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Italian Consumers' Reaction to Corporate Storytelling During the Global Pandemic: a Qualitative Study

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INTRODUCTION

The origin and development of corporate storytelling has been central to significant studies, which have required preliminary analysis of the classical narrative theories. Indeed, storytelling is an ancient phenomenon founded on human beings' innate need of communication, although it currently refers to the activity of using specific skills to tell a story to an audience, i.e. to simulate reality in several areas of life, including the economic field, where the expression "corporate storytelling" was conceived.

Corporate storytelling represents an improvement of the traditional narration, since it is used by companies as a powerful tool for communicating activities, projects, values, and information. Thus, one of its main purposes is to create a deep relationship with consumers who can be reached through several media, including digital channels such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, that turned them into content creators. In this regard, Roberto Rondinelli and Riccardo Bresciani (2019), two of the authors studied for this research, attributed the role of real media to consumers who hold active positions. However, Christian Salmon studied the transformation of human beings' innate need of telling stories into a persuasive marketing tool, and proved that corporate storytelling can assume different undertones according to the way in which it is conveyed. Nevertheless, the most effective contents are visuals, since human brains are programmed to easily process them. Therefore, this study includes the works of Ekaterina Walter (2014) and Daniele Orzati (2019), who focused on the narrative power of still and dynamic images, even though the protagonist of the literature review is Andrea Fontana, who wrote several guides between 2010 and 2018, that focus on corporate storytelling.

The topic has been recently discussed again due to the widespread of Covid-19, the global pandemic which is challenging every area of life, including the economic field. Indeed, companies have changed their communication strategies in order to suit the emergency situation and to create an empathetic relationship with their clients. This attitude, as well as the unknown future of corporate storytelling, led me to conduct an extensive analysis of the subject matter.

The first time I heard about corporate storytelling was last year, during experiential marketing classes at university. In that period, I had the opportunity to reflect on the power of advertising; companies started to use storytelling as a tool for promoting their

products or services, compared to previous methods where the advertisement was strictly related to the product/service and presented an explicit call to action for the consumer. Therefore, the use of storytelling as a persuasive tool that combines narrative and informative languages made me realise that there is indeed a connection between the humanistic and economic field. As a consequence, I decided to further investigate on this subject, since it represents the perfect ending of my academic career, which involves the study of foreign languages and cultures, both active and passive translations, as well as marketing and international economics. However, it was the outbreak of the global pandemic that directed my research. I spent months studying the topic and comparing the points of view of the most disparate authors, until one day in March I turned on the television, and I saw a commercial that seemed a social advertising. Newscasts were starting to talk about phase two of the pandemic, which marked the end of the lockdown, although the return to normality appeared to be an illusion. Thus, the words of that commercial, spoken aloud, initially moved me, but later distressed me: it was the global campaign created by Lavazza and it was also the first time I had ever watched and listened carefully to a promotional message, from the first to the sixtieth second. At the end of the video, when I saw the logo, I felt the need and the willingness to discover how the other Italian companies were dealing with the national lockdown period. However, as the months passed and the security measures loosened, the communication strategies started to change, leading me to decide that my study should not go beyond 31 July 2020. Indeed, I was aware that, despite the considerable limits of time and resources, I would be able to study a current situation by observing the evolution of Italian companies' storytelling and the reaction of Italian consumers in a difficult period both at national and international level.

In other words, the purpose of this research is to show how Italian consumers reacted to corporate storytelling during the global pandemic. This objective will be achieved by conducting a qualitative analysis on a sample of 25 people divided into 5 age ranges: 15-20, 20-27, 27-35, 35-50, and over 50. The selected people will be asked to participate to structured interviews, consisting of general questions concerning their lifestyles (during and after quarantine), and specific questions concerning three case studies: Vodafone Italia, Lavazza, and Conad. The data collected from the interviews will be analysed and cross-checked in order to graphically represent, through histograms, the

most common attitude of Italian consumers. However, to achieve this objective, it will be necessary to proceed gradually. Therefore, the paper will have a tripartite structure: the first chapter will describe the main topic, the second its application to the current situation, and the third its impact on consumers.

The first chapter, entitled *Corporate storytelling: origin and development*, will be a literature review on corporate storytelling, from its roots to its evolution into digital storytelling. Special attention will be paid to the figures of the storyteller and the consumer, who are the communication sender and receiver, respectively. In particular, the storyteller is used to develop a storyline tailored to the interests of the target audience, including both current and potential consumers, who play a key role in marketing. In fact, their function has changed over the years, evolving from passive advertising targets to active listeners with decision-making skills and a propensity to be creative. They have the ability to create contents, to decide in advance what should be watched and, above all, whether or not to be moved by the emotions conveyed by corporate storytelling. In this regard, it will also be necessary to reflect on the term “story”, which is not a mere tale or anecdote but a simulation of reality, and on the media used to spread it. The latter will be presented as fundamental elements of narrative processes, especially after their fragmentation, which occurred in the twenty-first century due to the increased power of consumers and coincided with the technological development and the subsequent emergence of digital storytelling. Currently, consumers do not want to be persuaded, but rather to be free to skip advertisements, to choose topics related to their interests, and to create their own contents. This leads to stories that are true commercial products, making traditional push advertising obsolete and replacing it with pull advertising. In addition, particular attention will be paid to the advent of social media, which made stories and information available in real time and resulted in user-generated contents, since consumers spontaneously contribute to the storytelling process, removing the traditional distinction between narrator and listener. In particular, there will be an overview of the main features and functions of YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. A paragraph will also be dedicated to the description of the consequences of the evolution of social media platforms, focusing on visual storytelling, involving images, photos, GIFs, videos, infographics, etc.

The second chapter, entitled *Italian corporate storytelling in the age of Covid-19* will be structured in two parts: the first section will be an overview of the current situation, while the second one will be an analysis of the current storytelling. In particular, the first pages will be dedicated to the development dynamics of the pandemic, focusing on the global and European situation, by referring to World Health Organisation's (WHO) official data. Particular attention will be paid to the Italian situation, where the pandemic was managed by the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and structured in three phases characterised by different containment measures. The progression of the three pandemic phases will be used to show the evolution of corporate storytelling, which has been adapted to the situation. A total of 9 advertisements, 3 for each pandemic phase (Vodafone Italia, Mondadori, and Barilla for the first phase; Star, Pupa Milano, and Lavazza for the second phase; Enel Energia, Conad, and Lago for the third phase) will be examined in order to show the changed communication strategies of Italian companies. However, it will be necessary to mention that the third pandemic phase will become effective when a cure and/or vaccine is found, although everybody believes we have already entered that phase. Therefore, the paragraph dedicated to the advertising released in this phase will be entitled *Toward pandemic phase three*. Nevertheless, the hypothesis is that the messages are particularly emotional during the lockdown, and that they return to their predominant commercial purposes during phase two, especially close to phase three. For this reason, still images will be captured from the videos and described, paying attention to topics of the messages, images, tones of voices and hashtags. In the end, a comparative analysis will be conducted and a concise comparison of the main features of corporate storytelling among the three pandemic phases will be offered.

The third chapter, entitled *Italian consumers' reaction to corporate storytelling during the global pandemic: the cases of Vodafone Italia, Lavazza, and Conad* will be the cornerstone of the research. It will be divided into five parts: goals, methodology, results, discussion, and research limitations. Indeed, at the beginning there will be a description of the already mentioned macro-objective, and of the micro-objective indispensable to its achievement. In particular, the consumer profile will be outlined and an attempt will be made to understand whether storytelling is able to create a relationship of trust between companies and clients even during a difficult situation such as the current one or whether, on the contrary, its sole objective is to increase sales. The hypothesis is

that consumers have enough control of their choices and emotions to the point that they do not pay attention to advertisements or voluntarily decide to skip them, especially when they do not involve products of their interest. Moreover, their possible customer status will not determine the appreciation of certain advertisements and vice versa; consumers will show that they are aware of and attached to their buying habits. In other words, it will be demonstrated that consumers have an active role. Thus, the method used, which will be described more in depth in chapter 3, will consist of interviews directly addressed to Italian consumers in the month of August, either personally or on Skype, depending on their availability. Moreover, the results obtained from the transcript of the interviews, divided by age ranges, will be reported, analysed, and discussed. For this reason, the data will be cross-checked and made more understandable with the help of histograms that are specific for each objective. This section will include some conclusive considerations and a part dedicated to the limits of the study, which will be the scarcity of time available, the non-representativeness of the sample size, and the limited number of case studies.

The research will end with a section dedicated to the conclusions. These will include a summary of the course and of the results obtained through the achievement of the previously established objectives.

1. CORPORATE STORYTELLING: ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

Research into storytelling, a compound noun made with the combination of story and the present participle of tell, has a long tradition. There is a large volume of published studies describing the origin and evolution of this concept since its introduction in 1709 (Online etymology dictionary, 2020). Nowadays, dictionaries define it as the activity of telling and writing stories. However, over the centuries, this concept has been adopted in many areas of the world we live in, eventually becoming fashionable. Therefore, it has been taken on the meaning of communicating through stories, i.e. building narrative universes in order to establish solid and empathetic relationships with the audience (Fontana, 2016). As a consequence, it generates the need to develop further study.

1.1. The concept of storytelling

«Narrative starts with the very history of mankind», asserted Roland Barthes (1975: 237) in one of his works. At the heart of this statement is the awareness that we, as human beings, are social animals that have an innate need to communicate with each other. This communication lies at the base of the human history, since it is the reason why our lives are dominated by stories, which were initially told around a tribal fire by shamans with the aim to talk about news, beliefs and norms of a tribe. They were then used by religious leaders in the hope of consoling and healing the members of the communities. Finally, they were delivered by musicians, poets, writers and actors. As a consequence, oral stories were often written afterwards: some became a painting, others a novel, others a script. Nonetheless, they were, and still are, human, i.e. able to create a remarkable relationship of trust and empathy with the audience (Jutkowitz, 2017). The topic has been central to significant disciplinary investigations, from which many theories arose, including Russian formalism¹ and French structuralism² (Fontana, 2009). A reference to semiotic and narratology is, therefore, fundamental.

¹ Russian formalism was a school of literary criticism which introduced important novelties in the literary field. Its influence dates back to the 1920s, when in Soviet Union the already mentioned Tzvetan Todorov, Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp and other authors gave rise to several theories concerning, in fact, the formal aspect of literary phenomena (Treccani, 2020).

² French structuralism is a theory that has been applied in various sciences since the early twentieth century. It is based on the assumption that each object of study constitutes a structure, i.e. an organic whole whose

The term “narratology” is the Anglicization of French *narratologie*, invented by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969 to indicate a wide field of research that focuses on the analysis of narrative structures. It is a modern theory based on the thirty-one narrative functions³ depicted by the Russian linguist and anthropology Vladimir Jakovlevič Propp. The functions at issue are structural elements recurring in Russian fairy tales that have been subsequently used to develop a universal theoretical model applicable to each narrative system. In this regard, particular mention should go to Algirdas Julien Greimas, Claude Bremond and Gerald Prince (Treccani, 2020). They carried out several researches about the issue but, nonetheless, the simplification of the narrative architecture developed by Propp is the only essential notion for the purpose of this paper. Indeed, they have actively contributed to the semiotic definition of the modern narrative, made by an initial situation, an action that starts and ends, and a final situation. Not coincidentally, in semiotics⁴ the narration is associated with the construction of a story, for which a canonical narrative schema is used (Ferraro, 2015). This schema is composed of some basic elements, such as a hero in search of himself, an amazing feat, an opponent, a fight (between the hero and the opponent) caused by the discovery of a treasure, a traumatic event the hero must recover from, magical objects, at least one helper who support the hero, and a final wedding, that is the successful completion of the heroic feat (Fontana, 2009). Nevertheless, this is just one of the countless meanings associated with the narrative, and it is necessary to go beyond the semiotic sphere in order to seize the act of telling.

In the last few decades, special attention has been paid to the way stories are used, rather than to the way they are structured. Narration has become a social action that increasingly relies on real experiences, overshadowing the traditional narrative form (Ferraro, 2015). It has been conceived as the main way to make life meaningful and to

constituent elements take on value when they relate to each other (Treccani, 2020). Among its major exponents there is the already mentioned Roland Barthes, along with other two authors which have some relevance to this paper: Algirdas Julien Greimas and Claude Bremond (Fontana, 2009).

