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Chair of Advanced Marketing Management

Artificial Intelligence as a "Reason to Believe" for Made in Italy: Consumer Perceptions Between Brand Enhancement and Risk of Dilution

Prof. Marco Francesco Mazzù

SUPERVISOR

Prof. Carlo Fei

CO - SUPERVISOR

Isabella Giulietti Virgulti 775551

CANDIDATE

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Abstract

This study investigates how the adoption of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) by Made in Italy companies affects the perceptions of consumers residing abroad in terms of authenticity, quality, craftsmanship, trust and brand identity. Using a qualitative approach inspired by Gioia Methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 participants selected through purposive sampling (non-Italian Europeans, non-Europeans residing in Europe and Italians residing abroad).

The results show that GenAI is predominantly perceived as a tool for supporting and enhancing Made in Italy, rather than as a risk factor: (i) in storytelling, it reduces the awareness gap between Italian and international consumers by making origin, supply chain and cultural references more accessible; (ii) in certification, it increases the perception of authenticity, especially among less experienced consumers. Systematic differences emerge international consumers tend to implicitly trust the Italianness of the product (especially in European contexts), while Italians abroad adopt more vigilant verification behaviors. While recognising its benefits, respondents emphasize the need for a balance with the human dimension, which is key to perceived authenticity.

1. Introduction

Global interest in Made in Italy has grown steadily in recent years, reinforcing the international perception of Italy as symbol of quality, authenticity and craftsmanship (Lawless & Fisher, 1990; Peneder, 2003; Qureshi, 2017).

This positive image built on the excellence of several sectors and industries has strengthened the global competitive potential of Made in Italy but also encouraged the proliferation of unfair and misleading practices, among which the phenomenon of Italian Sounding stands out (Magagnoli, 2013).

According to The European House - Ambrosetti report (2024), the value of Italian Sounding reached 98 billion euros in 2023, a figure that represents a multiplier of 1.57 compared to the current value of Italian exports. This figure suggests that, in the absence of imitations, the potential for Made in Italy expansion could

be close to 160 billion euros, highlighting the significant economic losses to the Italian production system. Limiting the analysis to the portion of the market - that is, consumers who buy "Italian Sounding" products in good faith without knowing the real origin - the estimated value is still around 63 billion euros. Correcting this distortion, then, could allow the Italian agribusiness sector to reach an export value of 126 billion euros, more than double its current value. Parallel to this scenario, an epochal transformation is taking shape that affects not only the Italian economic and productive fabric, but also its symbolic and identity dimension, with the introduction and progressive diffusion of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) adoption by Made in Italy companies could contribute, according to The European House - Ambrosetti (2023), to a growth in Italian GDP of up to 18 percent.

In recent years, the scientific literature has turned increasing attention to the cognitive and perceptual effects related to the attribution – whether correct or incorrect - of a product's origin, with particular the phenomenon of Italian Sounding. This practice can be interpreted through the paradigm of Country Sound Branding (CSB), i.e. a communicative strategy aimed at evoking the cultural and symbolic identity of a particular country - in this case Italy - even in the absence of a real production or geographical link (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Several studies have shown how the perception of origin alone can significantly influence consumers' judgment on aspects such as perceived quality, reliability, tradition and brand value, activating cognitive processes - such as the "halo effect" - and affective dynamics related to cultural stereotypes, feelings of belonging or nationalism (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008; Ahmed *et al*., 2002).

In this context, Made in Italy is configured as a particularly powerful symbolic and identity construct, universally associated with tangible values such as creativity, aesthetics, craftsmanship and authenticity, but also with an imaginative and affective dimension that contributes to reinforce its perceived value (Francioni & Albanesi, 2017; Heinemann, 2019). The perception of "Italianness" operates, therefore, as a reputational multiplier, capable of elevating the competitive positioning of the product: when a good is recognized as authentically Italian its qualitative characteristics are emphasized and reinterpreted in the light of a positive stereotype of excellence, thus making the application of a premium price more justifiable (Bonaiuto *et al*., 2021).

In light of these considerations, it is evident how the protection and enhancement of Made in Italy today also passes through a reflection on the adoption of new technologies, in particular the strategic use of

Artificial Intelligence. According to The European House - Ambrosetti (2024), an effective fight against Italian Sounding requires increased consumer awareness and the promotion of product traceability. With this in mind, GenAI can be a decisive tool not only to improve brand storytelling and customer care activities through chatbots (Prasad Agrawal, 2024), but also to certify the authenticity of products through integration with technologies such as machine learning and blockchain, which can ensure transparency, traceability and security along the entire supply chain (Priya *et al*., 2023; Varghese *et al*., 2022).

However, the use of AI by businesses has raised a number of questions about its actual impact on consumers' perception of authenticity, trust, and quality. While anthropomorphizing and humanizing technologies can strengthen the emotional bond between brand and consumers, an interaction perceived as artificial or mechanical can generate distrust and detachment (Pandey & Rai, 2025).

Although there are studies that analyze the general impact of digital transformation on Made in Italy (Matarazzo *et al*., 2021), a significant gap emerges in the literature regarding the specific implications of Generative Artificial Intelligence on consumers' perceptions. In particular, the extent to which tools such as chatbots or virtual assistants contribute to strengthening or, on the contrary, weakening the value identity of Made in Italy has not yet been adequately explored.

The present research therefore aims to investigate how the adoption of GenAI by Italian brands can affect the perception of authenticity, quality and craftsmanship by international consumers, contributing to the enhancement of Made in Italy or leading to its progressive symbolic "dilution".

To answer the questions posed, the research will adopt a qualitative approach based on Gioia Methodology (Gioia *et al.,* 2013), which is considered the most suitable to explore in depth the perceptions and attitudes of consumers. The sample, selected through purposive sampling, consisted of consumers living abroad in Europe, divided into three subgroups (non-Italian Europeans, non-Europeans, and Italians living abroad) to ensure heterogeneity of background. The interviews focused on exploring perceptions of Made in Italy products, awareness of Italian Sounding practices, and opinions on the use of GenAI as a tool for communication and certification.

The study aims to make relevant contributions from both theoretical and managerial perspectives. From the theoretical point of view, it aims to broaden the understanding of the symbolic impact of GenAI in Made in Italy marketing by assessing whether such tools reinforce or undermine the traditional values

associated with the brand. From a practical point of view, the research will provide useful operational guidance to Italian companies on how to effectively integrate AI into communication strategies, enhancing the product narrative, strengthening the link with the consumer, and contributing to the protection of authenticity through the extension of GenAI-based tools.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Cognitive and Psychological Impact of Country-of-Origin Misattribution: The Case of Italian Sounding and Its Influence on Consumer Perception and Market Dynamics

The following paragraphs will examine how the perception of origin impacts product quality, price, and market dynamics, focusing specifically on the concepts of Country Sound Branding, the Made in Italy label, and the phenomenon of Italian Sounding.

2.1.1 Country of Origin and Country Sound Branding: Cognitive and Psychological Effects of Perceived Origin

In recent years, a growing number of studies have analyzed the cognitive and perceptual effects resulting from the erroneous association between a product and its country of origin. This phenomenon, which restricted to the Italian panorama takes the name of Italian Sounding, can be interpreted within the broader framework of Country of Origin (COO), but finds a more precise theoretical collocation in the concept of Country Sound Branding (CSB), which is based on the intentional ambiguity of the real origin of a product, exploiting cultural, linguistic or symbolic signals of a given country to generate a "favourable misclassification" (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011).

Several authors have shown how the attribution – whether correct or incorrect - of a COO significantly influences consumers' perceptions of the brand and product (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008). In particular, consumers tend to infer characteristics such as quality, reliability and durability on the basis of perceived origin, attributing the same distinctive traits to all brands associated with a certain country. This cognitive mechanism known as the "halo effect" (Bloemer *et al*., 2009) operates even when

there is little or no concrete product information (Bertoli & Resciniti, 2013). However, the association with a country of origin does not only activate cognitive processes, but also affective ones (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Emotions such as affinity (Oberecker, *et al*., 2008) or animosity towards a country can influence product judgements (Klein *et al*., 1998), sometimes overriding rational evaluations (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1989). This is the case, for example, with the reluctance to buy products from negatively perceived countries (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007), or the "bias towards one's own country", which leads to a preference for domestic products even if they are inferior (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004).

Considering the impact of cognitive and affective mechanisms activated by the misattribution of a product's origin, it has been observed that when consumers associate a brand with an incorrect country of origin, their evaluations - and subsequent purchasing decisions - may be significantly different from those made on the basis of the real origin (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008). Origin-related information, in fact, plays a crucial role in the development of positive or negative biases about goods, conditioning consumers' purchase choices (Bursi *et al*., 2012). Consequently, the attribution – whether correct or incorrect - of a geographical origin to a product generates significant effects on several variables, including quality perception, brand positioning, consumer attitude, propensity to purchase and willingness to pay (WTP) (Ahmed *et al*., 2002; Francioni & Albanesi, 2017). Even when origin is falsely attributed, as in the case of Country Sound Branding, these perceptions are equally influenced, resulting in potentially distorted evaluations and purchasing behaviour (Bonaiuto *et al*., 2021).

2.1.2   *Made in Italy and Consumer Perception: Effects on Perceived Quality and Price*

In general, the perceived quality of a product is higher when it comes from a country commonly recognized for excellence in that particular product category (Ahmed *et al*., 2002).

Italy emblematically represents this case, thanks to an established reputation in several sectors that positively affects multiple dimensions of consumer behaviour (Temperini *et al*., 2016). Indeed, Made in Italy products are globally recognized for the so-called "Italian style", an expression of the high creative content of production processes (Francioni & Albanesi, 2017), and are associated with values such as aesthetics, authenticity, tradition and high craftsmanship (Cerrato & Piva, 2012; Fallan & Lees-Maffei, 2014; Guerini & Uslenghi, 2006). In addition to the tangible aspects linked to quality, Made in Italy products also incorporate a symbolic and emotional component that amplifies their perceived value (Napolitano *et al*.,

2015; Temperini *et al.,* 2016). Indeed, they evoke in consumers a strongly positive cultural and affective imaginary - linked to the style and quality of life, as well as to their own tourist memories in Italy- which represents an emotional added value of great economic relevance (Heinemann, 2019). Such associations in fact activate sensory experiences and pleasant memories in consumers, reinforcing in their minds the image of Made in Italy and significantly influencing their decision-making process (Dona, 2010).

In this scenario, the perception of the "Italianness" of a product acts as a powerful reputation multiplier. When a good is identified as authentically Italian, the qualitative characteristics attributed to it tend to be emphasized, helping to build an image of excellence that justifies a higher price. Italianness, therefore, not only reinforces the product's credibility, but is itself a differential value that can justify a premium price compared to similar products of different origin (Bonaiuto *et al.*, 2021).

2.1.3 The Italian Sounding Phenomenon: Perceptual Mechanisms, Consumer Misclassification, and Market Impact

The phenomenon of Italian Sounding fits fully into the theoretical framework of Country Sound Branding (Erickson *et al.*, 1984; Roth & Romeo, 1992; Phau & Prendergast, 2000; Rosenbloom & Haefner, 2009; Samiee, 2010; Aichner, 2014), as it exploits those identity and symbolic traits of Made in Italy previously outlined, strategically transferring them to products that do not have an authentic Italian origin (Magagnoli, 2013; The European House - Ambrosetti, 2024). Indeed, the intentional use of names, symbols, colours, graphics or references recalling Italianness aims to evoke, even in the absence of a real geographical belonging, the same reputational qualities that consumers associate with goods actually produced in Italy (Carreño & Vergano, 2016; Francioni & Albanesi, 2017). Such strategies thus exploit the cognitive processes through which the consumer, in the absence of a clear indication of the Country of Origin, relies on more or less explicit signals and clues to infer the product's origin (Josiassen & Harzing, 2008). These processes generate an interpretative space of ambiguity and perceptual confusion in which Italian Sounding can operate, inducing a transfer - often unconscious - of attributes such as aesthetic quality, manufacturing tradition, cultural authenticity and high level of craftsmanship onto goods that actually lack these traits (Heinemann, 2019).

The strength of this inferential process depends, however, on a number of individual and contextual variables. In particular, the consumer's limited familiarity with the brand or product category tends

to accentuate the effect of symbolic clues on the processing of perceived origin (Hong & Wyer, 1989; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1989).

In such a complex scenario, in which information - real or presumed - on the product's origin is intertwined with the consumer's cultural background in the context of a national market that is strongly interconnected with the global one, it is necessary not only to delve into the psychological and socio-cognitive dynamics that make the phenomenon of Italian Sounding possible, but also to carefully analyze its consequences (Bonaiuto *et al*., 2021).

These consequences are reflected on several levels, involving different categories of actors (Boatto *et al*., 2016). Producers that employ strategies to evoke the Italian character gain a clear competitive advantage: the misclassification by the consumer can in fact lead to a positive revaluation of the brand, attributing to it reputational characteristics superior to its actual origin (Zeugner-Roth *et al*., 2008). However, this same mechanism produces critical effects both for Italian exporting companies and for the market as a whole (EURISPES, 2013). On the one hand, unfair competition from Italian Sounding products undermines the visibility and competitiveness of authentic productions, eroding market shares and jeopardizing the survival of entire manufacturing sectors (Carreño & Vergano, 2016). On the other hand, the spread of such practices weakens market transparency, generating confusion in purchasing decision-making processes (Bonaiuto *et al*., 2021).

Consumers, in fact, are also penalized by these unfair strategies, which undermine trust in information available and hinder truly informed consumption choices (Francioni & Albanesi, 2017).

2.2 Artificial Intelligence for Enhancing Made in Italy Authenticity: Generative AI, Chatbots, and Product Certification as Tools for Brand Storytelling and Consumer Engagement

According to The European House - Ambrosetti (2024), two of the eight key actions identified to counter the phenomenon of Italian Sounding consist, on the one hand, in increasing foreign consumers' awareness of the qualities and distinctive characteristics of Made in Italy (e.g., through effective communication that enhances Made in Italy history traditions and values, education initiatives aimed at international consumers on the correct reading of labels) and, on the other hand, in promoting the adoption of systems capable of guaranteeing the traceability of products, thus strengthening their perceived authenticity. In this context,

Generative Artificial Intelligence represents a boat that Italy should not miss, as a fundamental lever to protect the identity and integrity of Made in Italy in international markets (The European House - Ambrosetti, 2023).

2.2.1 Generative AI Chatbots as Narrative Agents: Enhancing Brand Storytelling and Consumer Engagement

Artificial intelligence (AI), in particular through the use of chatbots powered by Generative AI (GAI) algorithms, is emerging as an increasingly central marketing tool for brand storytelling (Prasad Agrawal, 2024) and for the creation of personalized interactive experiences (Chakraborty *et al*., 2024), playing a key role in shaping consumers with respect to brand values, story and identity (Wang, 2021; Lo Presti *et al*., 2021). Thanks to the integration of Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies, which allow them to understand and reproduce human language, these chatbots are able to generate interactions that not only satisfy functional needs, but also contribute to the construction of an engaging narrative around the brand (Kusal, 2022).

As virtual assistants, GAI-based chatbots can answer questions, solve specific problems and guide the user through the purchas process in a smooth and intuitive manner, while offering timely support that enhances the overall customer experience (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2019; Kushwaha & Kar, 2021; Ooi *et al*., 2025; Crolic *et al*., 2022). Such continuous interaction not only optimizes communication between brand and consumer, but also strengthens the emotional connection (Adikari *et al*., 2019) of the user with the brand, contributing to greater satisfaction and loyalty (Chung *et al*., 2020). Interaction, therefore, is not limited to a utilitarian function, but takes on an emotional relevance (Wang, 2021), making chatbots ideal tools for implementing narrative strategies in which the user can discover product-related stories, values, traditions and information (Hoyer *et al*., 2020, Lo Presti *et al*., 2021). Thanks to machine learning and deep learning capabilities (Kusal *et al*., 2022), these digital assistants also personalize the interaction by dynamically adapting to individual preferences, offering content and suggestions consistent with the user's purchase path and interests (Kar *et al*., 2023; Wamba *et al*., 2023).

2.2.2 Artificial Intelligence as a Tool for Product Certification: Toward More Transparent and Reliable Authenticity Systems

Regarding the application of Artificial Intelligence as a tool for certifying product authenticity, this technology emerges as an innovative and strategic resource (Priya *et al*., 2023; Varghese *et al*., 2022). Indeed, traditional certification methods are increasingly inadequate in ensuring transparency, security and traceability in a market exposed to counterfeiting and deceptive practices (Gbashi & Njobeh, 2024; Alotaibi, 2023; Wu & Weng, 2021). AI eliminates the margin of human error, thus allowing for more accurate and reliable control, through the integration of technologies such as machine learning and blockchain (Naeem, 2024). These tools make it possible to trace the entire production chain - from raw material to distribution - ensuring the authenticity of products and protecting both consumers and brand value (Ye *et al*., 2008). However, being an emerging technological field, the scientific literature on the use of AI for certification purposes is still limited, and the application potential is largely unexplored (Aznan *et al*., 2022). Nevertheless, studies conducted so far show that these technologies are promising in contributing to the identification of counterfeit products and the validation of authentic ones (Daoud *et al*., 2020).

Some concrete applications of Artificial Intelligence in the field of certification relate in particular to processes that take place upstream from the purchase by the end consumer (Naeem, 2024). For example, in food engineering, AI-based machine vision systems automatically analyze images and videos to classify products, assess their quality and detect any anomalies, thus ensuring that only food that conforms to standards is placed on the market (de Santana *et al*., 2019). Furthermore, the integration of AI and blockchain has been experimented with to improve traceability and transparency along the entire food value chain, enabling effective monitoring from the place of production to final consumption, with benefits also in terms of safety and speed of intervention in case of contamination or recalls (Laga & Sarno, 2020). A further use of AI concerns predictive models applied to production and storage: thanks to machine learning, it is in fact possible to predict phenomena such as spoilage or contamination, intervening promptly to safeguard product quality and integrity (Naeem, 2024; Si *et al*., 2007).

Alongside these industrial applications, some scholars have explored the possibility of using Artificial Intelligence on the consumer side as well, to autonomously recognize the authenticity of products. The most interesting experiments include the use of machine learning technologies for automatic image and

text recognition, with the aim of quickly detecting counterfeits. In a study conducted at the Technische Universität Chemnitz, a user-friendly web application was developed that can simultaneously process a product photograph and its textual description, entered directly by the user. By comparing the entered data with a trained model, the system provides a prediction of the product's authenticity, showing particularly promising results due to the multimodal combination of text and image (Daoud *et al*., 2020).

Although still in the experimental stage, these technologies represent a significant evolution toward more dynamic, accessible, and automated forms of certification that can complement official systems in ensuring the authenticity and reliability of products (Naeem, 2024; Verma *et al*., 2025).

2.3 AI and Consumer Perception: Impact on Perceived Authenticity and Quality

In recent years, the use of Artificial Intelligence by companies has raised relevant questions about the impact such technology has on consumers' perceptions of concepts such as authenticity, quality, emotional attachment, and trust toward brands (Jago, 2019; Hasija & Esper, 2022; Pandey & Rai, 2025). In particular, the adoption of conversational and Generative AI has prompted scholars to question how the humanization of digital technologies affects users' evaluation of brands (Jago *et al*., 2022; Matthews & Eilert, 2022). Several authors have pointed out that the perceived authenticity of an interaction with AI, in terms of humanity and consistence with social values, is considered to be a key factor in consumer behavioral intentions (Jago e*t al*., 2022; Hasija & Esper, 2022; Girardin *et al*., 2024).

Anthropomorphism, understood as the attribution of human characteristics to technologies, fosters the creation of an emotional bond between consumer and AI, increasing sympathy and trust towards the latter, and contributing to the construction of a new form of perceived authenticity and quality (Munnukka *et al*., 2022; Reddy *et al*., 2023), no longer based solely on product origin or materiality, but also on interactive, engaging, and personalized experiences (Waytz *et al*., 2010; Epley *et al*., 2007; Purington *et al*., 2017).

However, while AI can reinforce the perception of quality through tailored interactions and targeted recommendations (Coelho & Imamovic, 2025), its digital features can be perceived as less authentic than traditional experiences (Hausmann & Weuster, 2018), generating a possible sense of detachment or artificiality. This limitation, however, can be overcome when AI manages to build an interaction perceived

as empathetic and human, thus transforming itself not only into a functional tool, but also into a relational element that contributes to the symbolic and affective value of the brand (Pandey & Rai, 2025).

The literature thus highlights an interesting ambivalence: AI can either reinforce or threaten perceptions of authenticity, quality and tradition, depending on how it is designed and integrated into brand strategies.

In light of the contributions examined, it is useful to propose a summary of the main findings in the literature, highlighting the subject of study and the variables examined for each one. Table 1 summarizes the main studies discussed, highlighting the extent to which they provide useful antecedents or, conversely, leave unexplored areas that this research intends to investigate further.

