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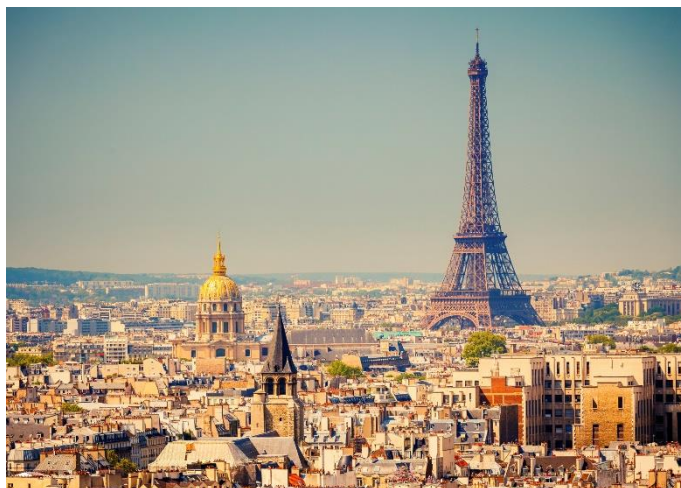
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Origin labels on the World Wide Web. A study of the presence in the Internet of Italian PDO labelled food products

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INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web has recently seen a dramatic increase of users and content suppliers. It represents a useful tool for making information available on traditional and regional products and related enterprises to a wide area of potential customers. Besides, it also gives quality food producers an interesting opportunity to make their products directly available on a global market, theoretically enlarging the market to the whole world. The level of usage of such an opportunity in the Italian market still seems low, mainly due to the relative lag existing in the diffusion of personal computers among consumers.

The aim of the study is to outline and characterise the presence of the so called "hypertext documents" on the World Wide Web, dealing both with the protected denominations of origin and with the Italian food products (excluding wine) to which those denominations are related.

The survey on the present availability of information should allow us to begin an analysis of the potential use of this innovative communication medium, both in term of chances of spreading out the message, and in term of the setting up of a direct connection with the global market.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this first stage, the presence of web documents and sites related with PDO labelled food products available in Italy has been investigated.

The study is being carried out with the help of one of the search engines already available on the Internet, which execute queries allowing the use of keywords (in this case *denominazione di origine protetta*) to extract the requested documents. In this way, the selected documents can be examined and classified using the proper descriptors.

The information available is classified according to several specific characteristics, e.g. :

- Type of publisher of the web pages ;
- Type of the information supplied and topic of the pages ;
- Type of food products ;
- Connection with the related territory ;
- Presence of a foreign language version, of an e-mail reference and of an e-commerce facility.

RESULTS

The initial picture obtained from the about 500 web pages (corresponding to about 150 published web sites) found by Arianna, an Italian search engine, is described in this paper.

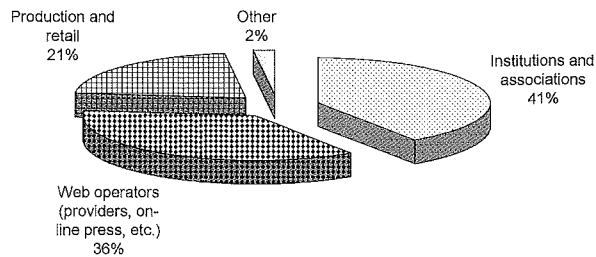
Summarising the information given by the frequency analysis of several classification criteria, we can still say that, as shown in Figure 1, a low number of producers have marked their presence in the Web and that the web pages are mainly related to law and regulations or treats general topics (environment, tourism, gastronomy

and local products) almost totally in an informative and journalistic style.

The rate of producers' advertising pages is very low, as well as the presence of foreign language versions and the e-mail and e-commerce facilities indicators.

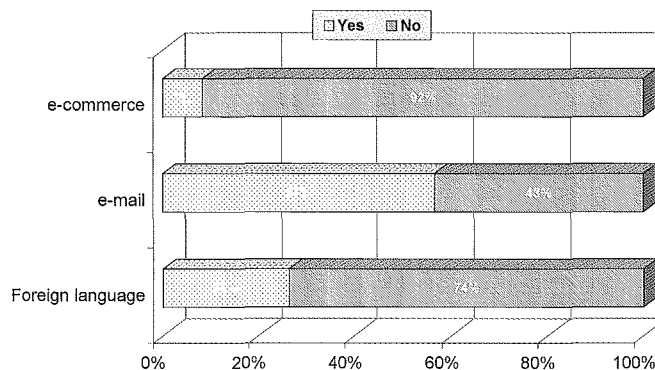
In Figure 2, it can be seen that the sites including e-commerce facilities are particularly few. This indicates that, even if the aptitude of the Internet to enlarge the potential demand is partially understood, only few producers and marketers are ready to promptly respond to it using adequate tools.

