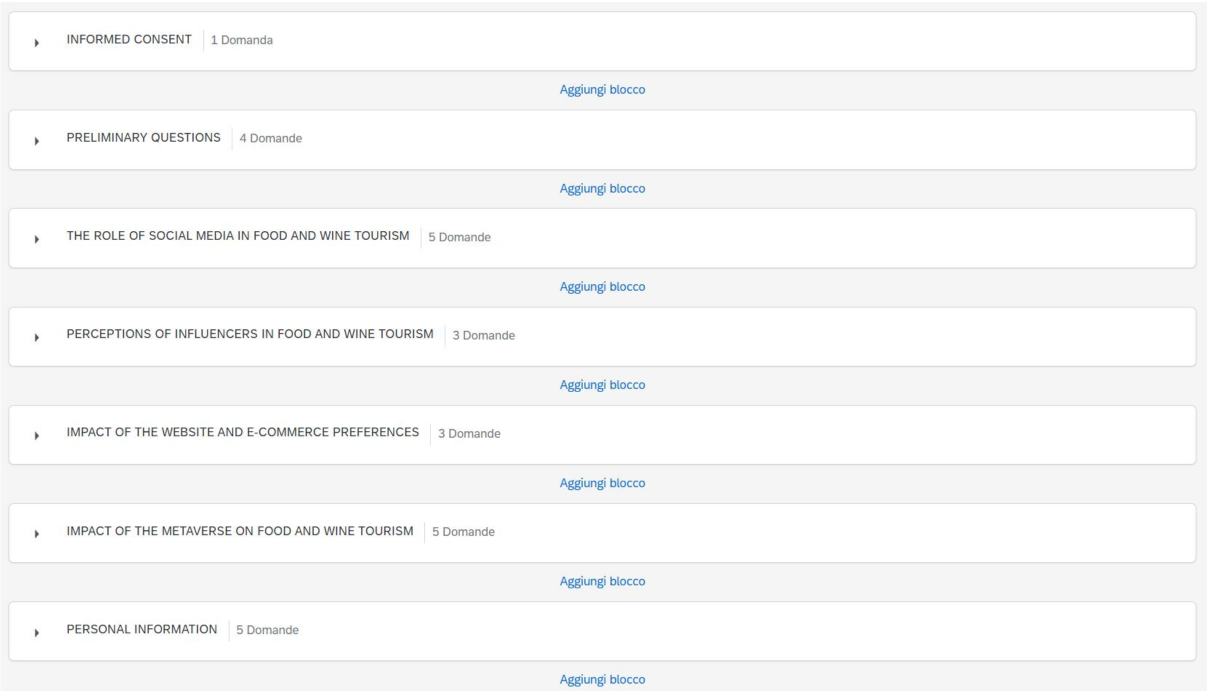
The questionnaire consists of a total of 25 questions and is divided into 6 sections.

However, the first question, which pertains to informed consent, was not included in the analysis of the questionnaire's structure.

[33] Source website: https://www.qualtrics.com/it/

As can be seen in figure 23, the first section pertains to preliminary questions designed to orient the respondent towards the theme of food and wine tourism and to understand their familiarity and interest in the topic. The questions are necessary to determine which food and wine experiences are most appreciated and sought after during trips.

Figure 23: Questionnaire's structure. Personal elaboration.



The second section examines the role of social media in food and wine tourism.

Specifically, this section analyzes how frequently Italian tourist-consumers use social media to seek information about food and wine experiences, such as visits to a local producer and wine tastings.

This section is crucial for identifying which social media platforms are most used for seeking such experiences and for evaluating the impact these platforms can have on the respondents' choices.

The third section investigates the role of influencers in the food and wine

sector. This part is essential to understand how influencers are perceived and how credible they are considered when promoting local food products, wines, and food and wine destinations.
It also examines whether and to what extent tourist-consumers prefer to rely on the advice of influencers compared to that of frineds and family when choosing food and wine experiences.

The fourth section analyzes the importance of local business websites, such as restaurants, agritourisms, wineries and companies, and their impact on the decision to visit a food and wine destination.
The questions aim to understand if a well-designed website can attract potential tourists and make a destination more attractive.
Additionally, the topic of e-commerce is addressed, examining respondents' preferences between online purchases and purchases made directly on-site.

The questions in the penultimate section evaluate the respondents' familiarity with the concept of the Metaverse and their interest in exploring food and wine destinations through virtual experiences.
Specifically, this section explores how useful respondents consider the Metaverse as a tool to enrich physical experiences, and which specific virtual food and wine experiences they would like to have.

The last section of the questionnaire gathers information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age, gender, province of residence, education level and profession. These questions are asked at the end because they are simpler and take less time to complete.
The information collected is useful for describing the sample, identifying the peculiarities of the average respondent, and highlighting the differences

between different generations (Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z).

3.3 Methodology

The method used to analyze the results of the questionnaire includes two types of analysis: univariate analysis and bivariate analysis.

Specifically, univariate analysis considers one variable at a time.

For each variable, tables and graphs are constructed in order to describe and understand its characteristics.
Descriptive statistics are then performed, reporting the percentage values of each result.

Bivariate analysis, on the other hand, is an analysis that combines two variables.
Therefore, this type of analysis examines the relationship between two variables and allows us to understand how they interact with each other.

Usually, the variables considered are demographic in nature.
For instance, during the analysis, one migh discover that the variable "gender: female" is more inclined to travel with the purpose of exploring the food and wine of an Italian region compared to the variable "gender: male" or vice versa.

To analyze the data, graphs and tables will be created to provide visual representations that facilitate overall comprehension.

3.4 Characteristics of the sample

Before proceeding with the aforementioned analyses, it is essential to provide an overview of the demographic characteristics, including age, gender and province of residence, as well as the socio-economic features, such as educational level and occupation of the sample involved in the study.

First of all, the sample consists of a total of 373 Italian respondents, selected through a non-probabilistic sampling process.

Therefore, the participants were recruited by posting the questionnaire in Facebook groups dedicated to food and wine tourism, on the Instagram profiles of individuals with experience or interest in the sector, and through personal contacts among relatives and friends.

Subsequently, the questionnaire was further disseminated through a network of acquaintances.
Thanks to this method, it was possible to reach a wide range of profiles, allowing for a more in-depth analysis.

Regarding the age of the respondents, the majority (approximately 57%) belongs to Generation Z, which includes individuals aged 15 to 27.
About 24% are Millennials, meaning those aged 28 to 43, while 15% belong to Generation X, with ages ranging from 44 to 59.
Finally, the minority, comprising 4.4% consists of Boomers, those aged 60 to 79.
The figure 24 illustrates the distribution of generations, including the exact percentage values for each group.

Regarding gender, the majority of respondents are female, while a smaller percentage are male (figure 25).

Figure 24: Distribution by generations of participants.

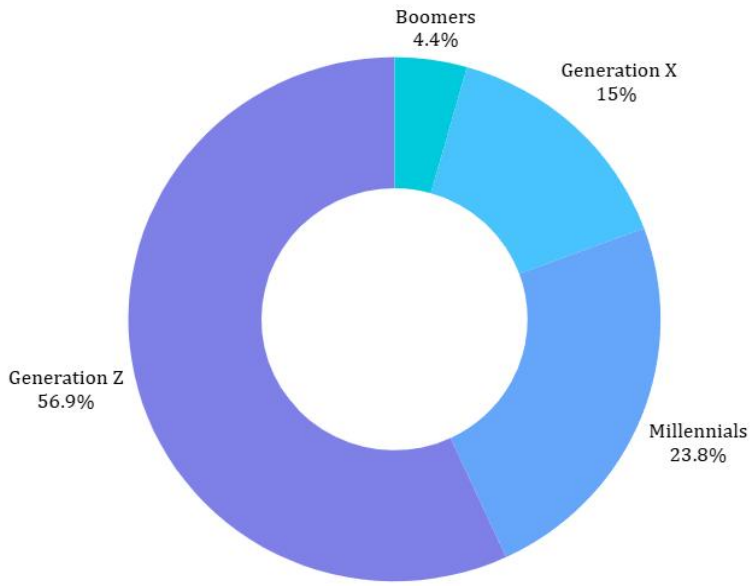
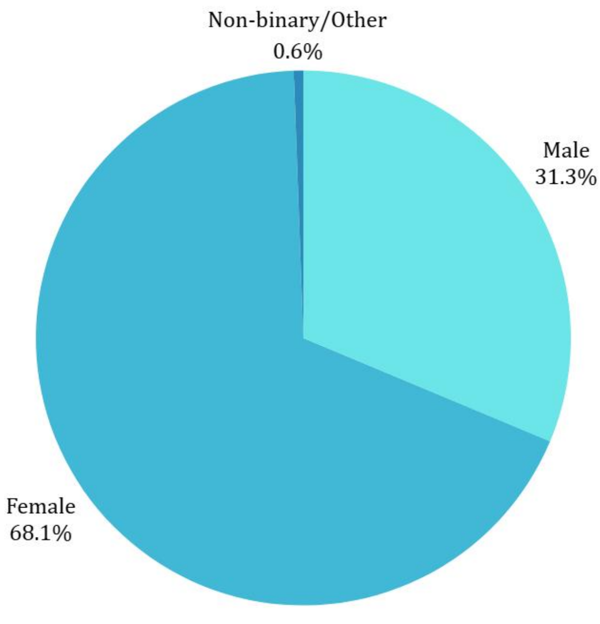


Figure 25: Gender distribution of participants.



Subsequently, respondents were asked to indicate their province of residence. To simplify the analysis, table 2 was created where each region is associated with the number of respondents who participated in the survey. Note that "Other regions" refers to all other regions whose number of respondents per province is smaller.

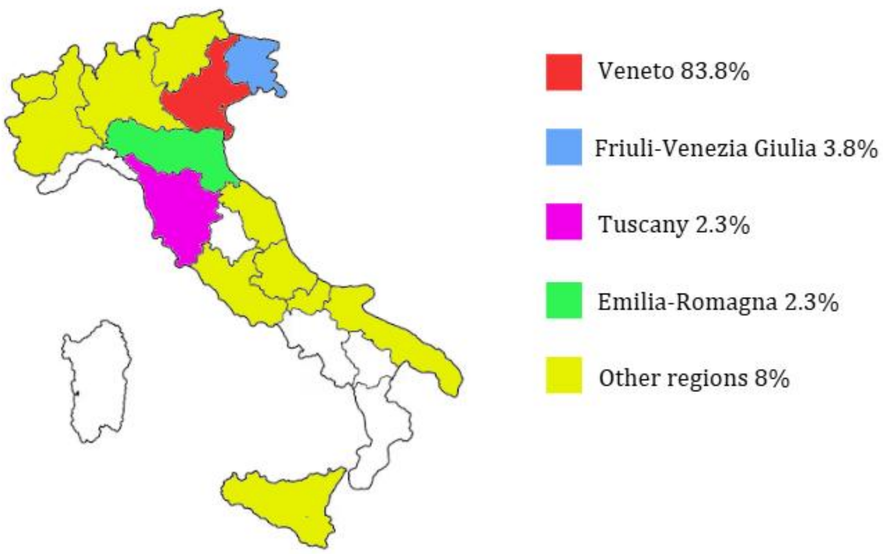
Table 2: Number of respondents per province within each region[34].