³ Given an initial situation, the thirty-one functions are: alienation, interdiction, violation of interdiction, reconnaissance, tip off, trap, complicity, damage or lack, mediation, beginning of the counteraction, hero's departure from home, first function of the donor, hero's reaction, achievement of a magical means, transfer to the place where there is the searched object, struggle against the antagonist, branding, victory of the hero, removal of the damage or lack, hero's homecoming, pursuit, rescue, hero's undercover arrival, fake hero's unfounded claims, difficult task, solution, hero's recognition, fake hero's exposure, hero's transfiguration, punishment, wedding. For details on the specific functions and their reformulation, it is possible to consult: Ferraro G., (2015). *Teorie della narrazione. Dai racconti tradizionali all'odierno storytelling*. Carocci editore, Roma.

⁴ The Collins Dictionary defines Semiotics as «the academic study of the relationship of language and other signs to their meanings» (Collins, 2020).

convey human beings' thoughts (Ryan, 2004). Simultaneously, this concept has been expressed using the term “storytelling”, which makes it appropriate to clarify the difference between history, story, and narrative. Indeed, a history is a set of chronological facts and situations that occur in time and space. There is no need to have special skills to write it, and it often is exclusively interesting for the author, and not for a potential audience. To the contrary, a story is a portrayal of facts, a simulation of reality which goes beyond both spatial and temporal dimensions. Besides an accurate knowledge of the facts, a storyteller requires narrative skills enabling him to make proper use of words, linguistic registers, visual imagery, and emotions in order to build an archetypical structure that catches the audience's attention. Moreover, a story may contain a history, since it may depict events that actually happened, as well as fictional elements that have an impact in the real world. Therefore, reality and its representation have a common point, which is the narrative, that is the sense making process which turns them into two aspects of a wider reality. In other words, it is the the act through which a certain story is concretely conveyed to an audience (Fontana, 2016). Narrative has been the subject of several studies⁵, from which two significant approaches have emerged: the epistemological and the ontological. While the former describes narration as a cognitive tool that gives meaning to human life, the latter sees it as a constitutive element of human existence, precisely an ontological category. However, whichever point of view is adopted, both experience and narrative are the result of an interpretative activity. This is especially important when trying to understand how storytelling influences the creation of our narrative existence (Meretoja, 2014).

1.1.1. A narrative world

Based on the concepts illustrated above, a story is a communicative product that aims to define and direct behaviours, flows of emotions, and perceptions beyond time and space. In other words, it is a narrative model with which individuals can easily identify and comply with (Salmon, 2008). For this reason, a story must have an accessible language

⁵ Both the epistemological and the ontological approaches have a specific background. The first one developed from the philosophers of history's belief that historic facts have a narrative order, exactly as everything else in our life. Instead, the second one goes against narrative, embracing the philosophical idea that human existence is chaotic due to the presence of no narrative aspects (Meretoja, 2014).

and style in order to become memorable. In this regard, there is a general guideline to follow: tailor the story for the target audience, situation, and media, after carefully analysing them. It is therefore essential to know in depth the recipient of the communication in order to notice every detail of the story beforehand, while always maintaining a certain degree of flexibility. In addition, the storyteller must believe in the message he or she is conveying, with the purpose of influencing and empowering the audience, who in turn has the option of sharing his/her stories (Jutkowitz, 2017).

However, the definition of story as a means of communication deserves further explanation. Andrea Fontana is well aware of this, as he specified that stories are mental mediums, models of knowledge, forms of consumption, media formats and care devices. As a matter of fact, stories are not easy representations, but a sort of scripts through which reality is simulated. This applies to all the different areas in life, as to be used to disseminate information, encourage consumers to make a purchase, share social positioning, and provide serenity to those who read, listen and/or watch them. Accordingly, Andrea Fontana also stated that narrative is the sum of our life experience and our psychological, social, political, and economic habitat; it is the link between the chronological events and their representation (Fontana, 2016). Therefore, it can be described as the contemporary explanation of Ernest Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory, which was introduced in the 1970s and showed communication both as a creative and logical transmission mode. Indeed, it highlights the relevance of the stories that, by spreading and repeating themselves, give rise to social, institutional, and organizational realities. In this respect, every human community is conversational, since the reality is perceived through its own specific stories (Olufowote, 2017). In addition, it is important to bear in mind that storytelling is the sum of words used to describe memories that are part of our autobiographical memory, i.e. the narrative device through which we remember the reality enhanced by additional meanings. Thus, we are not able to live, love, and die without it (Fontana, 2009).

Over the centuries, narrative has become an integral part of the world in which we live due to the increased complexity of everyday life. Information and communication continue to be important, but they are no longer sufficient to create and share economic, social, and political value (Fontana, Sassoon, Soranzo, 2011). This evolution is commonly called "narrative turn" and marks the beginning of the narrative era.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the notion of narrative has spread across all sectors of the society (Salmon, 2008). Since then, it has been taken into account in many scientific disciplines, such as political sciences, psychological sciences, economic sciences, media sciences, military sciences, managerial sciences, religious sciences, physical sciences, and the entertainment industry (Fontana, 2016). On the one hand, this leads to look at narrative as a rhetorical instrument of power, whereas, on the other hand, it tends to trivialise the concept itself. Indeed, narratives are commonly confused with stories, the latter being just simple anecdotes (Salmon, 2008).

However, this paper will exclusively focus on the origin, development, and economic use of the mentioned instrument of power that is commonly called “storytelling”. The concept of storytelling is a scientific approach according to which narrative processes are both individual and collective, since they make sense of already existing notions and create new realities (Fontana, 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO) described storytelling as the producer of some life skills, essential to learn in order to avoid risky behaviours, such as drug addiction or alcoholism. Among the many skills in question, decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, empathy, and management of emotions are the most interesting ones (Batini, Fontana, 2010). Moreover, the storytelling application to the economic field marked the beginning of the experience economy era⁶, during which several studies about the narrative trend of the production processes have emerged (Fontana, 2009). At the core of these investigations there is the awareness that storytelling not only can serve as an analysis tool but also as a production system for content creation. Thus, its use is suitable for a person, as well as an organization, a society or a reference market. In any case, it is accurate to associate the concept of storytelling with the one of feat, since this reveals the major decisions taken by an individual or a community and their consequent actions. Storytelling is a way of thinking, producing value, spreading knowledge, and encouraging consumers to buy a

⁶ According to the Cambridge Dictionary, «the experience economy is an economy in which many goods or services are sold by emphasizing the effect they can have on people’s lives» (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). The concept was first introduced by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore in the late 1993. It is opposed to the service economy, since it refers to memorable situations designed to surprise and move the consumers. As a consequence, it totally changed the business world (Sunbdo, SÈrensen, 2013). For additional information it is useful to consult Sunbdo J., SÈrensen F., (2013). *Handbook on the Experience economy*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham (UK) and Northampton (USA).

particular product, that utilises different media according to the specific requirements (Fontana, 2016).

To conclude, the studies presented thus far provide evidence that storytelling is a complex and ancient phenomenon able to meet the most diverse needs of human life, which have been extensively dealt with by Andrea Fontana (2016) in his book *Storytelling d'impresa. La guida definitiva*. Firstly, he elucidates the importance of using a narrative to be understood and remembered, overcoming any sense of inadequacy. As a matter of fact, we, as human beings, are imperfect, not only from the physical and behavioural point of view, but also in the way we narrate our life. Indeed, what is interesting to us may not be interesting to our listener. This happens because we live in a narrative world that we have to learn to read, predict, and make meaningful. Moreover, our reality is characterized by several identities that become relevant thanks to storytelling, which gives them the perfect shape. This way, our autobiographical memory, which includes consumptions, is constantly nourished. In particular, according to Fontana, consumption in all its forms is a discourse that has the ability to increase sales, as well as to create a deep connection between the producer and the consumer. This relationship is gradually fed by the mutual narratives of their past life-journeys and the prediction of the future ones. Thus, storytelling is at the basis of the so-called “narrative capital”, i.e. the whole of powerful and valuable identity narratives with a strong impact on the recipients. However, there are some aspects of our life that are not interesting enough to be narrated. In this respect, Fontana claims that, in the absence of certain circumstances, storytelling is useless. This occurs when its purpose is that to provide information, share anecdotes, rethink a communication strategy, and sell a product or service without captivating or influencing anyone. In short, storytelling has become fashionable, but it is pointless using it just for this reason.

1.2. Corporate storytelling

In literature, there is evidence of the evolution of storytelling in the most diverse areas of life. Indeed, while storytelling was initially conceived as an entertainment tool for children, it eventually became the medium through which human beings talk about

themselves, build their own narrative identities⁷, and share their experiences. Specifically, the turning point came in the 1990s, when storytelling began to succeed among social sciences, to the point of concerning no longer merely private but also organisational life. In other words, from that moment, storytelling started to be used as a powerful and universal way of communication (Chautard, Collin-Lachaud, 2019).

For the aim of this paper, suffice it to say that the expression “corporate storytelling” indicates the combination of literature and management that is very popular in the economic field. On the one hand, the word “corporate” refers to any company that host different kind of narratives by moving away from the individual feat mentioned so far. On the other hand, the noun “storytelling” refers to the tool used to achieve different purposes, such as sharing information, outlining the corporate culture, planning the future, enhancing consumer awareness of products and services characteristics, increasing sales, etc. Thus, corporate storytelling is commonly used in several areas of activity. The first one is the internal and external communication area, that is particularly relevant for the development of this paper since it leads to a concrete dialogue between the company and the consumer. In this area of activity, storytelling aims to convert the organization’s key messages to stories and optimise the communication tools through social narrative plans, newsletters, institutional videos, and so forth. The second area of activity concerns the public relations, in which storytellers aim at building engagement. The third area relates to vocational training, where stories represent the perfect way to increase workers’ quality and corporate value. The fourth area involves brand management, that uses storytelling in order to make the brand narrative after an accurate analysis of both the brand and its target audience. The fifth area of activity complies with institutional marketing, in which stories serve to enhance the territorial and cultural features of a specific place, with the ultimate aim to attract tourists’ attention. The sixth area appertains to advertising, that is fundamental for establishing a deep relationship between the brand and the consumer that will eventually lead to an increase in sales. The seventh area refers to strategic principles, in which storytelling aims at improving the corporate identity, aligning internal and external stories and recognizing the

⁷ The concept of narrative identity was deeply studied by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005). In particular, he compared it with the immutable biological identity that depends on the genetic code. Unlike the latter, the narrative identity preserves its integrity just in a life story and in a second-level temporality, since the time in which it evolves is different from that of the clock (Brezzi, 2006). For more information, consult Brezzi F., (2006). *Introduzione a Ricoeur*. Editori Laterza, Bari.

organisational values and the most significant moments of the organisation's life. Finally, the last area of activity pertains to product design, in the perspective in which products and services are increasingly associated with social discourses created from the life history of the consumers and their connection with the goods.

Generally speaking, within an organizational context, storytelling may be management or organizational. The former concerns the writing of the narrative plans with the aim of best managing the corporate narratives. Instead, the latter is responsible for the production and the communication of the narrative content. In this case, there is a need for external experts with particular skills in writing, photography, and video editing. Nonetheless, often the two types of storytelling complement each other to the extent that they are managed by the same group of specialists.

In this respect, the corporate storytelling process, as described by Andrea Fontana, is divided into three phases: brief, narrative plan, and execution. The brief is used in order to analyse the company's strengths and weaknesses and to give voice to its internal and external requests. This is a critical step in order to examine in depth the key elements of storytelling, such as the author, the purpose, the target audience, the media, and so forth. Then, afterwards, companies edit the narrative plan, which establishes themes, visual imageries, and the media of a specific story. However, the project must be implemented in order to mobilise the team works and to ensure that they will fill the gaps identified at the beginning (Fontana, 2016). Moreover, in cooperation with Joseph Sassoon and Ramon Soranzo, Fontana claims that corporate storytelling is just one of the three approaches that lie at the basis of the so-called "narrative marketing". The other two approaches are semioscreen and neuromarketing. On the one hand, semioscreen originates from the semiotic approach, and it allows companies to conduct complex analysis in order to differentiate from their competitors. On the other hand, neuromarketing deals with the study of human brain when this is stimulated by a marketing action that may lead to a spontaneous purchase (Fontana, Sassoon, Soranzo, 2011).