Author(s), Year	Topic	Variables investigated	Contribution	Limitations
Ahmed *et al.*, 2002	Joint effects of Country-of-Origin (COO) and brand on product evaluation	Perceived quality; brand evaluation; WTP	Shows that COO strongly shapes quality perception and purchase intention	Does not address GenAI, storytelling, or digital authentication
Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008	How consumers classify the brand's origin	Misclassification; brand-origin identification; cognitive bias	Explains mechanisms of COO misclassification	No exploration of digital mediation (AI/chatbots)
Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011 misperception	Advantages/disadvantages of COO misperception	Brand strength; country image; misperception outcomes	Theorizes reputational transfer from COO perception	No consideration of AI as amplifier/mitigator
Francioni & Albanesi, 2017	Case study on Italian Sounding in the German market	Consumer confusion; trust; transparency	Provides empirical evidence of how Italian Sounding misleads consumers	No link to AI, storytelling, or certification tools
Bonaiuto *et al.*, 2021	Consumer assessments of authentic vs. Italian Sounding	Quality judgments; consumer attitudes; COO bias	Experimental proof that Italian Sounding distorts consumer perception	No connection to GenAI or digital authenticity systems

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Matarazzo *et al.*, 2021	Digitalization in Made in Italy SMEs and customer value creation	Dynamic capabilities; digital adoption; competitiveness	Positions digital transformation as central for Made in Italy competitiveness	Does not analyze GenAI or consumer perception of authenticity
Jago, 2019	Algorithmic mediation and perceived authenticity	Authenticity; trust; genuineness	Frames authenticity as a critical variable in algorithm-mediated interactions	Does not focus on COO or Made in Italy
Hasija & Esper, 2022	Trust and acceptance of AI technologies	Trust in AI; technology acceptance	Identifies trust antecedents relevant to AI-based certification	Does not address COO/Italian Sounding or symbolic authenticity
Chung *et al.*, 2020	Chatbots and customer satisfaction in luxury contexts	Customer satisfaction; e-service; brand experience	Shows chatbots enhance customer experience and loyalty, relevant for luxury Made in Italy	No examination of authenticity/tradition concerns
Crolic *et al.*, 2022	Risks of chatbot anthropomorphism	Anthropomorphism; consumer anger	Highlights risks of poorly designed AI interactions	No COO/Italian Sounding or Made in Italy link
Lo Presti *et al.*, 2021	Role of chatbots in shaping purchase decisions	Relational sales; engagement; brand narrative	Shows chatbots can support storytelling and relational sales	Does not test authenticity perception
Prasad Agrawal, 2024	GenAI adoption in organizational contexts	GenAI use cases; adoption processes	Positions GenAI as a strategic lever for storytelling and consumer experience	Lacks COO/Italian Sounding perspective
Naeem, 2024	AI applications in food authenticity & fraud prevention	Machine learning; blockchain; traceability	Provides technical basis for AI certification and authenticity checks	No evidence on consumer perception (trust, authenticity, WTP)
Daoud *et al.*, 2020	AI-based consumer-side product recognition	Image/text recognition; authenticity prediction	Shows practical potential for AI consumer apps (scanning, label verification)	Does not measure consumer perception outcomes

| My Research (Giulietti Virgulti, 2025) | Impact of GenAI adoption by Made in Italy companies on international consumers' perceptions, complemented by insights from Italian consumers living abroad | Perceived authenticity, quality, craftsmanship, trust, and brand identity | Explores whether GenAI strengthens or dilutes Made in Italy's symbolic value. Fills the literature gap on the ambivalence of AI (enhancer vs. risk of dilution) in relation to COO, Italian Sounding, and brand authenticity, specifically from the perspective of international markets |

Table 1.
Summary of
Key Literature

Table 1 - Source: Author's elaboration

3. Research Propositions

Some previous studies, such as the one by Matarazzo *et al*. (2021), have analyzed how digital transformation has affected the creation of consumer value in Made in Italy companies, highlighting the progressive integration of digital technologies in business processes to maintain competitiveness in international markets.

However, as summarized in Table 1, the effects of the adoption of specific digital tools - such as Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) - by Made in Italy companies, and their impact on consumer attitudes and the perception of brand value and authenticity, are still little explored.

In particular, there is a lack of in-depth investigation on the impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence - and its use in tools such as virtual assistants or chatbots - on the perceptual positioning of the Made in Italy brand. The existing literature, in fact, has not yet investigated whether GenAI, while representing an innovative opportunity to strengthen the narrative of origin and brand protection – and thus acting as a potential "reason to believe" (Tybout & Sternthal, 2012), may at the same time entail risks of "dilution" (Loken & John, 2023) of the identity and uniqueness of Made in Italy, compromising both its tangible and intangible values that distinguish it, including authenticity, tradition, quality and craftsmanship.

This gives rise to the following research question:

How does the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) by Made in Italy companies influence the perceptions of consumers living abroad, potentially reinforcing the brand's distinctive identity—grounded in authenticity, tradition, quality, and craftsmanship—or, conversely, leading to its "dilution"?

4. Methodologies

4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative approach, considered particularly suitable for investigating phenomena that have not yet been thoroughly explored at a theoretical and empirical level, with a particular focus on how the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) by Made in Italy companies can affect the perceptions of consumers living abroad.

To answer the research question, a design based on semi-structured interviews was adopted, considered by Gioia Methodology (Gioia *et al.,* 2013) to be the central tool in inductive qualitative studies, as they allow for the collection of meaningful data and capture the nuances of the interviewees' perceptions. This approach guarantees a basic common structure to all participants, but at the same time offers the flexibility needed for the emergence of themes not predefined in advance.

4.2 Sampling and Participants

The sample was defined using purposive sampling, which involves the intentional selection of participants based on their relevance to the research question. In particular, a "homogeneous sampling" strategy was adopted (Etikan *et al*., 2016), as the selected subjects shared two fundamental characteristics: they were residents abroad, more specifically in Europe, and they were familiar, to a greater or lesser extent, with the purchase and consumption of Made in Italy products in their country of residence. Europe was identified as the preferred setting for the analysis, as it represents a market in which the dynamics of Italian value creation are intertwined with possible distortive phenomena, such as Italian Sounding.

The sample size was not established *a priori* but determined on the basis of the principle of theoretical saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022), i.e. the point at which further interviews did not provide any new evidence significant for the purposes of the analysis. A total of 16 participants, aged between 23 and 31, were interviewed.

To ensure variety in terms of cultural background and consumer experiences, the sample was divided into three subgroups: (a) five non-Italian European citizens living in Europe; (b) six non-European citizens living in Europe; (c) five Italian citizens residing abroad in Europe, included to enrich the analysis with the perspective of those who have direct cultural familiarity with Made in Italy. This configuration made it possible to compare international and Italian perceptions, highlighting significant similarities and differences in interpretation.

4.3   Data Collection

The interviews were conducted entirely online, as the participants resided in different European countries. All conversations were audio-recorded with informed consent, ensuring full confidentiality and anonymity for the interviewees through the assignment of identification codes used in the analysis and presentation of the results (IA = Italian Consumers Living Abroad; EU = European Consumers Living Abroad; NE = Non-European Consumers Living Abroad, followed by a progressive number).

The interview guide, divided into four sections, was developed following a "funnel approach" (Roller, 2020), proceeding from general questions to progressively more specific ones. In the first section, socio-demographic and general questions were asked to outline the participant's profile. The second section explored general perceptions of Made in Italy, drawing inspiration from previous qualitative studies, such as that by Bellini and Cardinali (2015) – focusing on the role of the brand and distribution channels in the perception of typical products – and that by Asioli *et al.* (2012) – relating to consumers' expectations and sensory experiences with organic products – adapting the questions by analogy to the Made in Italy context. The third section introduced the phenomenon of Italian Sounding, with the aim of gauging consumer awareness, perceptions and the implications of such practices on purchasing choices and trust in Made in Italy products. Finally, the fourth section gathered opinions on the use of Artificial Intelligence by Italian companies as a tool for enhancing and guaranteeing the authenticity of Made in Italy, drawing inspiration from the contributions of Fischer *et al.* (2025) and Chen *et al.* (2022) on consumer perceptions of the reliability, transparency and communicative value of AI

technologies.

4.4   Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Gioia Methodology (Gioia *et al*., 2013), which involves an inductive and systematic coding process aimed at ensuring rigor and transparency in theoretical elaboration. The full transcripts of the interviews (available in Appendix) underwent an iterative coding process, which resulted in first-order concepts, subsequently grouped into second-order themes and finally synthesized into aggregate dimensions. This process made it possible to move from the participants' voices to a more abstract conceptual representation, while maintaining a strong link between the empirical data and the theoretical construction.

5.   Findings

This section is structured around the three aggregate dimensions that emerged from the coding process – Perceived Authenticity, Perceived Risk and Legitimacy - which summarize the main patterns found in the interviews (see Table 2).

Although the sample was initially conceived as a single unit, during the coding phase, recurring themes and systematic differences emerged between the perceptions of international consumers living abroad (European and non-European ones) and those of Italian consumers living abroad. For this reason, in the outline and presentation of the results, the two groups are distinguished in order to highlight both the convergences and the divergences in interpretation. For each dimension, illustrative quotations are provided to clarify and elaborate on the perceptions that emerged. Quotations originally expressed in Italian were translated into English to ensure consistency.
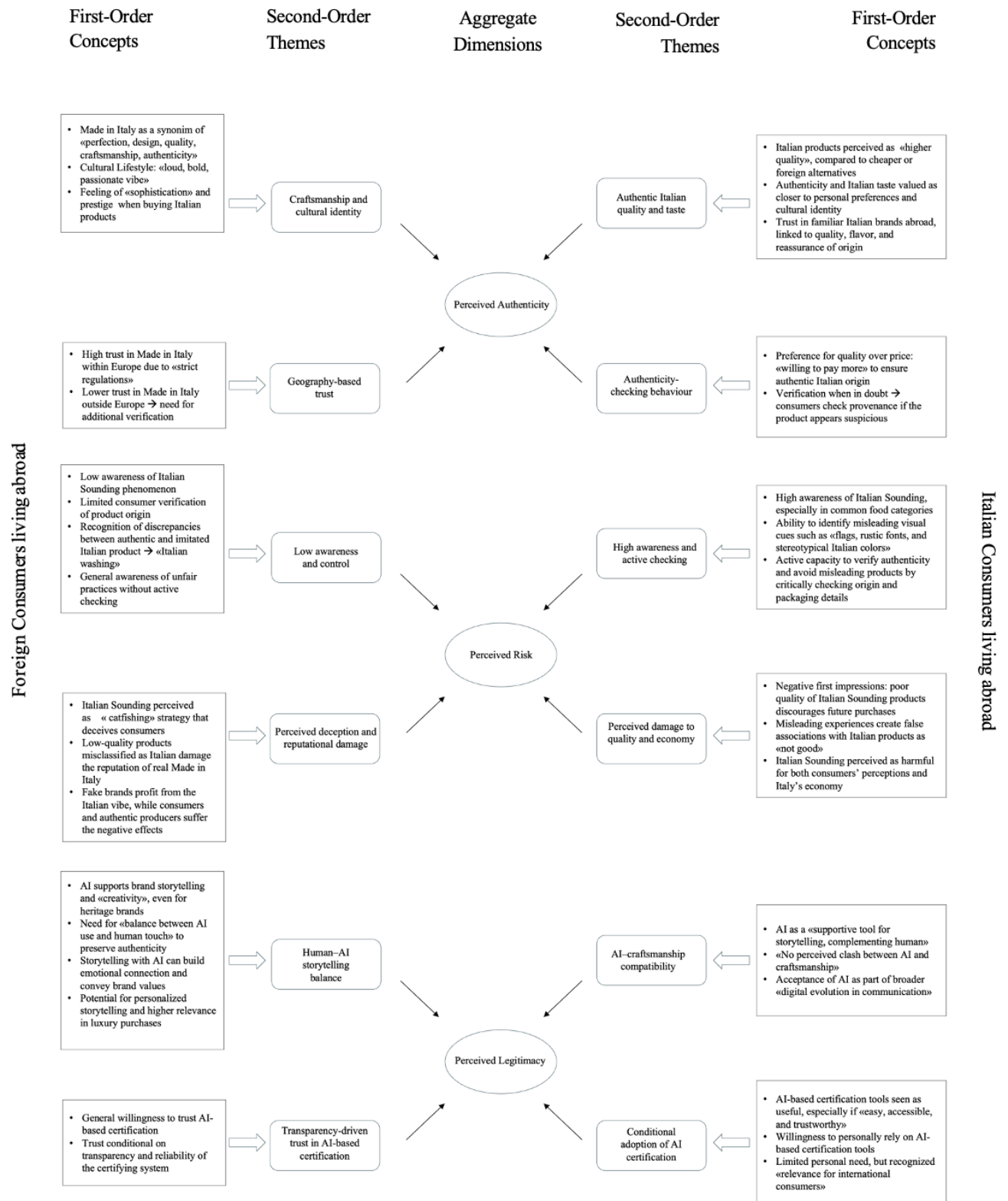
Foreign Consumers living abroad

Italian Consumers living abroad

First-Order Concepts	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions	Second-Order Themes	First-Order Concepts

Perceived Authenticity

First-Order Concepts (Foreign):
- Made in Italy as a synonim of «perfection, design, quality, craftsmanship, authenticity»
- Cultural Lifestyle: «loud, bold, passionate vibe»
- Feeling of «sophistication» and prestige when buying Italian products

Second-Order Theme: Craftsmanship and cultural identity

First-Order Concepts (Foreign):
- High trust in Made in Italy within Europe due to «strict regulations»
- Lower trust in Made in Italy outside Europe → need for additional verification

Second-Order Theme: Geography-based trust

Second-Order Theme: Authentic Italian quality and taste

First-Order Concepts (Italian):
- Italian products perceived as «higher quality», compared to cheaper or foreign alternatives
- Authenticity and Italian taste valued as closer to personal preferences and cultural identity
- Trust in familiar Italian brands abroad, linked to quality, flavor, and reassurance of origin

Second-Order Theme: Authenticity-checking behaviour

First-Order Concepts (Italian):
- Preference for quality over price: «willing to pay more» to ensure authentic Italian origin
- Verification when in doubt → consumers check provenance if the product appears suspicious

Perceived Risk

First-Order Concepts (Foreign):
- Low awareness of Italian Sounding phenomenon
- Limited consumer verification of product origin
- Recognition of discrepancies between authentic and imitated Italian product → «Italian washing»
- General awareness of unfair practices without active checking

Second-Order Theme: Low awareness and control

First-Order Concepts (Foreign):
- Italian Sounding perceived as «catfishing» strategy that deceives consumers
- Low-quality products misclassified as Italian damage the reputation of real Made in Italy
- Fake brands profit from the Italian vibe, while consumers and authentic producers suffer the negative effects

Second-Order Theme: Perceived deception and reputational damage

Second-Order Theme: High awareness and active checking

First-Order Concepts (Italian):
- High awareness of Italian Sounding, especially in common food categories
- Ability to identify misleading visual cues such as «flags, rustic fonts, and stereotypical Italian colors»
- Active capacity to verify authenticity and avoid misleading products by critically checking origin and packaging details

Second-Order Theme: Perceived damage to quality and economy

First-Order Concepts (Italian):
- Negative first impressions: poor quality of Italian Sounding products discourages future purchases
- Misleading experiences create false associations with Italian products as «not good»
- Italian Sounding perceived as harmful for both consumers' perceptions and Italy's economy

Perceived Legitimacy

First-Order Concepts (Foreign):
- AI supports brand storytelling and «creativity», even for heritage brands
- Need for «balance between AI use and human touch» to preserve authenticity
- Storytelling with AI can build emotional connection and convey brand values
- Potential for personalized storytelling and higher relevance in luxury purchases

Second-Order Theme: Human–AI storytelling balance

First-Order Concepts (Foreign):
- General willingness to trust AI-based certification
- Trust conditional on transparency and reliability of the certifying system

Second-Order Theme: Transparency-driven trust in AI-based certification

Second-Order Theme: AI–craftsmanship compatibility

First-Order Concepts (Italian):
- AI as a «supportive tool for storytelling, complementing human»
- «No perceived clash between AI and craftsmanship»
- Acceptance of AI as part of broader «digital evolution in communication»

Second-Order Theme: Conditional adoption of AI certification

First-Order Concepts (Italian):
- AI-based certification tools seen as useful, especially if «easy, accessible, and trustworthy»
- Willingness to personally rely on AI-based certification tools
- Limited personal need, but recognized «relevance for international consumers»

Table 2 - Source: Author's elaboration

Table 2.
Coding Framework

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5.1 Perceived Authenticity

The aggregate dimension of Perceived Authenticity emerged from participants' attributions of distinctive values to Made in Italy products - such as quality, craftsmanship and cultural identity - and from varying degrees of trust and verification with regard to the authenticity of products purchased abroad.

All respondents, regardless of their origin, associated Made in Italy with distinctive traits such as quality, craftsmanship and authenticity, to which in some cases references to design and sophistication were added: "*the first thing that comes to my mind is quality... and craftsmanship... a good amount of research*" (NE5). In addition to the tangible aspects related to product characteristics, some participants recognized a more emotional and cultural component that contributes to defining the identity of Italian products: "*Like to me Italian culture is about being bold and loud and have passionate vibe*" (NE2). For Italian consumers living abroad, these dimensions are complemented by an emotional connection with the purchase of Italian products, which are seen as a means of continuity with their culture of origin ("*it's like feeling at home*", IA5).

A second recurring element concerns confidence in the authenticity of the products purchased. International consumers stated that they trust Italian origin, especially when purchasing within Europe: "*I do believe and trust in the image*" (NE1). However, several non-European respondents expressed greater caution with regard to non-European contexts, where the implicit guarantee of origin appears less obvious**.**

The perspective of Italians is different, as most of them have shown a more vigilant and skeptical attitude, stating that they carefully check the origin and prefer products with clear signs of authenticity, even if it means paying a higher price: "*...when I buy an Italian product, I go more for quality than convenience*" (IA3).

5.2   Perceived Risk

The Perceived Risk aggregate dimension emerged in relation to participants' awareness and perceptions of the Italian Sounding phenomenon and its implications in terms of trust and reputation of Made in Italy.

A first significant divergence concerns the level of awareness. Most international consumers stated that they were not clearly aware of the phenomenon, or only had a vague idea of it, without however translating this awareness into concrete behavior at the time of purchase: "*I just take it and put it in my basket*" (EU4). The exceptions were two respondents with a background in luxury management studies, who showed greater familiarity with the issue. On the contrary, all Italian consumers living abroad showed a high level of attention and recognition of such practices, also highlighting the visual and stylistic details that characterize them, such

as the recurrent use of certain colors and fonts: "*...Italian products are always linked to colors... such as green... packaging that has a slightly more artisanal look...*" (IA3).

Once the phenomenon had been introduced and clarified, most respondents - both Italian and international - interpreted it as a potentially deceptive practice, capable of misleading consumers and compromising the image of authentic Made in Italy products. In particular, it emerged that associating low-quality product with an apparent Italian origin risk damaging the overall reputation: "*...if we buy these products thinking they come from Italy and their quality is bad... we will associate those bad products with Made in Italy...*" (EU1).

However, there was also an interviewee among Italian consumers living abroad who suggested that, in some cases, the presence of products of ambiguous origin could stimulate the curiosity of less informed consumers, prompting them to actively seek information and develop greater awareness of the authenticity of Made in Italy.

5.3   Perceived Legitimacy

The Perceived Legitimacy aggregate dimension emerged from participants' perceptions of the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence both as a brand storytelling tool and as a means of certifying the authenticity of Made in Italy products.

With reference to previous experiences, almost all respondents said they had interacted with chatbots or virtual assistants, mainly for practical functions such as obtaining information on returns or refunds. In some cases, these interactions were described as unsatisfactory, as the systems were unable to provide adequate responses to requests.

With regard to the use of AI in storytelling, the majority of participants - both international and Italian - were in favor of using virtual assistants or AI-based applications to describe the characteristics and origin of Made in Italy products. Not only are these tools not perceived as conflicting with the tradition and craftsmanship that characterize "Italianness", but several interviewees emphasized that they expect AI to provide more in-depth narratives. Some expressed a desire to receive clear information about the supply chain, "*where products actually come from*" (F1), or to hear "*good background stories... how it was born... why the product has been developed and exists for so many years... and what it does to the planet...*" (EU1).

Others have highlighted the potential of generative technologies to enrich the narrative experience through innovative methods, exploiting multimedia capabilities "*to tell the story of the brand... in a better way, like with visualizations or sounds, to better tell consumers about the story of the brand*" (NE5), provided that AI-based systems are designed in a sophisticated manner and in line with the brand's identity ("*if the people who design the systems are capable to design very sophisticated flow in line with the brand's messages and values*", NE2). In this perspective, AI has been described as a tool capable of offering new possibilities for brand communication, "*providing creative ways to redefine themselves and do something which is different from human creativity*" (NE1) and "*elevating the Made in Italy experience*" (NE2). At the same time, several interviewees emphasized the need to maintain an equilibrium with the human dimension, reiterating that "*there's the need to strike a balance so that people can feel the human touch*" (NE4).

As for AI-based certification, almost all participants described it as a useful option for guaranteeing product authenticity, expressing a general willingness to trust an AI-certified label. Only one interviewee expressed doubts about the risk of technological errors. Italian consumers living abroad, while considering themselves less inclined to use such tools themselves, nevertheless acknowledged their importance, especially for international consumers who are less accustomed to recognizing the distinctive features of authentic Made in Italy products.

6. Discussion

The results offer relevant insights into answering the research question. A first key aspect concerns the potential of GenAI as a storytelling tool. The interviews highlighted a significant divergence between international consumers and Italian consumers living abroad in terms of awareness of the Italian Sounding phenomenon and, more generally, of the distinctive features that characterize Made in Italy.

This difference suggests that using GenAI to describe the origin, history and characteristics of products could have an educational and informative function, helping to bridge knowledge gaps and make those aspects that are often implicit - such as cultural references, craft techniques and territorial roots - more immediately accessible, as they are not always fully decipherable to international consumers. Not surprisingly, many respondents said that, as consumers, they would like to receive from AI a narrative insight into these

elements, including information on the supply chain, brand stories and the link between products and the territory and sustainability.

In this sense, AI is not perceived as a disruptive element with respect to the heritage of Made in Italy, but as a tool capable of strengthening it through digital and interactive languages. However, participants insisted on the need to maintain a balance with the human component: in the case of Made in Italy, which bases its credibility on cultural heritage and craftsmanship, technology must serve as a support and not a substitute, at the risk of losing the human dimension that is an integral part of its perceived authenticity.

