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The emotion of disgust in Marketing - An analysis of preferences between made in Italy and foreign brands

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ABSTRACT

This research studies the role of disgust in consumer behavior. The study focuses on the relation between disgust and conservatism and tries to show a correlation with the preference for made in Italy. The hypothesis states that the more a consumer is subject to a disgust-eliciting stimulus, the more he or she will prefer brands made in their own country. A questionnaire was used as a tool to prove such hypothesis, which then was disproved by the outcome. The results revealed that brand knowledge and brand preference is a bigger motivator for consumer choice in respect to the disgust factor.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the year 2020 we have been under constant news reports about a virus called COVID-19. This virus, commonly known as corona virus, has started spreading in China and has now reached many countries around the Globe becoming a real pandemic crisis. The first news that was released regarding the “birth” of COVID-19 was that a person in a Chinese restaurant in China, had eaten a bat, thus, contracting the virus. The effect that this news (which has never been more than a mere suggestion, and then revealed to be a fake news) resulted in, has been a very massive avoidance towards the Chinese culture. Media, and conservative politicians have surfed the wave of populism and started to point fingers to Asian culinary culture trying to establish an emotion of disgust in the citizens of their countries. My question in this study is whether disgust can have a conservative effect in costumer behavior, and how it will affect the Made in Italy market during this time of crisis.

But first we need to know, what are emotions? Are emotions important in consumer behavior? Is there a difference between positive and negative emotions when it comes to decision making? Can we find a correlation between brands chosen and the emotional state in which the costumer finds her/himself? “A strong feeling deriving from one’s circumstances, mood, or relationships with others”, this is how the Oxford Dictionary defines the word “emotion”. During the last century emotions have been studied with more focus by many scientists. One of the most influent people in the study of this matter is Paul Ekman, an American psychologist, who dedicated his life to the study of emotions and their link to facial expressions. Ekman came up with what are known as the six basic emotions: happiness or sadness, surprise, fear, anger, disgust and contempt. These emotions are to be found globally in each and every individual living on this Earth.

Since the first years of 1990’s, marketing researchers have started to study the emotions in consumer behavior (for example, Babin, Darden, and Griffin, 1992 and Cohen and Areni, 1991), in this thesis we will look specifically at the emotion of disgust. This emotion is very stimulating for human behaviors and human choices and it can affect people's daily life and areas, such as politics, judicial system, and spending habits (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Hodson & Costello, 2007; Olatunji, Tolin, Huppert, & Lohr, 2005; Wheatley & Haidt, 2005; Morales, Wu, & Fitzsimons, 2012). What has been studied about disgust tell us that people who experience such feeling will suffer the persuasive effects of this emotion to its strong and immediate avoidance reaction (C. Morales, C. Wu & J. Fitzsimons, 2012), and thus imply a feeling of discomfort in the individual. When a person experiences a disgusting stimulus, he or she will be likely to feel a source of threat and will try to restore safety and order of their environment (Donato & Miceli, 2019).

This type of human behavior has also been studied in politics. For example, in 2012, Inbar, Pizarro, Iyer & Haidt, have studied how people who are affected by disgust stimuli will behave when voting. The study has shown that “disgust was most strongly associated with political conservatism” (Inbar, Pizarro, Iyer & Haidt,

2012) and that this type of emotion will encourage the individuals to avoid things that they do not know. People will thus be willing to keep away out-groups who differ in their normal practices like, food preparation, hygiene routines or sexual behaviors.

2. OVERVIEW LITERATURE

2.1 HISTORY OF EMOTIONS

Charles Darwin in addition to writing about the theory of evolution, published, in 1872, “The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals”. In this study, the naturalist, stated that humans, and other animals, show emotions through similar behaviors, and that emotions could be found across many cultures and had evolutionary history. Darwin argued that emotions evolved through adaptive mechanisms which allowed human beings and animals to survive and reproduce. But what is an emotion?

The agreed upon definition in psychology is that an emotion is a complex state of feeling resulting in physical and psychological changes which influence thought and behavior. Other than Charles Darwin we have many other theories about emotions, one of them being the “James-Lange Theory of Emotion”. Considered to be a physiological theory, the James-Lange theory states that emotions happen because of physiological reactions to events (James, 1884). The most famous, and easy, example that was made to understand this theory, is the one of the grizzly bear: suppose you are walking and you find yourself in front of a bear. You will start to get anxious, your heart rate will go up and you will start to breathe heavily. This theory asserts that you will be able to interpret your body language and physical state and understand that you are feeling the emotion of fear. On the contrary, another theory, called “The Cannon-Bard Theory of Emotion”, proposed by Cannon in the 1920s and then enhanced by physiologist Bard in the 1930, goes against the one of James-Lange for two main reasons: 1) People can experience physiological reactions without feeling emotions (for example your heart rate might be accelerated just because you are playing sports, not necessarily because you are anxious); 2) Emotions may occur faster than physiological reactions (going back to the bear example, Cannon would say that the person having the encounter would much quickly realize their emotion of fear and anxiety, than have the physical reaction of sweating and breathing heavily. A third theory of emotion is an example of cognitive theory and was invented by Schachter and Singer. The two, stated that a person will experience a physiological arousal first and then will identify the reason for such arousal and label it as an emotion. This third theory grabs from both the James-Lange and the Cannon-Bard theories, stating that people feel emotion based on their physiological responses.

If we take a leap, all the way up to early 1970s we will stumble upon the studies of one of the most famous “facial expression of emotion experts” in the world, Doctor Paul Ekman. Ekman initially had an opposite vision to Charles Darwin’s theory of expression of emotions, in fact, he stated that people would

discover how to facially express their feelings in a cultural way. This meaning that if you lived in the United States or in Japan you will most certainly have different ways to express your emotions. The study brought Ekman to many different countries (Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Japan and United States of America) to experiment with different ethnicities. The Doctor would show groups of people pictures of individuals with different facial expressions, thus asking them to label the emotions that they thought were being represented. Soon enough, Ekman found out that the vast majority of the tested individuals agreed upon the same results. This was not enough for the Doctor who thought that maybe, all the tested individuals, agreed upon the same pictures and emotion just because they grew up watching the same TV, music or visual contents. Ekman brought his studies to Papa New Guinea, to examine a human tribe called Fore. If the uncontaminated Fore tribe, reacted in the same way as the individuals from the other countries then, Ekman, could state with certainty that people across the globe recognize the same emotions with specific facial expressions. Obviously, the test results found that also the tribe members reacted to the pictures as the other tested individuals. The studies of the American psychologist brought to the concept of the six basic emotions. This idea states that every human being on Earth is born with six innate emotions: happiness/sadness, surprise, fear, anger, disgust and contempt. Later on with his life, Ekman added many emotions to his theories and many other psychologist like Robert Plutchick enhanced their studies on the subject. Nowadays we know that there are about 154 emotions (Tiffany Watt Smith, “The Book of Human Emotions”, 2015), which are all a combination of the primary emotions. This being said, how can it be recognized and fully understood what emotion we are encountering or experiencing?