Another author who has cleverly studied the topic is Stephen Denning (2011). Indeed, he compared storytelling to leadership in his book *The leader's guide to storytelling. Mastering the art and discipline of business narrative*. According to him, these two concepts lead to a common aim, that is gaining the hearts and minds of the

people involved through the technique of persuasion. Moreover, both require specific skills that need to be learnt throughout professional life. In particular, as for the leaders, they use narrative patterns in order to achieve various objectives, such as to introduce themselves and their companies to the employees, to share positive values and knowledge, and to pave the way for silencing potential rumours. This creates empathy and ensures that employees collaborate with each other and, together with consumers, trust the company and its leader. However, the main purpose is to make people change through the so-called “springboard stories”⁸, that are based on preferably recent true stories. They convey and foster a complex idea with the ultimate aim to implement it through the listeners’ active participation. Therefore, the communication is effective to the extent that it makes clear what would have happened without the mentioned project. Superfluous details are avoided, the tone is overall positive and the protagonist, situated in a specific space-time dimension, is similar to the target audience; thus, the happy ending is guaranteed. To sum up, there is almost no difference between the storyteller and the listener, since the latter contributes to the production of the story, therefore adapting it to his/her own lifestyle.

Based on the concepts illustrated above, storytelling is a powerful tool used by managers and leaders in order to increase the effectiveness of their actions. As already seen, in the narrative world the focus is on how the story is told. This aspect is also relevant in the leadership world, where the shape of the story, along with the content, the storyteller, and the audience, create an indissoluble whole to pay attention to. The modern leader, not coincidentally, is interactive, meaning that he creates a deep connection with the target audience by using a simple language and by telling the truth in a spontaneous way. Instead, in the corporate world, particular relevance is given to the content. As a matter of fact, each company is responsible for its own corporate communication, which occurs using narrative schemes that later will be converted into business practices. Thus, the aptitudes of workers and external clients are always controlled, keeping the first ones informed about work policies and involving the second ones in the consumer experience. In order to achieve this, several plots can be used. The most important ones are the epic

⁸ For more information, consult Denning S., (2001). *The Springboard. How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations*. Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford.

poems (in which a hero overcomes various obstacles to accomplish his mission), the drama (characterized by the presence of victims who fight to the end), the melodrama (which converts victims into heroes), and the comedy (where heroes are replaced by smart protagonists who achieve their goals in an amusing way). Therefore, a corporate story is, on the one hand, a tool for organizing and managing the work and, on the other hand, a means to manipulate cultural perception (Fontana, 2009).

At this point, as stated by Seth Godin (2009) in his book *All marketers are liars tell stories*, it is clear that marketers did not create storytelling but they definitively enhanced its properties. According to Godin, since stories represent an integral part of our identity and a way to survive within society, each one of us is considered a liar. Nonetheless, stories are a powerful tool especially for marketers who need to meet the requirements of the consumers in order to encourage them to make purchases.

Roberto Rondinelli and Riccardo Bresciani (2019) share a similar point of view in their book *Nice to Brand You. Perché funziona quando funziona la comunicazione pubblicitaria all'epoca dello storytelling*. In particular, they highlight the importance of using stories to involve and dialogue with the consumer in order to make this appreciate the brand during the experiential and emotional journey that precedes the potential purchase. This is a direct consequence of traditional advertising, which was designed to show the best side of the products that had to be bought by happy families, whose lives would be improved by this purchase. On the contrary, current storytelling, despite being used to sell, leaves the consumers the possibility to decide, making them experience an emotion.

In short, corporate stories are suitable for being analysed from an individual and strategic point of view. Thus, the following pages of this paper are going to shed light on the role and skills of the storyteller, on the construction and broadcasting of a story, and on the consumer behaviour.

1.2.1. The storyteller

«The most powerful person in the world is the storyteller», claimed the Apple founder Steve Jobs, to highlight the power of storytelling in the digital era (Menabney, 2020). However, the topic is so wide and complex that needs further consideration.

The storyteller is the manager of the narrative, the one who has the appropriate skills for pursuing the objectives that lie at the very basis of each narrative activity. His/her specific skills vary due to his/her own specialisation. Indeed, there are four different types of acknowledged professionals in this sector: the storyteller strategist or architect, the content storyteller or script writer, the visual storyteller, and the media narrative designer. An accurate description is essential in order to carefully analyse their respective skills and to outline the distinctive traits they have in common.

The storyteller strategist devotes himself/herself to the creation and management of the narrative process, after decoding the narrative trends. He/she takes into account both the author's and the reader's point of view, thanks to his/her deep knowledge in sociology, psychology, and narrative marketing. Instead, the content storyteller shapes the contents and devises the script which will be subsequently adapted to the different media and business functions. He/she masters the narrative writing as well as the storytelling strategist, but he/she also is an expert in editorial design and project management. However, he/she does not deal with the visual imagery, fundamental to create a great connection with the reader; this is the task of the visual storyteller. Indeed, his/her skills include the control of photography and video making, as well as project management, that is also a characteristic of the content storyteller. Finally, the media narrative designer organises the communication channels, paying particular attention to the final experience of the readers. Therefore, he/she oversees the narrative design of the product and prepares the online and offline spaces, perfectly mastering social media strategies. Despite their differences, the above-mentioned storytellers create efficient work teams, precisely because of their ability to perfectly complement one another (Fontana, 2016).

In wider terms, a storyteller is a strategist who, above all, must plan and structure the story accurately. According to Batini and Fontana (2010), he/she should refer to a proper scheme which takes note of all the fundamental steps to produce an effective story. The first of these steps concerns the target audience, whose life experience serves as a starting point to make all the decisions regarding the construction of the canonical narrative schema previously discussed. The second step deals with the specification of the main purpose and the respective themes from which the plot unfolds. This is followed by the definition of the narrative strategies, of the linguistic style, of the emotional impact, and of the communication channel of the story. Then, as the final step, the storyteller must

be aware of the economic resources at his/her disposal and act on them. Indeed, it is important to bear in mind that everything, including storytelling, has a cost. The price to be paid, in this case, relates to the training of managers and employees, to the hiring of professionals, and to any ongoing collaboration with them. This is essential in order to acquire or exploit the skills and the professionalism that a storyteller must necessarily have. Nevertheless, in addition to the economic investment, there is that of time, necessary to build an effective strategy and to prevent the story from falling into oblivion (Fontana, 2016). The only way to achieve this goal is converting communication into narrative sequences through the confutation of traditional marketing vocabulary and through the depiction of characters able to give voice to the audience and to the brand (Salmon, 2008).

However, a storyteller is not merely an author, but also a narrator and a character. As a matter of fact, he/she has the power to make decisions regarding every aspect of the story, from the plot to its duration and dissemination. In particular, in the case of corporate storytelling, a company acts as an author of products and services, but becomes a narrator when communicating the outcome of its work to potential customers. When this happens, the company may decide to hide itself behind the voice of one or more characters of the story, that will be adapted to the communication channels used (Fontana, 2009).

1.2.2. The story

Corporate stories are complex narrative forms used by workers to describe the work experience or by the company to promote activities, internal projects and purchases. Thus, they are placed in a specific time, space, and culture, where they build a meaningful reality, also thanks to the active participation of the consumers (Fontana, 2009). In fact, each story is produced by a story-architect, that is an author who deals with the management of the narrative world and its inhabitants. He/she always speaks to a reader, the story-listener, whose life-journey lies at the very basis of an interesting and emotional content showed in an appropriate context. This context is responsible for the role of the story-listener, who may identify with the narrative experience, becoming the main character or the holder of the story shared by the storyteller through different media platforms (Fontana, 2016). Thus, corporate stories are never completely finished because

they depend on the identities and on the behaviours of their users (Fontana, 2016). However, each story is always composed by six essential elements: implicit or explicit subjects, clear objectives, values to be transmitted, themes to be shared, feelings to be provoked, and aptitudes to be suggested. Moreover, the merger of the stories, whether they are objects of the internal, external or public perception narration⁹, gives rise to the so-called “core story” (Fontana, 2009). This represents the starting point of the narration of one’s own reality, i.e. what emerges after the planning stage, and needs to align itself to the target audience’s life and to their requests for power, care, salvation, and evasion. Moreover, the core story offers a destiny to fulfil and a destination to reach, dramatizing the information according to the canonical narrative schema previously analysed.

Corporate stories, just as life stories, are call for actions that connect the staging of acts with the deep motivations of the acts themselves (Fontana, 2016). Indeed, stories do not clearly separate the rational from the emotional aspect because their main purpose is moving the readers, always maintaining a narrative coherence. Therefore, each story is situated in an historical period, a physical or virtual space, and a specific culture. Similarly, the linguistic style may be different in accordance with the characters, who in turn are static or dynamic, in line with the narrative requirements. Indeed, their personality, appearance, and life journey are involved in the finalisation of the emotional tension of the story (Batini, Fontana, 2010). In particular, this is the case of corporate stories, which are designed to describe and improve a company, a product or a service. Thus, they should have a long run impact and credibility on consumers (Godin, 2009). In conformity with this objective, Batini and Fontana proposed rules for the production of effective and persuasive stories, which depict an event through the actions of the characters. These stories do not necessarily need to be faithful to reality or to have a moral, but they must include silences as well as words. Moreover, all the stories are perceived differently by each reader, who will attribute to each of them specific meanings. It is therefore fundamental for the storyteller to equate himself/herself with the readers and to stimulate the imagination in order to offer compelling contents (Batini, Fontana, 2010). However, not all the stories succeed. A story fails when it disappears among the

⁹ The internal narration includes emails, personal relationships, newsletters, meetings, workshops, and so forth. Otherwise, forms of communication such as advertising, press releases, business cards, marketing activities, and public relations are part of the external stories. Finally, rumours about stakeholders and consumers and public beliefs are public perception narration (Fontana, 2009).

several types of communication and information to which we are constantly exposed. Indeed, even though someone might notice it, this does not mean he/she will like it or share it (Godin, 2009).

In addition, analogously to other types of storytelling, the corporate one originates from a conflict, paradox or clash between different visions of reality; it aims to fill a void or solve a complex situation. Therefore, it stages values that have the ultimate goal to create an emotional connection among interlocutors rather than to persuade them through a simple egocentric portrayal of the corporate identity. In fact, the business is no longer a response to the concrete needs of the consumers, but a producer of experiences. Similarly, brands serve as a spokesperson for specific worldviews and symbolic universes. Once again, the companies' discourses become effective when the values of their brands are declined in narrative. Therefore, each brand tells a story (Qualizza, 2009).

So far, this paper has focused on written and oral stories that are respectively read and told, without considering the visual ones that, on the contrary, are observed. As a matter of fact, in the latter case it is required to depict a narrative context through specific colours and visual nuances. This must be enriched by an appropriate psychological atmosphere and by symbols through which the storyteller and the audience have the opportunity to express themselves.

Generally speaking, when a fact is told, our imagination, composed of visual images and linguistic systems, is stimulated. Visual images are particularly important as they act as the main vehicle of our brain thoughts. In addition, they contribute to build reality through the production of perceptual experiences and behaviours related to childhood memories and socio-cultural traditions. Therefore, a visual corporate story must take into account the environment in which readers live, in order to design places in line with their worldview, places where the characters of the story will perform their actions. In fact, just as the traditional storyteller, the visual storyteller is not merely a creative person, but a professional. In particular, he/she has the ability to merge his imagination with that of the audience, according to the communication tool. Moreover, he/she is aware of the wide variety of forms that a visual story can take in different fields, since sometimes the image is still while other times it is dynamic. As a consequence, the visual storyteller needs to manage photographs, illustrations, infographics, as well as videos, movies, animations, documentaries. However, his/her main task is to dramatize the image, that is the key step

in order to speak of visual storytelling. Indeed, when this happens, the images acquire the power to move and captivate the target audience to the point of making easily deducible what has occurred and what will happen to the characters depicted. It is therefore fundamental to establish the time of action, to pose a problem, and to elaborate the subsequent possibility of solving it. All this must be done while maintaining a certain continuity between the different imageries, which in turn must be authentic and coherent. In short, narrative images bring us into the world they represent, much more intensely than words do (Fontana, 2016).