Figure 1 : Distribution of the web sites among the types of web site publishers



Source : Processing of the "Arianna" web search engine data query : "denominazione di origine protetta"

Figure 2 : Advanced characteristics of the web sites

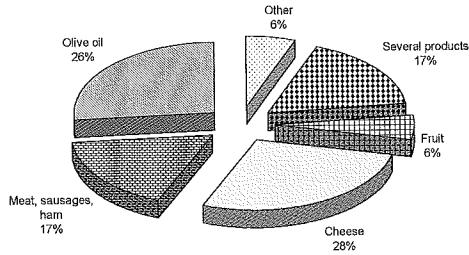


Source : Processing of the "Arianna" web search engine data query : "denominazione di origine protetta"

The more frequently named products are cheeses and olive oil, primarily among the sites published by producers and retailers (Figure 3) and, as expected, a strong relationship with the territory is confirmed, as

showed in Figure 4: just a minor part of the product-related web sites refers to a generic Italian provenance, while a large number of sites refers to a specific area or region.

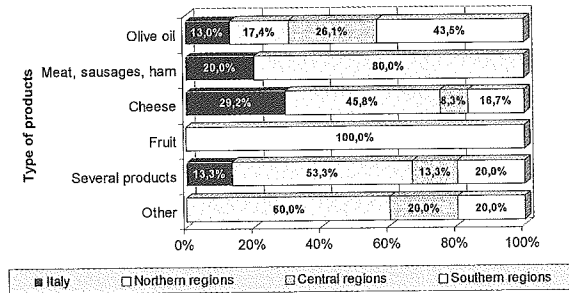
Figure 3 : Distribution of the web sites* among the types of products



* Only the 87 related to any product

Source : Processing of the "Arianna" web search engine data
 query : "denominazione di origine protetta"

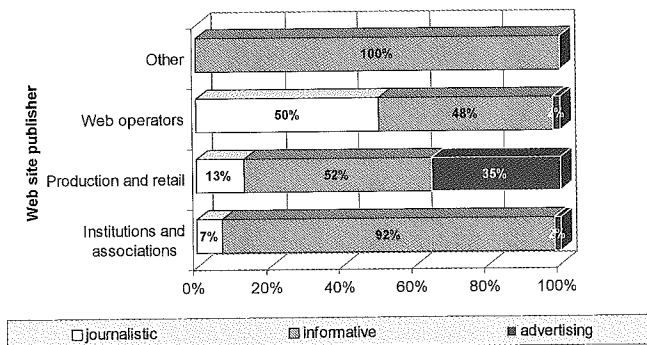
Figure 4 : Distribution of territorial references among product types*



*Only the 87 related to any product

Source : Processing of the "Arianna" web search engine data
 query : "denominazione di origine protetta"

Figure 5 : Distribution of the site styles among the type of publishers



Source : Processing of the "Arianna" web search engine data
 query : "denominazione di origine protetta"

The low presence rate of fruit is obviously due to the scarce number of PDO labelled fruit products, and it fairly increases if the query is executed including the PGI labels. Moreover, it must be pointed out that there is a quota of 70% of web pages not related to any specific product.

The cross-analysis of some of the indicators shows that even in the web sites published by producers and retailers the rate of advertising contents is only 35%, as shown in Figure 5. It can be seen that some producers' web pages have been edited maintaining an informative style, so they do not give much evidence that the web site publisher has the purpose to sell any product.

Other information caught examining the selected web pages, is that those related with olive oil often also deal with quality wines coming from the same territory.

As a negative factor, it was evident that a lot of the available general information was rather old and not up-to-date, and some pages have been edited three or two years ago. This could bring a certain grade of confusion to a web user who is searching for detailed and useful information, forcing him to make a selection of the more reliable web sites.

Finally, it is useful to emphasise that the newer and more complete Web site directly selling Italian quality food products was not found by the query, because it does not mention the PDO label while describing the available products, even if they actually offer PDO labelled products. That is because they assume a definition of traditional product (*prodotto tipico*) of their

own, without considering the specific European or national label.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE ANALYSIS

The present analysis confirms that traditional and regional Italian food producers and marketers, are slow in taking advantage of the new opportunities offered by the Web and its potential market. An attempt to promote the quality of PDO labelled food products through the Internet is still not evident, and this seems to be a lost opportunity for producers. In fact, high quality products and gastronomic specialities could be directly sold to a grocery high price level, and thereby cover the still relatively high costs of logistics and delivery.

The main problem could be found in the low diffusion rate of the "Internet culture" among Italian consumers, but also among market operators, the latter seeming to have not yet perceived the potential uses of this new communication medium.

This results represents a first picture of the present situation ; in the next steps of the study, the PGI labelled products will be also considered, and the characteristics of the information contents put into the WWW will be brought into comparison with those presented on other more utilised communication media.

Finally, the objective of the research program is to give evidence of the suitability of the new medium to cope with the issues raised as a result of the increasing trend toward a globalisation of the markets.

NOTE

- (1) R. Spadoni is the author of introduction and section 1, M. Canavari is responsible for section 2 and conclusions, and D. Regazzi is co-ordinator of the study.