Now it is needed to introduce the concept of ‘Emotional Literacy’. Claude Steiner (1997), French born American psychotherapist, describes this term as “the ability to understand your emotions, the ability to listen to others and empathize with their emotions, and the ability to express emotions productively.” The higher level of emotional literacy in an individual, the easier it will be for him to understand what emotion he is feeling. What are the steps that can bring us to the understanding of our emotions? This process may be divided into five steps: 1) Look at the external signs (verbal and paraverbal) that your body is showing, like facial expression and tone of voice that you are using. 2) Understand what your body is making you feel. For example, different emotions can make you breathe in different ways, make you sweat or make your legs tremble. 3) Analyze your thoughts and ask yourself what you are thinking in the exact moment that you are feeling an emotion. 4) Try to understand in what context you find yourself. For example, one might work in an office that makes him or her uncomfortable, while his or her coworker, who works in the same office, might feel happy and excited. In this case we see that it is not as important where you physically find yourself, but how you react in that particular situation. 5) The last step is the final product of this analysis. Basically, after all the previous steps you will understand how you are behaving and more importantly why.

2.2 THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN MARKETING

The first marketing thoughts, blossomed around the early years of the twentieth century, are documented by Robert Bartels in “The History of Marketing Thought” in 1962. Bartels classified the Classical schools of marketing as, the commodity school, the functional school and the institutional School. The first school that we are going to talk about is the commodity school. The main objective of this school of thought, is to explain the various types of goods which exist in the marketplace (Copeland, 1923), and also the shopping behaviors associated with such goods (Rhoades, 1927). Copeland came up with a categorization of goods in 1923, who divided products into: convenience goods, shopping goods and specialty goods. This type of school is very important in the history of marketing has it established a way to categorize different products for its characteristics, giving marketers a guideline to follow when analyzing their products. The functional school, one of the first school of thought to emerge, based its concern, in categorizing the main functions of marketing. The first list that was suggested was proposed by Shaw in 1912, who said that marketing had seven main functions: 1) Sharing the risk; 2) Transporting the goods; 3) Financing the operations; 4) Selling; 5) Assembling; 6) Assorting; 7) Reshipping. This list was later modified as suggested by Weld in 1917. Weld proposed six main functions: 1) Assembling; 2) Storing; 3) Assumption of risk; 4) Rearrangement; 5) Selling; 6) Transportation. In 1949, Breyer, developed the systemic approach, “where selling activities within a channel of distribution were considered to be one of several activities for a channel member” (Sheth, 1985). An important concept to grasp about the functional school of marketing thought, is that every channel (marketing process from start to end), must have all the functions of marketing at one point or another (Weld, 1917). A channel can be modified in the order in which the marketing functions are executed but it cannot have one or more functions taken out. Highlighting the functions of marketing, proved to be crucial to describe and fully understand the specific marketing activities related to retailing (Beckman et al., 1957). The last Classical school of thought is the institutional school. The term “institution” refers to all who work in marketing, like marketing middleman, wholesalers, agents, brokers, and retailers (Shaw, 2005). As Sheth declares, Weld deserves the credit for the founding of the institutional school, since he has been the first one to speak about the importance of specialized middlemen in marketing activities. Basically, the institutional school is based on describing and classifying the types of marketing subjects that are then going to interact with the channel of distribution. The main common point that we can make about these first schools of marketing thought, is that all of them “were influenced by concepts of demand theory in microeconomics” (Sheth, 1985) and by the market itself. During the course of the nineteen hundreds, many subjects like psychology and sociology started to arise more consistently. These new studies revolving around the idea of analyzing the human mind and behavior, struck a chord in the managerial field. The managerial schools started to think more about the individuals as less rational and more emotively involved in their life decision. It was not long before this type of mentality had a role also in the marketing world. Marketing started to shift its main focus point from the product to the consumer. The old traditional way of marketing was based upon finding as many consumers

possible and selling them the products. Nowadays, instead, marketers work upon establishing very extensive and trustworthy customer relationships, not because finding new customers is less important, but because this role is now taken on by the same customers. Consumers now are globally connected, and with the use of social media, like Facebook or Instagram and so on, companies can create big nets of brand loyal consumers. But how do marketers connect in such a deep way with customers? How are marketers so able to engage with individuals and keep them attracted to their brands? This is all possible thanks to the study of consumer behavior. Behavioral marketing encourages the study of customers' psychology, and states that consumers are not always rational, as thought before, but can be emotionally driven in their buying processes. Since then, marketing has never been closer to a kind of social psychology, deeply analyzing how people interact around certain stimuli and are influenced in their buying decisions.

2.3 MODERN DAY MARKETING

Modern day marketing has changed from how it used to be. The old view of marketing was “telling and selling”, which meant that it was all centered around selling the product. Nowadays marketing has changed, and the center of attention has become the consumer, and marketing's priority is to satisfy his or her needs. Marketing is nothing else than the process with which companies create value for the customers and aim to create strong customer relations to capture value from customers in return, building what are called “profitable customer relations”. For many years now, marketers have started to study sociology and look at the buying behavior of consumers. Such behavior can be defined as how individuals select and then use goods and services which will satisfy their needs. This type of analysis takes into consideration all the mental, physical and emotional activities that customers will have. This is very important nowadays since having a deep understanding of customers, will help companies to sell the right products, to the right people, in the right way. The best way for marketers to fully comprehend consumers, is to empathize with their emotions. When a product is sold, customers will most certainly feel a kind of emotion, before, during and after the buying process, and, if marketers can somehow “control” what emotions are going to be felt, than the companies selling the products will surely be a step ahead. Because of what has just been explained, it can be stated that studying consumer emotivity is a big factor in a marketing campaign.

2.4 FIRST STUDIES OF EMOTIONS IN MARKETING

For a long period of time, customers were thought completely rational in their buying process, but since the 1980s, marketers have started to study how the emotions evoked by marketing, brands and products, affect consumers (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Studies varied across this field, from how advertising affect consumers' emotional responses (Derbaix, 1995), to the role of emotion in consumer satisfaction

(Phillips and Baumgartner, 2002). During the first researches about this topic, emotions seemed to be easily and generally categorized into two main groups: positive and negative. Basically, this meant that researchers found emotions which would have positive or negative effects on consumers, thus without going in depth with the categorization of emotions. Later on, scholars started to focus more on one or more particular emotions such as anger (Bougie et al., 2003; Taylor, 1994), regret (e.g., Inman & Zeelenberg, 2002), embarrassment (Verbeke & Bagozzi, 2003), surprise (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003), sympathy and empathy (Edson Escalas and Stern, 2003). This change, from broad generalization to more specific and in-depth studies on single emotions, happened since many theorists, like, Smith & Lazarus (1993) and Roseman (1996) stated that emotions should not be categorized in broad emotional factors, as each emotion has a distinctive set of traits and characteristics. As we have said before, human emotions are more than one hundred (154 as Tiffany Watt Smith said in “The Book of Human Emotions”, 2015), so can they all be felt in every situation? The answer is no. In marketing for example, we know that only a certain number of emotions can be perceived by consumers in their buying experience, so how can which emotions apply to the marketing sphere, and thus to the consumers, be known?