Region	Province	N° of respondents
Emilia-Romagna	Bologna	2
	Ferrara	3
	Modena	1
	Ravenna	1
	Rimini	1
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Pordenone	5
	Trieste	2
	Udine	6
Tuscany	Arezzo	1
	Florence	2
	Grosseto	2
	Pistoia	1
	Prato	1
	Siena	1
Veneto	Belluno	2
	Padua	19
	Rovigo	190
	Treviso	28
	Venice	32
	Verona	14
	Vicenza	4
Other Regions		28
Total		**346**

[34] Note that the total number of respondents per province is 346, whereas the actual total number of survey participants is 373. The discrepancy is due to 27 individuals who did not answer the question about their province of residence.

From the table 2 and the figure 26, it is observed that the majority of respondents come from the Veneto region (about 84%), followed by Friuli-Venezia Giulia (about 4%), Tuscany (2.3%) and finally Emilia-Romagna (2.3%).
The regions marked in yellow are those where the number of participants was small and therefore a sum of the total number of respondents was made (i.e., 28 total representing 8%).
In contrast, regions marked in white indicate the absence of data collected from residents in these areas.

Figure 26: Regional distribution of respondents.



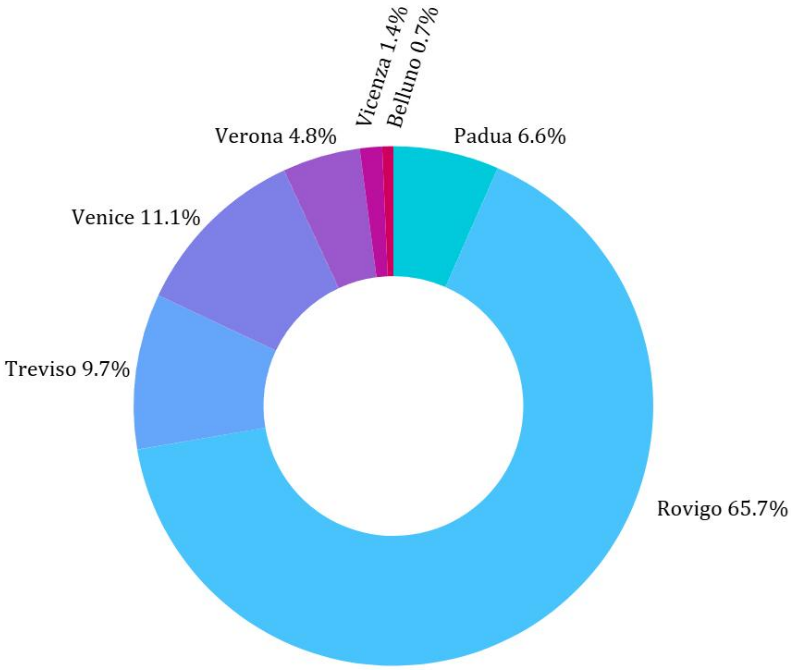
Although most of the respondents come from Veneto, efforts were made to include a significant number of people from other regions as well.

This approach allows for the analysis of potential differences in the behavior of tourist-consumers towards food and wine tourism based on their place of origin.
In detail, since our region is the most significantly represented, the majority

of respondents come from the province of Rovigo (about 66%, as can be seen in figure 27).

This is followed by Venice (11%), Treviso (around 10%), Padua (approximately 7%), Verona (about 5%), and, to a lesser extent, Vicenza and Belluno (1.4% and 0.7% respectively).

Figure 27: Residence provinces distribution in the Veneto region.



Finally, participants were asked to indicate their level of education and their profession.

Regarding the level of education, the majority of respondents had obtained a bachelor's degree (37.3% that is, 131 out of 351 respondents) followed by those who had obtained high school diploma (34.5%) and, lastly, by a minority who had obtained a master's degree (18.2%).

In the figure 28, further data is shown, illustrating those who have only completed elementary or middle school, as well as other levels of education.

Regarding profession, by contrast, 43% of the sample consists of employees (151 out of 350 respondents), 37% are students, and 6% are engaged in other professions such as homemakers, nurses, educators, social health operators, teachers, warehouse workers, etc.

The figure 29 also shows the percentage for the other professions, as well as for the unemployed, retirees, and those seeking employment.

Figure 28: Educational qualifications distribution of respondents.

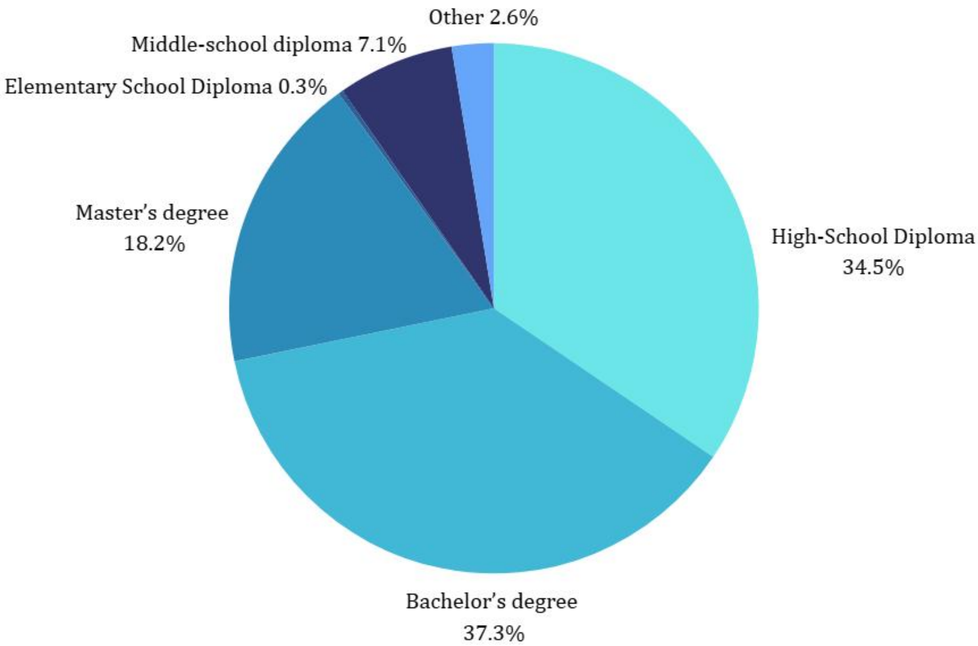
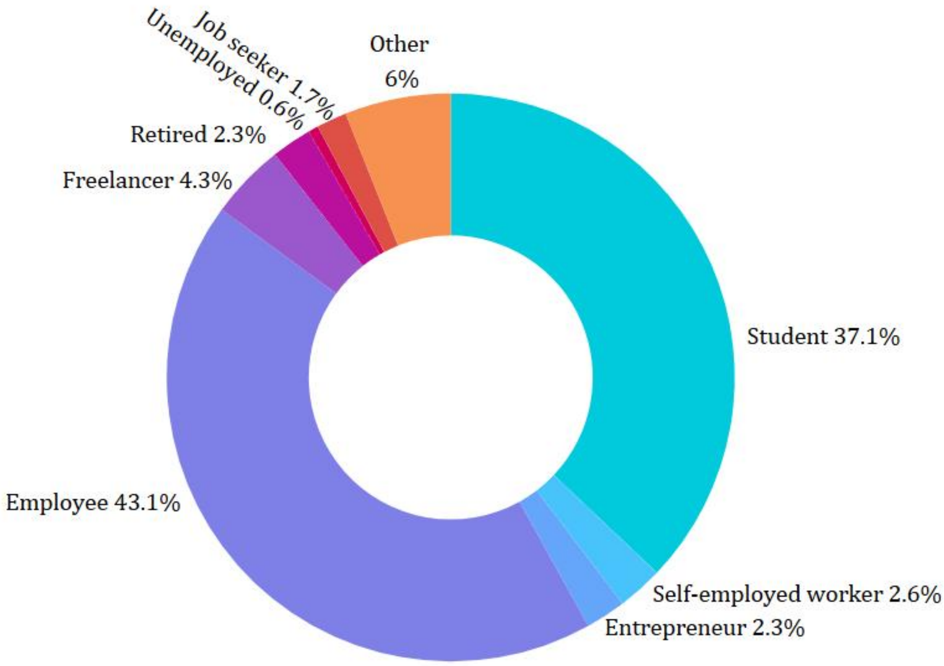


Figure 29: Occupational distribution of respondents.



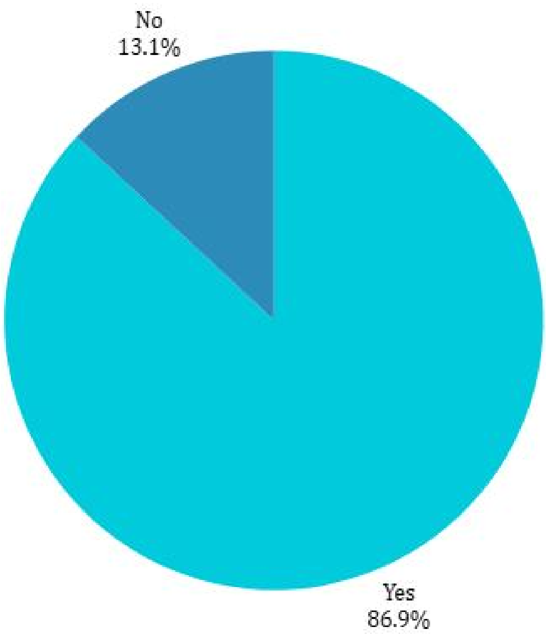
3.5 Digital influence on food and wine tourism: understanding tourist behaviour

Participants were asked preliminary questions to guide them towards the main topic of Italian food and wine tourism.

The first question, “Have you ever heard about food and wine tourism?” assesses the respondents’ familiarity with this concept.

As shown in the figure 30, the majority answered affirmatively, indicating that they have heard of this form of tourism before[35].

Figure 30: Knowledge of food and wine tourism among respondents.



To assist those who had never heard of food and wine tourism, a definition of the term was provided.

Since for food and wine tourists the main motivation for travel lies in

[35] It is essential to highlight that, as in previous instances, in this univariate analysis, only the provided responses were considered, excluding the blanks, or unanswered responses. In the figure 30, the total number of responses is 350.

discovering local flavors, a second question was asked: "Have you ever traveled with the purpose of exploring food and wine of a particular Italian region?".

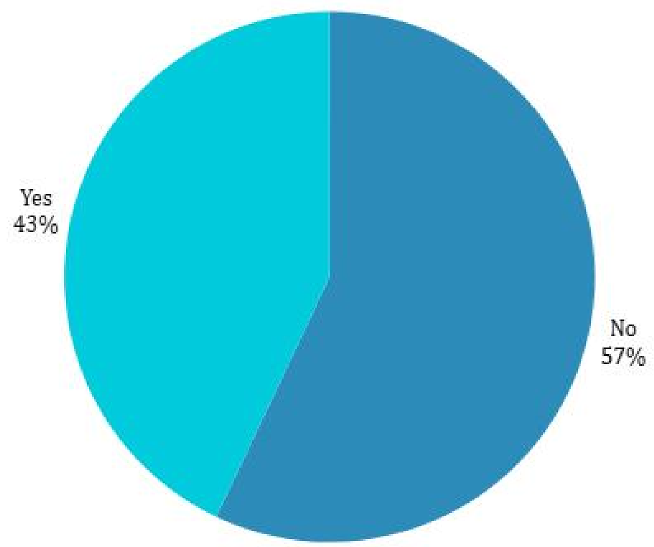
This question was fundamental for two reasons: first, to assess the participants' interest in traveling with the purpose of exploring the food and wine of an Italian region, and second, to determine how many of them appear to be true food and wine tourists.