Alongside its narrative function, the results show how GenAI can strengthen trust in Made in Italy through certification systems. Most respondents expressed openness to the adoption of "AI-certified" labels as a guarantee of origin, recognizing their usefulness especially for less experienced consumers, such as international ones.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The results of this research offer some relevant theoretical implications, by positioning themselves within the existing literature on Country of Origin, Made in Italy, and the role of Artificial Intelligence in shaping consumer perceptions, while also highlighting new elements.

Firstly, the recurring association between Made in Italy and values such as quality, craftsmanship and authenticity confirms the findings of previous studies, which have emphasized the role of "Italian style" as a reputational multiplier and a lever capable of justifying a premium price (Francioni & Albanesi, 2017; Bonaiuto *et al*., 2021). The emergence of an emotional and cultural dimension, mentioned by several participants, is also in line with what has been described in the literature about the ability of Italian products to evoke an affective and symbolic imagery of great economic relevance (Heinemann, 2019; Napolitano *et al*., 2015).

At the same time, the results enrich the theoretical perspective by highlighting systematic differences between international consumers and Italian consumers living abroad. In particular, while the former tend to implicitly trust Italian origin, especially in European contexts, the latter show a more vigilant attitude and are willing to verify authenticity even at the cost of a higher price. This divergence broadens our knowledge of the cognitive and affective mechanisms activated by the Country of origin (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008;

Bloemer *et al.,* 2009), suggesting that cultural familiarity with the product influences not only affectivity, as indicated by Oberecker *et al*. (2008), but also on the propensity for more active authenticity-checking behavior.

With regard to Italian Sounding, the results contribute to understanding consumer perceptions. In particular, they highlight how the lack of awareness shown by international consumers fits in with the cognitive mechanisms described in the literature, according to which limited familiarity accentuates dependence on symbolic cues (Hong & Wyer, 1989). However, the fact that all Italians living abroad demonstrated an awareness of these practices reinforces the idea that cultural background plays a crucial role in mitigating the effects of "favorable misclassification" (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Furthermore, the observation of an interviewee who interpreted Italian Sounding as a possible stimulus for curiosity represents a new element, which opens up less unambiguous perspectives on the reputational effects of these practices.

Finally, with regard to the role of Artificial Intelligence, the results are in line with studies that identify chatbots and GenAI tools as an opportunity to strengthen brand storytelling and engagement (Prasad Agrawal, 2024; Chakraborty *et al*., 2024; Wang, 2021).

Respondents not only recognized the compatibility between GenAI and the identifying traits of Made in Italy, but also expressed an explicit expectation that these tools would provide in-depth narratives on supply chains, brand stories and environmental impacts, confirming the technology's potential to meet educational and informational needs already highlighted by The European House - Ambrosetti (2024). At the same time, the emphasis on the need to maintain a balance with the human dimension confirms the ambivalence described by Jago *et al.* (2022) and Matthews & Eilert (2022), according to whom AI can either reinforce or, conversely, threaten the perception of authenticity depending on how it is integrated.

With regard to certification, the results corroborate the literature that identifies AI as an innovative option for ensuring traceability and authenticity (Priya *et al*., 2023; Varghese *et al*., 2022; Naeem, 2024). The widespread willingness to trust an "AI-certified" label is an extension of previous evidence, indicating that the legitimacy of such tools is already perceived at the end-consumer level, not just at the industrial or upstream stage.

6.2 Limitations and future research

This research is not without limitations. First, the topic of the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in strengthening or putting at risk the identity of Made in Italy is still largely unexplored in the literature: the

results therefore offer a preliminary contribution, which needs to be further explored with additional research. Furthermore, although the sample is culturally diverse, it is limited to consumers living in Europe and of a relatively homogeneous age, limiting the possibility of generalizing the findings to broader geographical and demographic contexts. Added to this is the qualitative nature of the study, which allows for the capture of nuances and perceptual dynamics but does not allow the results to be extended to a statistical level.

In light of these limitations, future research could first expand the geographical and demographic scope of the sample to include consumers from other parts of the world in order to assess whether and how the value of Made in Italy and the adoption of AI are perceived in different cultural contexts. Further quantitative studies could also validate and measure the extent of the patterns that have emerged, providing generalizable evidence. Finally, longitudinal research could analyze how perceptions evolve over time, in parallel with the growing use of AI technologies by businesses, thus contributing to understanding the long-term trajectories of the integration between digital innovation and the Made in Italy identity.

7. Conclusion

The research highlighted how Generative Artificial Intelligence, when applied to Made in Italy products, is perceived by consumers residing abroad primarily as a support capable of strengthening their identity, rather than putting it at risk. In particular, it emerged that GenAI can play the role of "reason to believe" through two main functions: on the one hand, storytelling, which helps to reduce the awareness gap between Italian and international consumers by making elements of origin, supply chain and cultural values accessible; on the other hand, certification, perceived as a guarantee of authenticity, especially for less experienced consumers.

These results are significant because they highlight how Generative Artificial Intelligence and, more generally, digitalization processes, although at first glance appearing distant from the characteristics of craftsmanship that define Made in Italy, are actually perceived by consumers as complementary and supportive tools, rather than as substitutes. In the context of Made in Italy, based on craftsmanship and cultural heritage, technology must therefore act as an amplifier of existing values, without ever obscuring that element of humanity that consumers recognize as an integral part of its authenticity.

From a practical point of view, this opens up an opportunity for Italian companies: the possibility of developing AI applications that not only guarantee traceability and certification, but also convey the stories, roots and values of Made in Italy in a clearer and more engaging way. If developed in line with brand identity and the quality of the messages it intends to convey, GenAI-based tools can strengthen the legitimacy of Made in Italy in international markets, acting not as a diluting factor but as an opportunity for brand enhancement.

In conclusion GenAI represents a potential and strategic "reason to believe" in Made in Italy, capable of innovating its language without betraying its values, while strengthening its credibility on a global level.

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Appendix - Interviews

European Consumers Living Abroad (Europe)

Appendix A.1 – Interview with Participant EU1

Participant Code: EU1
Date: 6 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: France
Country of Residence: France
Age: 24
Profession: Event coordinator

I: Hi! Thank you for your time and for being here. The first thing that I ask you is if you can just briefly introduce yourself, like how old are you, where do you live, what's your study background and what's your current job if you have.

EU1: Ok, so my name is …, I live in France, in Paris. I studied 5 years, ehm.. in a business school in the South of France, ehm… mostly in the luxury marketing, and now I'm doing an internship at Louis Vuitton for 6 months in event coordination.

I: Perfect. So, the first section of questions is just about your perception of Made in Italy in general. So, do you happen to buy Made in Italy products and, if yes, which product categories do you buy?

EU1: Ehm, I actually don't usually look that much about where a product has been made, but I know I have a few bags that are Made in Italy, so yeah I think it's mostly bags and of course food at the supermarket.

I: Ok, and where do you usually buy these products, for example physical shops, e-commerce, trips to Italy and stuff like that?

EU1: Ehm, I would say physical shops, mostly.

I: Ok, an in your opinion, like what makes you choose an Italian product over others?

EU1: In my opinion, I think that if it's Made in Italy it has a better quality, more craftsmanship and yeah it's more like they have more craftsmanship.

I: Got it, and when you buy in a country which is not Italy, so abroad from Italy, do you trust brands that claim to be Made in Italy, even when you find them in your country?

EU1: Ehm, I mean, if it says Made in Italy, usually I trust them and I don't check before buying. Yes, I trust them even if I'm not in Italy.

I: Ok. Moving on to the second set of questions, have you ever bought a product that you thought was Italian, perhaps because of the brand name or packaging and then discovered that it was not?

EU1: Ehm, I don't think so, I don't have any example, sorry there's nothing that comes to my mind.

I: Ok, don't worry that's fine. It is very common because often a lot of people buy that kind of stuff, but they don't know that those products are not actually Italian. So, this kind of phenomenon is called Italian sounding, and it consists in the use of names, geographical references, images, color combinations and trademarks that evoke Italy on labels and packaging of non-Italian products.

EU1: Oh okay okay.

I: So, considering this perspective and this definition. Does the phenomenon of Italian sounding damage the value of real Made in Italy abroad, or can it someway reinforce the value of the brand by bringing the consumers closer to the Italian culture?

EU1: Ehm, I think it definitely damages because if we buy these products thinking they come from Italy and their quality is bad or like for food it tastes bad or like for clothes they have bad materials, we will, you know, associate those bad products to Made in Italy, so it's a risk for the country.

I: Ok, got your point. And in fact Made in Italy brands are trying to find new ways to fight this kind of phenomenon, and one tool they are using to enhance and protect the value of Made in Italy abroad is AI. In this perspective, the first thing that I ask you is very general and it's: have you ever interacted with a virtual assistant while buying something, like a chatbot or an AI-based tool?

EU1: Yes, it happened, you know when you have that little pop-up and it says "do you have a question?" or something like that, so I've already use it.

I: Ok, and imagine that you are on a website or on an application of a Made in Italy brand and you receive information about the products directly from a chatbot or from an AI-based tool, how would you react? Would you feel more or less confident about the quality and the origin of the product?

EU1: Ehm, I don't think it would change my perception of the quality, but maybe I would prefer to choose by myself if I want to access this information and not having that information popping up in front of my screen, you know, I'd prefer to have just a little section in which I can find this information only if I want to, but it doesn't really change the quality perception.

I: Ok, interesting. And do you think that this way to communicate which is basically digital and virtual can be consistent with the tradition, craftsmanship characteristics of Made in Italy brand?

EU1: I mean, I think yes. Like typical Italian craftsmanship I associate it to luxury, to personalization and to talking to consumers and making them feel very unique, so I think the use of AI need to be very careful to not damage this image of personalization, ehm, so I think that if it's used properly, keeping this in mind, it's okay to use it and every brand is using this so it is necessary to take this opportunity.

I: Ok, got it. And some Made in Italy brands are starting to use AI not only for a storytelling purpose, but also by developing some features in applications/website which are able to scan the label of the products and say to consumers "this is a real Made in Italy product, this is not". Considering this feature, would you use it? I mean, would you trust a label that says for example "authenticity guaranteed by AI" on a Made in Italy product?

EU1: If I know a little bit about the company of AI which is labelling it, to understand if I can trust it or not, I think that I would trust. I think that if it correctly explains to the consumers what it means and how it has been guaranteed that that specific product is from Italy, yes it would be fine for me.

I: Ok, now we have the last question, which is very personal actually. If you had the chance to give advice to a Made in Italy company that wants to use AI to tell and protect its product and to enhance its value, what would you tell it? Which kind of information would you like to receive as a foreign consumer from an AI tool?

EU1: Ehm, personally I always love to learn more about the history of the brand, so if its history is closely linked to the place where is produced, I think it's interesting to talk about that and the city and these specific characteristics of the brand and which craftsmanship techniques are used, and about all the production and the craftsmanship behind that. I would say all this kind of storytelling.

I: Ok, perfect we've finished! Thank you very much!

Appendix A.2 – Interview with Participant EU2

Participant Code: EU2
Date: 8 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: Sweden
Country of Residence: Sweden
Age: 27
Profession: Business Controller

I: So, the first thing that I ask you is to briefly introduce yourself and tell me how old are you, what do you do and what did you study and where do you live right now.

EU2: Yes, my name is …, I'm 27 years old and I'm from Sweden, Gothenburg. I have studied a bachelor's in economy, business economy to be exact and I've also studied my master's in management, so also economy focused, but more sustainability as well. So yeah, I have broad w3eeebackground but right now I've started working because I graduated now in June. So now I work as a business controller.

I: Okay, perfect. The first part of section is about like your experience with Made in Italy in general, so the first thing I ask you is do you happen to buy Made in Italy products for example pasta at supermarket or olive oil or clothes, like which kind of categories do you happen to buy?

EU2: I would say that I mostly buy Made in Italy food because we have very high, how do you say, we think that all the Italian products have really high quality so we like to buy olive oil and we like to buy ham and cheese from Italy because we think and it's very well known that Italy is very good at food. So often when I cook food I like to change the environment a bit and when I want to be a little luxurious, of course we have some Swedish types as well but yeah I love the Italian pesto and

everything like that. But sometimes when it comes to clothes maybe I have been buying less non-Swedish brands so to say. I've started buying more Swedish designers but when I'm in Italy for vacation of course I shop a lot of clothes so it's wrong to say that I don't own any Italian clothes.

I: Okay, perfect. And what characteristics do you expect from an authentically Made in Italy product, like which kind of word comes to your mind, something like that?

EU2: When I think about Italian products overall it could be food and perfumes and beverages. I would say everything when it comes to food has extra taste and it feels like it's the authentic taste like when I buy tomato sauce so to say. I think I really like the kitchen in Italy, so I think it's very good flavored. When it comes to clothes, I would say quality is a very big, it's a word that comes to mind. Then I think Italian women are very good or like the fashion in Italy is very, how do you say, daring. That you dare to have bright colors. We are not so good at that in Sweden so I like that you dare to stand out from the crowd and yeah.

I: Okay, interesting. And do you trust brands that claim to be Made in Italy even when you find them in your country for example?

EU2: I always look at the tags where they actually are made because I know that some brands are like sewing the clothes in China but then ship them to Italy to be like, how do you say, footing boxes like in the packaging. So, I think I've become more aware in the last couple of years that even if it says Made in Italy it's not. So, I try to do my research.

I: Okay, perfect. You like anticipate the next part because like the second part is about the phenomenon of Italian sounding. I don't know if you know the name but it's exactly what you were saying. So it is the use of names, geographical references, images, color combinations and trademarks that evoke Italy on labels and packaging of non-Italian foods. So as you can imagine it's like it's something that steals a lot of euros from our market so it's a problem actually. And so my question is, in your opinion, this kind of phenomenon like can damage the value of Made in Italy or some way it can reinforce it by, I don't know, getting consumers close to Italian culture in general?

EU2: I think it can be damaging and it's wrong, how do you say, wrong quality brands are claiming to be Italian when they are not and maybe the level of quality that most Italian brands are having maybe it gets damaged when other brands are creating non-quality clothing and says that they are Italian and of course I think it can be damaged but I would also make sure to merchandise the fact that the buyer like the individual should be curious about knowing the details not only looking at the brand and says true Italian designs and then the buyer would assume that it's Italian. I think more focus should be put on do the buyer wants to know the details, yes, then everybody will know the truth.

I: Okay, perfect, got it.

EU2: Yeah, I think me and my friends are pretty aware, I don't know about the elderly people.

I: Okay, so the last section is about the main topic of the thesis which is the use of artificial intelligence to fight this kind of phenomenon. So, the first question is very general and it is have you ever interacted with a virtual assistant, chatbot or AI-based tool while buying a product online of any type?

EU2: I've only been in contact with an AI robot when it was suggested which size I should choose on a website. I don't remember which website it was but I had shopped there before and I also put in my regular sizes which size I used to have and then the AI robot would tell me which size I should have on that website because some sizes are big, some are smaller. So yeah, I think that's the only AI.

I: Okay, Okay. Now I'll tell you two ways in which Made in Italy is using AI to enhance its value. The first one is a communication and storytelling feature because some Made in Italy brands are developing some chatbots which tell the consumer like the story of the products, the origin of the product and in this perspective I ask your opinion about that and I ask you if in your opinion like a completely digital-based communication can be consistent with the tradition craftsmanship characteristics which are typical of Made in Italy.

EU2: Do you mean that if I would trust AI to tell me the truth?

I: Yes, and if in your opinion this kind of communication which is basically digital and virtual can be consistent with the traditional part of Made in Italy and its typical craftsmanship?

EU2: I'm starting to get more used to AI I would say so probably if I would see it more and that it would be used more I would recognize it and trust AI to tell the truth but sometimes I would say that when a true Italian person or maybe a celebrity told me that this is the brand that I'm raised with, this is a brand that my grandparents wore maybe I would also think that that is very authentic and I would believe that if that actress says that this is a true Italian brand and I think I would believe that more than if an AI robot is telling me that this is a true way of creating bags.

This is the true way of creating perfumes or fragrances.

I: Okay perfect and the second way in which Made in Italy is using AI is by developing some features in Made in Italy brands' applications which are able to scan the label for example of olive oil or pasta or products and they can say to the consumer "this is Made in Italy; this is not Made in Italy". In this perspective I ask of course your opinion and if you would trust an AI certified label or not.

EU2: My direct answer would be yes. I like labels and I think we use them in Sweden very much for different type of ecological products so if something was branded with a certain label saying that this is true Italian products I think I would believe that. I don't know if it's good or bad but I think I actually would.

I: Okay perfect and the last one is personal and is if you had the chance to give an advice to a Made in Italy company that wants to use AI to tell and protect its product what would you tell it and what would you like to listen as a consumer from it?

EU2: I think it would be great to tell how do you say good background stories like great make a history about the brand don't just tell this is a good product that's why you should buy it. I think it's very important to tell the customer how it was born like why the product has been developed and exists for so many years and what it does to also the planet because I think sustainability is a very big part of today's products.

I: Okay perfect. We're finished. It was very very interesting to hear from you. Thank you again for your time and for your help. Thank you so much.

Appendix A.3– Interview with Participant EU3

Participant Code: EU3
Date: 12 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: France
Country of Residence: Switzerland
Age: 23
Profession: Marketing intern

I: Hi …, thank you for being here! The first thing that I ask you is if you can briefly introduce yourself, such as like, how old are you, where do you live, and what is your job at the moment?

EU3: Yeah, okay, so my name is …, I'm 23 years old. I'm currently in Geneva for an internship in marketing in a watchmaking company, which name is Frank Muller. I'm doing this six-month internship to validate my Master of Science in Luxury and Fashion Management, and I'm French of origin.

I: Okay, perfect. And as I told you some weeks ago, this thesis is about the perception of Made in Italy abroad for foreign consumers, and so the first part of questions will be about this topic. So, I ask you if, for example, do you happen to buy Made in Italy products, and if yes, which product categories, for example, food, clothes, and stuff like that?

EU3: Okay, if I often buy Italian things. Made in Italy products, yes. Yeah, yeah, of course I do, because I love a lot of Italian brands. Like recently I just bought some Fendi glasses, you know, like they were, it's a model that was really, really famous, really at the, how can I say, hot at the moment, a pair of glasses, really nice. Yeah, I mean, they are 400 euros, but, you know, I really like them, and I think the quality is always good with Italy. I don't know why, maybe sometimes it's just like an idea we have of Italy with the food, the masters of everything, but every time I bought something from an Italian brand, I was always happy, I didn't have a

problem of, I don't know, quality or something. So, yeah, yeah, I like that. Yeah, bags or even, yeah, accessories, I really love sunglasses. So, yeah, that's why I bought this new pair, but yeah, also, yeah, also the bags. Sometimes I love, wait, what was the brand? I don't remember. It's a brand my sister offered me a bag. Yeah, it's Prada, sorry, it's Prada, of course. Oh, Prada, okay, okay. Of course, yeah, I love, I also love Miu Miu a lot, you know, for their shoes, for them. So, yeah, I love Italian brands.

I: Okay, perfect. And where do you usually buy these products, like physical shops or online trips to Italy?

EU3: No, yeah, online, yeah, online a lot, yeah, for the glasses, for example, online, because, I mean, yeah, you have some, maybe you have some shops in Geneva, but the price will be maybe different. So, yeah, and yes, I think it's easier when you, I don't buy online really often clothes, you know, because it's harder to determine the size and everything. But, yeah, accessories or shoes or, yeah, bags, it's really online, yeah.

I: Okay, perfect. And what makes you choose an Italian product over others? For example, what are the characteristics that you associate to Made in Italy?

EU3: That's how I said, we know the French quality, but also the Italian one, because it has really a long story. For example, we worked in class about Bottega Veneta. Yeah. And, yeah, that's real. They do really amazing things with good leather. They have their famous *intrecciato*, you know, with the kind of the model and everything. They have this thing, like this legacy. And I think, yeah, it's the history of Italy and everything. And it's quite, it's not really far away from France. So, I think they're both linked with quality. And, yeah, maybe style and design, very good, how can I say, what the Italian and French people like. I think it's the same. So, yeah, that's why.

I: Okay, perfect, got it. And the last question of this section is, do you trust brands, which are not famous, of course, that claim to be Made in Italy, even when you find them in your country?

EU3: Yeah, if they, how can I say, if they do their proof, you know, we say it in French, but I don't know if you understand. If they prove that they are, I mean, legitimate and they do good things, of course, I don't care if it's not really famous. It has to start somewhere, one day become famous. So, why not?

I: Okay, okay, perfect, perfect. The second part of question is about the phenomenon of Italian sounding. I don't know if you know it. Otherwise, I'll give you the definition.

EU3: Italian sounding? Yes. No, I don't, I don't really see.

I: I'll give you the definition. It is the use of names, geographical references, images, color combinations and trademarks that evoke Italy on labels and packaging of non-Italian food products.

EU3: Okay.

I: And so, in this perspective, not only with food, but also with other types of products, I ask you if, have you ever bought a product that you thought was Italian, perhaps because of the packaging or something like that, and then discovered that it was not?

EU3: I don't really have an example in mind, but how can I maybe try to find something Italian?

I: Oh, like, for example, did you, like, have you ever had the doubt?

F8: Yeah. For example, I'm not sure that this kind of stuff is really Italian or not. I can't, I really struggle to find an example right now. Maybe it will come to my mind, but no, not, I don't have something.

I: Usually, maybe, like, at the supermarket, I don't know, if you had, like, if you used to buy, for example, food products such as cheese, ham and stuff like that. Or pasta, olive oil, something like that. Because usually...

EU3: Oh, yeah, maybe, yeah, yeah, maybe. There is a French brand of pasta that is, no, they seem, they give the idea that they are Italian, but no, they are French. I think it's the brand *Panzani.*

I: Okay, yeah, perfect.