Based on the concepts illustrated above, the study of images from a narrative point of view is particularly relevant in the marketing field. As a matter of fact, narrative images conceal unequivocal messages that need to be grasped. Therefore, images are not all narrative since, in addition to representing a narrative world and being attractive, they must replicate, spread through different media, and comply with specific objectives. Likewise, the narrative must not be incomplete or ambiguous, and it must have sufficient grammatical elements, which are the same as those of the narrative in general, the ones already analysed referring to the canonical narrative schema. Indeed, each story, although represented graphically, must show or suggest its main character. The traumatic event and the feat are implicitly represented through the explicit depiction of the fight, the opponent, the helper, the magical object, the treasure, and the final wedding. A linear series of these images results in a visual story, which consists of an initial context, a fall, a rise, and a new context (Orzati, 2019). However, first of all, it is necessary to carefully study the target audience in order to understand their fears, shortages, needs, and to represent them by offering a solution depending on the context (Yesterday). This one can be military, medical, sporting, political, romantic, religious or economic (Yesterday). In short, visual storytelling will continue to strengthen as new platforms for sharing photos, videos, and other contents emerge. Thus, the topic will be fully explored later on, in the paragraph addressed to digital media.

In an attempt to elucidate the real power of the story as described, a reference to its variables of evaluation is essential. In particular, Andrea Fontana (2016) claims that there are two criteria: intensity and extent. The first one reflects the impact that the story has on the target audience and it is measured in terms of whether or not public online and offline conversations on the subject have emerged. Instead, the second one shows the

story widespread in time and space. As a consequence, stories might be scratch, deep, common or aim. A scratch story is characterized by low intensity and diffusion since it is used for the achievement of an immediate goal. This is the case of impromptu speeches, jokes or email replies. At the other extreme, there is the aim story, i.e. a corporate story that has the same level of intensity and extension of a best seller. On the contrary, the deep and common stories are distinguished respectively by high intensity but low diffusion and high diffusion but low intensity. The first one may be exemplified through the text of a professional profile or press conference, whereas the second one is more similar to a Facebook post.

To conclude, what emerged from the study of the literature on corporate stories complies with Seth Godin's point of view. In fact, Godin (2009) claimed that a story must be authentic, trusted, and able to make a promise and elicit an emotional impact. For this reason, the narration follows a logical thread, leaving many details implicit and evolving at a fast pace. The point of view conveyed is always that of the target audience, since each story is designed for a specific spectator.

1.2.3. The consumer

The consumer plays a key role in marketing, since he/she is the one who believes in the stories told by marketers. Over the centuries, this role has changed due to the appearance of new needs and communication channels. In particular, the turning point corresponds with the American Golden Age of Television which, from the late 1940s to the late 1950s, increased the importance of marketing with the aim of selling to as many consumers as possible. Indeed, at that time, the stories had no specific recipient; the most important thing was increasing sales. However, over time, it has become clear that consumers do not trust advertising to such an extent that they often do not even pay attention to it. Therefore, today marketers have the task of ensuring that their stories spread everywhere, getting away from traditional mass advertising. In short, it is the individual consumer the current focus of attention (Godin, 2009). Marketing has thus begun to look at the world through the eyes of the consumers, who should be surprised, delighted, and encouraged to share their satisfaction with other potential clients. This way, passion has become a new key driver, together with the already existing product, price, promotion, and place.

Concurrently, corporate communication no longer aims to make the brand known, but rather to create authentic stories that can strike the consumers.

Human beings are different from each other for countless reasons, and so are consumers. They grow up in different realities, where they embrace certain values, and they act accordingly to them. Thus, each consumer has his/her own worldview, which is fundamental for marketers in order to identify the target audience and properly frame the story. This is an unavoidable step for sending messages to the people interested, notwithstanding the awareness that everyone, regardless of his/her own background, may react differently to the same way of communication. Indeed, while someone would be captured by the innovation introduced by a particular story, others should not be influenced nor influencing their acquaintances. In this regard, there is a need for marketers to carefully work on giving the right first impression to the consumers in order to ensure that they will believe in the story, have a positive opinion regarding the narrated product or service, and share it. In other words, the stories have to deal with the consumer expectations in order to become memorable (Denning, 2011).

What has just been depicted occurred in the so-called “age of the educated consumer”. This expression is used to refer to the exponentially increased intelligence of the consumers, who nowadays demand smart products from companies. These, in turn, have considerably changed their communication strategies with the aim to be impressive (Jutkowitz, 2017). Part of their plan is to produce stories that are able to emotionally involve as many people as possible, leveraging the natural human tendency to have faith or be deceived. Corporate storytelling exploits the ease with which we, as human beings, suspend our disbelief, producing memorable narratives that talk about us and with which we can fully identify. Therefore, we, as consumers far from *homo oeconomicus*’ aptitude, make irrational purchasing decisions that we will logically explain only later (Fontana, Sassoon, Soranzo, 2011). Indeed, we do not accept impositions, we just want to be surprised, satisfied, and led to make wise choices among the countless options that the market offers (Jutkowitz, 2017). In short, consumers lie at the core of the narrative of ideas, products, and services. Therefore, before telling a story, it is necessary to listen to the consumer in order to understand and map his/her current life time and to act consequently. This way, the consumer’s need to be strong to escape and save himself/herself will be respected. In other words, the consumer’s fears are exploited to

move them and allow them to have control of the story, allowing therefore corporate storytelling to represent the narrative of the company's target audience (Fontana, 2016). In this respect, in literature there are several examples of the deep relationship that storytelling creates between a company and its clients. This is mainly due to the fact that, over the years, sellers and buyers have achieved a balance of power, to the extent that buyers are no longer treated as human resources but rather as decision-makers. Therefore, companies must constantly increase productivity and innovation in order to capture the attention of potential clients and satisfy their needs. To say it in another way, the corporate world bears resemblance to the narrative one, in which the storyteller has the task of introducing the listener or the reader to a virtual world that is obviously different from the one he/she lives in. Thus, the process of following a storyline is anything but complex: the recipient automatically remaps his/her life and worldview. This, as in the corporate world, relies on the active role the consumer has since he/she is no longer treated as an object (Denning, 2011).

As it is commonly known, at the basis of marketing there are economic transactions between the production systems and their respective clients. This relationship may be either collaborative or conflicting with the result that sometimes consumers' needs are deeply analysed and used to bring benefits to the company. However, companies and consumers are bound together by narrative contracts according to which they share the same power and freedom of decision. Therefore, Ramon Soranzo agrees with Stephen Denning when he states that corporate stories must be co-produced to the extent that the listener/reader is on the same level as the teller/writer. Soranzo goes even further and declares that the recipients have the task of interpreting the messages, as well as an active role in their production (Fontana, Sassoon, Soranzo, 2011).

1.2.4. Media

The studies presented thus far provide evidence that storytelling is not a spontaneous activity but rather a strategic one. This is also evident in the choice of the appropriate media through which a story has to be told.

Media are communication channels that send messages that must be decoded by the recipient and, simultaneously, they are material support for the content of the message itself. Thus, media are not only telephone, radio, television, computer networks, and press, but also artistic expressions such as cinema, music, literature, and so forth (Ryan, 2004). This guarantees the existence of two processes: mediatisation and mediation. The first one refers to the spread and use of media in all those contemporary socio-cultural contexts that need to be represented. Instead, the second consists of using media as a means to communicate something to a contemporary audience (Lundby, 2008).

Media have the same importance as the narrator, the speech acts, and the duration of the story; they are the last step of the narrative process previously analysed (Fontana, 2009). Indeed, in each company, the media narrative designer uses a wide range of linguistic and symbolic codes in order to offer to his/her readers the appropriate narrative habitat. According to the already mentioned storyteller Andrea Fontana, there are four narrative habitats suitable for a corporate story: paper, relational, digital, and exhibition (an event). Moreover, as shown in table 1.1, each narrative habitat may be depicted through basic, advanced or beyond the edge tools (Fontana, 2016).

Habitats Tools	Paper habitat	Relational habitat	Digital habitat	Exhibition habitat
“Basic” tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic or monographic booklets • Narrative catalogues • Poster Designing • Promocard • Magalog 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of storytelling skills • Narrative conventions • Workshops with an high emotional impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infomercial • Institutional video stories • Narrative trailer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video-mapping
“Advanced” tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journals • Business memoirs • Narrative booklets about epic business • Narrative report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted task forces with narrative processes (on organizational development) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media script • Narrative blog of internal initiatives • Wikis for organizational improvement • Feed-back novel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate art • Events with a strong social orientation
“Beyond the edge” tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate autobiographies (for strategic foundations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animation and re-validation of internal communities (also in logic 2.0) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animated vlogs (for the presentation of internal initiatives) • Photo-stories on platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban/corporate storytelling

Table 1.1 - Translation of the tools for corporate storytelling (Fontana, 2016: 251)

The paper habitat is a literary work that a consumer receives every month (as in the case of newsletters), that is conceived as an editorial product (as in the case of booklets) or that he/she freely decides to read. Instead, the relational habitat may be a training course, a narrative convention or a workshop in which narrative is conceived as a working structure. Lastly, the digital processing of a story consists in using a digital tool for its spread. This is a relatively simple way to share professional experiences and knowledge through narrative trailers, internal blogs, feedback novels, and so forth (Fontana, 2009).

However, over the past few years, the concept of “deep” media was developed, which assumes the function of a story gate to allow readers to enter or leave the narration in order to plunge into another dimension. As a matter of fact, the importance of producing experience has exceeded that of the media through which it is spread. For this reason, nowadays stories are designed for several online and offline media or they are divided into various parts, each of which belongs to a particular medium. The first ones constitute the so-called “cross media storytelling”, while the second ones refer to a more complicated “trans media storytelling” (Fontana, 2016).

In the twenty-first century, beyond the increase of consumers’ power, we are witnessing a fragmentation of media. Indeed, the launch of new communication channels has led to a drastic reduction of mass communication and advertising. This has occurred contemporarily with the technological change and, in particular, with the advent of social media, through which consumers have started to interact instantly with each other, bringing benefits or disadvantages to the company (Denning, 2011). In contrast to the age of pre-digital media, today the audience has an active role and a voice that can be heard on the Internet. This is a network where everyone chooses his/her own individual path, since the sites have a hyper-textual nature that does not allow users to sequentially access the content. Thus, websites may be used together with traditional media and offer the communicative experience necessary to talk about digital storytelling (Fontana, Sassoon, Soranzo, 2011). However, digital communication has changed the way stories are produced, distributed, and shared among people who are physically distant from each other. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the topic is essential.

1.3. Digital storytelling

The power that storytelling acquired in the nineties has multiplied because of the advent of new technologies and the beginning of the digital age. Indeed, digital technology has led to the development of new modes of expression, especially used in the economic field due to its user-friendliness and affordable costs. In particular, digital stories vividly narrate specific situations, taking advantage of the possibility to combine photographs, videos, music, and people's voices. They are authentic stories that convey the different value systems of each company, producing a strong emotional impact on the consumer. However, digital stories are facing a greater risk, which is the exclusion of all those who belong to a generation different from generation Y, since they were born before 1980, and they grew up without digital and interactive media. Therefore, digital storytelling is not suitable for all organisations, to the extent that it may be an obstacle for the achievement of certain objectives. Nevertheless, it enables a direct interaction among the interlocutors, involving them in a way that goes beyond the classic interpersonal communication (Fontana, 2009).

Generally speaking, digital storytelling is a recent area of research that completely changed our approach to storytelling itself. As a matter of fact, it is the process which allows people to shape their daily stories and easily create authentic contents through portable devices and online services. This is due to the constant collaboration between the author and the readers, who actively receive the text resulting from the collaboration of writers, programmers, users, and selected digital devices. What emerges is a dynamic system able to reproduce the heterogeneity of the world we live in (Lundby, 2008). This is particularly evident in the marketing field, characterized by user-generated stories that aim to engage the consumers by giving them emotional responses and making them live a deeply immersive experience. The stories become real commercial products with an unprecedented power of persuasion. Indeed, they are able to partially or totally modify the consumers' aptitudes, beliefs, and worldviews. In other words, the evolving technological environment has led to the enhancement of the value of the storytelling and its commercial use; at this stage it is a fundamental tool for every kind of production, from fast-moving consumer goods to luxury products and services. Thus, the traditional push advertising has become obsolete and has been replaced by pull advertising, which,

on the contrary, is based on the consumers' active research and fruition of commercial narrative contents. In particular, the ads are overtly commercial when they spread rational messages, or covertly commercial when the product is invisible and the story is purely narrative. However, despite their increased impact on consumers, corporate digital stories need to be planned exactly as the analogical ones, that is through the choice of an author, a target audience, and a style suitable for one or more specific media (Lear, Feiereisen, Visconti, 2018).