The results of the analysis show that 57% of the 370 respondents have never traveled with this purpose, while 43% have (figure 31).

This indicates that the majority of respondents do not turn out to be true food and wine tourists.

The purpose of their travel is probably different, so instead of being solely interested in food and wine experiences, they might travel with the intention of discovering the culture and traditions of the place, admiring natural attractions and enjoying the beauty of the landscape, which also represent other factors of attraction.

Figure 31: Proportion of respondents traveling to explore food and wine in Italy vs. those who have not.

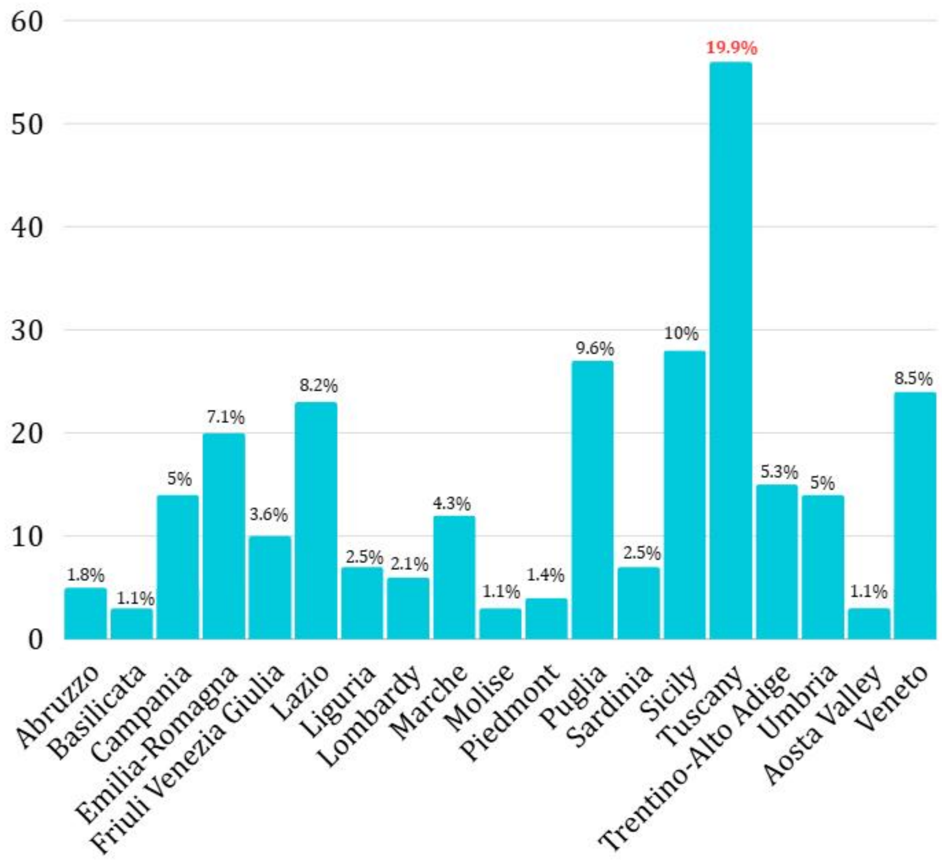


Subsequently, participants who answered “Yes” and those who answered “No” were asked two slightly different questions.
Specifically, those who answered “Yes” were asked to indicate the regions they had visited and the food and wine experiences they enjoyed the most during their travels.

In the first case, the analysis of the results identified the four most visited regions: Tuscany in first place (representing 20% of the responses), Sicily in second place (10% of the responses), Puglia in third place (9.6%) and finally Veneto (8.5%).

In the figure 32, the vertical axis shows the number of times a specific region was mentioned, while the horizontal axis lists the visited regions.

Figure 32: Distribution of the visited regions by participants.

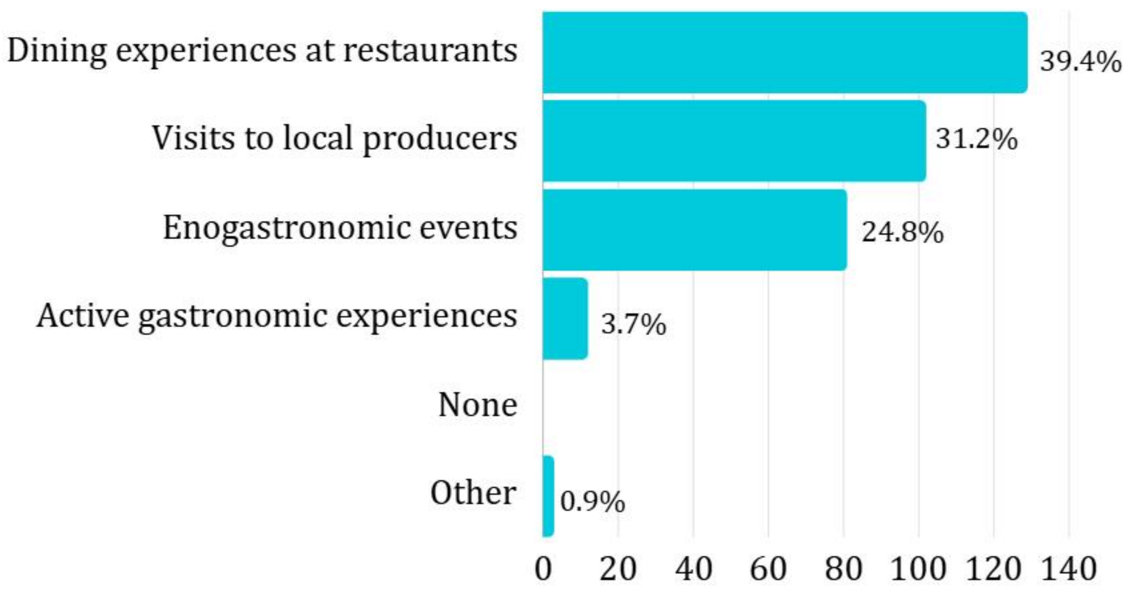


In the second case, regarding the most appreciated food and wine experiences, participants were offered several options to choose from.

The options included:
- Dining experiences at restaurants (e.g., fine dining at Michelin-starred restaurants, casual dining at local trattorias);
- Visits to local producers (e.g., wineries, farms, agritourisms);
- Gastronomic events (e.g., food festivals, wine and typical dishes tasting);
- Active gastronomic experiences (e.g., cooking classes, harvesting grapes);
- None;
- Other.

The figure 33 illustrates the results, clearly highlighting that dining experiences at restaurants were the most appreciated, accounting for approximately 40% of the responses.

Figure 33: distribution of preferences for food and wine experiences.



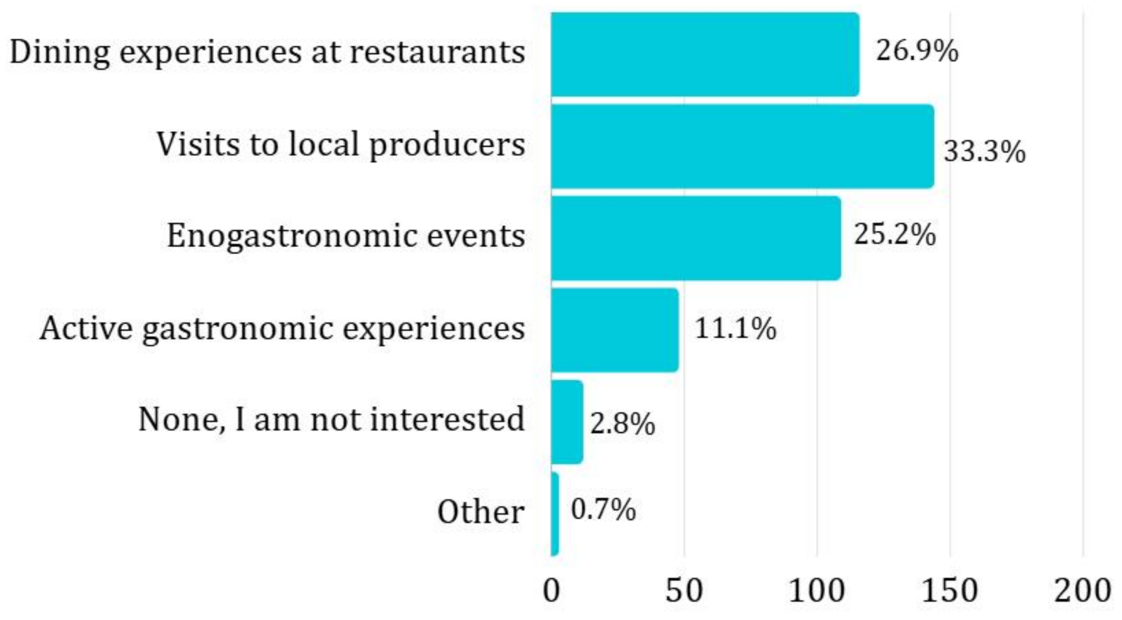
Those who answered “No”, on the other hand, were asked whether they would be interested in undertaking such a trip and which food and wine experiences they would like to try in the future.

The results highlight that people are most interested in visits to local producers, which account for about 33% of the responses.
A minority, on the other hand, indicated that they are not interested in this type of travel (figure 34).

This suggests that, despite our country being widely celebrated for its cuisine, there are still people for whom such experiences are not of particular interest.

Additionally, the “Other” category included a mention of vegan cuisine, an option worth considering given the increasing number of vegetarians and vegans.

Figure 34: distribution of preferences for food and wine experiences.



Based on the analyses conducted so far, it is essential that establishments in the food and wine sector, such as restaurants, local producers, wineries, agritourisms and other businesses, take into account the preferences of these Italian tourists.

Although the sample size is relatively small, this information is crucial for helping these establishments develop more targeted and appealing food and wine offerings that align with the desires and preferences of tourist-consumers.

Following the first section of the survey, the subsequent one, as previously indicated, pertains to the role of social media in food and wine tourism.

The first question, "How often do you use social media platform to discover information about travel destinations, restaurants, food and wine experiences?" was useful to understand how frequently respondents rely on social media, both during the trip planning phase and when they are not planning a trip (figure 35).