EU3: If I remember, they do, they share this Italian stylish lifestyle and everything made in Italy for the pasta, the real pasta, but the company is French, if I remember well.

I: Yeah, exactly, this is the perfect explanation of what I was saying, exactly.

EU3: Okay, yeah, I see now.

I: Okay, and in your opinion, does this phenomenon damage or reinforce some way the value of real made-in-Italy abroad?

EU3: No, yeah, not damages, but it's not legitimate. If you're not from Italy, why do you want to share and be, how can I say, pretentious, too? I don't know why, like, because, you know, the pasta is a huge market, okay, but then that's not legitimate. Why would you want to make false that you're Italian and that you're not, you know? So, yeah, no, I don't think, not damages, but it's not legitimate.

I: Okay, okay, got it. And then we have the last section of questions, which is about the main topic of the thesis, which is the use of artificial intelligence to fight this kind of phenomenon. And so the first question is very general, and it is, have you ever interacted with a virtual assistant, chatbot, or AI-based tool while buying a product?

EU3: Yeah, of course, yeah, quite sometimes.

I: Okay, and which kind of chatbots were they?

EU3: Sometimes it's, I mean, it's not really when I buy something, it's often when, you know, your bank application, when you have some problems, it's really quite often when I use that. But on the websites, when I try to buy, when I buy some products, I mean, when I do shopping, it's a lot when, you know, you have to do returns and reimbursements, refunds, and everything. I always, I really often use the chatbot, but sometimes it bothers me, and I start to get angry because I don't have the answer I'm looking for.

I: Okay, yeah, yeah.

EU3: Yeah, it's a robot who's answering, and, you know, I want to speak with someone like a real human, and, like, it doesn't give me classical answers. Like, I want to go deeper.

I: Yeah, I see. And now I'll tell you in which ways Made in Italy is using, is starting to use, because, of course, it's the first, like, these are the first tentative. And so Made in Italy is using AI in two ways. The first one is by developing some chatbots on the websites of Made in Italy products that used to tell the story of the products to consumers. So it's like a storytelling part. And in this perspective, I ask your opinion about that, and if, in your opinion, digital-based communication can be consistent with the tradition, craftsmanship, which are typical of Made in Italy.

EU3: I think it's really important every time to share the storytelling of the brand, of the Italian brand and everything, because sometimes the people buy products, and they don't even know the story behind the brand. So, if, you know, always on the websites, you have this section about us and the story of the company, of the Maison and everything, but not every people go on that part, you know. They don't care. So maybe if you have, like, directly when you come on the website, if you have this AI thing, you're just really directly showing you all the story you have to know, I think that could be really nice because you can be, I cannot say, emotionally linked at the moment that you understand the story. And then, like, maybe you can really reassure you that if you buy this brand, it's because you understand the values and everything, where it comes from. So, yeah, I think it's really nice to put something like that.

I: Okay, so do you think that a chatbot can, like, deliver an emotional message some way?

EU3: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, of course. How can I say? It's quite difficult sometimes because, you know, when you talk with the chat GPT or Siri on iPhone, they sometimes say, oh, I cannot feel emotions and everything. But they're telling that, but when you ask them, write me a wonderful story of love between two persons, they are kind of inspired. So, you have to ask them special ways and then they can do everything. Of course, they're robots.

I: Okay, got it.

EU3: So, they can pretend to, of course, they don't really do things, but yeah, they can pretend to, and I think they can pretend very well. That's kind of scary sometimes. If it helps us, it's okay. Just to help us, it's very good.

I: Okay, and the second way in which Made in Italy is using AI is by developing some applications which are able to scan the label after, like, behind the products, for example, olive oil or pasta. And this scanner is able to say to you, like, "this is real Made in Italy and this is not".

EU3: Yeah, okay. It's nice.

I: Okay, and I ask you, like, if you agree with this kind of stuff and if you would trust an AI-certified label or not.

EU3: Yeah, I think it's good because with, in terms of, how can I say, yeah, trustability, you know? Yeah. It's nice. Yeah, I think it's pretty cool. Yeah, so you're sure that you're not fooled by some brand and everything. It's nice. And France should also do the same, I think, because, as I said, like Italy, they share really the same culture of craftsmanship and refinement and everything. So, I think it's really nice. It's like, yeah, it's like a passport. It's like a passport for them.

I: Yeah, exactly.

EU3: An ID, a scanner. It's nice. It's nice. So, you make sure that they don't, some companies that are not legitimate to tell that I'm French or I'm Italian, of course, in your case, so they don't do it anymore and the consumers are reassured that they buy Italian things. And, yeah, I think it's really nice. Why not?

I: Okay, perfect.

EU3: Yeah, I would use it because, you know the application YUKA, which tells you, for example, you scan the tag of an article, and it tells you which kind of bad components you have inside and you have a score.

I: Yeah, I know it.

EU3: And you have a score and then a lot of people use it and they're really, they are, how can I say, they trust it. So, it can be kind of the same. I think it's a good example. But not in terms of YUKA, it's more in terms of health.

I: Yeah, sure. The goal is the same, it's just to help the consumer to make choices. So, yeah, of course. Perfect. And then we had the last question, which is personal, actually. And it's like, if you had the chance to give an advice to a made-in-Italy company that wants to use AI to tell and protect its product, what would you tell it? Like, what would you, as a consumer, would like to listen as a consumer by a chatbot or like?

EU3: As I said, I think all the, the advantage, the pros of the company itself, the story, how they became who they are today, how they started, why did they do it, for who, for what, they have to tell that. Like in the passport, this kind of section about the story, but also the pros of the product itself, you know, like how it can help you, what it can offer you and everything, like really, like, yeah, an ID, an ID paper, you know, where every question you can have, they are answered even before asking, going on the internet to search about the product and everything. Like every answer is on your hand, you know, like you don't doubt anymore. This is really important to me at the moment, because I'm working in watch making industry and a lot of people are more reassured about buying Swiss watches, and why? Because they have a big past and a big story on it. So, that's the same for Italy. Italy is known for some things. It has to be known for that. Like all the watches made in Geneva, they have the stamp behind the watch – "Made in Geneva, Geneva product, Geneva watch making "– and that's what reassures people, like a real ID which says it's legitimate. That should be the same for Italy and for its products.

I: Okay, perfect. Thank you very much. We're finished. Thank you very much

Appendix A.4 – Interview with Participant EU4

Participant Code: EU4
Date: 22 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: Cyprus
Country of Residence: France
Age: 25
Profession: Trade Marketing intern

I: Hi …! Let's start. The first thing is, like, just briefly introduce yourself, so how old are you, and where do you live, and which kind of studies did you do, and your job.

EU4: Okay, okay. Okay, if you want, I'm going to start.

I: Yeah, yeah, you can start whenever you want, yes.

EU4: So, my name is …, I'm 25 years old, I'm from Cyprus, I'm a student living in Paris, I'm doing my six-month end-of-year internship at Coty as a trade marketing for Gucci Beauty. That's it.

I: Okay, perfect. The first thing that I ask you is, do you happen to buy made-in-Italy products? And if yes, which product categories, for example, at supermarkets or in other shops?

EU4: Okay, so even if it's not luxury products?

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah, not luxury, not necessary luxury.

EU4: Okay, so I tend to buy a lot of... Actually, I don't know if those brands are made in Italy, but like the pasta, you know, and pasta sauces, I don't know if Barilla is Italian. Okay. But I try to... Since I was living in Antibes, I was really close to Italy, so I tend to have found more Italian products. I always got like, not ready-made, but like risotto that is already mixed with the spices and everything. And it says that it was made in Italy, so I tend to buy those things because it's really tasty and easy to prepare. For everything retail, I already bought Italian shoes. I can't remember the brand, but because I know that Italian leather is very well-known and it's durable and comfortable, so it won't hurt my feet and I'll be okay walking with them. Yeah.

I: Okay, perfect. And so, do you buy these products mostly in physical shops, don't you? Not online?

EU4: Yes, I tend to buy in physical shops because I like to try on the clothes, I like to look at the product, if it's pasta or like a toast.

I: Okay, okay.

EU4: So, I prefer to shop in-store, but if I know what I want and I already bought the item before, I can shop it online.

I: Okay, okay, perfect. And what makes you choose an Italian product over others? Like, which characteristics do you expect from a made-in-Italy product?

EU4: So, it depends on the product, because each product is well-made somewhere. So, if I'm looking for an Italian product, like I told you, the leather is excellent from Italy. Also, like ice cream and pasta. I also found cheese and ham. So, I tend to go to the more authentic stuff because I know that I cannot find better products that are Italian but not made in Italy. So, if I really want to eat something good and nice and tasty, I would go for Italian products.

I: And do you trust brands that claim to be made in Italy even when you find them in your country, for example, in France in this moment?

EU4: Yes, but like I told you, I don't know if they are really made in Italy, you know. Because some brands are not as transparent as you want them to be and as the consumer expects them to be. So, I buy my Barilla pasta and I don't know if it's Italian.

I: Okay, okay.

EU4: But I know that it's a good brand.

I: It's interesting because you hit the point of the thesis with your first answer. Because in fact the second section is a little bit deeper and it's about the phenomenon of Italian sounding. I don't know if you know that.

EU4: No.

I: Okay, I'll give you the definition. It is the use of names, geographical references, images, color combinations and trademarks that evoke Italy on labels and packaging of non-Italian products. So, it's a phenomenon that, as you can imagine, steals a lot of money from the real made in Italy abroad. So, the first question is, have you ever bought a product that you thought was Italian, perhaps because of the label or the packaging, and then discovered it was not?

EU4: First when I was buying *Panzani* pasta, I thought it was Italian because of the name, you know. And it was red, and they used all of the good colors for their packaging. But then, I don't know, maybe I came across an ad or something on Instagram that said that it was a French brand actually. So that's why I started buying Barilla, but I still don't know. I want to Google it to see if it's Italian or not.

I: You can Google it. I won't tell you.

EU4: It's Italian. So now I'm happy and I'm going to keep on getting Barilla.

I: Yeah, it's Italian. You know, Barilla in Italy is not the best label of pasta. But as an Italian, when I go abroad, Barilla is my choice because I'm sure of it. It's Italian, yeah.

EU4: But you know, I think people will tend to go buy *Panzani* more than Barilla because it's red and not blue, you know, the packaging.

I: Yeah, and in fact, my question is like, which are the elements that make you think that a product is Italian? Like the visual elements, you know.

EU4: There's the name, like how the name sounds. And also, of course, like when I go to a pizza shop, pizza place, Italian restaurant, it's always either red or green. So, it chooses a lot of the colours of the flag. Also, you know, the typography, it's like handwritten. It's not like a burger place, you know, it's different identity. So, yeah, so the use of colours, how it's branded and everything.

I: And like when you buy, for example, pasta, do you use to like to turn the product and see the origin or do you like just take it and put in your basket?

EU4: I just take it and put it in my basket.

I: Perfect. And like, for example, with the *Panzani* pasta, for that example, like how did you feel after discovering it was not a real Italian product?

EU4: I felt like I was like being scammed, you know, like being cheated on. Because like their ads, their everything, their whole branding is like on point. But it's like except it's just not an Italian brand.

I: OK, got it. And like in your opinion, this kind of phenomenon like damage the value of real made in Italy abroad or it can be an opportunity because a lot of people can like get close to the Italian culture?

EU4: It depends, like, for example, if we are somewhere, I don't know, like somewhere where Italian products are not accessible. And the certain country can imitate the Italian resources. Why not? But I, I would rather them stating that they are not 100 percent Italian and just like, you know, and then but then doing a whole branding and using it like as a mask to to just show off that they are Italian. In fact, when they're not.

I: Ok, I see. And then we have the last section, which is like the main topic of the thesis, which is the use of artificial intelligence to fight this kind of phenomenon. And the first question is very general. And it is, have you ever interacted with a virtual assistant or AI-based tool while buying a product, for example, online?

EU4: No. Because when I know that the chatbot is like an AI, I won't talk to it.

I: Why?

EU4: Because every time I try to talk to it, it doesn't get me the information that I want. I feel like because, for example, if I write my sentence, they will give me like multiple suggestions from and then I have to wait. And it's not like as practical as actually talking to a real someone on the other side.

I: Ok, got it. And so like made in Italy, companies are using AI in two ways. Basically, the first one is by developing some chatbots that like tell the story and storytelling origins of the product in order to like teach to foreign consumers, especially like the origins and make some information about that. And so I ask you like your opinion about that. And if you think that digital based communication can be consistent with the traditions, craftsmanship characteristics of Italy.

EU4: I think in this case, when I'm not the one asking and he's the one giving me information that I need, that I want. It can be interesting because since it's AI, it can reformulate the story depending on who the customer is and who is looking at the website or whatever. So, for example, if I'm not Italian, maybe there's terms in Italy that are better to describe the story. So he's going to know that I'm not Italian. He's going to cater it in a different way in French or in English to better understand the brand and to better get the whole story of the brand. So this can be a very good point. What was your second point?

I: Do you think that completely virtual and digital based communication can be consistent with the tradition, craftsmanship characteristics of Made in Italy?

EU4: Yes, but I think that to some extent, you need a more human presence just to update and to understand more the new customers that are coming. For example, if something new and new innovation comes up, you need an actual human to understand it better than a robot.

I: Okay, perfect. And then the second way in which Made in Italy is using that is by developing some applications that are able to scan the label behind the product and tell you this is real Made in Italy, this is not. And so my question is, would you use it? And the second one is, would you trust an AI certified label or not?

EU4: If it's an application, of course, I'm going to trust it because it's the purpose of the application. So I think yes. Okay, perfect.

I: And the last question is like so personal and you've already said me something. It's like as a foreign consumer, what would you like to receive as information or as like features from a chatbot or AI tool that has the purpose of enhance the value of Made in Italy abroad?

EU4: Very interesting question. Like, for example, to tell me about where the resources of each product came from. Because, for example, I've never been to Italy, but let's say pasta are excellent in Rome and Roma and the pesto sauce is specialized in Milan. So, like things like this to make the customer more interested in the backstory of the brand and like to be very deep in the storytelling and very transparent in their communications and values.

I: It was really interesting. Thank you very much.

Appendix A.5 – Interview with Participant EU5

Participant Code: EU5
Date: 28 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: France
Country of Residence: France
Age: 26
Profession: Finance intern

I: Hi …! Thank you for being here! Can you briefly introduce yourself? How old are you? Where do you live? What did you study and what's your job right now?

EU5: Okay, so my name is …, I live in France. I currently live in Paris, but I'm from Lyon. I did my studies at Skema, a business school during my Master 2. I studied finance and now I work in finance in Paris.

I: Okay, perfect. So, the topic of the thesis is about the perception of Made in Italy of the foreign consumers who live abroad from Italy. And so, this is the general topic like and then we will go deeper in it. The first thing that I ask you is like, do you happen to buy Made in Italy products? For example, also at the supermarket and which product categories do you buy?

EU5: Yeah, of course, I buy Italian products, especially at the supermarket, because like for all the classic Italian dishes, like for, I don't know, for pasta, for pizza, I like to buy some Italian stuff. For, I don't really buy

a lot of like clothes from Italy. I know that if I want like a nice suit or stuff like that, I will buy some from Italy because I know it's good quality and so yeah, I think that's all.

I: So do you usually buy these products mainly in physical shops, right? Not online?

EU5: This kind of products, yeah, because I usually buy Italian products that are in the supermarket, so I don't buy them online.

I: Okay, perfect. And what makes you choose an Italian product over others? You know, which are the characteristics that you associate and do you expect from an authentically Made in Italy product?

EU5: I would say the quality first. Like when I buy some Italian pasta, I know that it's going to be better than other brands. Yeah, I would say quality and I don't know what more to say, but yeah.

I: Okay, perfect. And do you trust brands that claim to be Made in Italy, even when you find them in your own country, for example, in France?

EU5: What do you mean?

I: Like when you are at the supermarket and you see a brand which claims to be Made in Italy, do you trust it? Even if you're not in Italy, of course, at the supermarket, like you're in France, you see a lot of brands, for example, pasta brands that claim to be Made in Italy. Do you trust them or do you have some doubts?

EU5: Some brands, yes. Like some brands, yes. Like very famous brands like Barilla. I know that they are Made in Italy. I think I know that they are Made there.

I: Okay.

EU5: But for other brands, I know that some brands try to use the Italian identity to sell more. So, I would not trust all of them, but I would trust only the ones that I buy usually.

I: Okay. Okay, perfect. You are hitting the point of the interview. In fact, the second part is a bit more inside this kind of phenomenon. And the first question of the second part is, have you ever bought a product that you thought was Italian, perhaps because of the packaging or of the colors and then discovered it was not?

EU5: Like this specific situation, no. But there are a lot of brands, a lot of products that we see at the supermarket. And even if you have the Italian flag on it, you have like like small guys with a mustache or stuff like that, like you know that they are not made there. So I don't really know if I have bought some products that I thought that they were made in Italy and finally not. Like if I had done it, I don't know.

I: Okay. And like, since you are aware of this kind of phenomenon, like when you buy an Italian product, do you always check the origin, like behind the product or not?

EU5: No.

I: Okay, okay, perfect. So with your last answer, you completely hit the point of the thesis, which is the phenomenon of Italian sounding, which is the use of names, geographical references, images, color combinations, and blah, that evoke Italian labels and packaging of non-Italian products. So which are the characteristics that you see on the packaging? You've already told me something, and that you think that brands used to evoke Italy on packaging, like which colors, which kind of images do you see?

EU5: Of course, a lot of Italian flags. They also, like sometimes they use, as I told you, like a small guy with a mustache or, yeah, I think. What can you have for Italy? Like, it's not, I don't know how to explain that, but like all the packaging are the same, like when they try to make them as they are from Italy, like they are all trying to put packaging like very authentic, I would say.

I: Okay, okay, okay.

EU5: Yeah, I have not much to say.

I: Okay, perfect. And as you can imagine, like this phenomenon steals a lot of money from the real made-in-Italy market abroad. But I ask you, like, if in your opinion this kind of phenomenon damaged the value of real made-in-Italy abroad, or some way can, like, make the consumer get close to Italian culture?

EU5: I don't really think it's damaged the, like, the Italian market. Like, of course, it's not really good, but like, uh, like, usually the non-Italian product that try to fake it, they are not good quality, so like the real authentic one, they are most valued than the non-authentic, so I think it can be good for the Italian market in some way.

I: Okay, okay, okay, got it, perfect. The last section is about your perception of the use of artificial intelligence to fight this kind of phenomenon. So, the first question is very general and is, like, have you ever interacted with a chatbot or AI-based tool while buying something online, for example?

EU5: Ah, to buy something online?

I: Yeah, yeah, something general.

EU5: No, I don't think so.

I: Okay, okay, now I'll tell you, like, the ways in which Made in Italy is using AI. The first way is by developing some chatbots which, like, make some storytelling about the products to foreign consumers in order to, like, make some information about that. And, like, in your opinion, this kind of communication, which is completely

digitally based, can be consistent with the tradition, craftsmanship characteristics of Made in Italy, like, these two aspects can go together, in your opinion, or not?

EU5: I'm sorry, I didn't get everything, like, what can...

I: Like, these chatbots are AI-based tools that tell the consumers the story of the products, the origins, and blah, blah, blah. So, in your opinion, this type of communication, which is virtual and digital, can be consistent with the values of Made in Italy, which are based on craftsmanship, tradition, history. Like, these are two potentially opposite aspects.

EU5: I think, yes, because, like, all the markets, even, like, more traditional ones, like the Italian one, they have to evolve with their time. So, yeah, I think it can be consistent in the way that, even by using chatbots, you can keep the authenticity of the brand, in my opinion.

I: Okay, yeah, yeah, perfect. And the second way in which Made in Italy is using AI is by developing some applications which are able to scan the label behind the products. And these applications are able to say to you "this is real Made in Italy, this is fake". Would you ever, like, use it?

EU5: If I have a tool to tell me if it's a real Italian product or not?

I: Yeah, like, would you be prone to use it? Like, is it a good idea, in your opinion?

EU5: For a big Italian product consumer, yes. And you have a lot of Italian products onshore, so yeah, yeah, maybe. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think it can be a good idea, yeah.

I: Okay, and would you trust an AI-certified label?

EU5: Like, if I have the proof that it's true and, like, the tool is not paid for promoting, like, some products, yes.

I: Okay, got it, got it. Okay, we've finished. There's just the last question, which is personal, actually. So if you have, like, you are a foreign consumer, you sometimes buy something from Made in Italy market, and as a consumer, what would you like to receive as information from a chatbot, from an application? Like, which kind of information, in your opinion, could help to fight this kind of phenomenon of Italian sounding and counterfeiting? Yeah, like, from a chatbot, from an application, from something, like, generated by AI, which kind of information, in your opinion, could help the foreign consumer to be more aware of this kind of phenomenon?

EU5: So, the concept of, you know, like, you know, scan a product, and the chatbot is, okay. Maybe I think the best thing is, when you scan a non-Italian product, it can suggest you some real one, like, close to the one you scan.

I: Very interesting. Thank you very much!

Non-European Consumers Living Abroad (Europe)

Appendix A.6 – Interview with Participant NE1

Participant Code: NE1
Date: 3 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: India
Country of Residence: France
Age: 25
Profession: Sales & Marketing Associate

I: Hi…. Thank you very much for being here and thank you for your time. The first thing that I ask you is if you can just briefly introduce yourself and tell me how old you are, where do you live and what is your current profession in this moment.

NE1: Ok, so my name is … and I live in Nice, France, and I am currently working as a sales and marketing associate in a multinational company.

I: Ok, perfect, and may I ask you how old are you?

NE1: I'm 25

I: Perfect, thank you. Ok, now let's move on to the main topic and let's start with the first question. Do you happen to buy Made in Italy products and, if yes, which categories?