1.3.1. The power of social media

During the last years, technology has deeply changed, and it has started to control human life. This passage was marked by the advent of social media, which made stories and information available in real time, redefining our innate need to be connected. Indeed, social media are platforms designed to relate to individuals who share the same interests. In addition, they simplify the arrangement and publication of the most varied contents (Walter, 2014). Therefore, they are increasingly used in private and public sector organizations in order to convert them into communication environments opened to effective participation and interactivity (Macnamara, Zerfass, 2012).

In the economic field, the digital era has led to renewed marketing strategies, based on the omnichannel model, composed of social media platforms and e-commerce. Thus, companies have the opportunity to communicate or cooperate with their clients and to sell them products in real time. However, this new digital panorama requires specific skills and continuing training, given the higher probability of making clients unhappy (Rondinelli, Bresciani, 2019). Indeed, marketers need to break through the algorithms of the numerous platforms in order to catch the consumers' attention (Walter, 2014). The pinball metaphor perfectly describes the implied complexity and power of co-creative narrative. Indeed, the managing of the latter is comparable to the pinball game, where the ball acts as the story, since the gamer intended for it to go in a specific direction even though this does not always happen. Thus, despite the agile use of flippers, the player does not always have full control of the game. Similarly, a brand owner is not always able to manage the whole co-creative process. Notwithstanding, just as the player, the brand

owner must combine the stories of the different participants in order to align them to his/her original purposes (Singh, Sonnenburg, 2012).

Overall, the nature of the content marketing has not changed since the Golden Age of Advertising. However, nowadays, the arrangement of its communication strategies is easier due to the combination of various platforms which allow real time feedback. This way, despite the potential difficulties in using digital systems, companies have the opportunity to immediately understand what works and what does not. Then, companies will produce interesting and memorable contents, able to compete against the multiplicity of social media and visual stories (Jutkowitz, 2017).

Based on the concepts illustrated above, social media are more than just an evolution of technology. This is demonstrated by the description of the social media platforms that the globally recognized marketer innovator Ekaterina Walter (2014) made in her book *The Power of Visual Storytelling: How to Use Visuals, Videos, and Social Media to Market Your Brand*. First of all, she claims that companies must produce high-quality contents and share them with the target audience through appropriate media. Then, she reviews the currently existing social media platforms, showing how they continuously evolve in order to offer new opportunities to the corporate communication. However, for the aim of this paper, suffice it to highlight the main features of YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

YouTube was first introduced in 2005 and has completely revolutionized the video content perception. This is primarily due to the fact that this platform is owned by Google, the world's largest search engine, through which brands can easily be discovered by simply typing suitable key words. In doing this, users may have access to a large amount of videos, including the advertisements located in the channels owned by the brand. These channels are useful in order to impose restrictions on users and to give a complete vision of the companies' work merely to the interested clients. Moreover, there is the possibility to create interactive videos which allow consumers to make their purchases through a simple click.

Facebook, despite being introduced in 2004, started to allow companies to create their own public pages only in 2007. Indeed, at the beginning it simply showed a contact's information by navigating through that user's profile. However, over the years, it has completely evolved, and nowadays it is no longer considered a simple social network.

Beyond the more colourful and interactive pages, companies have the opportunity to integrate texts, images, and videos, with the purpose of increasing the consumers' engagement. Business pages can be created following a step-by-step explicative process, and they are full of advice on how to increase their own influence. In addition, the timeline launched in 2011 positively changed the user experience: followers have never been so close to the companies before.

In 2006, another innovative marketing tool was invented: Twitter. It is a microblogging and social network that gives companies the chance to guarantee a new kind of customer experience. In fact, Twitter allows business users "to tweet", i.e. to write and share short messages called "tweets" on the homepage. These are often composed of "hashtags", that are combinations of words preceded by the hash sign, which leads to the creation of a hyper textual link among messages with the same "hashtag". Moreover, creative people may combine "hashtags" with images, taking advantage of the potential of this social media.

Four years later, in 2010, Instagram was introduced, a photo and video sharing social media platform that completely changed the way in which we interact with images. Among its features, there are the above-mentioned "hashtags", that serve as a way to connect with similar contents or to find something specific. Companies in particular use Instagram for telling their stories, humanising their brands and encouraging user-generated content. That explains why some of the most innovative campaigns of the past few years have included the use of Instagram.

To sum up, the four platforms analysed are used to convert companies into informal spaces where consumers can easily interact with each other or with the brands. Indeed, these social networks have totally redefined what we think of marketing. Moreover, they are measurable, i.e. they give the companies the opportunity to value the popularity of their contents, on the base of likes, comments, and shares. However, since users often perceive advertising as an unwelcome interruption in the feed, social media contents must be carefully prepared, paying special attention to their visual aspect. The key words are creativity and innovation.

1.3.1.1. Visual storytelling

Nowadays, visual storytelling is a direct consequence of the already described evolution of social media platforms. Indeed, these have been designed to rapidly share ideas that are often expressed through visual contents which are more easily processed by the human brain. Thus, over the years, the production of visual contents has become one of the main purposes of several companies, despite the existing risk of using symbols that are not suitable for certain cultures. For this reason, visual storytelling needs to be carefully planned. First of all, companies must set the goals they want to reach through social media communication. Secondly, they need to analyse their current professional situation and the engagement of the consumers. In this respect, each company must ensure the publication of posts aligned with its purposes and able to catch the users' attention. Thus, companies have to carefully listen to customers' conversations in order to understand their point of view and the type of communication they prefer. Thirdly, companies need to shape the story with the aim of highlighting the key themes of the corporate communication and establishing a deep and personal relationship with the consumers. Finally, they must set a timeline of the monthly frequency of publication and recognise the opportunities to create visual storytelling both from positive or negative common situations. The outcomes of the work will only be visible when companies analyse consumer's feedback in the form of likes and comments for each shared post.

To explore this topic further, it is important to bear in mind that visual storytelling in the digital age also involves powerful and artistic tools such as cartoons, GIFs, and videos. In particular, cartoons are amusing and attractive due to the fact that the story is delivered through visual sequences, which in turn may lead to a feeling of brand recognition or nostalgia. Companies usually rely on professional cartoonists to show their clients their most human side. Alternatively, they animate still images, therefore producing GIFs, i.e. videos of a few seconds that emphasise specific moments. Moreover, sometimes even information and data need to be converted into fascinating visual contents named "infographics", designed to instruct the target audience, which must be carefully listened and observed in order to be provided with creative and valued contents. This objective can be achieved through slide-by-slide presentations developed by talented speakers or through interesting videos shared on media platforms such as YouTube.

Videos, in particular, are able to educate, surprise, motivate, move or simply entertain consumers, simultaneously allowing companies to excel. However, the vast majority of visual contents takes the form of an image. Specifically, when there is a need for showing people's lives, experiences, and interests, it is recommended to use realistic photos. Instead, in the event that the purpose is that of selling technical products, it is fundamental to resort to explanatory graphics. On the contrary, to be more creative, it is desirable to employ user-generated stories or collages, in order to increase the consumers' awareness and to identify the main differences among products or companies. Nevertheless, companies can customise images by adding captions, quotes, and stats, as well as by producing postcards, e-cards, and word photos. Moreover, they should decide to globally spread socio-cultural information through memes.

To conclude, it is important to notice that visual storytelling, just as the traditional one, is a strategic activity. Usually, companies collaborate with professional photographers and artists in order to design personalised and useful contents, suitable for each kind of social media and audience. As a matter of fact, they aim to gain consumers' trust but without forcing any purchase. Thus, they deeply analyse the trends and consequently produce worth sharing stories (Walter, 2014).

1.3.2. The evolution of the consumer

In literature there is evidence of the incessant evolution of the consumers. Previously, this paper has focused on the analysis of the changes produced by corporate storytelling as a whole. However, the digital and ephemeral world in which we currently live was not taken into account for the will of showing the development of the phenomenon in a logical and chronological way.

Recently, digital media have led consumers to avoid marketing messages by skipping the advertisements. This phenomenon occurs when companies produce contents that are not original enough to stand out and be eye-catching. Currently, for a few simple reasons, the best solution is to engage consumers through a well-crafted story, especially in the form of videos. Indeed, these represent a powerful tool to move the target audience who, in turn, will change aptitudes, making more purchases, sharing the contents, and, above all, spreading positive impressions about a specific brand or company. However,

it is important to bear in mind that consumers do not want to be persuaded. Thus, beyond the accurate choice of media, it is essential to use a suitable style of performance (Coker, Flight, Baima, 2017).

In addition, the advent of social media increased the consumers' contribution to the storytelling process, turning them into people whose opinions are worth considering. As a matter of fact, they acquire an active role, becoming the authors of the already mentioned user-generated stories. Therefore, they collaborate and interact with the brand owners who, in turn, work to find ways to control the communication of the products, since this must be aligned with the purposes previously set. However, the resulting performance is spontaneous, unpredictable, and highly participatory. In other words, social media have removed the traditional distinction between narrator and listener, providing consumers a setting where they can be involved as mere spectators, supporters or leaders. Moreover, they have become a real platform for conversation, within which consumers relate to each other, building communities that may have not only positive but also negative consequences on the company professional life (Singh, Sonnenburg, 2012). This is due to the large amount of information and advertisements to which we, as consumers, are exposed. Indeed, we are constantly inclined to increasingly desire interesting and personalised contents about brands that often become our faithful life partners. Thus, there is no doubt that both positive and negative opinions and experiences, which spontaneously arise around specific brands, help create or diminish their values. In the latter case, consumers are converted into haters, who need to be managed by the companies, which can depict them as wicked people or distance from them. Nevertheless, haters actively participate to brands' characterization. They are unsatisfied clients but they have the same relevance as the satisfied ones, who often become brand ambassadors or, if they have a lot of followers, influencers. Thus, nowadays, consumers are the real media (Rondinelli, Bresciani, 2019).

2. ITALIAN CORPORATE STORYTELLING IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

Research into corporate storytelling has a long history. The studies presented thus far provide evidence that it is not a recent phenomenon. However, relatively little is known about its possible future. Therefore, it is essential to analyse its evolution in the age of Covid-19.

Over the last few months, our lives as individuals, consumers, and workers have changed radically due to the widespread of Covid-19, first in China and then in the rest of the world. Thus, there are still no researches on the real effect that the global pandemic is having on the object of study of this paper. This is principally due to the faster spread of the virus and the period of uncertainty we are currently living. However, when a social, cultural, economic or politic change occurred, companies usually adapt to it. Their relationship with the consumers became the main way to show to everybody their renewed interests and values, which are adapted to the current context. In the age of Covid-19, companies from all over the world have changed and are still changing their communication strategies; indeed, the marketing field has been subject to the measures adopted by the various governments.