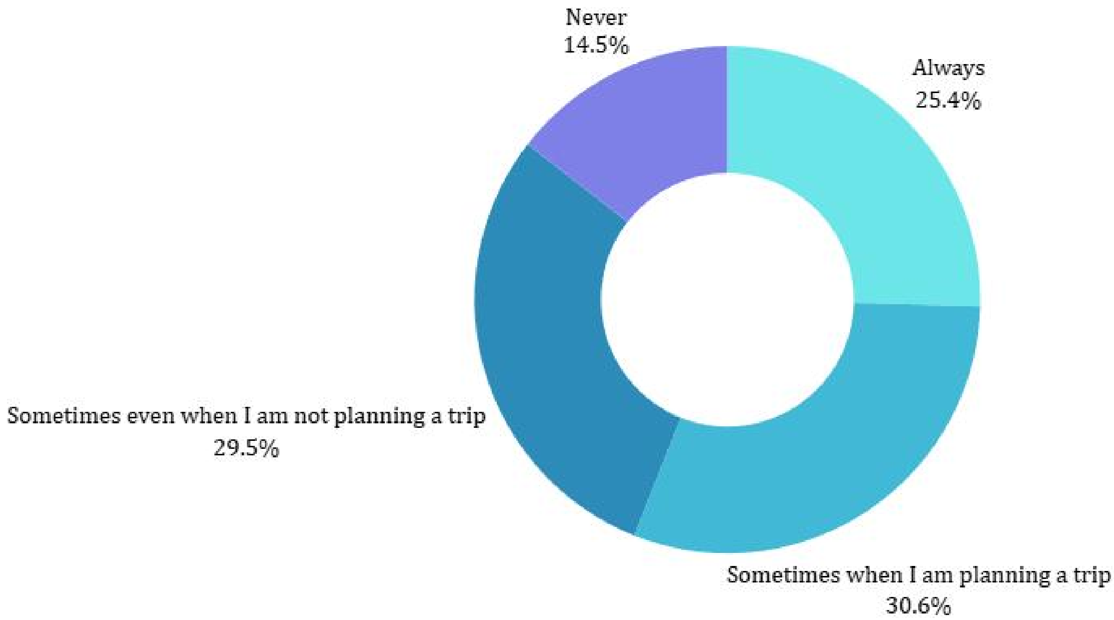
It is interesting to note that only a minority of respondents (14.5%, that is, 53 out of 366 respondents) do not use social media, a figure that could be attributed to older generations, such as Generation X and Boomers.

In contrast, 25.4% of respondents use social media all the time, while there is a slight difference between the two options: "Sometimes when I am not planning a trip" and "Sometimes when I am planning a trip", with 29.5% and 30.6% of the responses, respectively.

Therefore, the analysis clearly shows that social media are extremely

influential in our daily lives.
This is because, whether planning a trip or not, people still use social media and are constantly influenced by what others share online.

Figure 35: frequency of social media usage for food and wine experiences.



The next question asked participants which social media platforms they primarily use to search for food and wine experiences[36].

The results show that Instagram is the most widely used social media platforms (46% of responses as can be seen in figure 36), confirming findings from the literature review that highlight the growing use of this platforms, its ease of use, and its crucial role in promoting food and wine tourism.

The second most used platforms is Facebook (18.3% of responses), which further confirms the insights from the second chapter. Facebook continues

[36] Food and wine experiences such as wine tasting, a visit to a local producer, events and festivals.

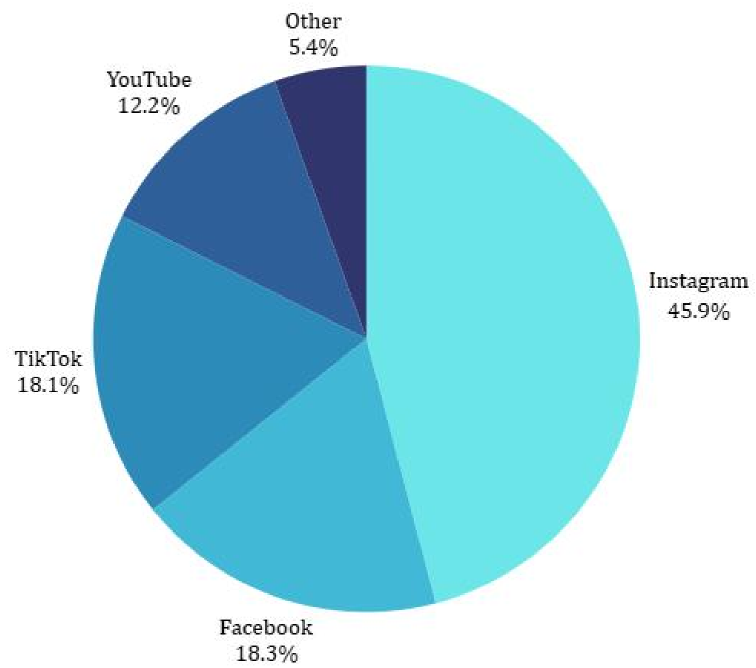
to be a valuable and established resource, particularly useful for tourists due to the presence of groups dedicated to food and wine tourism.

The third platform is TikTok (18.1%), which has gained increasing popularity in recent years. It is a powerful tool capable of attracting a younger audience through engaging short videos.

In the "Other" section, additional tools mentioned by participants include Google, Tripadvisor, Sky and LinkedIn.

Although these are not social media in the strict sense, they are also essential resources for finding food and wine experiences.

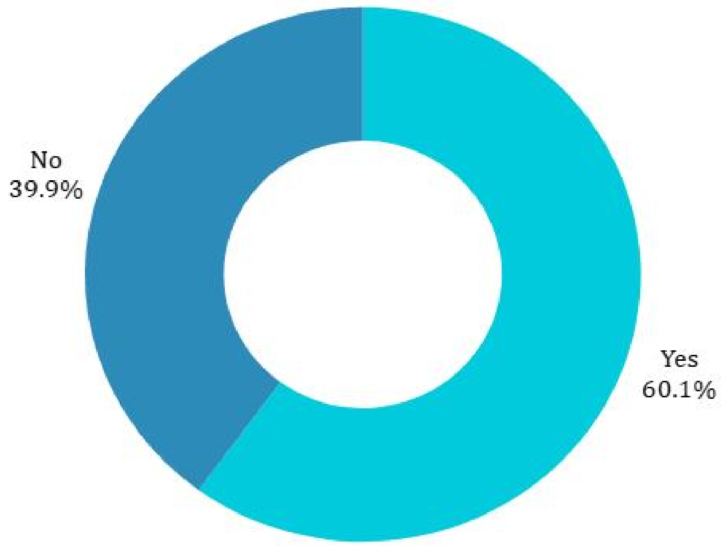
Figure 36: Social Media usage for food and wine experiences.



The third question, "Have you ever chosen a food and wine experience promoted on social media?" aimed to understand the impact of social media on the decisions made by tourist-consumers, through a direct “Yes” or “No” response (figure 37).

The prevalence of affirmative responses (60%, that is, 188 out of 313 respondents) highlights once again the enormous potential of these platforms in influencing tourist behavior.

Figure 37: Percentage of respondents who chose food and wine experiences promoted on social media.



All the results of this analysis highlight the importance for businesses in the food and wine tourism sector to develop or at least mantain a strong presence on social media, including the less popular ones, in order to reach and engage a broad and diverse audience.

Being active on these channels is fundamental because it not only facilitates the promotion of their offerings but also allows them to identify emerging trends and consumer preferences.

The last two questions regarding the role of social media in shaping travel decisions were as follows:

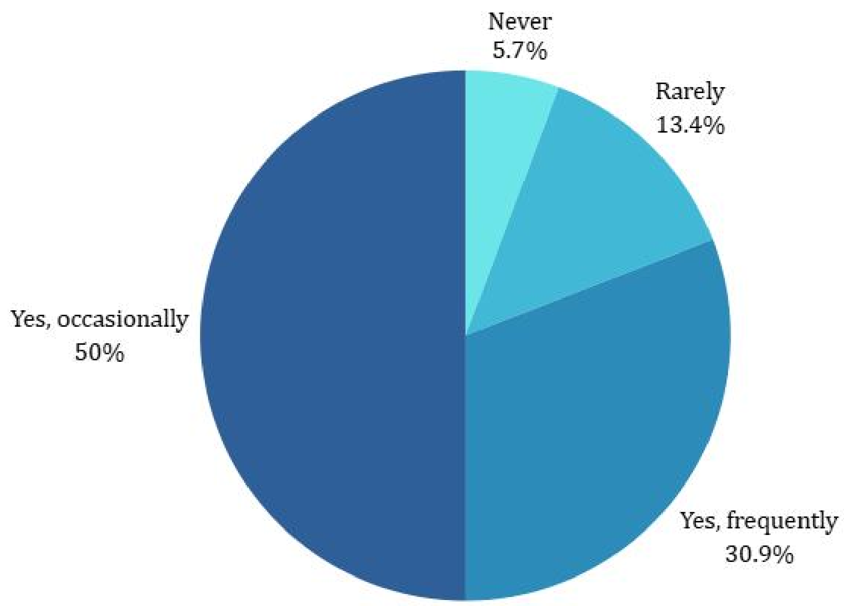
- Have you ever been influenced by online reviews or comments on social media when selecting your destination?

- What types of social media content do you find most useful when looking for food and wine experiences?

Regarding the first question, which was essential for understanding the influence of online reviews and comments shared on social media, it emerged that the majority of participants are influenced, while a minority are not[37].

The data highlighted in the figure 38 clearly indicate that both reviews and comments have a significant impact on the travel decisions of most participants. Being aware of what other travelers share online regarding food and wine experiences is fundamental for the entire food and wine sector, as it helps to take into account consumer preferences.

Figure 38: Impact of social media reviews and comments on travel decisions.



[37] In this case, the total number of responses amounts to 314, with 59 responses missing.

Regarding the second question, which aimed to understand which types of social media content are considered most useful, it emerged that videos showcasing culinary and wine experiences, as well as written reviews by other travelers, are particularly appreciated by the respondents, with approximately 25% and 24% of preferences, respectively (figure 39).

Images of dishes and drinks and posts shared by travelers are also considered useful.

These findings once again confirm what was observed in the literature review in the previous chapter, which indicated that tourists tend to trust written reviews and posts from real travelers more than content from other sources.

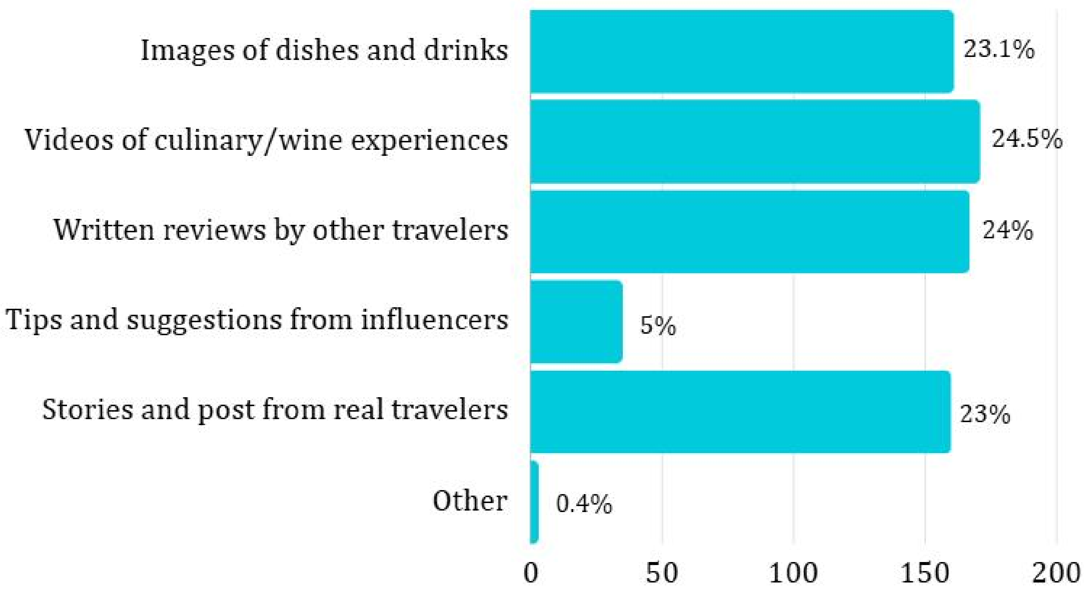
Specifically, it can be noted that tips and suggestions from influencers are perceived as less useful, highlighting a trust issue concerning these figures, which has been identified as one of the critical aspects regarding influencers.