NE1: Oh yes, I buy a lot of Made in Italy products, specifically, most of them are food items, because I literally survive on Made in Italy food products, so food products, and then secondly I would say specifically leather

items because I honestly don't like to buy from luxury brands, so if I have to buy anything even in Nice, or even if I go to Italy I would buy leather products from local shops, which are Made in Italy.

I: Mmm and in fact the second one was "where do you usually buy these products, so for example physical shops, trips to Italy, e-commerce, …?"

F1: Ehm, talking about leather and luxury goods I would say most probably when I go to Italy because it's convenient for me to go there and buy everything there, since it's cheaper, while talking about food I would say physical shops, like supermarkets.

I: Ok, perfect. And what makes you choose an Italian product over others?

NE1: Ok, so, according to…like a foreigner, like…as a foreigner, when we come to Europe, our image of Italy is like craftsmanship and very like "made with heart", and stuff like that and, ehm, I think about perfection, because for example I use to talk with a lot of brokers and everyone is like "the quality is everything, but Italian brands, the design, the quality and everything is very high quality and perfect", so that is the image and I do believe and trust in the image, so yeah, I feel this honestly.

I: Ok, got it. And do you trust brands that claim to be Made in Italy, even when you find them in your country?

NE1: It depends, because in France is possible because there are a lot of Italian families who are based here and they might have their trading ehm here, so if they have their small local shop and if the products actually come from Italy and if they are actually imported from Italy is okay. So if you talk about Europe, yes I would do trust brands that claim to be Made in Italy, but outside Europe no, I wouldn't trust. Like in India if you say Made in Italy in a shop, no I wouldn't trust that.

I: Ok ok. And let me ask you something else. Have you ever bought a product that you thought was Italian, perhaps because of the brand name or the packaging and then discovered that it was not?

NE1: Ehmm, maybe. I don't remember but maybe. Because I do remember feeling something was Italian but it was not but I couldn't recall what exactly was.

I: Ok, so it is a doubt that you've had, isn't it?

NE1: Yes, sometimes.

I: And when you buy a product that is presented as Italian abroad, do you ever check the real origin or source?

NE1: Yes, often.

I: Ok perfect. Now, let's move on a little bit deeper inside the topic. Are you aware of the phenomenon of the Italian sounding? Do you know what it is?

NE1: Italian what?

I: Italian sounding

NE1: No…

I: Ok, I'll give you the definition: it is the use of names, geographical references, images, color combination and trademarks, that evoke Italy on labels and packaging of non-Italian food products.

NE1: Ok, got it.

I: So it's when a product seems like to be Italian but it is not actually.

NE1: Ok, and they are basically "catfishing" people making them believe it is an Italian product?

I: Exactly. And so, like in this perspective, would you continue to trust that specific brand or would you change your attitude?

NE1: Ok, make sense. No, I wouldn't trust, because if they are saying if it's just like "Made in Italy", but it is not, then I wouldn't trust, because they are giving fake message to consumers.

I: And how do you think that this kind of phenomenon could change the value of Made in Italy abroad and the perception of Made in Italy among foreign consumers?

NE1: Ehm, can you repeat?

I: Sure. Like, what do you think about this phenomenon and its effects on the foreign consumers' perception of Made in Italy products.

NE1: Ok, yes. So that is one thing, because honestly if people who are not educated and are not someone like me, because I've already studied fashion and I come from this field, so I know how to differentiate but people who are not educated, for them those "fake products" are real Made in Italy and maybe they think they are buying very high quality products, high craftsmanship, high value and everything. So, for consumers like them the effect is very negative, even if of course for those "fake brands" the effect is positive.

I: Ok, perfect, everything clear. Now, the last section of questions is about the application of Artificial intelligence to fight this kind of phenomenon. So, the first question is very general, and it is: have you ever interacted with a virtual assistant, or chatbot while buying a product and which impression did it gave to you?

NE1: Yes, I have. It depends. Like, sometimes when I buy ehm… , like some of them are very good like when I ask questions and they ask me all the details to understand exactly what am I looking for, the size and

everything, the color and everything, even for makeup, if they are asking me the right question, if they are giving me the exact product, then it's ok. Some don't ask you detailed questions, and they will just recommend products just like that, like "what are you looking for?" and I'm like "I'm looking for bags for example", and they are like giving you random selection. So, I have different experiences. Some are not good, and some are good. So it depends on how they are.

I: Ok, perfect. I asked you that because Made in Italy brands are actually starting to use AI in two main ways in order to ehance the value of Made in Italy abroad. The first one is for a communication and storytelling purpose. Imagine that you are on a website of a Made in Italy brands, and you receive product information directly from an AI-based virtual assistant, how would you react Would you feel less or more confident about the quality and the origin of the product?

NE1: Maybe the same, because I think the website would be saying the same things, so I would trust. Honestly, I wouldn't go and check again. I would trust the chatbot.

I: Ok, so you would trust. And do you think that an AI-based tool, so a completely digital tool can convey value, such as craftsmanship, tradition, which are typical of Made in Italy. I mean, do you think that it is something that can be combined?

NE1: Like in which way? To deliver brand's value?

I: Exactly, in delivering brand's value. Like do you think that this kind of communication is consistent with the tradition and craftsmanship values of Made in Italy brand?

NE1: I think it can help. Like it can give the brands creative ways to redefine themselves and do something which is different from human creativity, but like chatbots and learning AI keeps on learning new things and keeps on creat new things, so if the brands use it in a very smart way, it can be useful to brands. I believe that. Because honestly, even for heritage brands I would use AI to create great storyline, and tell a good story, so I think yes. But I still believe that for Made in Italy brands the human component is crucial. You know, when I buy a Made in Italy product, I need someone who looks Italian, who speaks Italian that can explain everything to me. So, I would say that even AI can help, human component can't miss.

I: Ok, and in your opinion are there types of Made in Italy products for which the use of AI is more acceptable and for which ones is less acceptable?

NE1: Honestly I don't think so. I mean, for me it's not about the type of product, it's more about how the AI is used. Like, if it's used in a smart and creative way, then it can work for everything, like food, fashion, design, anything. It just depends on how well the brand uses it to support the story or to give the right information. So yeah, I wouldn't say that there are products where it's more or less acceptable, I think it's all about the execution.

I: Perfect, as I told you before, there are two main ways in which Made in Italy brands are starting to use AI to find ways to enhance the value of Made in Italy products and beside the communication and storytelling purpose, there is the "certification" one: some Made in Italy brands are developing some applications that consumers could use for example at the supermarket, and these applications are based on an AI tool which is able to scan the product's label and tell the consumer "this is real Made in Italy", "this is not". What's your opinion about that, I mean, would you use it or not?

NE1: Ehm, yes. Because, do you know some brands like Barilla or like the pasta brands. Some of them, I know that they are from Italy and that they are manufactured in Italy, but others I'm not sure about the real origin so it would be useful to scan the labels of those products to know if they are original or not.

I: Ok, so you would trust a "certified by AI label", wouldn't you?

NE1: Definitely I would.

I: Got, it. Final question: if you had the chance to give an advice to a Made in Italy company that wants to use AI to tell its products' story, what would you tell it?

NE1: Mmm, I mean maybe using products story, ehm.. that's a difficult question, okay let me think…

I: Like, what would you like to see from an AI-based tool helping you while buying a Made in Italy product or which kind of information would you like to receive as a "foreign" buyer?

NE1: Okay, so maybe like ehm… the AI assistant, like the chatbot, could ask the consumer what he is exactly looking for, so it can help you to sort something out, it goes into the category and give all the information about all the supply chain, and all the information about where the products actually come from, something which is like a certification, especially for food SKUs I would say, I think that's a very good idea for a brand.

I: Perfect! We've done, thank you very much!

Appendix A.7 – Interview with Participant NE2

Participant Code: NE2
Date: 4 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: Vietnam
Country of Residence: France
Age: 28
Profession: Luxury & Fashion Management student

I: Hi …, thank you for being here. So, the first part is very quick. I ask you if you can briefly introduce yourself, like how old are you, in which country do you live, what's your study path and what's your job, if you have.
NE2: Ok so, I'm doing a master in luxury and fashion management, ehm, my bachelor's degree I studied in Japan with a Major in Strategic Management and Organization and now I'm living in the South of France, I'm 28 years old, and that's it.
I: Perfect. Now, moving on with the first set of questions. Do you happen to buy Made in Italy products and if yes which product categories do you prefer to buy?
NE2: Ehm, a lot of things actually, like from personal leather goods, I have a wallet from Gucci Made in Italy, some of my fragrances are Made in Italy, and when I was in Italy I also bought like food and agricultural products, such as olive oil, ham and pasta and everything Made in Italy as well.
I: Ok, and where do you usually buy these products, for example physical shops, e-commerce, trips to Italy, exc.?
NE2: Ehm, I purchase both from physical stores and online. It depends, like if I go out for shopping and I see a nice, like Made in Italy product, and I'm in the mood to buy it, then I purchase it immediately. Ehm, sometimes when I see something nice online then I purchase it online as well, but most of the time I purchase it online.
I: Ok, got it. And what makes you choose an Italian product over others?
NE2: Ehm, I think that there are two countries in Europe that ehm are very famous for the luxury industry and known for, like they are known for making beautiful products, ehm, which are France and Italy, and since I'm in the South of France I'm very closed to Italy, and I'm like very informed about the country and the culture itself, and I do like appreciate the craftsmanship and the "*La dolce vita*" kind of vibe. Like to me Italian culture is about being bold and loud and have passionate vibe. I like that energy and that's what I appreciate the most about Made in Italy kind of products, yeah.
I: Ok, that's nice. And do you trust brands that claim to be Made in Italy even when you find them in your country, for example in France in this moment?
NE2: Ehm, I think here in Europe the regulation is quite strict, like in general like companies and brands cannot really lie to consumers, so here in Europe I do trust them more than in other countries. In other countries maybe I have to do a little bit more of research to see, you know, how Made in Italy is defined in, like such countries, because sometimes like the raw material is from Italy, and the product is produced in Italy, but sometimes like the raw materials is from somewhere else and the product is just assembled in Italy and that product is qualified as Made in Italy as well, so it really depends on the brands and on the regulations of the country that I'm in, but in general I think I'm very trusting with the Made in Italy labels here in Europe.
I: Ok, perfect. And have you ever bought a product that you thought was Italian, perhaps because of the brand name or packaging, and then discovered that it was not?
NE2: Ehm, I don't think I have purchased any product that I thought was Italian and then turned out it was not, because like I feel like for young people as we are, we are more informed and educated when it comes to like consuming things, so we have knowledge and information about products, so it has never happened to me before, but I do know that sometimes in foreign countries they have like brands, for example bakery that have like Italian name to benefit from the Made in Italy or the Italian vibe, so that people come in and purchase from them.
I: Exactly, in fact my next question is related to this phenomenon, because this is a phenomenon that is called Italian Sounding, I don't know if you've ever heard about this, which is the use of names, geographical references, images, color combinations, trademarks that evoke Italy on labels and packaging of non-Italian products. So, this is the main theme and my next question is: does in your opinion the Italian sounding

phenomenon damage the value of real Made in Italy abroad or can it someway help foreign consumers to get closer to Italian culture?

NE2: Ehm, I think from a business point of view, as long as it's not illegal, then people can do it, you know. Like sometimes it's about like selling the products, selling the vibe, like for me that I'm not Italian and in the future I would love to you know open a lingerie brand and give it a very like Italian name and having Italian people to like make the product by hand, just because I simply like love it and enjoy it, so I feel like this does not damage the Made in Italy brand as long as the brand owners and the business owners really put effort into, you know making high quality product and if they have like genuine appreciation for the country and for the aesthetic and Italian esthetic, then it's ok, but at the same time we cannot ignore the fact that many people, they just want to like financially benefit from the vibe, so like they just like get the name, get the Italian vibe, so I don't think it merely damage the Made in Italy vibe, but we have to agree that there are people who just want to financially benefit from the brand and the Italian heritage, without really appreciate the heritage or the country itself. But it depends on brand, by brand, I don't think it damages in general.

I: Ok, very interesting point. Now, the final set of questions is about the application of Artificial Intelligence to enhance the value of Made in Italy brand abroad and to fight the phenomenon of the Italian sounding, when it damages the brand. The first question of the section is very general, and it is: have you ever interacted with a virtual assistant chatbot, or AI-based tool when buying a product?

NE2: Ehm, I think I used AI, but mainly for product recommendation or like you know like virtual assistant chatbot. Or maybe I have another example, which is an AI experience that I have that is related to a brand that tells me the story about the brand and it's maybe the Cucinelli website. It talked a little bit about the brand and the product and answered to some of the questions, so that's my only experience with it and I think that's quite interesting because it's very like educational, yeah.

I: Ok, perfect. In the perspective of the Cucinelli example, you've just made me, some Made in Italy brands are starting to use AI and AI-based chatbot and assistant to tell the story of the products. So, imagine that you are on a Made in Italy website or application and imagine that you receive product information directly from an AI-based tool. How would you react? Would you feel more or less confident about the quality or the origin of that product?

NE2: Ehm, I think if the website and the brand is legitimate, you know, if it's Cucinelli and it's not a random brand, so if the brand is trustworthy I believe they would invest the money in the AI system and in their IT team and all the engineers that make sure that they supply the system with trustworthy you know information to give to consumers, so I would definitely trust them and trust the information they give me. So, in the end it doesn't matter if the AI system gives me the information. In the end it's about the brand and how legitimate it is and … ehm … its credibility and whether I trust the brand or not. So, if I trust the brand, I don't care like if AI or real people give me the information, I would trust it. But if I don't trust the brand, even if real people give me information, I will have to double check, triple check multiple times before trusting the information.

I: Got it. And do you think that this kind of way to communicate which is basically digital can be consistent with the tradition, craftsmanship characteristics of Made in Italy?

NE2: Ok, I get your point. Basically, your point is like the Made in Italy vibe is like tradition and focus on making things by hand, about craftsmanship, but at the same time AI is based on technology, exc. I think that it can be consistent if the people who design the systems are capable to design very sophisticated flow in line with the brand's messages and values. So, it's more about like at which step do you integrate this AI thing to the process, because like at this landscape of today business, everyone is using AI, like all the business are utilizing AI tools, so if we don't use these tools we would miss out and for example I'm living in Europe, close to Italy, so I have the privilege to go to Italy and experience the culture and the craftsmanship, but there are people who live in Asia for example, or you know South America and they do not have the privilege to go here all the times, and experience it with first hand. So I think like digital things, such as video or online stuff and AI tools could be really helpful in showing Made in Italy kind of vibe. So, as long as it is educational and as long as the people who design the system make sure that the flow it's sophisticated and meet the consumers' need, then I don't think there is a clashing point. I think that AI could even like elevate the Made in Italy experience for people.

I: Ok, and in your opinion are there types of Made in Italy products for which the use of AI is more acceptable and for which ones is less acceptable?

NE2: Ehm could you repeat the question please?

I: Yes, are there types or categories of Made in Italy products for which the use of AI to communicate the story is more or less acceptable?

NE2: Ehm, I'm pretty neutral on this one. I think I'm quite open, so I accept like new thing easily, so as long as it makes sense and as long as it helps me to understand the product and the Made in Italy value better I don't care if it's like wine, food, lingerie, leather goods, like anything. As long as it makes sense and as long as I gain some value from it, then it's appropriate. So in the end for me it's more value based and as long as it works, then it's appropriate.

I: Ok, got it. Another way in which Made in Italy brands are using AI to enhance the value of their products is by developing some applications which are able to scan the product's label and tell the consumer "this is real Made in Italy, this is not". So, my question is: would you ever use it and would you trust a "certified by AI" label?

NE2: Yes, definitely. I think it would be really useful actually, especially for people who are not familiar with the technical details behind the Made in Italy certification you know. Like, sometimes it's hard to know if a product is truly Made in Italy just by looking at the packaging or the brand name, so if there's an AI-based app that can scan and tell you directly if it's authentic, I would totally use it and I would trust it, especially if it's made by a legitimate organization or a trustworthy brand.

I: Ok perfect. The last question is very personal and it's like an advice. If you had the chance to give advice to a Made in Italy company that wants to use AI to tell and protect its product and to enhance its value, what would you tell it? And in the perspective, you were saying before of the sophistication of this kind of tool, what did you mean by that?

NE2: Yeah, ehm, I think in the end when you create a product and you supply it to the consumers, the most important thing is to understand your consumers to deliver the product that can satisfy their needs, so when using AI I think that companies that are focused on Made in Italy and embrace Italian heritage should really focus on what their consumers need in term of like the product itself, and in terms of customer service, like what they want to learn about the brand, and make sure that they integrate the AI in a way that becomes really useful to the user. Because in the end is the user, is us, the consumers who will evaluate whether it's effective or not, so the only advice is to have the consumer in mind and make sure that the AI thing that is integrated into the system is able to deliver the values and make the interaction between the consumers and the brand more meaningful, more effective and easier in general. Because the Made in Italy label itself already has a lot of value in it that many countries cannot compete, so I think that in the end everything should be consumer–centric.

I: Perfect, thank you very much for your time.

Appendix A.8– Interview with Participant NE3

Participant Code: NE3
Date: 6 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: India
Country of Residence: France
Age: 25
Profession: Supply chain intern

I: Hi…! Thank you for being here! Let's start! Can you briefly introduce yourself, like where do you live? How old are you? What's your study path and what's your current job, if you have.

NE3: Ok, so I'm …, I'm a student of luxury and fashion management and currently I'm staying in Paris because I have an internship here … ehm … in supply chain.

I: Ok, thank you. The first section is about your perception of Made in Italy and I ask you if do you happen to buy Made in Italy products, and if yes which product categories (food, clothes, and stuff like that)?

NE3: Ok, in India generally if you have Made in Italy products, they are only the luxury ones. So, that is only bought by very rich people, and generally "normal" people don't buy them. And I don't see this tendency in Europe because even if a person is not very rich, they will have one or two bags, makeup, exc. From the big brands, but in India people don't do that, so I don't purchase any Made in Italy luxury products, but I can tell you what Indian people think about that.

I: Ok, for sure. But, for example, what about food products? Do you happen to buy them at the supermarket, also in France? Something like pasta, cheese, or stuff like that?

NE3: Yes, I buy pasta and I still have pasta in my kitchen right now and in India a lot of people like pasta and pizza as well.

I: Ok, got it, and do you think that you are able to recognize the real Made in Italy pasta brands for example, when you're at the supermarket in France?

NE3: Ehm, no. I generally think that "ok this is pasta" and it does not make any difference if it's made in France or Made in India or Made in Italy.

I: Ok, perfect. And what makes you or the citizens of your native country choose an Italian product over others? Like which characteristics do you associate to an Italian product, with respect to products from other countries?

NE3: I would say good quality, craftsmanship, but it really depends on the specific brand.

I: Ok. And have you ever bought a product that you thought was Italian, perhaps because of the brand name or packaging, and then discovered that it was not?

NE3: Ehm, I actually don't know, because as I was saying before I don't really care too much about the origin of the product, so I never check in a second moment if the origin is right or not, you know.

I: Ok, clear. I ask you this question because we are moving to the second section of questions, which is about the phenomenon of Italian sounding. Do you know what it is?

NE3: Italian sounding? Is it like I intentionally give to my brand a name which is something near to an Italian one?

I: Ok, yes kind of. I'll tell you the definition. It is the use of names, geographical references, images, color combinations and trademarks that evoke Italy on labels and packaging of non-Italian products. In this perspective, do you think that this kind of phenomenon damage the value of real Made in Italy abroad, or can it someway reinforce the value of the brand by bringing the consumers closer to the Italian culture?

NE3: Ok, that is an interesting question. Like If I see a product that is made somewhere else but uses the references which are typical of Italy, ok …, I think, even before checking, if I go to a restaurant and I want to get some authentic Italian food, maybe there is no Italian chef in the restaurant but still they put some reference or some Italian name, then I would believe it is authentic. It would create that perception in my mind.

I: Ok, and do you think that this kind of practice can damage the Made in Italy brand, I mean the authentic one, or do you think that it can reinforce it someway?

NE3: Ok, maybe like in the previous example I was giving, maybe if there is for example a French chef, but the restaurant has an Italian name, then I think that it can be damaging because there would be an unfair competition with real Italian restaurants for example. It could take some market share of the real Italian. But maybe in the long term it would turn out anyway the real higher value of the Italian places with respect to the non-Italian ones, so with time the long-term customers will be aware of the real higher value of the authentic one. But when we talk about the new customers, that go for the first time directly to the "non authentic", for those customers I think it can be damaging for the real Made in Italy brand.

I: Ok, perfect. And the last section is about the use of Artificial Intelligence to enhance the value of Made in Italy abroad and fight this kind of phenomenon. So the first question is actually quite general: have you ever interacted with a virtual assistant, chatbot, AI-based system, while buying a product?

NE3: Yes, many times.

I: Ok, and which kind of AI tool were they?

NE3: Ehm, generally they were chatbots.

I: Ok, and imagine for example that you are on a website or application of a Made in Italy brand and there is a chatbot which gives you the product information, such as the story of the product, or some information about the supply chain, exc. Would you feel more or less confident about the quality and the origin of the product?

NE3: Yes, I mean I would appreciate it and feel more confident.

I: More confident, ok. And, in your opinion, can this kind of communication which is basically digital and virtual be consistent with the characteristics based on tradition, craftsmanship, which are typical of Made in Italy?

NE3: Yes yes, I definitely think that they are consistent and that it's a very good way to communicate every, I think now all the generations have started to use, I mean, AI, even the little ones and the old ones are become more friendly with these tools, and whatever digital media which is present on internet, so I think it's a very good form of communication.

I: Ok, got it. And some of these AI tools developed by Made in Italy brands are also integrating some features through which it's possible for example to scan the label of the products and the application is able to tell the consumer if that product is real Made in Italy or not. Would you trust a label that says "authenticity guaranteed by AI"?