2.1. The situation worldwide

The emergence situation we are experiencing began on 31 December 2019. This, in particular, was the day the Municipal Health Commission of Wuhan (China) alerted the WHO of the existence of several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City, Hubei province. The international newscasts and newspapers reported the spread of the mentioned respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus, named SARS-CoV-2. This would be referred to as Covid-19 when the WHO had already declared the Chinese epidemic a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” (PHEIC). Thus, the concept was assimilated into human life at the moment in which the epidemic concerning few geographical areas became a global pandemic. This was declared by the Director-General of WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, on 11 March 2020 (Ministero della Salute, 2020). As a consequence, every country should have taken aggressive measures, and

acted in unison in order to protect the citizens of the world against the common threats resulting from a person infected by a butchered animal in November 2019 in Wuhan. Indeed, due to the rate of spread of the disease, several attempts have been made to contain the number of terminally-ill and deceased people until a cure and/or a vaccine is found. For this reason, those who have symptoms attributable to Covid-19 must call the emergency phone or the specific Freephone numbers without going to the general practitioner or to the nearest hospital. He/she must, then undergo to a swab test and, if positive, must be quarantined or, in the worst case scenario, hospitalized. Moreover, it is mandatory to wear a mask, submit to temperature checks, and sanitize hands before entering public places (McNeil, 2020). These safety standards were used first in China and then in the rest of the world, where there currently are 17 106 007 confirmed cases and 668 910 deaths. Figure 2.1 shows the situation in WHO regions:

Situation in numbers (by WHO Region)		
Total (new cases in last 24 hours)		
Globally	17 106 007 cases (292 527)	668 910 deaths (6 812)
Africa	770 421 cases (16 031)	13 234 deaths (396)
Americas	9 152 173 cases (171 946)	351 121 deaths (4 567)
Eastern Mediterranean	1 533 357 cases (12 612)	39 661 deaths (458)
Europe	3 333 300 cases (25 241)	212 520 deaths (438)
South-East Asia	2 009 963 cases (60 113)	44 031 deaths (914)
Western Pacific	306 052 cases (6 584)	8 330 deaths (39)

Table 2.1 - Covid-19 Situation Report on 31 July 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020)

In addition, the WHO has introduced some precautions that people can take in order to reduce the risk of being infected or infecting others. First of all, it is recommended that people regularly wash their hands (that may be contaminated) and avoid touching their eyes, noses, and mouths, which are the virus's main entry points to the body. Then, it is advisable to maintain at least one metre of physical distance from other people and to avoid crowded places in order to reduce the chances to meet infected people and, consequently, to breathe liquid droplets which may contain virus. Nevertheless, it is mandatory to stay at home and contact the general practitioner or the hospital to report

any symptoms of infection. Lastly, it is important to be aware of the development of the situation by consulting reliable sources (World Health Organization, 2020).

However, despite the security measures taken, many countries have contained all unnecessary movements by declaring the state of partial or total lockdown, as the pandemic developed progressively. The term “lockdown” refers to the isolation of people and/or the closure of more than a hundred countries worldwide. The first continent to be affected was Asia, followed by Europe, in which Italy has immediately taken restrictive measures, allowing citizens to go out exclusively to work, take care of oneself or buy commodities (Dunford D., Dale B, Stylianou N., Lowther E., Ahmed M., de la Torre Arenas I., 2020).

Today, the whole world has a specific goal: to stop the spread of the virus in order to avoid the necessity of further lockdowns. For this reason, in addition to the already mentioned measures, the countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have used the so-called “TTT (testing, tracking, and tracing) strategy”. This is a post-lockdown procedure which consists in finding, isolating, testing, and treating every case, and then tracing his/her contacts with the aim to quarantine them. In this respect, the OECD countries, after a period of socio-economic restrictions, are working to ensure the necessary healthcare resources and to have a thorough understanding of the virus in order to inform the citizens, making them aware of the real situation. Thus, two types of tests are used: the molecular diagnostic test, that is necessary to identify the presence of the virus in the organism, and the serologic test, which shows the immunological status of those patients who have already had the infection and developed antibodies (Scarpetta S., Pearson M., Colombo F., Guanais F., 2020).

2.1.1. The situation in Europe

The first European case was reported by France on 24 January 2020. Since then, the European Commission has activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism for providing support and possibility of repatriation to European citizens in Wuhan. Moreover, it has allocated funds with the purpose of helping China and doing research on the new global pandemic. The latter has been at the base of every decision taken over the last few months, such as the number of indispensable medical supplies for each member state, the most

reliable tests for discovering the infection and the amount of money earmarked to find a safe vaccine. Moreover, special attention was paid to the production systems and the professionals who have produced and offered commodities to the citizens (Commissione europea, 2020).

Currently, European countries have loosened the containment measures through a gradual reopening of economic and productive activities, and public spaces. Nevertheless, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) highlights that the pandemic is not over, and people must collaborate in order to manage the situation and reduce the risk of infecting or being infected (Ministero della salute, 2020). Indeed, ECDC is monitoring the development of the pandemic in European land and the United Kingdom.

2.1.1.1. Focus on Italy

Italy was the first country in Europe to tackle the emergency. The Italian struggle began on 30 January 2020, when the first two cases, corresponding to a couple of Chinese tourists, were confirmed in Rome's Spallanzani Hospital. The following day, Italy closed the air traffic from and to China, and declared the State of Emergency. However, the first case of secondary transmission occurred on 18 February 2020 in Codogno, a municipality of Lodi province, which is located in Lombardy region. Thus, five days later (on 23 February 2020), the Council of Ministers¹⁰ launched the first Decree-Law to forbid circulation and events in the main sites of the illness. Subsequently, other Decree-Laws have been issued. The most important one is that of 9 March 2020, through which The Prime Minister of Italy, Giuseppe Conte, imposed a national quarantine. As to the following day, Italians were allowed to leave their houses just for serious health or business reasons, as well as for purchasing commodities. Indeed, just few indispensable places were not forced to close, such as hospitals, supermarkets, pharmacies, kiosks, tobacco shops, petrol stations, banks, post offices, and insurance companies. As a consequence, a decrease in industrial production occurred until the mentioned containment measures were loosened on 18 May 2020, when the phase of coexistence

¹⁰ The Council of Ministers is a collective body to which all the ministers belong in order to determine general policy of the Government (Governo italiano, 2020).

with the virus began. However, from that day forth, the general safety measures, already described in respect of the situation worldwide, have remained in force (Ministero della Salute, 2020).

Italy is currently experiencing a transition period between the second and the third phase; normality is partially reinstated. The government ensures greater freedom for citizens, reopening every public place and allowing free movement. Nonetheless, Italians are encouraged to be prudent and to use the application *Immuni*. This is a tool aligned with the so-called “TTT strategy” previously described. Indeed, it informs its users of their possible contact with other users who tested positive. Thus, they can isolate themselves and contact their general practitioners in order to contribute to the containment of the epidemic (Immuni, 2020).

2.2. The evolution of corporate storytelling

Covid-19 pandemic bears unprecedented challenges which have changed companies' way of working and telling their stories. Indeed, overall, consumers are witnessing a standardisation of corporate storytelling, since companies' communication changed and became more inclusive and helpful. The focus of this paper will be exclusively on the Italian reaction.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, Italy has stood out for the solidarity towards those who were suffering and challenging the virus. This has been proved by applause and songs performed from balconies in order to express gratitude to doctors, nurses, voluntaries, and infected people, as well as by various supportive hashtags used on social networks. The first one, *#iorestoacasa*, dates back to 9 March 2020, when Giuseppe Conte declared Italy's lockdown. This is a persuasive hashtag due to the use of the first person “*io*” that does not express a duty but a deliberate choice. Its meaning has subsequently been strengthened by the hashtags *#distantimauniti* and *#piùdistantioggiiperriabbracciarcidomani*, respectively launched by national athletes and Giuseppe Conte. These show the social distance as a sacrifice through which Italians would respect each other and act for the common good. However, the most popular hashtag has been *#andràtuttobene*, which conveyed the incorrect idea that the emergency situation would have been solved regardless of the citizens' attitude (Venturini, 2020).

Over the last few months, Italians have completely changed their life and consumption habits. Thus, brands have worked on new strategies of communication in order to create a deep relationship with consumers both through traditional advertisement and digital storytelling. Indeed, despite the media used, brands are currently standardised, to the extent that they share similar settings, musical bases, symbols, and messages. In particular, they refer to the pain caused by the illness and to the quarantine, without leaving space for creativity and for brands' features (Pietrini, 2020). The Italian flag has been a constant presence on the narrations of families cooking together, children drawing rainbows, students attending online classes, nurses and doctors working relentlessly, etc. Nevertheless, some brands have decided to suspend their advertising communication in order to prevent the loss of credibility which is inevitable when consumers feel annoyed or offended. This is the case with travel agencies and companies fabricating large products, since they both need and offer services that have been prohibited. Indeed, the ultimate aim of every brand has been to stabilize the empathetic relationship with its potential clients (Meriano, 2020).

However, regardless of the different decisions taken by companies, corporate storytelling is currently fundamental. Indeed, as mentioned in the first chapter, human beings are not able to survive without stories, especially in a period of emergency. For this reason, in the majority of cases, corporate storytelling is changing the rules but is not stopping. Indeed, companies have studied the ministerial directive, and they have informed consumers, recommending them suitable behaviours. Moreover, they have postponed planned events, and they have eliminated jokes and fun episodes from their storytelling. In other words, they have modified the contents and the style of their communication in order to deal with the situation with rationality (Maggipinto, 2020).

Furthermore, the Italian corporate storytelling has evolved through the three phases imposed by the government to deal with the pandemic. Indeed, every company has told its story and the story of its brand on the basis of the law in force. The consumer has been the protagonist of the communication, either as a co-creator of the message or a recipient. He/she has been moved by the images, words, and sounds used to tell effective stories. Thus, this paper will analyse the mentioned elements within videos transmitted by television and social networks in the period from 9 March 2020 to 31 July 2020.

2.2.1. Pandemic phase one

The first pandemic phase was declared through the Decree-Law signed by Giuseppe Conte on 9 March 2020, and became effective on the following day. This was a period of uncertainty and unawareness in which Italians were frightened, while on television and social networks were communicated the safety measures to be taken. Simultaneously, companies changed their communication strategies in order to suit the emergency situation. In particular, they tried to promote their brands through structured messages which were often supported by celebrities. These messages had emotional undertones since they were used in order to instil hope to and thank the citizens who stayed at home without hindering those who worked and fought on the front line. All the stories told were characterised by the certainty that everything would have been all right, especially if Italians supported each other despite the social distance. Indeed, Italy was depicted as a country which was surviving due to the dedication of workers and the strength of the quarantined citizens. The latter became the protagonists but also the direct recipients of the mentioned emotional messages. This is evident in the videos analysed below, which were released between the end of March and the beginning of April 2020.

2.2.1.1. Vodafone Italia

Vodafone Italia S.p.A. is an Italian telecommunication company which is part of the British group Vodafone. In the age of Covid-19, it has been the first Italian brand which produced a remote story thanks to the collaboration of its clients, who have recorded short daily moments of their life at home during the national lockdown. The relationship between the company and the consumers has been central in the choice of the title and the slogan of the campaign, that are respectively *insieme* and *anche quando non possiamo stare vicini, possiamo essere insieme*. The Italian word “*insieme*” is the translation of the English “together”, while the mentioned expression refers to the possibility to virtually stay together despite the social distance.

The video *Insieme* produced by Vodafone Italia has been released both on television and on social media with the goal of promoting the so-called “Giga Network”, i.e. a powerful network which allows people to communicate, share contents, and work

remotely. Thus, the concept behind the story told in the video is the importance of the virtual connection in a world dominated by physical distance, at both personal and professional level.

The narration evolves on the notes of the Beatles' song *Come Together*, which recalls the concepts of harmony and freedom. The beginning of the song is preceded by a second of chirp, while on the foreground appears a partial logo and on the background the representation of the dawn of a new day.



Figure 2.1 - Vodafone Italia advertisement, March 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3HjopSjTa4>)

However, the logo fades out when the setting changes, showing people awakening in their houses; the clients are the protagonists. Indeed, an alarm clock goes off at 8 in the morning and some girls start their daily routines characterised by waking up, opening the windows, making coffee using a moka pot, and preparing a fresh-squeezed juice. The slogan *impariamo insieme*, that is the Italian translation for “let us learn together”, opens the scene displaying some girls while attending or teaching online classes, despite possible distractions, such as that of a child playing in the room. This is the representation of the power of Giga Network, which connects teachers and students, both sharing efforts and satisfactions. Nevertheless, in addition to their duties, people relax in their living rooms, work out in their gardens, play a musical instrument in their bedrooms, and cook

in their kitchens. Vodafone Italia allows them to perform all these actions by watching YouTube videos or video calling friends and relatives. In this respect, the slogan used are: *relax insieme*, *rock insieme*, and *cuciniamo insieme*. The latter is a meaningful connection to the Italian culinary tradition, amplified by the presence of grandmothers who dispense advices at a distance. Subsequently, the slogans *stiamo insieme* and *buonanotte insieme* are associated with a narrative voice that creates a direct contact with the clients, remembering that the Giga Network is a powerful and reliable tool to make people feel close throughout the national lockdown. In particular, this is demonstrated through the representation of adults and children having a good time at home and sharing their moments with people they love and with their pets. Moreover, “*buonanotte insieme*” attributes a cyclical pattern to the narration, leading from morning to night.



