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## **Consumer attitude towards the products “Made in Italy”. An Empirical Investigation**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose.** The paper is part of a wider research which aims to study the attitude towards the purchase of products “Made in Italy”, by means of empirical investigations.

In a previous paper we investigated the characteristics associated by consumers in related to the products “Made in Italy”, detecting the presence or absence of a willingness to pay and quantifying the amount of “premium price” that the consumers are willing to pay for such products. It is come to light both a robust recognition of the products “Made in Italy”, in terms of high-quality, and a manifested willingness to pay, incrementing the price in a range from 10% to 30%, by consumer-side (Cappelli *et al.*, 2016). For this reason, the objective of the present study is to expand the field survey, for example introducing the concept of “innovation”, trying to verify whether and to what extent the consumers perceive the innovation of the products “Made in Italy” as element of identification, in order to analyze the propensity and the consumer attitude for such products. The research questions addressed are: 1) Does orientation really exist toward the purchase of the products “Made in Italy”? And if it is, 2) Is there an inclination based on the rational consumer attitude?

**Theoretical Background.** The main literature on the “Made in Italy” recognizes frameworks such as the Country of Origin, the Brand Image and Country Image. The consumer attitude of the product “Made in Italy” converges into a broader context concerning the Willingness to Pay a Premium Price, looking towards to some studies concerning the Rational Choice Theory.

Schooler (1965) is the first author that studies and demonstrates the existence of tangible effects on consumer behavior due to the country of origin of the products [1], the variables inherent the “Made in” are able to influencing the consumer decision processes during the purchasing of the product. Obermiller and Spangenberg analyze the relationship between the Country of Origin and the Consumer Behavior, using three component: affective, normative and cognitive [2]. In the affective component the country of origin is related to a series of factors such as emotions of the consumer [3], the normative component regards the adaptation of the legal standards of a product [4] and the cognitive component concerns a rational consumer oriented to measure the relationship among country of origin, brand, and willingness to pay a premium price, impacting on purchasing intention [5]. Relatively to the Brand Image, the country of origin is reminded by the brand associated to the country rather than by the physical location of plant making the country of manufacturing irrelevant to the consumers [6].

Another perspective of country of origin is the Country Image of a product [7]. The image of the country of origin is connected to the products of a particular country [8,9].

The country image have an effect on the willingness to pay a premium price of the product [10,11]. The Willingness to Pay is defined as the perception of consumers towards the purchase product in related to the psychology approach to pay a premium price for a product “Made in” [12]. The willingness to pay of the consumers is higher when the country of origin of a branded product reminds a positive country image [13]. Hence, the consumers for a product “Made in” are willing to pay a premium price [14].

**Originality.** Despite the paper arises from references in the literature scenario, there are many gap regarding the characterization and quantification of the willingness to pay of the products “Made in Italy”. Our study is framed in the relationship between the orientation towards product “Made in Italy” and the consumer attitude. None of this has previously been seen in the “Made in Italy” research. The paper fills the gap in the literature, since there is no the provision of sufficient references to an understanding of real value of “Made in Italy” expressed in terms of positioning towards the products “Made in Italy”, the willingness to pay and the consumer attitude. Furthermore, the study is interesting by the supply-side, the enterprises could re-allocate in terms of production.

**Methodology.** The sample survey conducted in the University of Cassino and Sapienza University of Rome, involved a total of 600 respondents. In the questionnaire, the first section regards the knowledge of the phenomenon, it comes to associate three attributes and three brand relatively to the products “Made in Italy”, in order to discover whether there is an recognition in terms of quality of the products “Made in Italy”. The section n.2, the behavior towards the products “Made in Italy”, it is asked the quantification in percentage terms of the spending that consumers would be willing to support, considering three commodity sectors of the “Made in Italy”: food, fashion and mechanical automation. The third section is characterized by measurement through two Likert-type rating scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) of the attitude to the “Made in Italy” and toward consumption. The last section is reserved to personal data, including the variables of gender, age, education level, profession and income bracket.

Use the questionnaire as a tool of empirical investigation allow to outline the kind of propensity towards the product “Made in Italy” and in what extent the willingness to pay of consumers is a rational or emotional choice, responding to the research question addressed.

**Findings.** Early results from the empirical survey (still under development) confirm the presence of a propensity towards the purchase of products “Made in Italy”, which does not seem to be supported by a rational consumers’ attitude. Other expected findings regard the existence and quantification of the willingness to pay in relation to specific commodity sectors and characteristics attributed to the “Made in Italy” such as the innovativeness.

**Research limitations.** The main limitations of the paper concern the geographically aspect (although the sampling provides to represent the entire population, the survey was conducted in only two towns, Rome and Cassino) and the correct legal/regulatory definition of the “Made in Italy”, which is not investigated.

**Keywords:** Made in Italy, Quality, Innovation, Willingness to Pay, Consumer Attitude.

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