NE3: Personally, right now I'm not sure I would trust it.

I: Ok, may I ask you why

NE3: Because AI, still it's in a experimental stage. Also when you use AI such as ChatGPT, it appears the sentence "ChatGPT can make mistakes", so it can make mistakes and can be misused.

I: Ok, got it. The last question is just an advice from you: if you had the chance to give an advice to a Made in Italy company that wants to use AI to tell and protect its products, what would you tell it?

NE3: Mmh, okay. First of all, the main things is now, for Made in Italy products, characterized by a high level of craftsmanship I would like to have some clarifications in the supply chain. So, I would say to deliver these details through AI to the customers, because the customers would know to have details, and they would trust the brands if they know these details. Nowadays we have a lot of news about unethical production, in which only the final step is happening in Italy and it's branded as "Made in Italy", so the consumer is quite confused. If AI was able to deliver this kind of details, I think it would be the best use.

I: Ok, got it. Very interesting. Thank you very much!

Appendix A9– Interview with Participant NE4

Participant Code: NE4
Date: 8 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: India
Country of Residence: Spain
Age: 23
Profession: Marketing intern

I: Hi … Thank you for your availability and time! Let's start. The first part is very quick. I ask you if you just briefly introduce yourself, like how old are you, where do you live, what's your study path and what's your job if you have one.

NE4: Ok, so I'm …, I'm 23 years old. I'm currently in Madrid, Spain and I work as a marketing intern for a new luxury brand which is based out in Spain, and I completed my Master in Luxury and fashion management.

I: Perfect. The first set of question is about you perception of Made in Italy in general. So, the first thing that I ask you is: do you happen to buy Made in Italy products? And if yes, which product categories (for example food, clothes, or what)?

NE4: Ehm, yes, although I'd say I'm not you know very frequent buyer of products like Made in Italy, or luxury in general. But whenever I do, I would probably go for something like a perfume, or something, yeah those kind of products I usually buy more.

I: Ok, got it. And where do you usually buy these products, for example, physical stores, trips to Italy, online stores, exc.?

NE4: Ehm…, I would usually buy them at the airport, so during the travel. That would be the time when I buy these products.

I: Ok, and may I ask you what makes you choose an Italian product over others? You know, what are the characteristics that you link to Made in Italy products?

NE4: Honestly speaking, I think that the first thing that comes to my mind is the quality. So, I immediately connect Made in Italy to the quality of the product and the craftsmanship. So, I just think that the products are made with a good amount of research. So I think that's the main reason to buy them.

I: Got it, and when you buy in a country which is not Italy, so abroad from Italy, do you trust brands that claim to be Made in Italy, even when you find them in your country?

NE4: Actually, not really. That's why I tend to buy them in "safe" places, such as the airport.

I: Ok, got it. And have you ever bought a product that you thought was Italian, perhaps because of the brand name or packaging, and then discovered that it was not?

NE4: Ehm, it hasn't really happened to me, but I can think about an example. If we talk about food, in India you can get like traditional Italian food, like pasta and pizza. But when I actually went to Italy and I had the original pasta and pizza, it was no way similar to the ones that we get in India. So you can say that the "Italian washing" happens a lot with a lot of brands and a lot of, I would say places, so yes. I wouldn't say particularly in the context of luxury, but in general yes.

I: Ok, yes you hit the point. We are talking about the phenomenon which is called "Italian Sounding", and it consists in the use of names, geographical references, images, color combinations and trademarks that evoke Italy on labels and packaging of non-Italian products. In this perspective, can you give me your opinion about that? Do you think that this kind of practice can someway reinforce the value of the real Made in Italy abroad, like bringing foreign consumer closer to Italian culture even if those products are not Italian, or do you think it can damage the value of real Made in Italy abroad?

NE4: Ehm, yes, I think it can damage. Because when we think about Made in Italy, we always think about something more luxurious, which has a certain class and quality. And when we get products, which are not up to the grade, in terms of quality, it can really damage the reputation of the real Made in Italy.

I: Ok, everything clear. Then, we have the last section of questions, which is about the main topic of the thesis and it is the use of Artificial Intelligence to fight this kind of phenomenon. So, the first thing that I ask you is very general, and it is: have you ever interacted with an AI virtual assistant or chatbot, while buying a product online for example, or on a website?

NE4: Ehm, yes, I have interacted, and I think nowadays almost every brand uses tools, such as virtual assistants, but I feel that they are not as helpful as human beings, so like sometimes you might have a specific query, which an AI cannot solve. So, I think the system is there, but it is not very efficient.

I: Ok, clear, and which kind of assistance did you receive from these chatbots and assistants?

NE4: Ehm, very basic one, like the assistant gave me a set of options and made me choose among three options, so that for example, if I chose option A, it would have sent me directly to it. But is not something unique about my query. There was not solution around it.

I: Ok, got it. So, the way in which Made in Italy is starting to use this kind of tool is basically for two main purposes. The first one consists in developing assistants and chatbots that tell the story of Made in Italy products to consumers, as they open the website or the application of the brands. So it's like a storytelling and communication purpose. In this perspective I ask you if in your opinion is a good idea and if you think that this kind of communication which is basically digital and virtual can be consistent with the tradition and craftsmanship characteristics of Made in Italy?

NE4: I think yes, the communication is very important and when it comes to AI and using AI to do that, I think there should be a proper balance, because if for example I'm communicating about the quality, then I need to deliver quality in my message as well. If I'm a customer I want quality also in the answers of the chatbot, I need my query to be solved. So, using AI to convey the values of craftsmanship and heritage of Made in Italy is a good tool, but at the same time, there's the need to strike a balance so that people can feel the human touch which the Made in Italy products actually bring with them.

I: Got it, very interesting. In addition, some brands are starting to integrate in applications an AI generated feature through which it is possible to scan the label of the products and know if the product the customer is buying is real Made in Italy or not. In this perspective I ask you: would you use it and would you trust an "Authenticated by AI" label?

NE4: Ehm, I think I might trust it, but my question is: who would actually use it, right? Before buying every product, do you actually scan it to get, you know, authentication? So, yes, it is very useful and a good tool to know whether the product you buy is real Made in Italy or not, but I don't think a lot of people would do that. For example if I go to the grocery shop and I have to buy pasta, I just take pasta and put it in my basket, it's something that comes very naturally, but maybe for luxury brands and luxury goods people would do that, because they are spending more.

I: Ok, perfect. And the last thing that I ask you is actually an advice from you: if you had the chance to give an advice to a Made in Italy company that wants to use AI to tell and protect its products, what would you tell it?

NE4: I would say that a brand should never lose its human touch we know that AI can literally do everything for a brand right now, but it's something that stands apart its craftsmanship and heritage values, so I firmly think that keeping the authenticity in the communication for every Made in Italy brand would be my main advice.

I: Perfect, it was so interesting! Thank you very much!

Appendix A.10 – Interview with Participant NE5

Participant Code: NE5
Date: 8 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: China
Country of Residence: India
Age: 23
Profession: Start-up intern

I: Firstly, I ask you to briefly introduce yourself. For example, how old are you? Where do you live and what are you doing right now as a job?
NE5: Okay, so my name is ... I'm from Shanghai, China, and I'm 23 years old. Now I'm living in Lyon, France and I'm doing an internship at a startup. The company sells nautical devices.
I: Okay, perfect. The first section of questions will be about your perception of Made in Italy. So my first one is, do you happen to buy Made in Italy products for example, food at the supermarket such as pasta or oil or which kind of categories of Made in Italy products do you buy?
NE5: I sometimes buy food like Nutella.
I: Okay.
NE5: Yes, and I've also bought like a purse when I travel to Italy. Ehm … I think it's handmade, a leather purse that I use every day.
I: Okay, perfect. And what makes you choose an Italian product over others? You know, what are the characteristics that you associate to a Made in Italy product?
NE5: Well, I think the product that's made in Italy makes me feel, sometimes feel fancy or good quality. So, I prefer, sometimes I prefer to buy them.
I: Okay. And do you trust brands that claim to be Made in Italy even when you find them, for example, in France or in another country, which is not Italy, of course?
NE5: Sorry, can you ask again?
I: Sure. Do you trust brands that claim to be Made in Italy even when you find them in another country, which is not Italy, for example in France?
NE5: Yes, I think so. Like I always buy Kiko at Rice.
I: Okay, so when there is a brand, do you trust it. But when there is not a famous brand and you see like "Made in Italy" label, even if that product is not sold in Italy, do you trust it or not?
NE5: Yes, I think I trust it.
I: Okay, got it. And have you ever like bought a Made in Italy product that you thought was made in Italy and then discovered it was not? For example, like pasta or food at the supermarket, something like that?
NE5: I think no, I didn't notice at all.
I: Okay, got it. I asked you this question because the second section of questions is about the phenomenon of Italian sounding. I don't know if you know it.
NE5: No.
I: Okay, I'll tell you the definition. It is the use of names, geographical references, images, color combinations that evoke Italy on labels and packaging of non-Italian products. So, in this perspective, my question is if, in your opinion, this kind of phenomenon can damage or someway reinforce the value of Made in Italy abroad.
NE5: Well, I think it may cause impacts on Made in Italy products because you can't make sure the quality of those products are good or not. And if there are something bad happens that caused by them, it may cause an impression to me that something looks like an Italian brand. It's not as good as I thought.
I: Okay, perfect. Then there is the last section of questions, which is the main topic of the thesis, which is the use of artificial intelligence to reinforce the value of Made in Italy abroad. And so, the

first question is very general, and it is, have you ever interacted with a virtual assistant, chatbot or AI tool while buying a product, for example, online?

NE5: Yes. Sometimes. Ehm, I would ask, ehm if I'm buying a t-shirt or something, I may ask in summer which color will be better if I buy it.

I: Okay, got it. Now I'll tell you which are the ways in which Made in Italy is using AI to enhance its value. The first one is it's a communication and storytelling part. So there are some chatbots that are being developed by Made in Italy brands, and these chatbots are used to tell the consumer the story of the product and the origin of the product. So, they are like a communication and storytelling tool. In this sense, my question is if you would be prone to receive this kind of information from an AI tool.

NE5: Well, I think it won't change my idea a lot. Yeah, I think I won't give too much attention to this kind of information.

I: Okay, perfect. And in your opinion, can this kind of communication, which is based on a virtual tool, be consistent with the tradition, craftsmanship, typical of Made in Italy? Do you think that these two aspects can go together or not?

NE5: I think no. For me, I think no.

I: Okay, okay. So do you think that they can like be opposite some way, don't you?

NE5: Yes, a little bit.

I: Okay, okay, perfect. And the second way in which Made in Italy is using AI to enhance its value is by developing some features in their applications that are able can scan the label of the products, for example, of olive oil, and tell you this is Made in Italy, this is not Made in Italy. Do you think that this is a good idea?
And would you trust an AI certified label or not?

NE5: I think this one is good, because it's kind of useful to me. Like it can help me to identify which is a real Italian product.

I: Okay, perfect. Then we have the last question, which is like personal: if you had the chance to give advice to a Made in Italy company that wants to use AI to enhance its value and to tell its product, what would you tell it?

NE5: Ehm, it's, it's hard. It's hard to think about it. But like, maybe you can use AI to, like, tell the story of the brand, like in a better way, like visualizations or with sounds to, to better tell the consumers about the start of the history, the story of the brand.

I: Okay, perfect. We've finished. So, thank you very much for your help. It was so interesting. Thank you very much.

Appendix A.11 – Interview with Participant NE6

Participant Code: NE6
Date: 23 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: English
Country of Origin: Peru
Country of Residence: France
Age: 31
Profession: Luxury logistics intern

I: Hi …! Thank you for being here. Can you firstly just briefly introduce yourself, like how old are you, where do you live and what did you study and what's your job right now?

NE6: Okay, sure, I'm 31 years old, I'm from Lima, Peru but right now I'm living in Paris and I've worked in logistics for the past eight years and right now I'm working in luxury logistics and I've studied international business as my bachelor and my master in luxury fashion management.

I: Okay, perfect and the first thing that I ask you is if you like do you happen to buy made in Italy products for example at supermarkets or like any type of category of product category in your daily life?

NE6: Sometimes, especially like in supermarkets if I buy like pasta sauce like this or stuff like that, yeah I'd rather buy pay a bit more and buy an Italian brand.

I: Okay, so especially in physical shops right, not online?

NE6: No, online not so much.

I: Okay, okay perfect and what makes you choose an Italian product over others even at the supermarket?

NE6: Because it's more prestigious like they are known for, it depends on the category of the product, they are known for their quality like in pasta, pasta is from Italy so I'd rather buy from them that they are supposed to have all the experience and know how it should be the best. If something else maybe like leather or stuff like that they also have a good reputation on it so I will also consider buying an Italian brand over another one but then I will have like different factors to evaluate which one I buy.

I: Okay, okay perfect and do you trust brands that claim to be made in Italy even when you find them in your country for example in France in this moment?

NE6: Uh yes, if the brand is from Italy especially, yes I would trust they are made there and I think in general yes because also to have the made in any place there are a lot of rules so they can just put that with for because they want to, they must have made something there, not entirely the whole product but at least something.

I: Okay perfect and have you ever bought a product that you thought was Italian perhaps because of the packaging and then discovered it was not?

NE6: I don't think so, I don't think that has happened.

I: Okay and like when you buy a product for example like pasta or olive oil which are presented as Italian like do you like turn it and look behind like the origin and the source of it or just do you take it and put in the basket?

NE6: It depends like for example in April I went to Sanremo and I went to buy olive oil to bring to my grandparent who lost it and I wanted to buy a hundred percent Italian for him. So, there I did check because I made sure that it was 100 percent Italian. But other times no I just read it if it says made in Italy or sometimes I don't even read that.

I: Okay okay perfect. I ask you this kind of stuff because like the one of the main topic of the thesis is the phenomenon of Italian sounding. I don't know if you know it otherwise I'll give you the definition.

NE6: Italian sounding?

I: Yes okay Italian sounding is the use of names, geographical references, images and colours that evoke Italy on labels of non-Italian products.

NE6: Okay okay.

I: In this perspective I ask you like which are the elements that you see on a product on a packaging that makes you think "okay this product is Italian or not", like which colours which kind of characteristics?

NE6: Okay well the name like it's if it sounds Italian, I will assume it's Italian. For colors it has the colors of the flag like red, green, white stuff like that.

I: Okay okay perfect and in your opinion like this kind of phenomenon can damage the value of real made in Italy abroad or some way it can like make people get close to Italian culture even if that product is not real Italian?

NE6: It depends I think it can damage the image if it's a bad product and they assume it's Italian and then they are like oh it's poor quality or something like that then it can definitely damage but for some products it could also make it more widely popular. So, I think it depends on how the brand manages.

I: Okay okay perfect. Then we have the last section which is about the use of artificial intelligence to fight this kind of phenomenon because as you can imagine this kind of like practice steal a lot of money from the real made in Italy market abroad. So, the first thing is very general and is like have you ever interacted with an AI-based tool or chatbot while buying a product also online of every category?

NE6: To ask for recommendations yes.

I: Okay okay and like was it a good experience or not?

NE6: Yeah it wasn't bad but I don't trust AI a hundred percent. So, I still read reviews by myself.

I: Okay okay perfect.

NE6: But it helps me make the comparison of products I would like to buy.

I: Okay and now I'll tell you how made in Italy is using AI like to fight this kind of phenomenon. The first practice is to develop some chatbots which like tell the consumers the story the origin of the products in order to make some information about that. And what's your opinion about this kind of practice and activity?

NE6: I think it's interesting and it will be helpful, but I think especially for products that are more expensive.

I: Okay.

NE6: Like for pasta I wouldn't go through that whole process of searching if it's actually Italian or not because it's just two euros but if I would buy like a purse that's 500 euros, I would definitely do some research.

I: Okay very interesting point and in your opinion like this kind of communication which is basically digital and virtual can be consistent with the values of tradition, craftsmanship which are typical of Made in Italy?

NE6: I think it can because it helps to preserve their identity.

I: Okay okay got it. And the second way in which Made in Italy is using that is by developing some applications which are able to scan the label after the behind the products and they are able to tell you "This is real Made in Italy and this is not". So, the first question is would you ever use it for example at the supermarket while buying olive oil or pasta or would you not?

NE6: In every day I don't think so. If I was looking for something specific that I really want it to be made in Italy for like a gift or something like that then yes.

I: Okay okay interesting and would you trust an AI certified label or not?

NE6: Yes but also if on the label of the product it says the same thing.

I: Okay so you would double check anyway?

NE6: Yes.

I: Okay okay perfect and the last question is it's personal and like it's just an opinion like as a foreign consumer who wants to buy a real Made in Italy product what would you like to have as information from an AI tool from a chatbot from an application like which kind of information would you like to receive to be like confident in buying the product?

NE6: Like the characteristics maybe the sourcing like if it's food like from which part of Italy is it price and could also be comparison of like other brands or options so I can choose better.

I: Okay okay interesting we've done. Thank you!

Italian Consumers Living Abroad (Europe)

Appendix A.12– Interview with Participant IA1

Participant Code: IA1
Date: 7 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: Italian
Country of Origin: Italy
Country of Residence: Spain
Age: 26
Profession: Data engineer

I: Ciao …, grazie per essere qui. Ti chiedo intanto di presentarti, quindi quanti anni hai, dove vivi e che lavoro fai?

IA1: Allora, mi chiamo…, ho 26 anni e lavoro come data engineer a Glovo, a Barcellona, Spagna.

I: Ok, perfetto. La prima parte di domande sarà incentrata sulla tua percezione in generale del Made in Italy. Quindi ti chiedo intanto da consumatore italiano che vive all'estero, se ti capita di acquistare prodotti Made in Italy e che tipi di prodotti acquisti?

IA1: Allora, molto spesso si tratta principalmente di cibo, direi quasi esclusivamente cose legate al parmigiano, non lo so, o olio, tendenzialmente. I salumi in realtà sì, va bene, in Spagna ci sono di diversi; quindi, non è necessario andare a cercare, poi ci sono varie denominazioni DOP. Quindi per quanto riguarda quella parte lì non troppo, però sì, tendenzialmente cibo. Si tratta di cibo, riguarda in particolare olio o formaggi.

I: Ok, perfetto. E ti chiedo sempre da consumatore italiano all'estero, quali sono le caratteristiche che tu associ a un prodotto Made in Italy in generale? Non solo cibo, anche abbigliamento, artigianato?

IA1: Allora, non ho capito troppo bene la domanda, scusa.

I: Tipo caratteristiche che associ a prodotti anche di moda Made in Italy? Ci sono delle caratteristiche comuni a tutti i prodotti Made in Italy secondo te? O comunque come li descriveresti?

IA1: Allora sì, probabilmente direi prodotti di una qualità migliore rispetto a quelli della media, almeno quelli che trovo qui. Sempre riguardo al cibo in realtà, poi appunto il vestiario non vado molto alla ricerca del Made in Italy personalmente. Però se dovessi andare a dire ciò che penso, la mia immagine di un abbigliamento Made in Italy sarebbe qualcosa che sicuramente ha un tessuto un po' più di qualità, ma che però è anche

accompagnato a un prezzo più alto, che però magari va ad essere più su misura del cliente rispetto a ciò che trovi nel negozio.

I: Ok, chiaro. Ti chiedo, sempre magari al supermercato quando fai la spesa, non lo so, ti è mai capitato di trovare dei prodotti che sembrano italiani ma che in realtà non lo sono?

IA1: Sì, cento per cento, soprattutto con i formaggi devo dire che non è capitato, ma anche in realtà con l'olio. No, scusa, riformulo la frase, con l'olio principalmente. Non riesco mai a capire quando effettivamente un prodotto di olio è italiano o no, cercano sempre appunto un po' di sviare, facendo vedere le bandiere o qualsiasi cosa.

I: Esatto, infatti ti chiedo, quali sono secondo te quegli elementi che utilizzano per far apparire un prodotto italiano? Cosa noti in giro?

IA1: Allora, secondo me campagne per qualche motivo. Campagne, direi, vabbè sicuramente la bandiera però in quel caso sembra quasi una truffa nel senso, bandiere…Anche un certo tipo di font, però adesso non ti so dire esattamente quale.

I: Sì, sì, no, ho capito perfettamente cosa dici.

IA1: Qualcosa di rustico, però…

I: Praticamente questo è il fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding, è un fenomeno che consiste nell'utilizzare delle combinazioni di colori, delle immagini, dei riferimenti che rimandano all'Italia su prodotti oggettivamente non italiani. E come immagini questo ruba milioni di euro al mercato del Made in Italy vero e proprio ed è effettivamente un tema. Quindi riguardo questo ti chiedo, secondo te questo tipo di fenomeno che effetti può avere sul Made in Italy? Nel senso, secondo te può aiutare perché dici da una parte magari avvicina il consumatore estero all'Italia in generale oppure secondo te va a danneggiare le immagini del Made in Italy?

IA1: No, secondo me va decisamente a danneggiare anche perché magari un consumatore che vuole provare un prodotto italiano per la prima volta vede, non lo so, la bandiera così di un'idea del prodotto che si è fatto in Italia e poi magari non è della stessa qualità. E non essendo della stessa qualità magari tende a non utilizzarlo più. Nel senso, magari si è fatto una brutta opinione la prima volta e poi finisce lì.

I: Ok, chiarissimo. Allora l'ultima sezione riguarda quello che poi è il tema della tesi, ovvero l'applicazione dell'intelligenza artificiale per contrastare questo fenomeno dell'Italian sounding all'estero. Allora intanto ti chiedo se ti è mai capitato in fase di acquisto di interagire con assistenti virtuali, chatbot su siti web?

IA1: Sì, diciamo non per quanto riguarda una spesa diretta con ciò che riguarda il Made in Italy però sì, tendenzialmente chatbot mi è capitato.