Figure 2.2 – Vodafone Italia advertisement, March 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3HjopSjTa4>)

To sum up, the concept at the basis of the video is the possibility to reduce the distance over the course of the day. The authenticity of the story is conveyed through recordings of real life moments in which there are some clients’ voices in the background, making them the protagonists throughout the entire duration of the narration. The logo is positioned in front of the footage from the beginning until the end of the spot, however,

it is not until the very end that it becomes the main focus of the video and the name of the brand appears below it.



Figure 2.3 - Vodafone Italia advertisement, March 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3HjopSjTa4>)

2.2.1.2. Mondadori

The Italian publishing group Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A. is a significant case study since its storytelling in the age of Covid-19 offers a concrete solution to the national lockdown. Indeed, books are depicted as instruments for escaping reality and travelling without leaving the house. Their readers are the protagonists of the story as well as the recipients of the message.

The video has been broadcasted on television and published on social networks. Its setting is a house which hosts a new everyday life on the notes of *With Some Malice* by the Italian soundtrack composer Francesco D'Andrea. The house is the location of a story told through a kind of subheadings, without the aid of a narrative voice. The first scene portrays the carefreeness of a little girl who plays with soap bubbles in the company of her mother. This is just one of the activities performed during the national lockdown; playing 56 hours with children. Other hobbies have been: chatting 34 hours with friends, drinking 65 coffees, having 27 snacks, and keeping up with the online news 96 times.

They are sequentially represented through dynamic images in order to express the monotony of quarantine's life. This monotony is broken up by the expression "*è ora di voltare pagina*" and the representation of a hand which takes a book from a library. This is an incitement to change the habits and to participate in the experiences lived by the characters of stories of different kinds, as suggested by the underlying image.



Figure 2.4 – Mondadori advertisement, March 2020 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=30&v=66aSQcyemEQ&feature=emb_logo)

The girl, who is reading a book and drinking a cup of tea in front of the window, is the evidence that it is not essential to leave home in order to produce and live interesting stories. Books have the power to minimize the emergency situation since they constitute an entertainment and learning tool. Indeed, on the one hand, they represent a hobby, on the other, they share knowledge. In this respect, consumers are encouraged to have and go out with imagination. This is the meaning of the Italian slogan *io esco con la fantasia*, which appears at the end of the video, after the logo.

#IOESCO CON LA FANTASIA



Figure 2.5 – Mondadori advertisement, March 2020 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=30&v=66aSQcyemEQ&feature=emb_logo)

2.2.1.3. Barilla

Barilla is an Italian multinational food company that, during the national lockdown, has celebrated the resistance of Italy. Its storytelling is deeply emotional due to the arranged notes of the *Hymne* by Vangelis, that alludes to the Barilla advertising of the 1980s, connecting consumers with the past. Moreover, the narrative role is entrusted to the Italian actress Sophia Loren who, over the years, has proudly described the Italianness around the world.

The video, which has been released both on television and social media, celebrates the eternal beauty of Italy and the altruism of Italians. At the beginning, a sequence of empty cities evokes people's life during the first phase of Covid-19, when the quarantine was mandatory for everyone with the exception of those who worked in areas that were essential for human survival. Then, a shop is shuttered, and the narrative voice describes the aspect of the silently streets. Meanwhile, Italian and peace flags fly on balconies as a symbol of resistance, respect, and gratitude towards those people who have been fighting on the front line. Simultaneously, a woman shows a banner with the Italian motto *andrà tutto bene*. This is the translation for “everything will be alright”, a message of hope that became the global symbol of the Italian lockdown.



Figure 2.6 – Barilla advertisement, April 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=848kapapk8I>)

Subsequently, the narrative voice express gratitude to those people who have contributed to the resistance of the country, such as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, bakers, workers, and cashiers. Their images flow, whereas Sophia Loren describes their kindness and their courage to deal with the emergency situation. This is an authentic representation of the fear converted to courage and concrete help, as shown in the picture below.



Figure 2.7 – Barilla advertisement, April 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=848kapapk8I>)

To sum up, on the one hand the video represents people forced to stay at home, on the other hand people who must act. The first ones are grateful for the help of the latter, and they prove it by applauding, singing, playing an instrument or waving flags from the balconies, as well as by respecting the rules imposed by the government. Thus, people are disoriented but unified in the fight against the virus. This is expressed through the Italian word game “*a chi è spaesato ma si sente ancora paese*”, in which “*paese*” is the Italian equivalent of “country” partially contained in the word “*spaesato*”, which means “disoriented”. In other words, the storytelling is tailored to the requirements of the first phase of Covid-19. However, Barilla, in contrast to other brands, chooses to show some of its products throughout the narration, which ends with a further image of hope: a blue sky in the background, an Italian flag, and the word “*grazie*” in the foreground. This is followed by the logo of the brand and the slogan *Italia che resiste*, that is the last reference and gratitude to the responsibility and resilience of Italians.

2.2.2. Pandemic phase two

The second pandemic phase began on 18 May 2020, when the containment measures were loosened for gradually reopening productive systems and restoring normal life. This phase is still underway and involves months of coexistence with the virus. Thus, corporate communication has undergone a further change: companies have started to launch messages of hope in order to give Italians the courage to live a new life. Sometimes, these messages have been spread before the 18 May 2020, when phase two was just a hypothesis. This implies that companies have complied with the evolution of the pandemic in order to offer words of encouragement to the consumers. Evidence is offered by the examined videos.

2.2.2.1. Star

Star is a leader company in the Italian food sector which developed a new communication strategy in order to support Italians in the transition from phase one to phase two. The campaign was realised for and published in several media, with the aim of reaching a

large number of families. Indeed, the narration is addressed to a wide audience, rather than to possible consumers only.

The video starts with a representation of a new life: a window opens up on a wonderful view of a silent city, whereas the expression “*star in famiglia*” appears on the foreground. This is composed of the Italian verb “*stare*” deprived of its final “*e*”, since it is followed by the preposition “*in*”, which begins with a vowel. For this reason, it is replaced by the logo of the brand in question. Meanwhile, a narrative voice remembers the constant presence of the company Star in Italians’ everyday life, including national lockdown period. The narration describes the usefulness of the products, positioning them in several rooms, according to the time of the day. Thus, a sequence of images depicts daily activities: granddaughters are cooking with or for their grandmothers, two lovers are kissing while they are waiting to have lunch, and children are eating pasta with their mother. They express altruism and harmony; two aspects that are accentuated by the representation of a man who is dropping a basket with some ingredients or dishes on his neighbour’s balcony.



Figure 2.8 – Star advertisement, April 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwL6L5esiGU>)

Subsequently, few seconds are dedicated to feelings: people are laughing, playing, listening to music, and crying in their kitchens. This is the last scene filmed in a house.

Indeed, the following one describes the beginning of a new life, with two girls eating pasta on a rooftop, as shown in the image below.



Figure 2.9 – Star advertisement, April 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwL6L5esiGU>)

Meanwhile, the narrative voice makes a promise to the Italians: Star will always be at their side, regardless of the pandemic. In addition, the initial expression “*Star in famiglia*” reappears, by conveying a cyclical pattern to the story. However, in contrast to the previous one, the background is now characterised by the presence of the two mentioned girls eating on a rooftop, whereas an Italian flag is waving, and the sun is setting. This is an invitation to begin a new life starting from small things.



Figure 2.10 – Star advertisement, April 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwL6L5esiGU>)

2.2.2.2. Pupa Milano

Pupa Milano is a brand of cosmetics which launched the campaign *Tornerà il sorriso* with the aim of sending a message of hope to Italians who were entering phase two of Covid-19. The expression is emblematic since, over the last few months, the obligation to wear a mask as a measure of containment of the virus has been hiding everyone's smile. Thus, on the notes of *Ritornerei* by Bruno Lanzi, performed by an anonymous singer, the video describes the places in which people will be happy and free again.

The story is a hymn to normal life. An empty staircase symbolises the path through the end of the emergency situation. On top, a woman, who is wearing a colourful skirt and holding a basket with some flowers, is enjoying the view. Then, a dog looks out of the window of a car, and a young girl and an old woman smile. A smile is also drawn on a *macchiato*, that is used as the symbol of the day. On the contrary, the night is represented by a little girl sleeping with her stuffed animal. Subsequently, an Italian flag waves from a window while a girl is walking and others are cycling near the Colosseum. These images are conceptualised by short phrases introduced by “*tornerà*”, the Italian verb for “it will come back”. They refer to the day when people will no longer be forced to wear a mask: that day, their smiles will shine on the streets of beautiful Italian cities and inside their

houses, both by day and by night. In other words, the images represent the importance of not losing faith so that people will be able to develop serenity. This concept is especially conveyed by the following pictures:



Figure 2.11 - Pupa Milano advertisement, April 2020 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=23&v=FhPB91jMRt0&feature=emb_logo)



Figure 2.12 - Pupa Milano advertisement, April 2020 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=23&v=FhPB91jMRt0&feature=emb_logo)

The first one represents a face hidden by a mask; the second one a girl who is smiling with a red lipstick that is the same used to draw a smile on a window in the next scene. This sequence shows life during and after the global pandemic, inciting people to act responsibly in order to contain the spread of the virus. In this respect, the video is also used to inform consumers that Pupa Milano is sustaining the Italian humanitarian association *Emergency*, as written at the end of the narration, when the slogan *tornerà il sorriso* appears again. Instead, as far as the logo is concerned, it is placed at the bottom right. Thus, the brand is a secondary element to the extent that its products are not visible. Once more, people are the protagonists.

2.2.2.3. Lavazza

Luigi Lavazza S.p.A. is an Italian company producing coffee, that is a strong symbol of Italianness. Over the years, it has been recognized as one of the leader of corporate storytelling. However, the story told in the age of Covid-19, and released both on television and social networks, is different from traditional ones, which depicted San Pietro who drinks a cup of coffee in Heaven.

The global campaign *Good Morning Humanity* is a message of hope and optimism conveyed by a readaptation of Charlie Chaplin's final speech in *The Great Dictator*, a movie produced in 1940 in United States. This is pronounced on the notes of *Rain in Your Black Eyes* by Ezio Bosso and subtitled in Italian.

The narration starts with the representation of the beginning of a new world: nature awakens, buildings light up, and people drink coffee. It is a precondition for a world in which there are places and resources for everyone. Thus, a sequence of images showing men and women of different ages, nationalities, and sexual orientation illustrates the speech. They constitute an encouragement to love humanity and life, regardless of diversity and difficulty. Thus, people are represented as the engine that allows to make this life a free and wonderful adventure. Indeed, they are encouraged to fight for a decent new world.



Figure 2.13 – Lavazza advertisement, May 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9cxIxMatnE>)

The image of a little girl confers the idea that every human being can improve his/her life as well as that of the entire humanity. This goal is achievable through the removal of hate, avarice, intolerance, and social barriers. In fact, as stated by Charlie Chaplin, people should work on their wellness, without forgetting to help others. The following image shows the importance of staying together.



Figure 2.14 – Lavazza advertisement, May 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9cxIxMatnE>)

This is the new humanity Charlie Chaplin was talking about; a humanity which loves diversity and fights for its rights. Moreover, it represents the conclusive image of the speech. Indeed, at the end of the video the focus is placed on coffee, which is used as a background for the message that Lavazza wants to convey to its clients.