2.5 CONSUMER EMOTION SET

Marsha Richins, from the University of Missouri, in 1997, came up with a way to categorize consumer emotions, the CES: Consumption Emotion Set. This set, or better yet, scale, includes all emotions that may be experienced in consumption situations, and was created to provide a way to distinguish the varieties of emotions that are associated with different products. The scale is divided into two main categories. On the left-hand side we have the “Cluster” group, which contains a list of all the consumption-related emotions, while on the right-hand side, we can see the “Descriptors”, which are basically the words that express feelings of such emotions. The emotions contained in the CES, can easily be divided into positive and negative effects (Laros & Steenkamp, 2003). Dividing these emotions based on their effects can help us for two main reasons: first, it will keep the model simple and easy to comprehend, second, based on the combination of positive and negative effects, we can understand consumers’ attitudes. The consumption emotion set measures seventeen consumption emotions, seven of them are positive, eight are negative, and the other two are considered neutral.

2.6 DISGUST

While emotions can still be divided into negative and positive effects, we will certainly understand that every single emotion is in some way different from another. In this study we will concentrate on one of the primary emotions: disgust. Before we start talking about this study, I think we should analyze this particular emotion, using the above cited five step process of emotional literacy, to see its main features and

characteristics. Think about something disgusting: your facial expression will obviously start to change. Your eyebrows will lower themselves and point inward, your nose will wrinkle up and your mouth will be slightly opened and pointing downwards. Your body will make you feel sick and noxious, and you might even have a stomachache. Your thoughts will be ones of avoidance towards the object that you find disgusting. To conclude this analysis, we can say that if you are feeling disgusted, you will behave in a repulsive manner, trying to avoid any type of visual or physical contact with the object causing your emotive state of distress.

2.7 FIRST STUDIES AND CONTROVERSIAL ADVERTISING

Even though disgust is such a strong and powerful emotion, with meaningful immediate reactions in the individuals who feel in such way, not many have studied the behavior of people under disgusting stimuli. Scholars mostly studied broader concepts like, negative emotions in marketing and controversial or shocking advertising. This type of advertising has been used in marketing to gain more attention, thus facilitating memory retrieval and recall (Waller et al. 2005). Dahl et al. (2003) and Manchanda, Dahl, and Frankenberger (2002), said that this effect on humans is given by surprise and perception of incongruity, which both increase attention and memory, and may also have a positive influence on behavior. In 1975, Mandler, came up with the “Schema Incongruity Theory”. In this theory, Mandler stated that consumers will process their stimuli on the basis of existing schemes. Schemes are nothing but cognitive structures, and according to Mandler, when a consumer finds himself in front of a stimulus which is incongruent with the existing scheme, he will be more attracted and willing to pay more attention than if the stimulus was congruent with the scheme. Because of this theory, consumers will process more extensively and will have a better memory of the advertisement, or incongruent stimulus. Mandler continued his studies proving that, if a consumer is subject to an extremely disgusting stimuli, he will negatively process the disgust-eliciting matter. This shows that both, non-disgusting stimuli and extremely disgusting stimuli, will have a negative effect on consumers: in the former, the consumer will not notice the subject since it is congruent with existing schemes, thus not effecting his interest, and in the latter, the extreme disgust deriving from the subject will make the consumer negatively process such matter.

2.8 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR UNDER DISGUSTING STIMULI

Now that it has been demonstrated how disgusting stimuli will catch consumers’ attention, it shall be looked more particularly into the consequences that they will have on their behavior. Consumer behavior is, in fact, nowadays one of the most important things to study when a company is working on a marketing strategy.

It has been shown that disgust in humans causes a response of psychological and physical avoidance towards the disgusting factor. Disgust is a part of human behavioral immune system, which causes avoidance of people, objects, or situations that might result in contamination, such as physical contact with an ill subject (Neuberg, Kenrick, & Schaller, 2011). As soon as individuals are faced with a disgust-eliciting stimulus, they will feel a sudden need to restore order in their world. This desire of structure, order and avoidance of uncertainty is a primary objective of a human being's life (Antonovsky, 1979; Kruglanski, 2013; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008). To back up this theory, C. Donato & G. Miceli (2019), have studied how individuals who are put in front of a disgusting stimulus, will show a high preference for structured logos, as this will restore a feeling of safety in the analyzed subjects. Previous studies made by Neuberg & Newsome (1993) showed that individuals who have a high preference for structure, are also reluctant towards new experiences, thus showing a strong correlation with conservatism. This enlightens us that both conservative thoughts and disgust stimuli, are associated with a need of structure (order).

2.9 CONTAMINATION EFFECT

To understand better how this study on disgust may be biased by the Covid-19 virus, the concept of "fear of contamination" should be introduced. Studies were made to understand which type of disgust-eliciting stimuli contribute to fear of contamination like for example the one made by, Olatunji, Sawchuk, Lohr & De Jong in 2004. This particular study focused on finding which disgust elicitors were related to fear of contamination. Further analyses focused on difference in disgust sensitivity amongst individuals. The results stated that "contamination fear was best predicted by seven different disgust domains", meaning that fear of contamination is closely related to general disgust-eliciting stimuli. The researchers also categorized the type of disgust in "core" and "animal reminder" disgust domains. Core disgust refers to a "sense of offensiveness and the threat of contamination", and usually will consist of stimuli like waste and rotting foods, or animals associated with diseases. Animal reminder disgust refers to whichever type of stimuli that reminds the "animal origins of humans, such as blood, veins, tissue, and death". The outcome of this test showed that there was a strong relationship between disgust sensitivity and fear of contamination and that it "was more pronounced for animal reminder disgust elicitors as opposed to core disgust elicitors". Another study regarding fear of contamination, was made by Argo, Dahl & Morales in 2006. This study analyzed a very specific argument called "consumer contamination", which explains how consumers are affected when deciding to buy products which have already been touched by other costumers. Many previous researches have shown that the sense of touch is very important for consumers and have a positive effect on buying choices. This particular study focused on analyzing how the touch of consumers on products "may actually be a double-edged sword for marketers". When customers touch a product they will have a higher chance of liking it and thus buying it, but they will usually choose another item that has not been touched by them or others, at the same time, consumers will generate avoidance towards products that have already been touched by others, even if these products are

objectively unharmed. The final result of this study has shown how “the increased salience of contact through a variety of contamination cues negatively affects consumer evaluations of touched products.” These two particular studies seem very relevant to understand how Corona virus can bias consumer choice: the fear of being contaminated by a strong virus is related to Animal reminder disgust since it can be spread by saliva, and more than ever consumer in this period will be victims of consumer contamination when buying products at supermarkets or retailers.

2.10 POLITICAL RESEARCH ON DISGUST AND CONSERVATISM

As John Stuart Mill said, it is commonplace for all political structures to have “a party of order or stability and a party of progress or reform” (Mill, 1861). This theory is backed up by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who stated that “the two parties which divide the state, the party of conservatism and that of innovation, are very old, and have disputed the possession of the world ever since it was made” (Emerson, 1844). If we go back in time, we can trace this division all the way from Sparta and Athens: Sparta was always considered to be a society very attached to its culture and not willing to expand its political views to innovation, while Athens was always seen as an innovating society ready to experiment in both politics and traditions. Emerson also states that the division in human beings and their political temperament, is possibly part of a deep innate condition of mankind, which will vary from individual to individual thanks to their diverse psychology and physiology (Inbar & Pizarro, 2012).