Therefore, although influencers play a significant role in promoting food and wine experiences, the majority of respondents consider their advice and suggestions to be of little value and prefer to rely on other factors.

In the "Other" category, some participants indicated that they trust posts and reviews shared and written by people they know, further narrowing their reference sources.

Another participant said she finds company websites useful when looking for food and wine experiences. In this respect, specific sections of the questionnarie with targeted questions have been created to further examine both the perception of influencers and the importance of company websites.

Figure 39: Most useful types of social media content for food and wine experiences.



In the following section of the questionnaire three questions were asked regarding the perception of influencers in food and wine tourism, specifically how they are viewed by participants when seeking food and wine experiences and destinations.

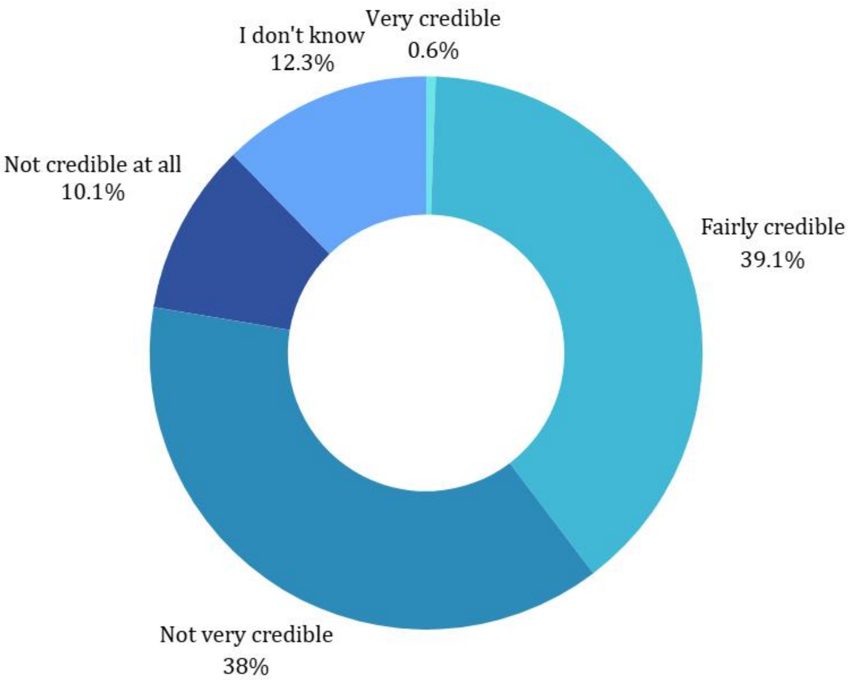
The first question aimed to assess how credible people find influencer recommendations regarding local products and food and wine destinations.
The analysis reveals that only 2 out of 358 respondents consider influencer recommendations to be very credible, while 36 view them as not credible at all[38].
Additionally, there is a slight difference between those who find them fairly credible (140) and those who find them not very credible (136).
This confirms that the majority of respondents have a rather skeptical perception of the credibility of influencer recommendations in the context of food and wine tourism. Indeed, although a significant portion of

[38]Although the overall sample consisted of 373 participants, 358 responses were recorded for this question, with 15 missing.

participants considers influencer recommendations to be fairly credibile, the number of those who judge them as not very or not at all credible is higher (+32).

This distribution (figure 40) thus indicates a certain lack of trust in the opinions of these figures, probably due to doubts about the authenticity and veracity of their recommendations.

Figure 40: Perceived credibility of influencer recommendations.



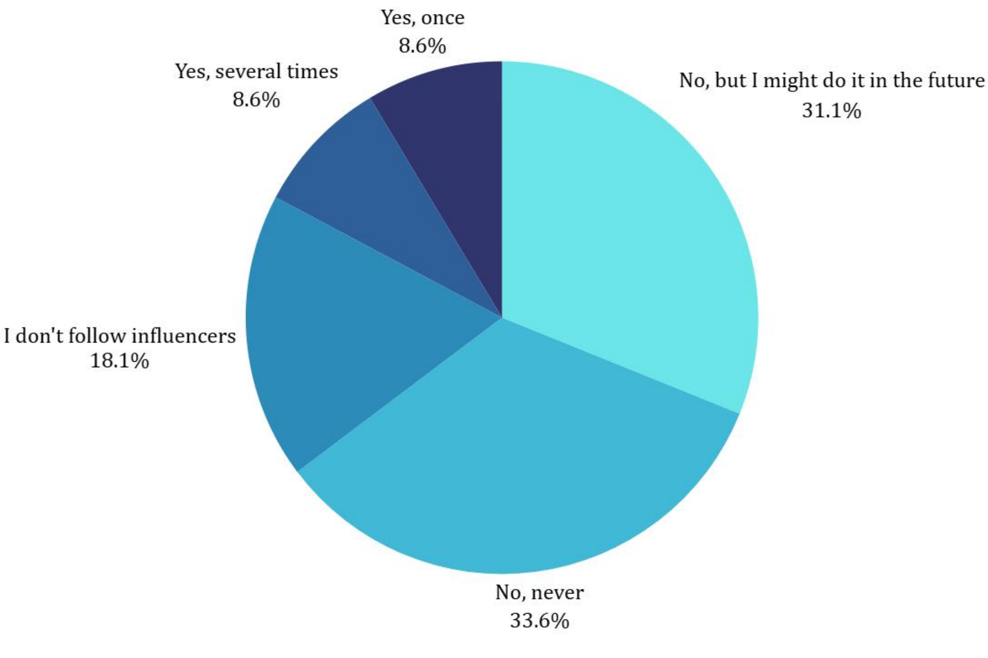
The second question asked participants if they had ever chosen a food and wine experience promoted by an influencer (figure 41). This question was useful for evaluating the influence of these figures on the decisions of Italian tourists.

The analysis of the results revealed that the majority of respondents, about 34%, have never opted for an experience recommended by an influencer.
However, nearly 31% stated that they might consider such a choice in the

future, while 18% indicated that do not follow influencers. Additionally, 8.6% of participants chose a food and wine experience promoted by an influencer only once, and the same percentage stated that they had made this choice more than once. These results suggest that, although a significant number of people have never chosen an experience promoted by an influencer (121 out of 360 participants[39]), there is a portion (112 people) that is inclined to consider it in the future, indicating a trend to take into account.

Furthermore, 65 out of 360 respondents have stated that they do not follow influencers, reflecting once again a certain skepticism towards the authenticity of these figures.

Figure 41: Respondents' choice of food and wine experiences promoted by influencers.



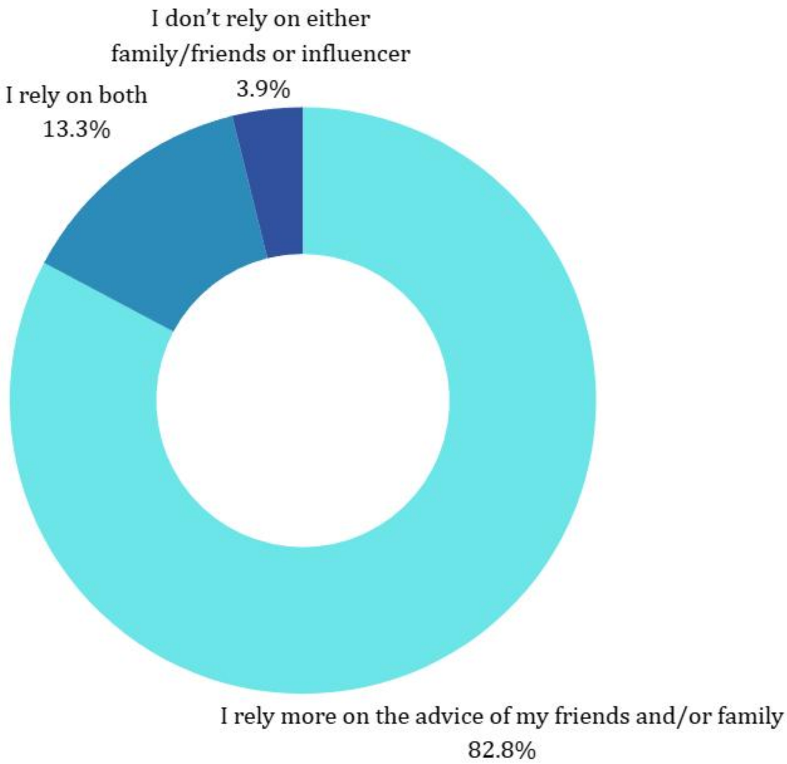
The third question asked whether, when choosing a food and wine experience, participants relied more on the recommendations of friends and family or those of influencers (figure 42).

[39] Also in this case, there are 13 respondents who provided blank answers, resulting in a total of 360 valid responses.

Once again, the results highlight a clear preference: 298 out of 360 people stated that they rely more on the advice of family and friends.
Additionally, it is interesting to note that none of the respondents rely exclusively on influencers, a figure not represented in the graph because it is zero. At most, participants consider both types of recommendations, with 48 out of 360 people stating that they follow both sources of advice.

A small portion (only 14 out of 360) does not rely on either friends and family or influencers, probably because they prefer to make autonomous choices based on personal research. This behavior suggests that a minority of respondents seek to avoid external influences, preferring to gather information from various sources.

Figure 42: Preferred sources of advice for food and wine experiences.



The penultimate part of the questionnaire contained three specific questions regarding the impact of websites on tourists' decisions to visit a particular place.