I: Ok, che funzioni avevano? Cioè che cosa facevano?

IA1: Allora molto spesso su cose che riguardavano magari la spedizione o il rimborso, questi due. Molto spesso mi sono collegato con chatbot e vabbè.

I: Ok, ti dico allora praticamente l'intelligenza artificiale in questo campo viene utilizzata principalmente in due modi. Il primo è con dei chatbot che raccontano la storia del prodotto; quindi, stanno iniziando a sviluppare dei chatbot con cui il consumatore italiano o straniero interagisce e che raccontano la storia del prodotto, magari le sue origini. E in quest'ottica ti chiedo se secondo te una narrazione prettamente digitale come può essere questa e virtuale può essere coerente con un brand che vive di tradizione e artigianalità? Cioè secondo te sono cose che possono andare insieme?

IA1: Ehm, è una domanda simpatica però ti direi, cioè di primo impatto ti direi di no, però poi ragionandoci un pochino viene più da dire che in realtà comunque, non lo so, i vari language models possono essere anche istruiti per narrare una certa storia in un certo modo, quindi sono un pochino un supporto al produttore rispetto a una sola posizione ecco.

I: Ok, e invece il secondo modo in cui vengono utilizzati questi chatbot è praticamente come delle applicazioni per cui tu fai la foto all'etichetta del prodotto e l'intelligenza artificiale è in grado di dirti "made in Italy o non made in Italy".

IA1: Scusa, non ho sentito.

I: Dico sono delle applicazioni che stanno iniziando a sviluppare per cui tu carichi la foto dell'etichetta di quello che stai acquistando e l'intelligenza artificiale è in grado di dirti "questa cosa è made in Italy certificata oppure no". Sì sì. E ti chiedo se in quest'ottica, per esempio, anche tu saresti disposto a utilizzarlo nella tua spesa quotidiana e se ti fideresti di una etichetta "certificata intelligenza artificiale".

IA1: Sì sì decisamente cioè poi in realtà se è un servizio che in modo facile; cioè per me è più sulla facilità di utilizzare un certo servizio ecco se si tratta di semplicemente fare una foto e in caso di dubbio e di avere una classificazione allora sì cioè sarebbe perfetto. Però poi per me dipende molto dall'utilizzabilità del prodotto finale del servizio però sì starei super d'accordo ecco.

I: Ultimissima ti chiedo solo se hai magari da consumatore qualcosa che ti viene in mente che pensi non lo so ti potrebbe essere utile in fase di spesa o che vorresti avere in termini proprio di magari un chatbot che ti aiuta in qualcosa o che ti racconta qualche aspetto specifico cosa ti aiuterebbe a fidarti di più di quel determinato prodotto?

IA1: Probabilmente sì cioè forse sarebbe più legato al primo punto cioè magari raccontava la storia del prodotto e tutto quanto più della classificazione in termini di fiducia però non avrei forse un'altra cosa da aggiungere a quei due ci penso un secondo.

I: Perfetto, grazie mille!

Appendix A.13– Interview with Participant IA2

Participant Code: IA2
Date: 17 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: Italian
Country of Origin: Italy
Country of Residence: Germany
Age: 23
Profession: Marketing intern

I: Ciao …, grazie per essere qui! Allora, mi servirebbe una brevissima introduzione su di te, quindi quanti anni hai, dove vivi, cosa hai studiato e che lavoro fai.

IA2: Ok, allora aspetta, ridiciamo. Quanti anni ho? 23, quasi 24. Vivo a Monaco di Baviera, in Germania e sto facendo un'internship nel Marketing.

I: Ok, che percorso di studi hai fatto?

IA2: Ok, allora ho studiato Economia e Management alla LUISS a Roma, poi ho studiato Management in Magistrale e poi ho fatto un programma in Double Degree in Luxury and Fashion Management alla Skema Business School.

I: Ok, perfetto. Allora, ti chiedo se adesso che vivi all'estero ti capita di cercare o acquistare prodotti Made in Italy e se sì, quali?

IA2: Allora sì, mi capita di cercare e acquistare in primis la pasta, quella che acquisto è Barilla, perché alla fine è quella più diffusa essenzialmente. Poi compro il pesto, compro i biscotti da colazione, che non si trovano moltissimo, più boh, sottomarchi o marchi strani. Sto pensando a qualcos'altro, ogni tanto la mozzarella italiana, poi la salsa di pomodoro assolutamente Mutti.

I: Ok. E ti chiedo che cosa ti spinge da consumatore italiano a cercare il marchio, magari anche famoso, Made in Italy, cioè quali caratteristiche tu associ a prodotti anche alimentari Made in Italy che invece non riscontri in "made in altro".

IA2: Ok, vabbè, allora sicuramente c'è un fattore di autenticità e magari è legato al fatto che io, essendo italiana e avendo vissuto per la maggior parte della mia vita in Italia, sono comunque consumatrice del brand, conosco bene il brand e trovandomi all'estero voglio consumarlo per una motivazione di fiducia, di sapori anche, perché tendenzialmente secondo me il sapore italiano rispecchia più i nostri gusti rispetto magari ad altri che sono, ok, sì italiani, però magari non sono al 100% autentici come gusto.

I: Ok, perfetto. Seconda sezione, diciamo, di domande riguarda quello che è il fenomeno dell'Italian sounding. Quindi ti chiedo se da consumatrice italiana ti è mai capitato di trovare in supermercati tedeschi o comunque, insomma, dove vai, dei prodotti che sembrano italiani ma che in realtà non lo sono.

IA2: Sì, sì, mi è capitato, con il pesto mi capita spesso, che comunque sono barattoli che imitano magari un po' i colori, la forma di marchi noti tipo Barilla, stessa cosa le mozzarelle, magari hanno dei colori simili, cioè comunque il blu, il bianco, quindi dei prodotti simili. Mi ricordo queste mozzarelle che erano molto simili a quelle proprio di Santa Lucia, tipo di colore. Boh, questo essenzialmente. Poi magari qualcosa anche nelle descrizioni, forse.

I: Ok, e tu se non avessi magari brand davanti, come Mutti, Barilla, riusciresti in prodotti senza brand a riconoscere facilmente un prodotto Made in Italy da uno non Made in Italy?

IA2: Senza il brand?

I: Senza brand, cioè quando hai davanti un marchio X, diciamo, non Barilla, ok? Quindi in prodotti no brand, ti sentiresti sicuro, da consumatore italiano all'estero nel dire questa cosa è certamente made in Italy, questa cosa non lo è?

IA2: No, non al 100%, cioè tendenzialmente forse c'è qualcosa che ti fa dire è Made in Italy, non lo so, forse le cose straniere anche dal punto di vista di come sono impacchettate, così mi sembrano più, diciamo, straniere. Però non lo so perché alla fine ci possono essere effettivamente anche marchi stranieri che imitano bene il marchio italiano, non lo so, al 100%.

I: Quindi non sicuro al 100%?

IA2: No, non sicuro al 100%.

I: E secondo te il fenomeno dell'Italian sounding in generale danneggia, diciamo, il vero Made in Italy all'estero oppure può essere un'opportunità perché comunque tu avvicini ipoteticamente il consumatore tedesco, o chi per lui, alla categoria prodotti italiani in generale?

IA2: Allora secondo me tendenzialmente no, forse no, perché alla fine l'elemento caratteristico di un prodotto è la qualità, cioè io se penso a qualcosa di italiano penso alla qualità. Quindi non è che perché è Italian sounding io dico è di qualità che, non lo so, non mi convincerebbe al 100%, anzi forse potrebbe danneggiarlo perché dico, ok, sembra italiano, poi l'assaggio ha un sapore particolare e nella mia testa rimane il fatto che quel prodotto è cattivo e da quel momento in poi lo associo al fatto che un prodotto italiano non è buono.

I: Ok, chiarissimo. Ultima sezione di domande riguarda quello che è poi il focus di questa tesi che è l'utilizzo dell'intelligenza artificiale per contrastare questo fenomeno. Ti chiedo in generale, intanto, se ti è mai capitato di interagire con assistente virtuale, chatbot e roba simile durante l'acquisto di un prodotto in generale?

IA2: Non lo so, forse sì, qualche volta ho chiesto qualcosa su prodotti, robe, non lo so, cioè io da Zara ho chiesto delle informazioni su dove potessi riportare i prodotti, cose, questo è il massimo penso.

I: Ok, ti dico più o meno quali sono i modi in cui lo sta usando il Made in Italy per contrastare questo fenomeno. Il primo modo è di comunicazione, tra virgolette di storytelling; quindi stanno sviluppando dei chatbot che su siti di prodotti Made in Italy spiegano al consumatore la storia del prodotto, quindi ti raccontano qualcosa, tu fai domande e loro ti raccontano la storia del prodotto. E ti chiedo se secondo te una comunicazione di questo tipo, che è prettamente digitale e virtuale, è coerente con i valori di tradizionalità, artigianalità, di cui mi parlavi prima, tipici del Made in Italy. Possono andare insieme le due cose, secondo te?

IA2: Alla fine penso di sì, perché uno mantiene lo storytelling, nel senso non sempre riesci a fare storytelling del prodotto in maniera diretta, quindi utilizzando gli AI vai a sostituire un po' la componente umana lasciando una specie di traccia. Quindi sì, secondo me potrebbe essere in linea, tendenzialmente sì.

I: Ok. Invece il secondo modo in cui lo stanno utilizzando è sviluppando delle funzioni in delle applicazioni. C'è un progetto pilota adesso con il Prosecco, per cui tu giri la bottiglia, scannerizzi l'etichetta e l'applicazione è in grado di dirti "questa è real Made in Italy, questa no". Ti chiedo se tu ti fideresti mai di un'etichetta certificata dall'intelligenza artificiale?

IA2: Non so. Perché io sono abituata a leggere l'etichetta, a vedere la provenienza, quindi non mi fiderei al 100%, la mia prima fonte, la mia conferma rimarrebbe comunque leggere l'etichetta.

I: Quindi faresti comunque un double check di questa roba?

IA2: Farei comunque un double check.

I: Allora abbiamo finito con le domande specifiche, ti chiedo solo l'ultima cosa che è più personale. E cioè da consumatrice italiana, e magari non lo so se provi a immedesimarti in una consumatrice tedesca, che cosa vorresti sentirti dire da un ipotetico chatbot su un prodotto Made in Italy? Cosa secondo te si può migliorare in quest'ottica per contrastare il fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding? Se ti viene in mente.

IA2: Direi avere informazioni sulle origini, di come viene poi proprio preparato, nei vari processi, la provenienza degli ingredienti, non lo so, qualcosa che mi parli della storia del prodotto.

I: Quindi anche proprio della produzione in sé per sé?

IA2: Sì, nella produzione sì sì, a partire dagli ingredienti.

I: Grazie, molto chiaro.

Appendix A.15– Interview with Participant IA3

Participant Code: IA3
Date: 17 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: Italian
Country of Origin: Italy
Country of Residence: England
Age: 28
Profession: Employee in a production company

I: Ciao …! Grazie per essere qui. Allora, intanto, ti chiedo una brevissima introduzione, quindi quanti anni hai, dove vivi, che cosa hai studiato e che lavoro fai?

IA3: Sì, allora, 28 anni, vivo stabilmente a Londra, ho studiato Economia e Finanza, prima a Roma poi a Londra e ho fatto per tanti anni il consulente, mentre adesso lavoro in una società di produzione tv e cinema.

I: Ok, perfetto. Il primo, diciamo, set di domande riguarda la tua percezione dei prodotti Made in Italy da consumatore italiano che vive all'estero. Quindi la prima cosa che ti chiedo è, da quando vivi all'estero ti capita di cercare e comprare prodotti Made in Italy, anche di supermercato? E se sì, quali categorie?

IA3: Sì, allora sicuramente mi capita. Allora, direi in due occasioni, cioè o al supermercato direttamente, al supermercato non italiano, oppure per, come dire, eventi speciali come può essere cena con amici a casa, mi capita anche di andare invece in dei negozi che vendono proprio prodotti italiani. Per quanto riguarda il supermercato, penso che i prodotti italiani siano sicuramente la pasta, sicuramente, anche tutto ciò, per esempio, olio, aceto, sicuramente cose legate magari a più formaggi, anche salumi, cioè tutto ciò che è un po', come dire, caratteristico dell'Italia e che fa parte della nostra dieta. Ovviamente all'estero uno usa di meno, però comunque le trovi.

I: Certo, e ti chiedo che cosa ti spinge a cercare un prodotto Made in Italy all'estero, anche in un supermercato non italiano? Vai nello scaffale della categoria pasta o formaggi, che cosa ti spinge a volere quello piuttosto che altro "Made in"?

IA3: La qualità. Secondo me è proprio il senso di qualità e il fatto che sia fatto in Italia, soprattutto per questa categoria di prodotti che io cerco in Italia.

I: Perfetto, e ti è mai capitato in questi supermercati magari di trovare dei prodotti che sembrano italiani ma che in realtà non lo sono?

IA3: Allora, no ma perché secondo me quelli che compro, controllo che siano italiani. Capita di trovare prodotti che sono per esempio italiani ma che hanno la label del supermercato straniero. Quindi al Waitrose a Londra, che è uno dei supermercati più buoni, loro hanno l'olio d'oliva italiano però con la targhetta Waitrose, piuttosto che l'aceto e altre cose. Comunque, sono fatti in Italia.

I: Ok, quindi tu fai sempre un doppio check dell'origine.

IA3: Esatto, se mi sembra un po' strano voglio assicurarmi a dove viene. Però generalmente quando compro un prodotto italiano vado più per la qualità che per la convenienza; quindi, cerco di prendere quello che costa di più, però sono sicuro che è italiano anche perché ho un brand italiano. O mi metto in modalità di risparmio e ci rinuncio, o se invece compro quello italiano vado sulla cosa che sono sicuro che sia italiano.

I: Ok, chiaro. Te lo chiedo perché il focus della tesi riguarda quello che è il fenomeno dell'Italian Sounding, che è l'utilizzo di colori, nomi, riferimenti geografici che evocano l'Italia su etichette e packaging di prodotti non italiani. Ti chiedevo quindi se ti fosse mai capitato di notare al supermercato questo tipo di prodotti sugli scaffali.

IA3: Allora, detto così sì, però non mi è mai capitato una cosa che sembrasse quasi italiana ma poi non lo fosse, ma perché comunque uno le nota facilmente e non lo sono. Poi diciamo, dando una prima occhiata agli scaffali è una pratica che qualcuno osserva, soprattutto per categorie di prodotti tipo la pasta, altre cose, ci sono certi packaging che ricordano un po' gruppo.

I: Quali sono le caratteristiche di packaging che hai notato che pensi che siano utilizzate per richiamare l'attenzione del consumatore straniero, un po' meno, perché tu giustamente dici io penso di essere in grado di riconoscerlo a vista d'occhio, ma secondo te il londinese medio? Quali sono quelle cose che attirano e che pensi che siano fatte per fare da specchietto?

IA3: Allora, è una bella domanda. Devo pensare un secondo.

I: Sì, vai tranquillo.

IA3: Allora, sicuramente, non sono sicuro, però i prodotti italiani sono sempre legati a colori, per esempio, o al verde, oppure ci sono anche confezioni che fanno vedere all'interno quello che c'è. Ci sono confezioni che hanno un look leggermente più artigianale o come si è abituati a dare. Basti pensare che i prodotti inglesi sono molto più colori artificiali, fatti per attirare l'attenzione, catchy. Mentre invece i prodotti italiani in Italia sono meno catchy, ma anche meno artificiali, quindi più verde, marrone. Ci sono tutti questi colori che associo alla natura.

I: Ok, chiaro. E secondo te questo tipo di fenomeno che effetto ha? Nel senso rischia di danneggiare l'immagine del vero Made in Italy all'estero oppure in qualche modo potrebbe facilitare l'avvicinamento dello straniero alla cultura italiana?

IA3: Ma insomma è un po' la danneggia nel senso che comunque detto che gli stranieri non hanno le capacità per distinguere cosa è buona e cosa è cattiva, però comunque è ovvio che sicuramente è un danno per l'economia italiana perché magari leva un po' una parte del business rispetto a chi potrebbe fare export e poi

ovviamente se io compro qualcosa che penso sia italiana ma poi diciamo che la qualità lascia a desiderare, ci rimango un po' male, quindi a quel punto direi un effetto più negativo che positivo come ho spiegato prima.

I: L'ultima parte di domande riguarda l'applicazione dell'intelligenza artificiale al tentativo di contrastare questa tipologia di fenomeno perché è uno strumento che effettivamente il Made in Italy sta iniziando ad utilizzare in vari modi. Ti dico sono principalmente due i modi in cui la stanno utilizzando, il primo è creando dei chatbot quindi degli assistenti virtuali che possano fare dello storytelling e della formazione soprattutto al consumatore straniero che come dicevi tu giustamente spesso non è in grado minimamente di sapere che cosa sta acquistando e ti chiedo se secondo te una narrazione prevalentemente digitale virtuale come quella dell'intelligenza artificiale può essere in qualche modo coerente con le caratteristiche di artigianalità tradizione tipiche del Made in Italy?

IA3: In che modo sarebbe fruibile da parte del controllatore?

I: Fai conto, per esempio, su siti di prodotti Made in Italy sono dei chatbot che prima che tu arrivi alla fase di acquisto ti raccontano magari le origini del prodotto, la storia del prodotto quindi è effettivamente uno storytelling di prodotto fatto da un'intelligenza artificiale.

IA3: Allora non vedo clash con artigianalità e AI, sono però dubbioso su poi quanta gente effettivamente lo userebbe, perché alla fine pensa che al consumatore si può essere appassionato di cibo ma alla fine lui vuole entrare, comprare la mozzarella buona e mangiarla. Non penso abbia la voglia di perdere, quindi mi immagino che anche se mettesse il QR code sulla confezione di qualsiasi cosa, la percentuale di gente che poi effettivamente lo userebbe e sarebbe molto bassa.

I: Ok perfetto e invece il secondo modo che stanno utilizzando è quello di creare delle applicazioni in grado di scannerizzare l'etichetta e l'intelligenza artificiale aiuta nel riconoscimento di real Made in Italy o fake Made in Italy?

IA3: Questo se me invece è molto bello. Ho visto in un ambito che in realtà non c'entra niente, per esempio la mia ragazza ha scaricato un'app che con le foto alle creme solari e ti dice quanti ingredienti naturali ci sono all'interno. Quello secondo me funziona molto bene. Se vuoi il mio parere, quello secondo me aiuterebbe un sacco nel senso che alla fine lo sforzo è solo di scaricarla una volta e poi in qualunque posto stai, fai foto a cose e ti può dire sia se è Made in Italy o no e ti può dare delle info aggiuntive o ti può suggerire una ricetta, quindi sì lo vedo come una cosa molto utile.

I: Perfetto, infatti l'ultimissima domanda era proprio questa, cioè secondo te quali altre informazioni più utili magari dello storytelling che mi hai detto che secondo te è un po' meno utile, potrebbe darti un'applicazione di questo tipo o, più che a te, magari a Londinese X o allo straniero che non ne sa nulla?

IA3: No, cioè secondo me, per quanto riguarda lo storytelling, sarebbe troppa informazione in un mondo in cui ci sono già tante informazioni. Però se io ho un interesse, e l'app mi aiuta a trovare un prodotto di alta qualità, a quel uno ci potrebbe aggiungere una parola o due parole a riguardo, cioè uno potrebbe mettere un link a potenziali ricette, piuttosto che magari dei link o delle cose su come è fatto, piuttosto che aneddoti, cose interessanti, però cose che magari uno se è interessato ci clicca. Però vedo difficile che senza l'utilità iniziale del riconoscimento Made in Italy, qualcuno utilizzi queste app o siti solo per la loro funzione di narrazione.

Appendix A.16– Interview with Participant IA4

Participant Code: IA4
Date: 17 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: Italian
Country of Origin: Italy
Country of Residence: England
Age: 28
Profession: Business consultant

I: Come ti ho accennato, è una tesi che riguarda principalmente la percezione dei prodotti made in Italy all'estero. Quindi, ti chiedo intanto brevissima introduzione di te, ti chiedo solamente quanti anni hai, dove vivi, il tuo percorso di studi e di cosa ti occupi in questo momento.

IA4: Io sono … , sono nato a Roma ma ho fatto tutte le scuole fuori. Dopo liceo ho studiato a Milano, quindi ho fatto l'università a Milano e ho iniziato a lavorare a Milano. Mi sono trasferito a Londra ormai da un po' più di un anno e mezzo, quindi dal 2023. Lavoro in banca, quindi sono nell'ambito della finanza.

I: Il primo set di domande riguarda soltanto la tua percezione del made in Italy da consumatore italiano che vive all'estero e ti chiedo quindi se ti capita nella tua vita di tutti i giorni di acquistare prodotti made in Italy anche al supermercato, non in supermercati prettamente italiani, diciamo a Londra, nel supermercato X.

IA4: Allora, diciamo di sì, soprattutto su certe categorie di prodotti. Nel senso che per quanto riguarda frutta e verdura non tanto. Principalmente per roba per mangiare, perché non mi è mai capitato di vestiti e cose del genere, non mi interessa tanto. Però sulla roba da mangiare mi interessa un po' di più. Però, per esempio, compro principalmente prodotti scatolati, quindi di caffè, biscotti, pasta, sugo, tutte quelle cose che abbiamo, un po' noi italiani abbiamo la percezione che se prodotti all'estero siano di qualità peggiore. Ma anche roba più elevata, anche i prodotti anche un po' freschi, quindi tipo, che ne so, il parmigiano, invece, naturalmente l'idea è sempre appunto che il prodotto va preso il parmigiano reggiano, perché l'italiano è quindi più buono rispetto a mai riprendere il parmigiano in inglese, non lo so.