Conservatism is defined as the political view that promotes traditional social institutions and culture. This political and philosophical concept is usually associated with right-wing politics, which are promoters of traditional elements opposed to modernism and innovation. An important concept to understand when talking about conservatism, is that this view can easily vary from nation to nation. Since conservative politics will encourage traditional values and culture, it can be easily understood that countries will differ on their characteristics. One common trait that conservativist share, is the one of patriotism for their home country and diffidence towards other nations and what is foreign. An interesting political and social study was held by Inbar, Pizarro, Iyer and Haidt, to study 2008 presidential election voters. This test had the objective to find out if the emotion of disgust was in some way correlated with political conservatism. The individuals tested, were, in the first place, asked about their political preferences (very liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate, slightly conservative, conservative, and very conservative). The surveyed participants were then asked to complete a 25-item disgust sensitivity test (DS-R). Disgust sensitivity is a test which measures an individuals' propensity to feel the emotion of disgust. The study showed that whoever had a higher disgust sensitivity, would also be more conservative. Thus, this study predicted that during the 2008 presidential election, participants with a low disgust sensitivity voted for democrat candidate Barack Obama, while voters with a high DS (disgust sensitivity) would have voted for the republican John McCain. The results of this test turn out to be in line

with what was said before about disgust: this emotion, will make elicited subjects, try to restore safety and order in what is known as safer, distrusting lesser known cultures representing the different and unknown. Obviously, this does not mean that democrats promote less safer programs than republicans, but it shows us how people with higher DS levels, will prefer a more conservative view about politics.

2.11 COUNTRY OF ORIGIN EFFECT AND ETHNOCENTRISM

Can this correlation between disgust and political conservatism, be translated into the marketing world? Two very important parallel marketing concepts shall be analyzed: country of origin effect, and consumer ethnocentricity.

As it is known, globalization brought to consumers all over the world, the possibility to choose products from various nations across the globe. Consumer behavior changed during the course of humanity, and nowadays, knowing what consumers think about the provenience of products is very important for marketing purposes. International trade has become a large variable in the world economy, and consumers have different regards in both domestic products, and foreign products. The first concept needing to be analyzed is the “country of origin” effect, which is basically how consumers perceive the products that come from countries (Roth & Romeo, 1992). Also called the “made in” effect, the country of origin effect has been commonly defined as the influence that a certain products’ country (where it has been manufactured), will have on a consumers’ decision and subsequent behavior (Elliott & Cameron, 1994). The country of origin has been defined as “an extrinsic cue that acts as a risk mitigant or quality cue for consumers” (Cordell, 1992). This means that, knowing where a product comes from, is an intangible trait of the product itself, like for example the brand name. Some have questioned if this effect was important in the consumer decision process (Elliot & Cameron, 1994; Hugstad & Durr, 1986; Mitchell & Greatorex, 1990; Schooler & Wildt, 1968), but studies have demonstrated how the country of origin has a big effect on consumer attitude towards brands and products, and the likelihood of buying them. These researches have shown that this effect can be as strong as the effect that brand name, quality, or price have on products (Ahmed & d’Astous, 1996; Lantz & Loeb, 1996; Okechuku, 1994). Consumers might not always have the opportunity to buy domestic products, as some goods can only be manufactured abroad. In this particular case, how will consumer behave? Studies have shown that developed countries have a country of origin effect, thus preferring home manufactured products, but, in case consumers did not have the possibility to buy domestic goods, they will prefer to buy from culturally similar countries as opposed to countries viewed as culturally different from their own (Crawford & Lamb, 1981; Heslop et al., 1998; Wang & Lamb, 1983). This is explained by a concept called “consumer ethnocentricity”. Ethnocentricity is based on the morality and responsibility of buying foreign products, and consumer loyalty to domestic manufactured goods (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). As Sharma said in 1995, ethnocentricity may bring to an overestimation of quality of domestic products and an underestimation of foreign products, thus

leading consumers to be irrational in their buying decisions. Shimp and Shar, in 1987, created the Consumer Ethnocentric Tendencies Scale, more commonly referred to as CETSCALE. This scale, developed to measure consumer ethnocentricity, is made up by 17 items which measure the tendencies of consumers to act towards foreign and domestic goods. These two marketing and social concepts give us an understanding of how consumer behavior is different and variable, but also how, stimuli will have more or less the same kind of reaction among human beings.

2.12 RESEARCH QUESTION: CORONA VIRUS AND ETHNOCENTRIC MARKETING

Nowadays we are submerged by news about Covid-19. This virus, also referred to as “corona virus” has had a global impact. According to Chinese media, the first case of this virus can be traced all the way back to the November 17th, 2019. Since that day, the virus started to spread ferociously, from Wuhan to all China. It was just a matter of time from when we saw this virus has a faraway threat, to cohabiting our European cities with this deadly disease. This silent killer has been on the top of everyone’s tongue for the last three months now, and every time we browse the internet or turn on the television, somebody amongst the media will be talking about Covid-19. The images passed on by the media vary from Chinese culinary habits, to desolated cities, closed restaurants and shops, hospitals, ambulances, doctors with antivirus suites, and politicians speaking to address this worldwide threat. But what can be said about the choices of this images? We can surely say that pictures and videos that we see daily, arise in us some type of reaction and emotion. As we have said before in this paper, both diseases and foreign cultures, can bring up the emotion of disgust in individuals with a high disgust sensitivity. News spread that the virus came from the eating of a bat in a restaurant in China and a viral video of a young lady eating a bat soup went viral. Although this news was declared false, many people around the world still accuse the Asian culinary culture as the main cause of this vicious virus. Conservative politicians are riding the highway of populism that has sprout since the coming of corona virus, waving around nationalist slogans which many times go against China, a nation with the only fault of having the patient zero (first infected individual in the world). In history, we know that during threats, like wars, conservative parties always have a growth in voters, since the majority of the nation feels more protected when its rights and needs are put before anybody else’s. Covid-19 can be seen as a modern-day virus, thus we can certainly say that our world will change after this pandemic crisis. Knowing what we have said before, about how disgust brings individuals to restore order and safety in their world, thus preferring more conservative views and ethnocentric buying decisions, we can ask ourselves some interesting questions about today’s marketing. Will this virus bring disgust to individuals, thus bringing them to prefer products which are manufactured in Italy compared to those manufactured abroad? Will the country of origin effect be more important than before?

3. METHOD

The objective of this study is to see if there is any correlation between disgust and consumer choice, more particularly between products made in Italy and foreign products. To obtain the results Professor Carmela Donato and I came up with a questionnaire that analyzed the choices of Italian individuals between Italian and foreign brands when under constant stimulus of disgust, under low disgust stimulus or under a neutral stimulus. The hypothesis is that the more the disgust issued to the tested participants, the more their preference will vert on Italian brands.

3.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE CHOSEN MODEL

The questionnaire had three different variations, where the only thing changing was the quantity of disgust included in the test. The most disgusting test, that we will call “*constant disgust test*”, opened with a picture of a filthy toilet (*Figure 1*) and the candidates were asked to describe their first impressions after viewing such image.