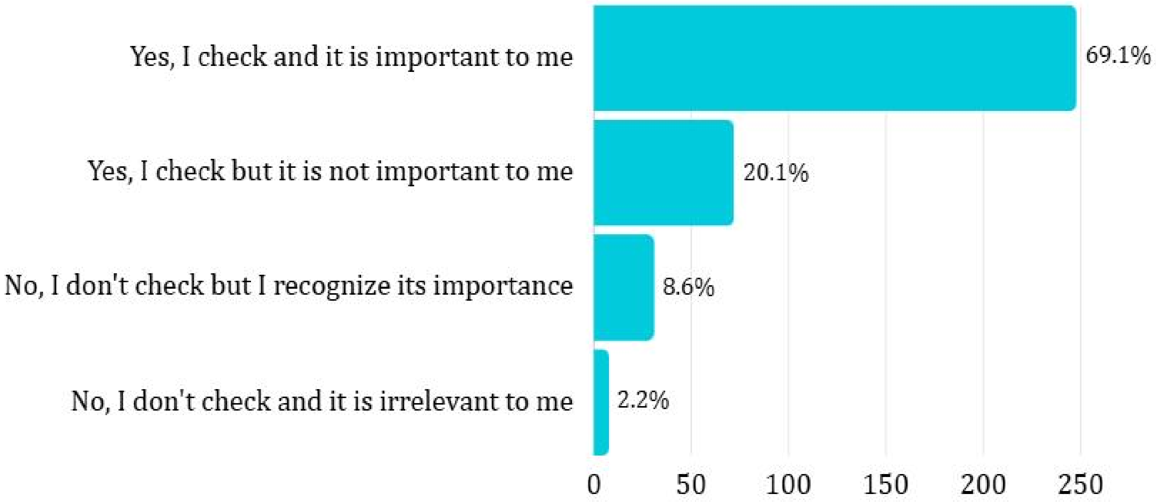
The first question concerned the importance of websites of wineries, farm stays and restaurants, and how much a well-structured website influences the decision to visit them (figure 43).
The majority of respondents stated that they check the website before visiting a destination and believe that a well-designed website is crucial (about 69%, that is, 248 out of 359 participants).
This data suggests that corporate websites play an essential role as they represent one of the first points of contact between the business and the potential customer.
Therefore, a visitor might be more inclined to visit the place if they find the website appealing and well-organized.

Even today, many small and medium-sized enterprises do not have a website, which could serve as an incentive to start developing one.

Although 20% of participants state that they visit the website without considering it particularly important, it is crucial to pay attention to its design.
Attractive colors, regularly updated information and high-quality content, can positively influence tourists' decisions to visit or not a specific destination.

However, 2% of participants state that they do not visit the website and consider it irrelevant, likely because they prioritize other sources of information, such as recommendations from friends and family or social media.

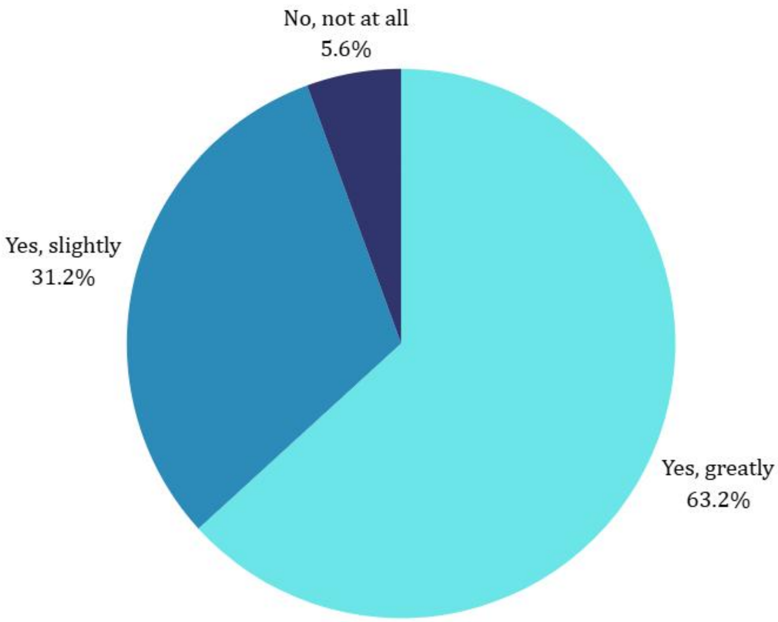
Figure 43: Impact of website on destination choice



The second question focused on the impact of photos on website that showcase typical dishes and local products. In this regard, the majority of respondents stated that they are strongly influenced by such images when deciding to visit a destination (figure 44).

It is therefore essential for businesses in the food and wine sector to pay greater attention to the quality of the images they publish, as these have enormous importance and influence tourists' behavior, both to mild extent (112 out of 359 respondents) and to a significant extent (227 respondents).

Figure 44: Impact of photos of local dishes and products on visit decisions



The third question investigated how important it is for tourists to have the option to purchase products from a local business through e-commerce.

The majority of respondents (45% as can be seen in figure 45) considered this option relevant, showing openness to both online and in-person purchases, thus adopting a neutral position (162 individuals out of 359 respondents).

However, the results reveal a clear preference for buying local products directly on-site. This suggests that Italian tourists prefer to physically visit the places of sale rather than buying online.
This preference presents numerous opportunities and advantages for local businesses. Specifically, tourists have the chance to explore the area and interact directly with the producers.

Additionally, purchasing on-site supports the local economy, as direct spending significantly contributes to the development of the territory. Considering this preference, local businesses could enhance the physical experience through targeted strategies such as special events or guided tours. Only 7% of respondents prefer to make purchases online.
Therefore, while the majority supports both modes of purchase, it is crucial not to overlook the online option.

This mode is essential because the digital presence is really pervasive and an integral part of our lives.
Moreover, online sales are necessary to reach those who cannot travel and offer the opportunity to expand beyond local boundaries, thus helping to grow the customer base.

Figure 45: Preferences for purchasing local products: online vs. in-person.

The final section of the questionnaire addresses the impact of the metaverse on food and wine tourism.

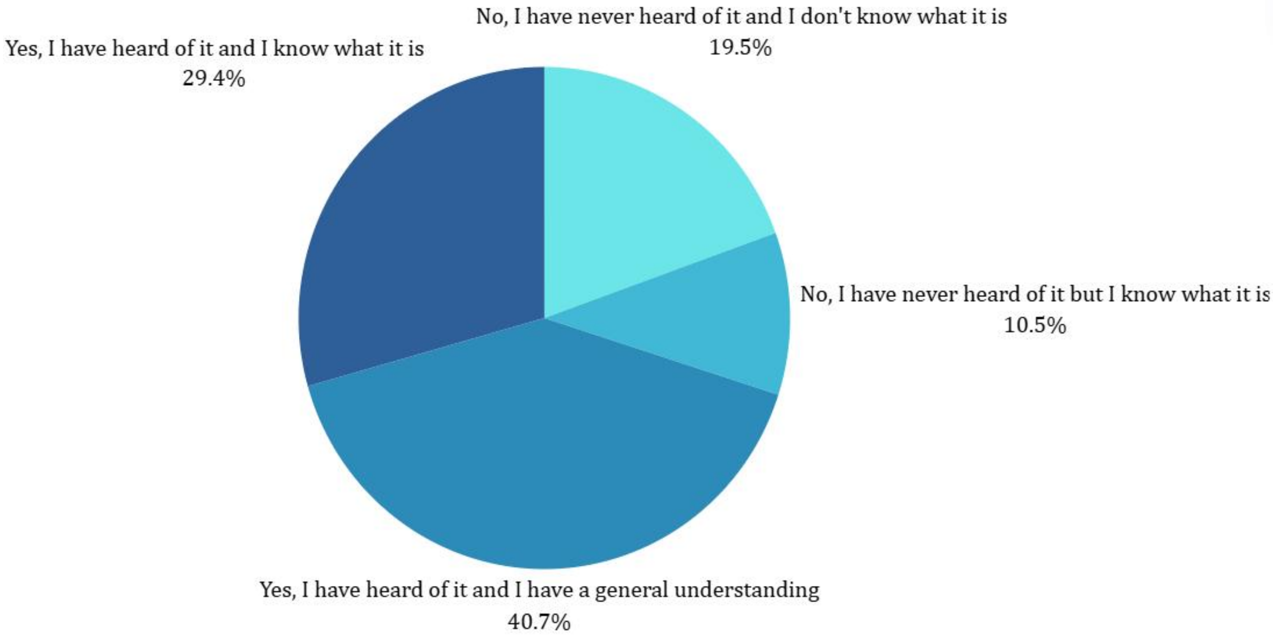
This section is crucial for understanding how this digital innovation might influence the sector and whether it generates interest among respondents.

The first section asked whether participants had ever heard of the metaverse. This helped assess the sample's familiarity with the concept and determine whether or not the metaverse is a known phenomenon.

The results (figure 46) indicate that approximately 41% of participants have heard of the metaverse and have a general understanding of the concept, while nearly 30% are aware of this digital innovation. In contrast, almost 11% of participants have never heard of the metaverse and do not know what it is[40]. These data suggest that, although the metaverse is gaining more and more popularity, there is still a percentage of people who are not fully familiar with the term. Therefore, it can be argued that, despite the progress made, the metaverse is still not fully known and understood and may require further communication efforts to reach a wider audience.

[40] These data are based on a total of 354 respondents.

Figure 46: Knowledge of the Metaverse among participants.



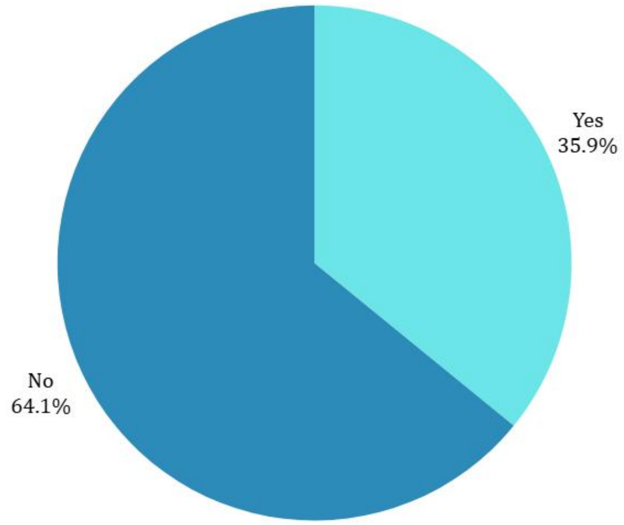
The second question asked whether respondents would be interested in exploring food and wine destinations through the metaverse, for instance, by taking virtual tours of wineries.

The majority (64%, that is, 184 out of 287 respondents) stated that they are not interested, indicating a greater preference for traveling and exploring destinations through real, rather than virtual, experiences.
However, 36% provided an affirmative response, showing interest in this type of experience (figure 47).

This suggests that, although most respondents prefer concrete travel experiences, a significant percentage is open to the idea of exploring food and wine destinations through the metaverse.

This implies that the metaverse could represent an opportunity for innovation in the sector, attracting those curious to experiment with new travel modalities, even if virtual.

Figure 47: Interest in exploring food and wine destinations through the metaverse.



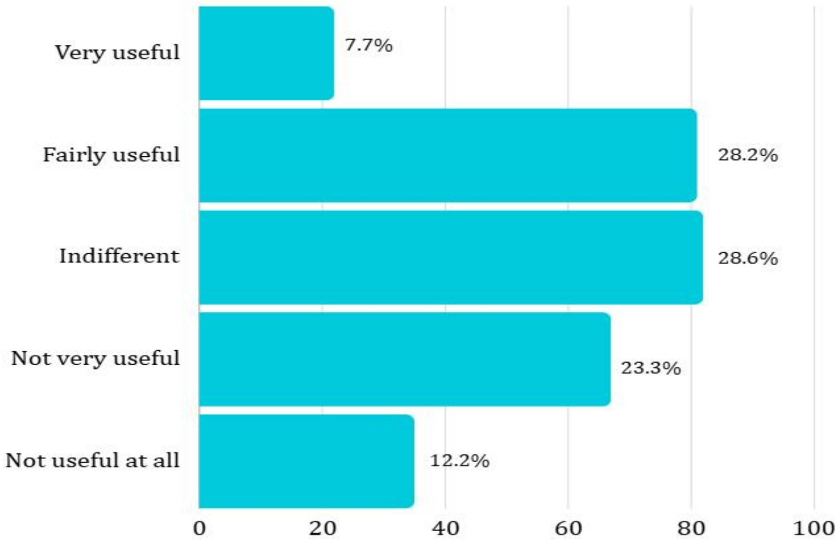
The next question asked participants if they found it useful to have a virtual food and wine experience (e.g., virtual tours of wineries, virtual visits to farms) before physically visiting a location.
This question aimed to assess whether the possibility of a virtual preview of food and wine experience could influence the decision to visit a destination in person.