I: Sì, certo, chiarissimo. E quindi ti chiedo, le caratteristiche che tu associ, diciamo, di default a prodotti made in Italy sono quindi la qualità, da quello che mi hai detto?

IA4: Sì.

I: E c'è altro?

IA4: No, inizialmente la roba principale è la qualità, poi il problema è che la qualità viene associata ad un prezzo più elevato rispetto al prodotto magari pari marca, però prodotto, non lo so, da marchi del supermercato, oppure direttamente prodotti UK, ecco.

I: Ok, perfetto. E ti è mai capitato da consumatore italiano di vedere tra gli scaffali, magari, non lo so, nella categoria pasta, dei prodotti che sembrano italiani all'apparenza, ma che in realtà non lo sono?

IA4: Sì, quello capita abbastanza spesso, diciamo che soprattutto, appunto sì, per prodotti che, diciamo, all'estero vengono associati all'Italia. Per esempio, qua, anche qui il primo esempio che mi viene in mente sono i Taralli o Stuzzichini, che ci sta un brand che penso sia del supermercato, che ha un nome italiano, tutto praticamente italiano, tanto è che un mio collega francese viene da me e mi ha detto "ah ma tu conosci questo marchio qui?" E io gli ho fatto "guarda, no, ma non è italiano". Quindi, diciamo, sì, c'è molta pubblicità, appunto, sull'idea che il prodotto italiano abbia qualità migliore e che quindi anche prodotti non strettamente italiani vengono venduti come tali.

I: Ok, e ti chiedo, secondo te quali sono quelle caratteristiche che fanno pensare al consumatore straniero, magari, che questo brand, cioè nel packaging, ci sono delle caratteristiche che li fanno associare a prodotti italiani, pur non essendolo?

IA4: Secondo me, ah sì, sono per lo più, diciamo, secondo me, tante cose magari impercettibili, cioè, nel senso, magari loro cercano di voler assomigliare a dei brand esistenti. Anche la pasta del supermercato ha un packaging che magari è simile a quello della De Cecco, quindi magari dei colori che sono i colori italiani, quindi adesso che mi viene in mente, la pasta anche del supermercato locale è verde, cioè, sulla busta c'è il colore verde e bianco. Però, nel senso, ti andranno ad associare questi colori qui, poi comunque dei design abbastanza semplici che contrastano un po' con, cioè anche, ne so, le patatine fritte uno pensa a San Carlo, è un design molto semplice, molto pulito, invece qui anche i Doritos sono tutti coloratissimi, mentre quindi questi prodotti che, secondo me, vogliono essere spacciati un po' come italiani, poi in realtà andranno ad avere dei packaging simili e a volte anche, appunto, un tentativo di ricordare i colori italiani tramite, appunto, i colori che vengono utilizzati.

I: Ok, perfetto, e secondo te questo fenomeno dell'Italian sounding, quindi di utilizzare questi nomi, referenze, colori che si associano all'Italia su prodotti non italiani, in qualche modo danneggia il valore del vero made in Italy all'estero, oppure può essere un modo per avvicinare, anche se in modo un po', diciamo, diverso il consumatore straniero alla cultura italiana?

IA4: Allora, secondo me, di base non lo danneggia più di tanto, nel senso che magari è una risposta che non ti dovrebbe dare.

I: No, no, no, tu devi andare libero, quindi non c'è risposta sbagliata.

IA4: Ok, cioè, per esempio, anche lì sulla pasta, cioè, io personalmente magari al supermercato trovo anche la de Cecco, però magari anche la pasta del supermercato che trovo qui, a mio gusto, non ha un gusto così diverso. È chiaro che qui, comunque, parliamo di prodotti di fascio medio-basso, non è che parliamo della pasta di Gragnano fatta a mano, quindi diciamo, parliamo di prodotti, secondo me, a livello base, secondo me, non lo danneggia più di tanto. E su certi tipi di prodotti poi effettivamente questo fenomeno porta magari un po' più di consapevolezza del tipo "ah, ok, ma quindi questo prodotto storicamente è italiano; quindi, magari fammi

andare a vedere qual è quello più buono". Per esempio, appunto, sempre con discorsi che faccio tra colleghi, magari esce fuori il fatto che uno mi fa "ah, ma io ho preso questo, ma secondo te è buono?". Quindi, da un certo punto di vista, secondo me, diciamo, non lo danneggia, anzi, secondo me, per certi prodotti migliora un po' anche la consapevolezza di alcuni consumatori che di base potrebbero non avere consapevolezza su quel tipo di prodotto.

I: Ok, capito, molto interessante questo punto di vista. E l'ultima, diciamo, sezione di domande riguarda l'applicazione dell'intelligenza artificiale da parte del Made in Italy per, diciamo, cercare di contrastare un pochino questo fenomeno, perché ovviamente ruba milioni dal mercato del vero Made in Italy all'estero, però, come dici tu, ci stanno degli aspetti un po' controversi; quindi, è ancora una tematica molto aperta. Diciamo che quello che stanno cercando di fare è, da una parte, sviluppare dei chatbot che facciano un po' di informazione al consumatore straniero, che comunque spesso non è proprio consapevole di quello che acquista, e quindi praticamente sono delle applicazioni, degli strumenti basati su intelligenza artificiale introdotti su siti di prodotti Made in Italy, per esempio, o in applicazioni che raccontano le origini, magari la supply chain del prodotto, la storia che c'è dietro. E ti chiedo se, secondo te, questo tipo di narrazione basata fondamentalmente sul virtuale, sul digitale, può essere coerente con una narrazione di un brand fatto di tradizione, di artigianalità, come quello del Made in Italy?

IA4: Personalmente io penso di sì. In primis perché tanto ormai c'è moltissima consapevolezza, nel senso che comunque, alla fine, le persone che vogliono informarsi su ogni tipo di ambito poi alla fine ricercano informazioni su internet tramite altre fonti. Quindi, da un certo punto di vista, sarebbe anche meglio che le persone si possano informare tramite i canali ufficiali in maniera fruibile, senza dover ricorrere a dei siti molto vecchi o comunque che mancano alcune informazioni, ma tramite interfacce abbastanza versatili e accessibili. La troverei una cosa interessante, ma questo di base non soltanto all'estero, sarebbe interessante anche farlo in Italia. Io all'università avevo studiato qualcosa di abbastanza simile e mi ricordo che ci sono dei supermercati anche in Italia che cercavano di fare... mi ricordo nella filiera dell'arancia rossa in Sicilia che comunque cercava di incrementare la blockchain all'interno del processo di produzione dell'arancia. E quindi penso che sia un modo giusto e corretto per progredire un po' questa idea di Made in Italy.

I: Perfetto. E invece un altro modo in cui lo stanno facendo è implementando delle applicazioni che sono in grado di scannerizzare l'etichetta dietro al prodotto e grazie all'intelligenza artificiale l'applicazione è in grado di dirti "questo è vero Made in Italy, questo è no". È un progetto pilota lanciato dal Prosecco e dall'Istituto Poligrafo di Cerca dello Stato. E ti chiedo se secondo te, intanto se qualcuno, anche magari parlando tu con i tuoi colleghi, se pensi che qualcuno lo utilizzerebbe e se tu ti fideresti di un'etichetta certificata AI.

IA4: Primis, secondo me sì, penso che la gente lo utilizzerebbe. Chiaramente penso più alla nostra generazione, forse un po' più grandi anche, ma non sono sicuro sulla generazione dei nostri genitori perché comunque è una roba un po' più immediata e che richiede anche un po' di facilità d'uso del telefono, mi immagino. Però penso che i giovani sicuramente l'utilizzerebbero, a patto che sia fruibile e accessibile facilmente. Penso che, non lo so, se io vedo l'etichetta, lo scannerizzo col telefono, poi appunto di subito mi dà le informazioni che cerco, non devo magari scaricare l'app o fare quello o quell'altro. Quello secondo me renderebbe l'utilizzo. Poi io personalmente penso che mi fiderei, mi fido di tante cose che sono anche molto più, diciamo, soft. Quindi fatto una roba così sicuramente sarebbe più affidabile.

I: Ok, perfetto. Ultimissima domanda, in realtà più un parere personale. Ti chiedo, secondo te, quali altre informazioni aggiuntive da consumatore, più che altro per quello che ti viene in mente con il confronto che hai con persone straniere, francesi, non so di quale nazionalità, quali informazioni aggiuntive potrebbero servire per fare un po' di informazioni e rendere i consumatori un po' più consapevoli di tutto questo mondo?

IA4: Beh, chiaramente, diciamo, le cose fondamentali sarebbero un po' a tutto il sistema produttivo, nel senso che, appunto, parlavi del Prosecco, dici sì, ok, da dove viene l'uva va bene, però sarebbe interessante sapere non soltanto da dove viene l'uva, perché magari sì, l'uva viene dal Veneto, però poi viene spedita tutto in blocco, viene spedita in Inghilterra, e l'imbottigliamento avviene in Inghilterra. Quindi, diciamo, sarebbe sì interessante sapere un po' di più sulla provenienza di alcune cose, magari mettendolo un po' più facilmente visibile, nel senso perché molte di queste cose vengono scritte anche al supermercato, ma poi la scritta è sotto, in piccolo, e comunque non è particolarmente visibile. Ma anche poi se uno appunto scannerizza il QR code poi in realtà uno scopre anche un po' tutto il processo, come avviene, quali sono i meccanismi utilizzati, se segue eventuali DOP, DOCG, se rispetta questi canoni, e anche se eventualmente la produzione non avvenisse direttamente in Italia, cosa che, vabbè, chiaramente danneggerebbe il Made in Italy, però magari anche se la produzione non avvenisse direttamente in Italia sarebbe interessante capire se, per esempio, il viticoltore in Inghilterra ha utilizzato lo stesso metodo che viene utilizzato a Venezia o a Belluno, insomma dove anche deve essere, quindi tutto un po' anche la provenienza, il procedimento, dove avviene, ma anche che tipo di

procedimento viene utilizzato per produrre un certo tipo di cibo, bevanda, ma anche vestiti, nel senso che hanno lo stesso principio.

I: Ok, perfetto. Grazie mille.

Appendix A.14– Interview with Participant IA5

Participant Code: IA5
Date: 31 July 2025
Method: Teams (oral)
Language: Italian
Country of Origin: Italy
Country of Residence: Denmark
Age: 26
Profession: Mechanical engineer

I: Ciao …, ti chiedo intanto una brevissima introduzione, quindi quanti anni hai, dove vivi e di cosa ti occupi.
IA5: Mi chiamo …, lavoro a Copenaghen, vivo anche qui in questa città, ma sono italiana e faccio l'ingegnere meccanico.
I: Ok, perfetto. Da consumatrice italiana all'estero, ti capita di acquistare prodotti Made in Italy anche al supermercato, che tipi di prodotti compri?
IA5: Eh sì, qua ci sta un supermercato italiano, proprio con solo i prodotti italiani, che si chiama Supermarco ed è famoso. Ci vado, ma non troppo spesso adesso perché sono più lontana dal supermercato. Ci compravo la chianina, gli hamburger, ehm avevano la mozzarella di bufala, ehm … il guanciale, che non si trova nei supermercati normali, dove c'è la pancetta se ti va bene. Anche tipo i formaggi, gli affettati, cioè per la prima volta vedi il San Daniele. Anche il pecorino non si trova, di solito in giro c'è il parmigiano, quindi il pecorino lo trovi lì. La pasta no, perché alla fine ci sta, tipo le marche De Cecco e Barilla esistono, però tipo il pesto quello buono, sì che viene proprio dall'Italia, insomma, non è quello dei commerciali. Anche la salsa tartufata non si trova, penso ci ho detto tutto.
I: Invece quando non riesci ad andare là, in supermercati normali tra virgolette, in cui va il danese tipo per intenderci?
IA5: Il danese tipo sì, cerco sempre di mangiare in modo sano come se fossi a casa. La pasta ovviamente, quella la trovo, la salsa pomodoro Mutti.
I: Ok, quindi comunque le marche italiane le trovi?
IA5: Eh sì, le marche italiane le trovo, ci stanno. Anche i ravioli, sai quelli Giovanni Rana, queste cose così.
I: In quest'ottica ti chiedo, perché tu da consumatrice italiana all'estero prediligi il prodotto italiano rispetto a marche X dello stesso prodotto e quali caratteristiche associ al Made in Italy in questo senso?
IA5: Allora, per esperienza, anche se tu provi altre marche, tipo, un esempio banale la pasta, qua hanno 300 altri mila tipi di paste, tutto scritto in danese eccetera, ma se tu la provi, poi costa un terzo, perché la De Cecco costa il triplo della loro pasta normale che è un euro al pacco. Però se tu poi la compri e te la fai, la pasta non si cuoce, è strana, non è uguale alla nostra.
I: Quindi di qualità, diciamo, trovi differenze di qualità?
IA5: Sì, e poi di base ti fidi di più, ecco, cioè, sai, ti rimane la cosa che se tu scegli, cioè magari tra due tipi di pesto, se uno è danese e l'altro è di una marchia italiana che conosci, di base comunque ti fidi di più di quella italiana, sì.
I: Ok, e ti chiedo se ti è mai capitato in questi supermercati, non in quello italiano, di trovare dei prodotti che sembrano italiani, ma che in realtà non lo sono e quali caratteristiche li fanno sembrare italiani, magari nel packaging.
IA5: Beh, allora, forse, non lo so, ma non saprei. Cioè, di solito si riescono a distinguere, quindi, però non so perché, ma ci sono, sì, tanti prodotti, cioè non so, anche penso, ma forse la pasta no, però tipo la salsa Mutti, l'olio extravergine d'oliva, tutte queste cose qui, il pesto no, anche se è Giovanni Rana, però tutte le istruzioni sono in danese, anche se gli ingredienti, cioè è scritto tutto in danese, l'unica cosa in italiano è proprio il nome del brand e magari c'è scritto "pesto alla genovese", capito?
I: Ok, ok, chiaro, chiaro.
IA5: E quindi per questo io comunque, cioè, perché non ho alternativa, quindi vabbè, prendo quello lì che è più italiano, insomma, anche se mi rimane sempre la domanda. Infatti se posso vado proprio a quello al

Supermarco e li trovo proprio già lì, stranamente tutto quello che c'è scritto nel packaging, tutto in italiano, cioè è come se fossi a casa mia, capito?

I: Ti ho chiesto questa cosa perché, diciamo, il topic principale della tesi è il fenomeno dell'Italian sounding, che non so se conosci, diciamo, precisamente la definizione, in caso, diciamo, te la dico brevemente, è semplicemente quell'attività di, diciamo, inserire nei packaging di prodotti non italiani determinati elementi che sono, per esempio, il tricolore, la bandiera, appunto, bianco, rosso, verde, parole in italiano, tipo "dolce vita", tutti questi riferimenti qua al paese su prodotti che effettivamente non lo sono. E ti chiedo se, secondo te, questo fenomeno, cioè che effetto può avere sul consumatore tipo estero in termini di avvicinamento, magari, al Made in Italy, perché dici comunque si avvicina alla categoria, oppure se, secondo te, può danneggiare il vero made in Italy all'estero.

IA5: Eh, guarda, questa cosa è complicata, perché, secondo me, cioè, il fatto è che loro si abituano a prodotti … se tu vai in un ristorante italiano dove ti dicono che la pizza è fatta in un modo ed è italiana loro se ne convincono. Anche tipo, la carbonara, cioè, per loro la carbonara è fatta con la panna, però per loro la carbonara è buona. Quindi tu puoi dire, sì, si sono avvicinati in un certo senso alla cultura italiana, però si sono adattati, cioè, si sono avvicinati alla concezione che comunque ti mangi un piatto italiano, però poi tu l'hai adattato a quello che tu sei abituato a mangiare. Quindi se tu in realtà gli fai proprio un piatto italiano vero, vero e proprio, come viene fatto da noi, magari a loro non piace. Tante volte io ho sentito da gestori di ristoranti italiani che dicono "se io gli faccio il piatto come è veramente fatto da noi", al cliente non piace, cioè, stranamente a loro non piace, quindi "io, cioè, guadagno di più se lo modifico un po' a quello che è una cultura abituata, sì".

I: Sì, sì, ho capito, chiarissimo, chiarissimo. Perfetto, e l'ultima parte riguarda l'utilizzo dell'intelligenza artificiale per combattere un pochino questo fenomeno, quindi ti dico, più o meno, intanto ti chiedo, hai mai interagito in fase di acquisto con chatbot, oppure assistenti virtuali, e se sì, che cosa facevano?

IA5: No, no, no.

I: Non ti è mai successo?

IA5: No, no.

I: Ok, allora, in pratica, diciamo che le aziende made in Italy si stanno muovendo un pochino in questa direzione in due modi, il primo è sviluppando dei chatbot in fase di acquisto su siti, soprattutto, che ti spiegano praticamente la storia dei prodotti che tu stai andando ad acquistare, quindi è più una funzione di storytelling, diciamo, e ti chiedo se secondo te un tipo di narrazione basato principalmente su una roba digitale, no, come può essere un assistente virtuale che ti dice le cose, ti racconta le cose, è coerente con le caratteristiche di tradizione, artigianalità tipiche del made in Italy?

IA5: Eh beh, se è stato programmato bene, tipo, chat GPT vi dovrebbe dire le cose giuste e corrette, no?

I: Sì, sì, no, non parlo, diciamo, di veridicità delle informazioni più che altro, di modo di comunicare, c'è un brand che si basa su tradizione, storia, valori, narrato da un qualcosa di totalmente digitale.

IA5: Eh beh, sì, ma ormai, anche quando guardi la televisione, cioè i programmi, le cose, è tutto quanto un, sì, un trasmettere digitalmente le cose. Poi sì, è più estremizzato, però alla fine tutti ci stiamo evolvendo in quella direzione lì.

I: Quindi non lo vedi come un limite?

IA5: No, no, no.

I: Ok, perfetto, e invece il secondo modo in cui stanno utilizzando l'intelligenza artificiale è sviluppando delle applicazioni che ti permettono di scannerizzare, per esempio, l'etichetta di un prodotto al supermercato o quello che è, e l'intelligenza artificiale è in grado di certificare se quella roba è veramente Made in Italy oppure no. E ti chiedo, in questo senso, se tu la utilizzeresti mai, o se pensi che un consumatore danese o comunque estero la potrebbe utilizzare, e se ti fideresti mai di un'applicazione che ti dice "questo è certificato Made in Italy, questo no".

IA5: Sì, io mi fiderei, sinceramente.

I: Ok.

IA5: Di base io, cioè, personalmente non penso che l'userei, perché me ne accorgo... Cioè, so distinguere io proprio ad occhio subito se una cosa è vera Made in Italy oppure no. Poi, quando c'hai esperienza e fai la spesa tutti i giorni, cioè, i prodotti alla fine compri sempre le stesse, una volta che li hai trovati, o comunque se mai hai sbagliato, comunque poi non fai lo stesso errore. Però, secondo me il fatto di andare a cercare, tipo, usare chat GPT o comunque l'intelligenza artificiale, secondo me, sai, tipo, le classi sociali, quelle più elevate, userebbero. Cioè, immagino, comunque le famiglie ricche, la tipica madre di famiglia che va a fare la spesa, ma sono ricchi, e quindi, tipo, gli importa sapere veramente quello che stanno mangiando... Oppure sono curiosi, perché magari non sono stressati da altre cose; quindi, hanno tempo nella loro testa per, tipo, appassionarsi, scoprire, no? E vanno a cercare le cose, gli ingredienti, le ricette, da dove proviene...

I: Tu stai parlando comunque di consumatori esteri, giusto? Non italiani.

IA5: Sì, sì, sì, consumatori esteri. Cioè, mi immagino... Ma anche i danesi, cioè, esistono quelli che cercano la... Sì, che sono un po' di nicchia e vanno a cercare... Però, secondo me, la massa, in media, tipo l'ottanta per cento del resto dei clienti che vanno a fare la spesa lì al supermercato, di cui prendono le cose... Vedono Made in Italy, vedono la bandiera italiana, è già quello per loro...Si sentono già che è quel prodotto migliore di un altro senza nessun tricolore, poi non fanno però l'extra step, cioè, prendono lo scaffale e via, capito? Non stanno adesso, secondo me, a vedere, a cercare, a googlare, no?

I: Ok, chiarissimo. E l'ultimissima domanda, ti chiedo solo se ce l'hai, se ti viene in mente, se tu, da consumatrice, oppure mettendoti nei panni, appunto, in una consumatrice estera, che cosa, quali informazioni, oppure quali utilizzi, pensi che si potrebbero implementare nell'utilizzo, appunto, dell'AI, per quanto riguarda il Made in Italy, per valorizzarlo e cercare di contrastare questo fenomeno?

IA5: Sicuramente, secondo me, scannerizzare, tipo, il prodotto, cioè, quello aiuterebbe, secondo me, che in qualche modo tu puoi inquadrare il prodotto e ti riesci a trovare la marca, da dove viene, chi l'ha fatto, eccetera, eccetera.

I: Ok, quindi la parte di certificazione, diciamo.

IA5: Eh, sì. Che cos'altro? Sì, poi, a me viene, ho proprio questa immagine visuale.

I: Vai, vai libera.

IA5: Immagino, immagino, sì, la donna o l'uomo, tipo, ricco, che è magari incurioso. Sì, oppure che vogliono essere proprio sani, capito, la gente che ci tiene molto a cosa mette nel loro corpo. Sono molto incuriositi da sapere proprio la provenienza, come è stato trattato. Quindi gente che di solito, questo, non so, di solito loro appartengono a un livello sociale più elevato, secondo me. Hanno i soldi per farlo, se lo possono permettere. Che poi tutti questi prodotti di alta qualità, insomma, di solito italiani, costano anche il triplo.

I: Bene, chiarissimo.