Figure 1: image used for disgust stimuli

During the entire test, the participants were answering at questions while having the picture of the toilet on the top of the screen providing a constant disgust stimulus. The second test, “*mild disgust test*”, began in the same way as the before cited questionnaire, but after the first question, this image was removed, and the candidate continued the test without further disgusting stimuli. The third and last type of survey, called the “*no disgust test*”, opened with no image and a white box were the candidate was asked to describe its typical route to its workplace or school/university, trying to provide a neutral stimulus to the candidate. After this first question, the test continued without any further type of stimuli. As it can be seen, these three types of test differed only in the first question, thus providing fair results. After the first question (which differentiated all

three tests), the participants were asked to choose between nine pair of brands: each pair had one Italian brand and one foreign brand. The brands of each pair were part of the same relevant product market (e.g. coffee, beer, chocolate, sportswear, ect.), and they were chosen trying to obtain fair couples based on brand size and brand popularity in Italy and in the world. The pairs chosen were: 1) *Balocco* and *Digestives*; 2) *Illy* and *Nespresso*; 3) *San Pellegrino* and *Perrier*; 4) *Nastro Azzurro* and *Corona*; 5) *Novi* and *Herhsey*; 6) *Santal* and *Minute Maid*; 7) *San Carlo* and *Pringles*; 8) *Diadora* and *Under Armour*; 9) *Bulgari* and *Chanel*. After this section, came a part of the questionnaire aimed at analyzing individuals' emotions right after the test, asking them to rate their emotions (e.g. nervous, stressed, disgusted, etc.) from 1 to 10. The final question asked the candidates to write any comments about the just concluded test. The test was administered online and each time the link was opened, the candidate was redirected onto one of the three various tests in a random way. In the next paragraph, the sample of this survey will be discussed along with the general results of the questionnaire.

Represented below are the exact images seen by the questionnaires' participants while choosing amongst the brands.



S.PELLEGRINO

perrier

Corona

NASTRO
AZZURRO

NOVI

HERSHEY'S

Minute
Maid

Santal

SAN
CARLO

Pringles

UNDER ARMOUR

DIADORA

3.2 SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

This survey was administered to 134 individuals, of which 65 males and 69 females, with age ranging from 18 to 34 (48.5% male, 51.5% female, $M_{age} = 24.5$, $SD = 3.29$). Respondents' were found by sending the test on various messaging apps. Participants' were 74 students (55.2%), and 60 workers (44.8%), giving us a diversified poll of individuals. The sample chosen was strictly made up of Italian people for the purpose of the test. We could not send the test abroad, because otherwise the results would be biased by members' nationality.

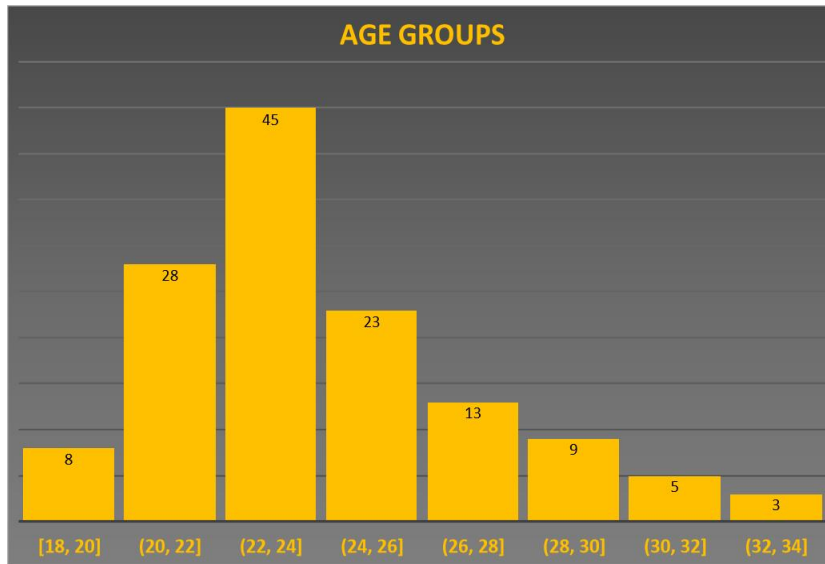


Figure 2: participants divided by age groups

This histogram represents the various age groups of our sample. Each column defines an age group with a constant two-year interval. As we can see, most of the polled individuals is in the age group (22, 24], while the minority is represented by just three individuals in the age group ranging from (32,34].

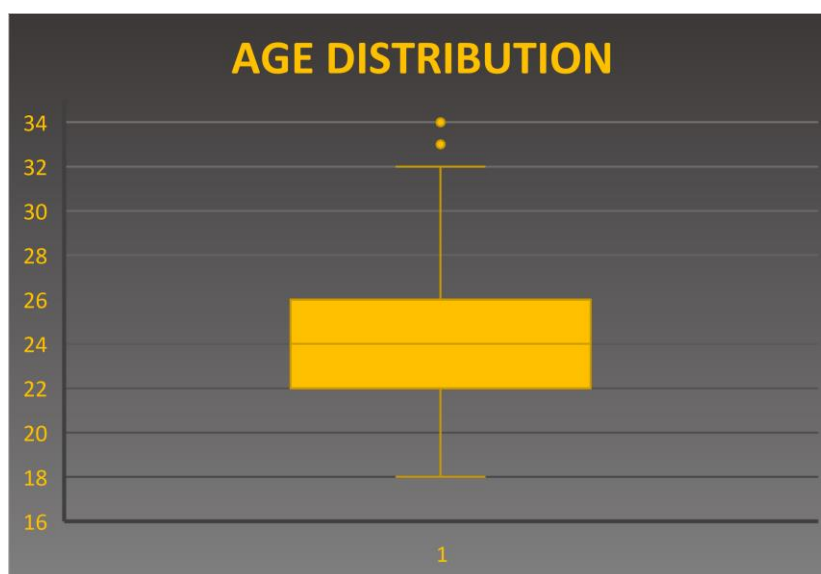


Figure 3: age distribution of sample

3.3 RESULTS PRESENTATION

First, the general results obtained through this questionnaire will be analyzed. If all the collected data was put together, it can be seen that 67% of the choices (802) verted on Italian brands, and the remaining 33% on foreign brands (404), independently of the test variation. Since most individuals (83 tested, so 61.9% of the total sample) were administered a test with a certain level of disgust stimuli, the hypothesis might seem satisfied at first, but to analyze the outcomes in the correct manner we will have to study the results more in depth. The first test, the “*constant disgust test*”, which involved a total of 40 participants (29.9%), provided a result of 65% (235) choices of Italian products, and 35% (125) choices of foreign brands. In this case, results showed a slight preference towards Italian brands, which was in line with the hypothesis. Since this test was the one with more disgust eliciting material, it was thought that the results would have been higher in favor of Italian brands. The second test, the “*mild disgust test*” was taken by a total of 43 individuals (32.1%) and resulted in 63% (244) choices of Italian brands, and 37% (143) choices for foreign brands. The preference for Italian brands went down by just two percentage points compared to the first test, giving results still in line with the hypothesis, but with differences that were not as significant as thought they would be. The last test was the “*no disgust test*”, which was taken by 51 individuals (38.1%), and had the results of 70% (323) choices for Italian brands, and 30% (136) choices for foreign brands. This is the part were the hypothesis was disproved. This last variation of the survey, which contained no disgust at all, was supposed to give opposite results. It was thought that in this scenario, the country of origin effect would have been blown away, and that the choices would have been verting on the foreign brands, or at least that the percentage of Italian brands chosen during the survey was lower than the other two percentages (so less than 63%). In the next paragraphs each test will be studied more in depth to see if it can give an answer as to why the hypothesis turned out to be null.