The results (figure 48) show that a significant portion of participants finds this option quite useful (approximately 28%), indicating that a preliminary virtual visit could help tourists make more informed decisions about their travels.

A virtual preview could therefore prove to be an effective tool for promoting such destinations and attracting potential tourists by offering them a taste of the experience before visiting the location in person.

From figure 48, it can be noted that, although the majority of participants do not find a virtual preview particularly useful, with some even being indifferent[41], there is still a significant portion of people who are interested[42], suggesting that a virtual visit is a valid idea for some tourists.

Figure 48: Usefulness of virtual food and wine experiences before a physical visit.



The penultimate question, "Should the metaverse be used as a supplement to the physical experiences or as a standalone option?", aimed to assess whether the metaverse could effectively be a useful tool to supplement the physical experiences or whether it should be considered an independent alternative (figure 49).

The majority of respondents (126 out of 287) expressed a preference for using the metaverse as a supplement to physical food and wine experiences.

From this, it can be deduced that a significant portion of the sample, considers the metaverse as a powerful tool to enrich and enhance the real experience, confirming what was stated in the previous chapter in which only using the metaverse in this way, and not as a replacement, allows for a balance between what is virtual and what is real.

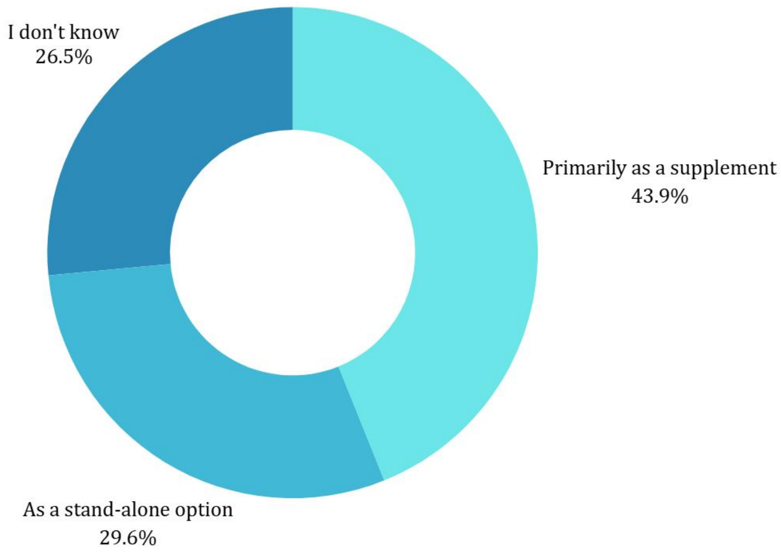
[41] Specifically, 35 out of 287 people find it not useful at all, 67 find it not very useful and 82 are indifferent.
[42] Specifically, 22 out of 287 people are very interested, and 81 are fairly interested.

On the other hand, 85 participants would prefer the metaverse as a stand-alone option (so an independent option).
This could indicate a growing interest in this new mode of travel, or simply curiosity or necessity due to the inability to travel physically.

Lastly, 76 participants stated that they did not know how to answer, reflecting some uncertainty or lack of familiarity with this term.

This segment may need further clarification to better understand the opportunities the metaverse can offer in the food and wine tourism sector.

Figure 49: Preferences for using the metaverse in food and wine tourism.



The survey concluded with an open-ended question asking participants what they would like to experience in the metaverse, if they had the opportunity to explore it.

Most respondents provided the following answers: to participate in virtual cooking classes, to take virtual tours of food companies and wineries (especially those that are difficult to reach), and to interact with chefs, industry experts and producers, with the opportunity to ask them questions.

Furthermore, some very interesting responses emerged, including using this tool to dicover foreign cuisines to evaluate whether it is worth visiting them in person (highlighting the importance of a virtual preview).

There was also significant interest in learning about the food and wine production process, from harvest to processing, and finally to the finished product.

These responses highlight the opportunities that the metaverse can offer the food and wine industry.
Companies in this sector could then consider implementing this digital innovation in order to expand their offerings and attract a wider audience.

Experiences such as those described above, could not only increase the interest of the tourist-consumer, but also educate and engage them in a whole new way.

In conclusion, the future of food and wine could really depend on these new tools.
Even if they are not appreciated by everyone, they have the ability to revolutionize the sector and thus foster significant growth.

3.6 Impact of socio-economic variables on food and wine tourism

Traveling with the aim of exploring the food and wine of a particular territory has become an increasingly popular trend.

Understanding what drives people to embark on these trips is essential for companies involved in the food and wine tourism sector.
Among several factors, the type of profession may play a significant role in influencing an individual's decision to undertake a food and wine trip.

For this reason, the present bivariate analysis aims to evaluate whether or not the profession variable influences this decision.

Therefore, the two variables to take into account are: the type of profession with respect to wheteher or not one has undertaken a food and wine trip.
The chi-square test will be used as it is fundamental to determine if there is significant dependence between these two qualitative variables.

First of all, to calculate the chi-square value, it is necessary to start with the construction of the table containing the observed frequencies, which will be denoted by n_{ij}.

Table 3: Observed frequencies: n_{ij}

	STUDENT	SELF-EMPLOYED WORKER	ENTREPRENEUR	EMPLOYEE	FREELANCER	RETIRED	**TOTAL**
YES	36	5	5	78	8	6	138
NO	94	4	3	72	7	2	182
TOTAL	130	9	8	150	15	**8**	**320**

From a first glance, it can be deduced that there are more workers who undertake food and wine trips compared to students (96 in total compared to 36).

The former, in fact, are more likely to take these types of trips, probably because they have a higher disposable income and greater flexibility in planning trips during weekends or holidays.
Students, on the other hand, are less inclined to undertake food and wine trips, probably due to insufficient financial resources or simply other interests.
Some of the respondents also included retirees, and as can be seen from table 3, most of them are inclined to take food and wine trips.

At this point, the chi-square statistic, which is useful for determing the dependence or independence between these two variables, is calculated.

To determine if this value is significant, it will be used a significance level of 5% (α) and the degrees of freedom (df).

Therefore, the hypotheses to formulate are as follows:
H_0 (null hypothesis): $\chi 2 = 0$ -> no significant connection between two variables
H_1 (alternative hypothesis): $\chi 2 > 0$ -> significant connection between the two variables

Given:
$\alpha = 5\% = 0.05$ (significance level)
$\chi 2 = 23{,}183$ (calculated chi-square value)

df = 5 (degrees of freedom)

To determine significance, it is necessary to find the critical value of chi-square from the chi-square distribution table.

The critical value is: $\chi 2_{0.05;5} = 11{,}070$
Consequently, it can be concluded that: $\chi 2 = 23{,}183 > \chi 2_{0.05;4} = 11{,}070$.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected as there is evidence of a significant dependency between the type of profession and the choice to undertake a food and wine trip.

In particular, some individuals with certain types of profession may have a higher income or more free time, making them more inclined to take food and wine trips compared to others. This is the case of both active workers and retirees.
In contrast, students, who typically have less time flexibility and more limited economic resources, are less likely to undertake such trips.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the two variables are correlated and that the type of profession has a significant impact on the propensity to undertake food and wine trips.

Following the explanation of this correlation using the chi-squared test, it is useful to investigate additional sets of correlated variables.

For instance, the relationship between the level of education and the tendency to choose food and wine experiences promoted on social media can be examined.

By applying similar statistical methods, it can be assessed whether there is evidence of dependence between these two variables.

Table 4: Observed Frequencies n_{ij}

	MIDDLE SCHOOL DIPLOMA	HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	MASTER'S DEGREE	**TOTAL**
YES	11	65	74	28	178
NO	11	30	39	32	112
TOTAL	22	95	113	60	**290**

In this case, the chi-square value is: $\chi 2$ = 9,472.

Given:

α = 5%

$\chi 2$ = 9,472

df = 3

The critical value at α = 0.05 with 3 degrees of freedom is: $\chi 2_{0.05;3}$ = 7,815.

Since $\chi 2$ = 9,472 exceeds the critical value of $\chi 2_{0.05;3}$ = 7,815, there is a significant relationship between the level of education and the tendency to choose food and wine experiences promoted on social media.

The reasons that can explain this dependency are manifold.

First, it can be argued that people with a high level of education tend to be more familiar with using computer and platforms such as social media, thus having access to more information.

In fact, the majority of the analyzed sample is composed of individuals from Generation Z, the so-called digital natives, who are the first generation to grow up with access to the Internet and portable digital technology.

Since this generation includes people up to 27 years old, it can be assumed that many of them have obtained a bachelor's and/or master's degree. Thus, these are very young individuals who, by actively using social media platfomrs, will tend to choose certain food and wine experiences because they are viewed and promoted online.

Secondly, a higher level of education could be linked to a greater interest and curiosity about culture, including the enogastronomy of a region, making these people more inclined to participate in food and wine experiences. This is especially true for those with degrees related to food and wine tourism, who, thanks to the use of social media, a crucial tool for promoting any food and wine-related activity, might be even more interested in participating in such experiences.

In conclusion, tourists-consumers with a certain level of education may be more inclined to choose a food and wine experience promoted on social media compared to others.

In particular, those who only have a middle school diploma are generally adults belonging to the Boomer generation, who grew up in a pre-digital era.

During their formative years, in fact, the use of the Internet was not yet widespread and, as a result, they are still not very inclined to use social media for tourism purposes, but rather for relational purposes.

After this second bivariate analysis, it is interesting to examine another aspect: to verify if gender (male or female) influences the choice of social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok).
In other words, the intention is to analyze whether the social media platforms used vary according to the gender of the tourist-consumers.

Proceeding similarly, the observed frequency are presented in table 4.

Table 5: Observed Frequencies n_{ij}

	INSTAGRAM	FACEBOOK	YOUTUBE	TIKTOK	**TOTAL**
MALE	70	28	30	25	153
FEMALE	171	68	31	68	338
TOTAL	241	96	61	93	**491**

In this context, the chi-square statistic is: $\chi 2$ = 10,708.
Taking into account these parameters:

α = 5%

$\chi 2$ = 10,708

df = 3

The critical chi-square value at α = 0.05 with 3 degrees of freedom is:

$\chi 2_{0.05;3}$ = 7,815.

Similarly, as $\chi 2$ = 10,708 is greater than the critical value of $\chi 2_{0.05;3}$ = 7,815, this indicates an additional significant relationship between gender and the type of social media used for searching food and wine experiences.

This means that there are statistically significant differences between males and females in their choice of social media platforms.

More precisely, men and women use different platforms, and thus, the preference for social media varies according to the gender.