To analyze in the best way the results of each test all the variables in our sample shall be analyzed to see if there is any correlation between them and the preference of Italian brands.

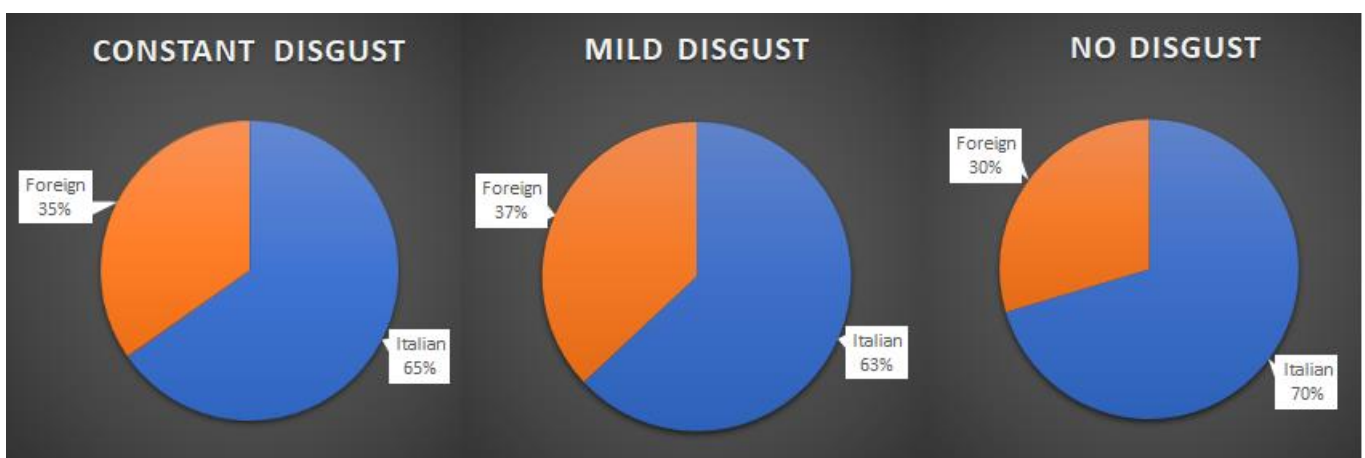


Figure 4: general overview of test's results

3.4 GENDER ANALYSIS

To study the results more specifically, the first analysis conducted was on gender. The question asked was: did gender differentiation play a key role in the choices of brands? The number of males and females in the test, was nearly equally spread (48.5% and 51.5%), so this analysis can be considered relatively impartial and fair results useful for this study. Females had 561 total choices (so in all the types of test), divided into 377 (67.2%) for Italian brands and 184 (32.8%), so there is a preference for Italian products regardless of the test that was taken. Males had a total of 585 choices, split it into 427 (73%) for Italian brands and 158 (27%) for foreign brands. In this case it is shown that males seem to have a more significant preference for Italian products instead of foreign brands. To understand better were the hypothesis was disproved, the results of each test, divided by gender, must be shown.

	MALES		FEMALES	
	FOREIGN	ITALIAN	FOREIGN	ITALIAN
C.DISGUST	29%	71%	38%	62%
M.DISGUST	31%	69%	16%	84%
NO DISGUST	22%	78%	37%	63%

Table 1: percentages for males and females' choices.

As it is shown in Table 1, the “*constant disgust*” test had results in line with the hypothesis. Males had a 71% preference for Italian brands, and females had a 62% preference for Italian brands. In the “*mild disgust test*” males lowered their preference by just two percentage points resulting in a 69% choice. This result is perfectly in line with the thesis supposition, in fact the disgust stimulus was lower in the “mild disgust test” than it was in the “constant disgust test”, so it is in harmony with the hypothesis that the percentage of Italian brands chosen was slightly diminished. Looking at the results provided by females, it will be noticed how the percentage of preference for Italian brands skyrocketed up to 84%, going against what was the theory of the hypothesis. The percentage of preference towards Italian companies should have lower than 62%, but instead it is significantly higher. By looking at the last variant of the questionnaire, the “no disgust test”, it can be seen that male individuals voted for Italian companies with a 78% preference. This result totally disapproves the hypothesis. The 78% preference is in fact, the highest percentage preference within males. Females voted with a 63% preference for Italian brands. This result also goes against the hypothesis as it is higher than the percentage of preference shown in the “constant disgust test” (62%). To conclude this analysis based on different preferences between males and females, it can be stated that gender results seem to be unbiased by disgust stimuli.

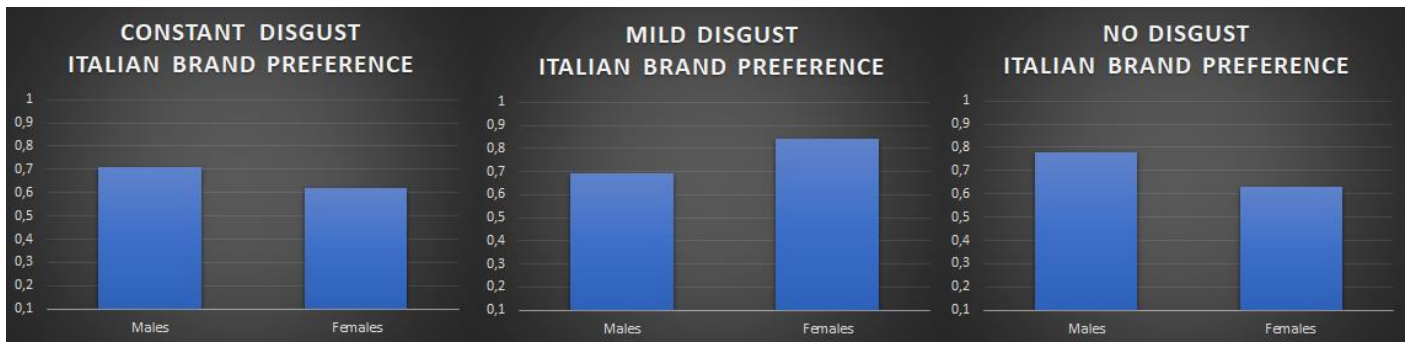


Figure 5: Italian brand preference for males and females in each test

3.5 OCCUPATION ANALYSIS

The sample of this test had a total of 134 individuals participating. The candidates have been divided into two categories: students and workers. In this part of the analysis it will be studied if there is an existing correlation between the brands chosen and the occupation of the participants. The sample contained 74 (55.2%) students and 60 (44.2%) workers. The students had a total of 747 choices, divided into 486 (65.1%) votes for the Italian brands and 261 (34.9%) votes for foreign brands. These results are in line with the general results obtained by looking at male and females' choices (67.2% for Italian brands, 32.8% for foreign brands). Thus, to reach a better conclusion on occupation analysis we should look further into the various typologies of test.

	STUDENTS		WORKERS	
	FOREIGN	ITALIAN	FOREIGN	ITALIAN
C. DISGUST	35%	65%	32%	68%
M. DISGUST	40%	60%	33%	67%
NO DISGUST	29%	71%	30%	70%

Table 2: percentages of students and workers' choices

As we can see in Table 2, in the “constant disgust test” we had 65% of students' votes and 68% of workers' votes for the Italian brands. Percentages are similar for both students and workers. The percentages should be a bit higher for Italian brands, but they are still good for keeping the hypothesis valid. In the second test, “mild disgust test”, students and workers preferred Italian brands with respective percentages of 60% and 67%. These results are perfectly in harmony with the initial thesis: the percentages dropped in respect to the “constant disgust test”. The last type of questionnaire, the “no disgust test” showed a high preference for Italian brands both for students and workers (71% and 70%), thus going against the hypothesis. Not only were the results opposite to what it was thought, but as it can be seen, the “no disgust test” provided us with the most unbalanced percentages. An interesting analysis is that the percentages of students and workers in all

three tests are very similar and follow the same trend. To conclude this analysis, it can be stated that disgust stimuli and occupation of the individuals seem to be uncorrelated.

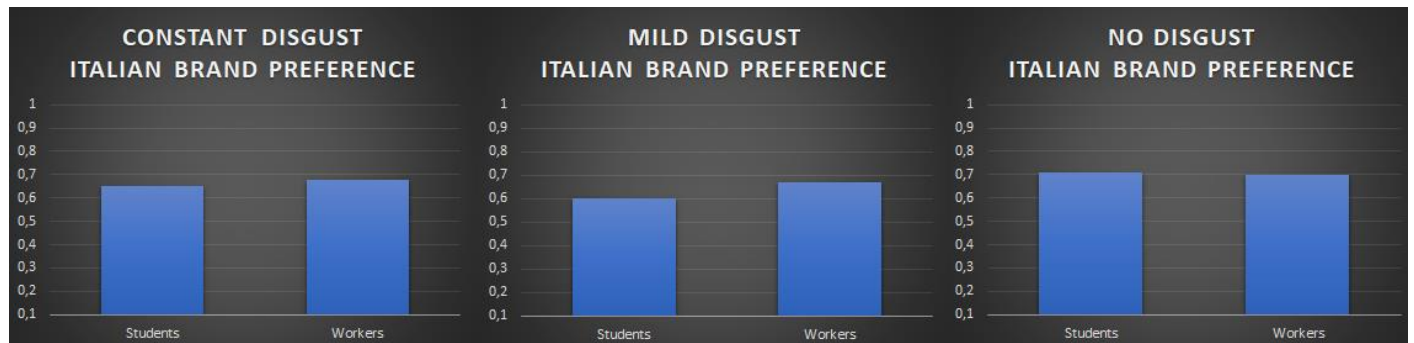


Figure 6: Italian brand preferences for students and workers in each test

3.6 DISGUST SENSITIVITY

In all three the various typologies of test that were administered to the sample, after the Italian vs. foreign choices, it was inserted a last section with the scope of understanding the emotions felt by the consumers right after having chosen among the various brands. The individuals were requested to rank their emotion level from 1 to 10. Participants were asked if they were: 1) nervous; 2) stressed; 3) anxious; 4) mad; 5) sad; 6) restless; 7) happy; 8) disgusted. Disgust ranks should be analyzed more specifically to see if there is any correlation between the emotion felt and the typology of brand chosen. To simplify the results, the data has been divided into four categories of disgust: 1-2; 3-4; 5-6; 7-8.

DISGUST RANK	N	%
1-2	73	54.5
3-4	29	21.6
5-6	27	20.2
7-8	5	3.7

Table 3: groups of disgust ranks, the number of individuals "n" and the relative percentage.

Table 3 is the representation of the level of disgust felt by all individuals regardless of the type of test that was taken. As it can be seen, the highest number of participants felt a very low disgust impulse (73, 54.5% in the 1-2 ranking group). The second and third group (3-4 and 5-6), were equally split with 29 and 27 individuals (21.6% and 20.2%), while the last group (7-8), has an incredibly low number of 5 participants who all voted 7, which is only a stunning 3.7% of the total sample. It is interesting to allocate the five individuals who ranked their disgust at 7, in their tests: two of them took the “constant disgust test” and 3 took the “mild disgust test”. Since the participants who voted 7 are only five, it is better to also study the results of ranks 5-6. By combining these two groups we have a total of 32 individuals: 22 of them took the “constant disgust test” (55% of all the participants of this type of test), 8 took the “mild disgust test” (18% of this type of test),

and just 2 were part of the “no disgust test” (only the 4% of the individuals who took this test). Such results show that the tests functioned in the correct way, in line with the scope of the division of the tests. The only thing that is not totally in line with the hypothesis is that in the “no disgust test”, in fact, it was thought that all the individuals would have ranked their disgust level lower than 5. To analyze if there is a correlation between the rank of disgust selected and the brands chosen, we need analyze the percentages of Italian brands and foreign brands picked by the individuals with different disgust ranks. Table 4 shows the results of such analysis. In the “constant disgust test”, 66.2% of the individuals with a level of disgust ranging from 5 through 7, chose Italian brands over foreign brands. In the “mild disgust test”, 55.6% preferred Italian brands. In the “no disgust test”, 61.1% of the candidates showed a preference for Italian brands over foreign ones. The first and second test, are in line with the hypothesis of this thesis, but the last test gave contrary results. In the last test, the level of Italian preference was expected to be somewhere from 55.6% (the preference percentage in the “mild disgust test”) down, while on the contrary, the percentage was higher. There is one thing that is important to underline: the individuals who ranked their disgust feeling from 5 through 7 in the last type of test, were only 2, so the results might not be as trustworthy. To have a better idea of what these last number mean, we should look at how people with disgust rank ranging from 1 through 4 behaved when choosing amongst Italian and foreign brands. It is shown in Table 5, that by taking all the individuals with disgust level ranging from 1 through 4, 102 to be exact, the participants in the “constant disgust test” preferred Italian brands 64.2% of the time, in the “mild disgust test” voted for Italian brands with a preference of 64.8%, and in the “no disgust test”, chose Italian brands with a stunning 70.7 percentage. These percentages are not in concordance with our hypothesis. The “mild disgust test” and the “constant disgust test” have not only almost the same exact percentage values, but also the former percent value for preferences of Italian brands, are higher than the ones for the latter test. By analyzing this gathered data regarding the level of disgust experienced by the individuals and by looking at their relative Tables, we can state that: the amount of more disgusted individuals came from the more disgust-eliciting tests, but, the choices between Italian brands and foreign brands do not seem to be correlated in the way that the hypothesis proposed.