This information, in addition to being confirmed by the chi-square calculation, has been demonstrated by other studies.

For instance, it has been shown that women prefer all those platforms characterized by exchange and sharing, such as Facebook (preferred by 62% of females); whereas men prefer other platforms like YouTube, which allow them to watch videos and comment primarily to express opinions and not to confront each other[43].

Conclusions

Our country is known for its food, and each region is unique because it has its own wines and typical dishes.

Over time, as Garibaldi stated, there has been an increase in tourists traveling with the aim of exploring the food and wine of an Italian region.

However, as previosly mentioned, the responses to the questionnaire show that a significant portion of people (more than half) do not travel for this purpose, indicating that interest in discovering the food and wine of a specific area is still limited.

Nevertheless, it is essential to remember that the analysis was conducted on a small sample (373 individuals), so this lack of interest is not representantive of all Italian tourists.

As for the most appreciated and visited region by food and wine tourists,

[43] Fanti, *Social Network: le differenze di utilizzo tra uomini e donne*, 2024. https://www.deabyday.tv/hobby-e-tempo-libero/whatsnew/guide/6950/Social-network--le-differenze-di-utilizzo-tra-uomini-e-donne.html.
Cilento, *Uomini e donne sui social network: differenze*, 2024. https://www.crescita-personale.it/articoli/relazioni/gender/uomini-e-donne-sui-social-network-differenze.html.

Tuscany is the one that received the highest number of preferences.
As highlighted by Garibaldi in her reports, this region boasts the largest number of wineries, the highest concentration of agritourism businesses and the greatest number of traditional food products.
Tuscany, therefore, turns out to be the most desired region as a food and wine destination, not only by Italian tourists but also by foreign ones.
This is highlighted in the "Report on Italian Food and Wine Tourism" where Garibaldi argues that Tuscany has managed to become a reference point both nationally and internationally. The region is thus recognized as a "true brand linked to food and wine tourism", emerging as the preferred destination thanks to the richness of its culinary and wine traditions.

Regarding food and wine experiences, it is worth noting that, according to data reported by Garibaldi, between 2021 and 2023, there was a high level of participation in two activities: dining experiences at restaurants (94% of all Italian travelers) and visits to local producers (74% of all Italian travelers).
These data are also confirmed by the survey conducted, as it emerges that the majority of food and wine tourists chose and enjoyed precisely these two experiences, with 39.4% and 31.2% of preferences, respectively.
The significant levels of participation in these two experiences indicate that Italian tourists are not only looking for good food, but also want to get in touch with the local culinary culture by engaging directly with local producers.

Moreover, the analysis performed allows to identify the most commonly used social media platforms for seeking food and wine experiences.
The results of the suvey confirm what emerged from the literature review,

namely that Instagram is the predominant platform.

In addition, when promoting certain food and wine experiences, businesses such as restaurants, agritourisms and wineries, should focus more on creating videos, as this content is found to be the favorite among tourists.

In this regard, a platform like Instagram, which supports the creation of short and impactful videos, can help generate interest among tourists for specific places, thereby increasing the attractiveness of a destination.

This approach further confirms what was analyzed in the second chapter, where it was pointed out that video creation represents a key element of digital storytelling. Indeed, videos offer a powerful means of highlighting the region's food and wine excellences, allowing for a visual narrative capable of engaging a wider audience.

In addition to having a strong presence on social media, it is also essential to have also a well-structured website, as emphasized in the previous chapters.

As stated by Cerquetti and Romagnoli (2023), corporate websites have assumed a strategic role and, in fact, the majority of tourists surveyed check the website before visiting a place, considering it an important aspect.

Websites, being a primary tool for communicating with the consumers, the market and the media (Cerquetti M. et al., 2023), offer the possibility of selling products through e-commerce.

This option is considered fundamental by 45% of tourists surveyed, who consider the possibility of online shopping as important as in-person purchases.

In this regard, it is essential to pay attention to the quality of photos of typical dishes, food and wine products published on social media and corporate websites. In fact, the results of the questionnaire show that high or low quality images can strongly influence tourists' choice of food and wine destination.

Regarding the role of influencers in food and wine tourism, it can be said that they do not have a strong influence on the decisions of Italian tourists. This suggests that, at least for the sample considered, influencers' advice do not constitute a decisive factor in the choice of food and wine experiences.

Despite the fact that influencers present themseleves as ordinary, approachable and genuine individuals, who can foster a sense of similarity among people (Ingrassia, 2022), there is a certain distrust towards their recommendations, which are often perceived as inauthentic or driven by commercial interests.
Most people, when choosing an experience, prefer to follow the advice of friends and family members over those of influencers, thus indicating a greater trust in known people whose advice appears more genuine.

However, it is important to note that there is potential for the future.
As mentioned earlier, 31% of participants are willing to consider influencers' recommendations in the future, suggesting that, despite current skepticism, there is a segment of the public willing to follow the advice of these people.

In addition, the literature review indicates that influencers are capable of attracting a large audience and influencing consumer behavior and preferences through content sharing. Nevertheless, for this to be realized, it is crucial that influencers are able to earn the public's trust and establish a connection that is as transparent and authentic as possible.

Finally, with regard to the metaverse, one of the most significant digital innovations, there is considerable interest in using this technology to discover production methods and virtually explore wineries and food companies, in order to get a preview before physically visiting the place.

However, from both the literature review and the questionnaire results, it is clear that the metaverse should be used as a supplement to physical experiences rather than a substitute for them.
This is because physical experiences remain irreplaceable, especially in the case of food and wine, which is strongly connected to real and tangible experiences.

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Appendix

SURVEY ON THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ON FOOD AND WINE TOURISM

Welcome!

My name is Aurora, and I am a student at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. I am conducting a survey on food and wine tourism and how digital technologies can promote its development and influence tourist consumer behavior.

Your participation is essential for the success of this research. Completing the questionnaire will take only 5 minutes of your time.

Thank you very much for your valuable contribution!

In accordance with Legislative Decree No. 196 of June 30, 2003, on the processing of personal data, the data will be collected anonymously and in aggregate form, and will be used solely for research purposes. No data will be used for commercial purposes.

Do you consent to participate in this survey?

- Yes, I consent
- No, I do not consent

PREMISE QUESTIONS

1) Have you ever heard about food and wine tourism?

- Yes
- No

2) Food and wine tourism is a journey dedicated to discovering local flavors, in which the local food and wine represents the main motivation for travel.

Have you ever traveled with the purpose of exploring the food and wine of a particular Italian region? If so, which region(s)?

- Yes
- No

3) If yes, what region(s) and what specific experiences did you enjoy during your travels? (multiple choices can be selected)

- Dining experiences at restaurants (e.g., fine dining at Michelin-starred restaurants, casual dining at local trattorias or bistros)
- Visits to local producers (e.g., wineries, farms, agritourisms)
- Gastronomic events (e.g., food festivals, wine and typical dishes tasting)
- Active gastronomic experiences (e.g., cooking classes, harvesting grapes)
- None
- Other (please, specify)

4) If no, what food and wine experiences would you like to try in the future? (multiple choices can be selected)

- Dining experiences at restaurants (e.g., fine dining at Michelin-starred restaurants, casual dining at local trattorias or bistors)
- Visits to local producers (e.g., wineries, farms, agritourisms)
- Enogastronomic events (e.g., food festivals, wine tasting)

- Active gastronomic experiences (e.g., cooking classes, harvesting grapes)
- None, I am not interested
- Other (please, specify)

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING TRAVEL DECISIONS

5) How often do you use social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) to discover information about food and wine experiences? (e.g., wine tastings, visits to local producers, events, festivals)

- Always
- Sometimes when I am planning a trip
- Sometimes even when I am not planning a trip
- Never

6) Which social media platforms do you primarily use for researching food and wine experiences?

- Instagram
- Facebook
- YouTube
- TikTok
- Other (please specify)

7) Have you ever chosen a food and wine experience (e.g., wine tastings, visits to local producers, events, festivals) promoted on social media?

- Yes
- No

8) Have you ever been influenced by online reviews and/or comments on social media when selecting your food and wine experience?

- Yes, frequently
- Yes, occasionally
- Rarely
- No, never

9) What types of social media content do you find most useful when looking for food and wine experiences? (multiple choices can be selected)

- Images of dishes and drinks
- Videos of culinary/wine experiences
- Written reviews by other travelers
- Tips and suggestions from influencers
- Stories and posts from real travelers
- Other (please, specify)

PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENCERS IN FOOD AND WINE TOURISM

10) How credible do you consider influencers' recommendations on local food products, wines and food and wine destinations?

- Very credible
- Fairly credible
- Not very credible
- Not credible at all
- I don't know

11) Have you ever chosen a food and wine experience (e.g., e.g., wine tastings, visits to local producers, events, festivals) promoted by an influencer?

- Yes, once
- Yes, several times
- No, but I might do it in the future
- No, never
- I don’t follow influencer

12) When choosing a food and wine experience, do you rely more on the advice of your friends and/or family or on that of influencers?

- I rely more on the advice of my friends and/or family
- I rely more on the advice of influencers
- I rely on both
- I don’t rely on either friends/family or influencers

WEBSITE INFLUENCE AND E-COMMERCE PREFERENCES

13) Before visiting restaurants, agritourisms, wineries, companies etc., do you check their website? Do you believe having a well-designed website is important?

- Yes, I check and it is important to me
- Yes, I check but it is not important to me
- No, I don’t check but I recognize its importance
- No, I don’t check and it is irrelevent to me

14) Do you think the inclusion of photos showcasing typical dishes, local food and wine products on a website influences your decision to visit a destination?

- Yes, greatly
- Yes, slightly
- No, not at all

15) How important is it for you that a local activity offers the option to purchase local products through e-commerce?

- Very important, I prefer to shop online for convenience
- Important, I'm open to both online and in person shopping
- Somewhat important, I prefer to buy local products in person
- Not important, I prefer to buy local products in person

IMPACT OF THE METAVERSE ON FOOD AND WINE TOURISM

16) Have you ever heard of the Metaverse, and do you know what it is?

- Yes, I have heard of it and know what it is
- Yes, I have heard of it and have a general understanding
- No, I have never heard of it but I know what it is
- No, I have never heard of it and don't know what it is

17) Would you be interested in exploring food and wine destinations through the Metaverse, such as virtual tours of wineries and farms?

- Yes
- No

18) Do you find it useful to have a virtual experience before physically visiting a place?

- Very useful
- Somewhat useful
- Neutral
- Not very useful
- Not useful at all

19) Should the metaverse be used as a supplement to physical experiences or as a standalone option?

- Primarily as a supplement
- As a standalone option

20) If you could explore the metaverse, what food and wine experiences would you lie to discover and experience? (for example: discovering food production methods, taking virtual cooking lessons, going on virtual winery tours, interacting with top chefs, etc.)

- Your opinion:

PERSONAL INFORMATION

21) Age:

- ...

22) Gender:

- Male
- Female

- Non-binary/Other

23) Province of residence:

- ...

24) Educational qualification:

- Elementary School Certificate
- Middle School Certificate
- High School Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Other (please, specify)

25) Occupation:

- Student
- Self-Employed
- Entrepreneur
- Employee
- Freelance Professional
- Retired
- Unemployed
- Job Seeker
- Other (please, specify)