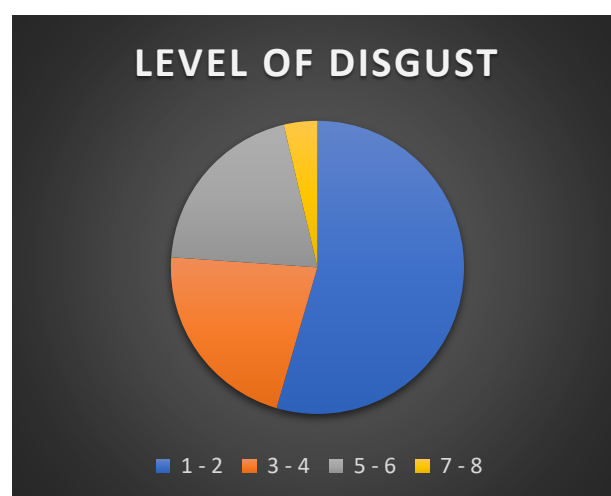


Figure 7: Pie chart representation of disgust level of all individuals

3.7 RESULT DISCUSSION

While analyzing the gathered data, we had to look deeper than just the general results, as they were not in line with the hypothesis. To try and find some justification to such unexpected results, three important differentiating factors have been analyzed: gender, occupation, and disgust level. By studying the data, it has not been possible to find a correlation between the gender of the individual and the brands chosen. Females showed more preference for Italian products while “mildly disgusted”, while males chose Italian products mostly when they were not disgusted at all. When studying the occupation analysis, it has been shown that both students and workers voted in a very similar way, having the highest value of preference for Italian products in the non-disgusting test. At last, the results of the disgust level test, showed that the number of disgusted individuals was in line with the description of the tests (since the more it was disgusting, the more disgusted individuals were found), but there was no correlation between how much they felt disgust and their preference for Italian or foreign brands. Having analyzed these three factors and not having found an important correlation between any of them, different plausible justifications came to mind. The first is that different individuals have different “disgust sensitivity”. As we have seen in paragraph 2.7, disgust sensitivity is a variable that differentiates from person to person. In fact, each person can react in different ways when living a disgust-eliciting situation. The fact that disgust sensitivity is a personal variable, can be seen by looking at the results of this test: for example, it was not expected that in the “*no disgust test*” we would have six individuals ranking a value higher than 1 under the disgust column, or another example might be that 19 participants of the “*mild disgust test*” ranked their disgust level not higher than 2, giving us another unexpected result. A confirmation of such statement can be found in a post-test comment (where it was asked if there were any comments that were wished to be made) of the “*constant disgust test*” of an aged 28 male worker who affirmed “I would add more pictures of filthy toilets to augment the sense of disgust”. Another important factor that must be taken into consideration is “brand preference”. Each and every individual has personal brand preferences, and sometimes brand loyalty can be so influential in consumer behavior, that they will not care about how much they feel disgusted or biased by any other emotion, and will always choose the same brand over and over. On this regard, it shall be known that many participants declared verbally similar comments after taking the test. Many individuals suggested that they did not feel biased by the various types of test, did not feel a correlation between the first question and the questions regarding the brands and that they voted exclusively by preference. If we look at the post-test comments in the “*mild disgust test*”, an aged 22 male student, stated “I did not know many of the presented brands so my answers may be a little biased”. This type of comment was received a lot when personally interacting with the people after the they had taken the test, and this led to another possible justification as if to why the hypothesis was rejected. The brands chosen for the test are amongst the most famous brands on the globe. It is interesting to see that many brands are globally famous but are not well known in Italy. For example, *Minute Maid* and *Hershey* are amongst the most famous

brands for juices and chocolate on the global market but are almost unknown here in Italy. The companies chosen for the pairs were selected based on relevant product market, and also by their popularity in the World and in Italy. Analyzing the results, it is shown that five times, the foreign brands were voted more than the Italian brands and only once they were perfectly tied. These brands were: *Chanel*, *Pringles*, *Nespresso* and *Under Armour*. *Chanel* was paired with *Bulgari* and won in both the “constant disgust test”, with 52.5% of the votes, and in the “no disgust test” with 52.9% of the votes. *Pringles* was paired with *San Carlo* and won in the “mild disgust test” with 53.5% preference and tied the score at 50% in the “constant disgust test”. The other two brands that won were, *Nespresso*, paired against *Illy*, which won in the “mild disgust test” with 60.5% of preference, and *Under Armour* which defeated *Diadora* also in the “mild disgust test” with 55.8% of the votes. To try to find a correlation between the foreign brands that won against the Italian brands, we will study their revenues found online. *San Carlo* has a revenue was 315 million euros (2017), it sells its products around most of the Globe, but it is most famous here in Italy. *Pringles*, an American company, has a revenue of 11 billion euros (2019) in just the European market. *Bulgari*, has a revenue of about 1.05 billion euros (2018) just for its watches and jewels division, while *Chanel*, declared its revenue of 8.6 billion euros (2019), setting the French company on a very high standard across the globe. *Nespresso*, part of the Swiss *Nestlè* group, had a revenue of 21.6 billion dollars in 2018 (24% of the entire *Nestlè* group). *Illy*, an Italian brand, had a revenue of 396.18 euros in 2018. *Under Armour*, an American company, had a revenue of 5.3 billion dollars, while *Diadora*, declared a revenue of 161 million euros in 2018. As it can be easily seen, all the foreign brands that were voted more than the Italian brands, have a much higher revenue. Higher revenues can thus increase the chances of being voted, but it is not a necessary and sufficient condition. For example, *Hershey*, has much higher revenue than *Novi*, but the Italian brand won in each of the three tests, and the foreign brands that were voted more than the Italian ones, did not win in all three typologies of test.

4. CONCLUSION

These analyzed results lead to the conclusion that the personal preferences of the participants of this questionnaire, were to invasive and important in their final choices and thus in the results. It would be interesting to see if the results changed if the brands chosen for the test, were all small and very little known brands: in this way, the participants would not be biased by preferences and would choose more based on the nationality of the brands. It is also interesting to think of how the results would change if this test was taken years ago before the globalization: maybe in this case, people will have less knowledge of foreign brands and will have voted more for the Italian brands. Another interesting suggestion to see how results would differentiate, concerns the age group. In this survey we have considered individuals only from 18 to 34 years of age, but how would the results have changed if the sample included people of all ages above 18? Or yet again, how would the results change if only individuals above 40 years of age were taken as a sample? Another aspect to look at is the global situation that we are currently living. The pandemic crisis spread by Covid-19 could have biased the votes for Italian brands. The results of the three combined tests, state the Italian brands were chosen with a 66.5% preference. The corona virus may have boosted these percentages up, but when analyzing the tests individually, it is clear that when the participants were not disgusted, they had the highest preference towards Italian brands. Thus, it is not possible to certainly state whether the Corona virus will make Italian consumers feel more attached to made in Italy brands. From this particular study, brand managers could learn that the level of disgust elicited to consumers is not always a powerful enough tool to lure people into buying their products. Managers need to face the reality that brand preference is the most important thing for keeping costumers loyal to their brands, thus building a strong relationship, and having a successful brand. This test showed that each individual is different form one another and that it is very difficult for brand managers to construct a marketing strategy equal for each potential consumer. From the prospective of retailers this study can be useful to understand which brands are better to be sold. It is shown by the results of this test that the initial hypothesis, stating that disgust brings costumers to prefer brands made in Italy, has not been confirmed. Further studies of these results show that there is no correlation between level of disgust and brands chosen, thus giving a strong information to retailers around the world: customers are always willing to buy brands for which they have a strong personal preference. Usually, most consumers have preferences for big international brands, thus retailers should consider selling bigger and more famous brands to target the highest possible number of costumers, instead of selling more “made in” products than foreign products.

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