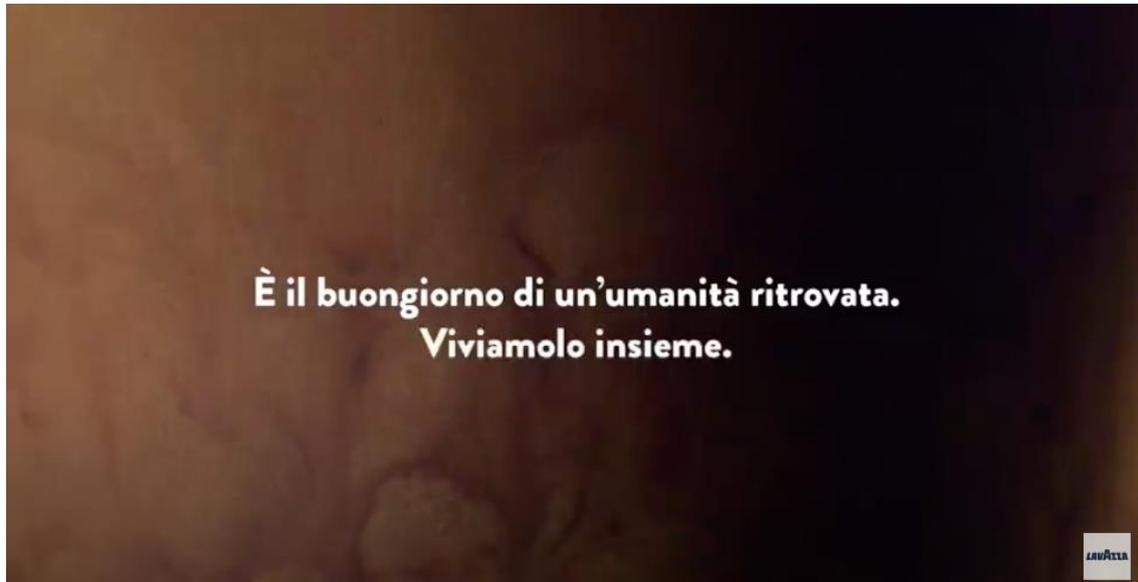


Figure 2.15 – Lavazza advertisement, May 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9cxIxMatnE>)

This is a call to say good morning to the new humanity by drinking a cup of Lavazza coffee. Indeed, the product is implicitly included in the end of the narration, in spite of the fact that the logo is placed on the bottom right corner throughout the whole video.

2.2.3. Toward pandemic phase three

The third pandemic phase represents the definitive exit from the State of Emergency. Thus, it refers to a recovery which has not yet occurred, since no cures or vaccines have been found. Nevertheless, over the last few months, companies have created stories which illustrate their concrete reopening: some have shown how the previous silence has been filled, while others have depicted their products as fundamental tools for reinstating normality. Indeed, consumers are still the protagonists of the narrations, but products are recovering their traditional role. Evidence is offered by the following videos, which have been released at the end of June.

2.2.3.1. Enel Energia

Enel Energia S.p.A. is an Italian company which operates in the electricity and natural gas sector. Nowadays, electricity is essential for human survival, to the extent that it is used for the majority of everyday actions. Thus, the company has produced a story which shows the activities that Italians are performing in the period of transition to phase three.

On the notes of *Deep into the wild* by Honoraries & Volunteer, the video starts with the image of a sunrise, i.e. the same symbol of rebirth used in the storytelling of the previous phases. Indeed, subsequently, a narrative voice lists things that Italians were doing before and during the national lockdown: running, loading, washing, opening, preparing, designing, changing, baking, teaching, drying, building, and sharing. The list is represented by a sequence of images which show people in action in several settings. There is a child who is riding a bicycle, a barman who is preparing a *cappuccino*, a couple who is moving out, a father who is teaching to his son how to use a drill, and others coherent dynamic pictures. Then, the narrative voice states that it is time to move forward with a new energy, concerning the electricity as well as the vitality required to survive. Indeed, meanwhile, a man, who is located in front of wind turbines, spreads his arms to metaphorically capture the wind energy.

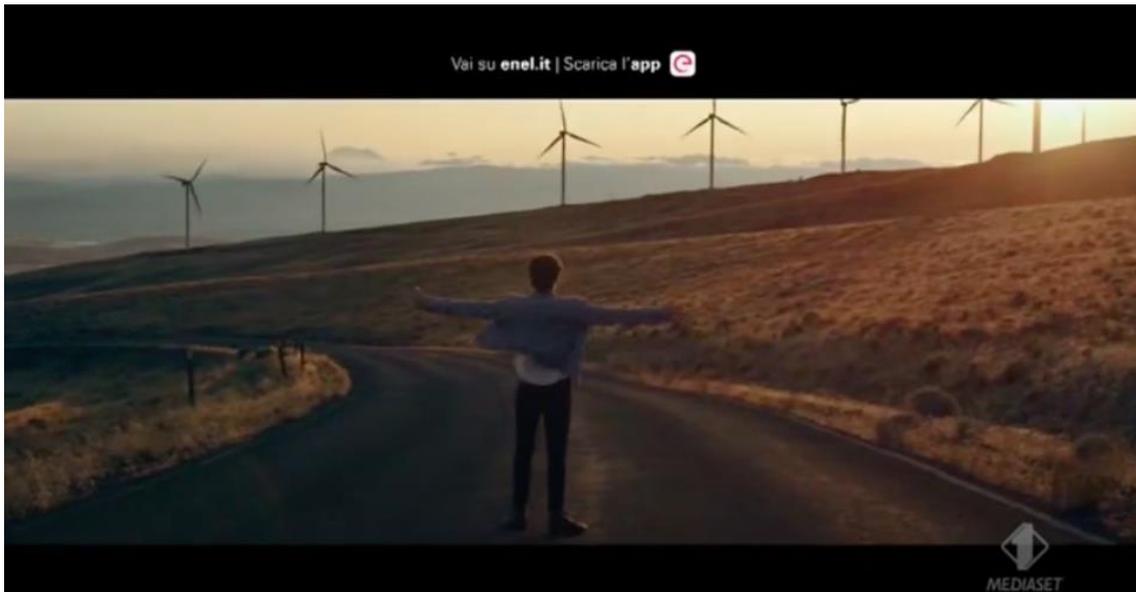


Figure 2.16 - Enel Energia advertisement, June 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDcs3KcRDJc>)

In addition to the already mentioned features, this image offers another element of reflection. Indeed, there is a writing on top which is present throughout the video and says: “*vai su enel.it, scarica l'app*”. This is an attempt to animate potential consumers to take a look at the company’s website and to download its application. Thus, energy is depicted as a product for sale that has the same importance of the consumers in the narration, which ends by encouraging families and small businesses to choose Enel Energia. This is also evident in the following image, which precedes the logo.

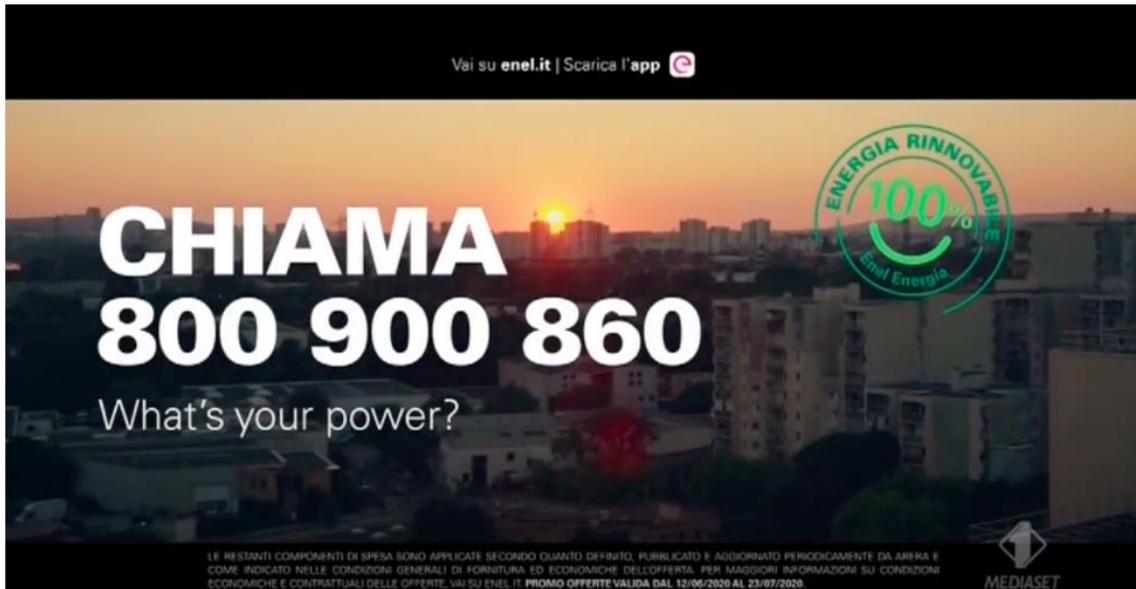


Figure 2.17 - Enel Energia advertisement, June 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDcs3KcRDJc>)

Similar to previous phases, the story has a cyclical pattern due to the fact that it begins with a sunrise and ends with a sunset. However, in this case the sunset functions as a background for commercial purposes: the tool-free number and the green sticker reminding people of the use of 100% renewable energy. Similarly, the emotional component no longer dominates the narration, leaving room to the brand. This is one of the consequences of the reopening of companies which, at the end of June, needed to increase sales after the national lockdown.

2.2.3.2. Conad

The acronym Conad stands for “*Consorzio nazionale dettaglianti*”, i.e. an Italian cooperative society that is active within large-scale distribution. Conad, as well as other supermarkets, remained open during the national lockdown. Thus, over the last few months, its storytelling has been conceived as a tool to beat the competition.

The video analysed was released at the end of June and, as in the case of Enel Energia, Conad products participate to the narration. Similarly, the logo is placed in the bottom right corner throughout the video, which was created on the notes of *Girasole* by the Italian singer Giorgia. The first scene represents, once more, the beginning of a new

day. However, the focus is placed on a salesperson who is opening the door and lighting the sign and the departments of one of the many Conad stores in Italy.



Figure 2.18 – Conad advertisement, June 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPNXrP0SD00>)

Meanwhile, a narrative voice explains that Conad stores sell Italian products and, therefore, employ thousands of Italian producers. This story is represented through the images of suppliers who are travelling, as well as those of farmers who are cultivating and irrigating fields and of workers who are producing pasta. Subsequently, the focus shifts to the consumers; there is a woman who went grocery shopping in a Conad store and she has been immortalized while buying a *mozzarella*. This image is emblematic since *mozzarella* is a traditional Italian cheese. Moreover, its packaging illustrates a drawing of the Italian flag, whose colours are recalled by the combination of *mozzarella*, tomato and basil.



Figure 2.19 – Conad advertisement, June 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPNXrP0SDO0>)

The reference to the Italianness of Conad products is essential in order to incite consumers to buy them and, therefore, sustain national workers, who reappear in the following images. Indeed, the slogan of the campaign is *ripartiamo insieme*, i.e. an exhortation to collaborate for facilitating the recovery. This appears at the end of the video along with the logo and a mechanical system created with the daisy of the logo itself. Once more, the colours used are those of the Italian flag.



Figure 2.20 – Conad advertisement, June 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPNXrP0SDO0>)

2.2.3.3. Lago

Lago is a company that produces Made in Italy furniture. Thus, it is one of the sectors that have been unprivileged during the national lockdown. However, it is actively participating to the recovery of the country.

The analysis of the storytelling produced by this company reveals some features different from those of the advertisements previously analysed. First of all, Lago's story was published only on social networks, while the others were broadcasted on national television. Secondly, it represents a tangible proof of the resilience. Thirdly, despite starting and ending with the logo, the narration has not a cyclical pattern.

The video is silent for the first 15 seconds. This silence represents a meaningful connection to the economic world that has been paused during the national lockdown. Indeed, the simultaneous sequence of images depicts the empty Lago factory, both from the outside and from the inside. In addition, two white writings on a black background highlight that the previous months have been characterised by silence and smart working. Then, the noise of machinery breaks the silence and brings the factory to life.



Figure 2.21 – Lago advertisement, June 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9pChUfOwXw>)



Figure 2.22 – Lago advertisement, June 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9pChUfOwXw>)

Subsequently, the focus is placed on the industriousness, that is represented by hands working in the close-up. This is a preview of the following metaphor: “We are returning as children with the enthusiasm and the imagination for a healthier and more sensible life”. The comparison with children is significant, since they have a creative worldview which is essential to retrace the steps through which the company developed over the years. In other words, the metaphor is a powerful tool used to show that Lago’s employees are working with enthusiasm in order to guarantee a fast recovery. Moreover, they are trying to look at the world through the eyes of a child with the aim of regaining lost carefreeness and creativity. Indeed, this is the only way that enables the company to give their best and to go “full speed ahead”.



Figure 2.23 – Lago advertisement, June 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9pChUfOwXw>)

The video ends with some workers smiling behind their masks and a reminder to visit one of the 800 Lago stores worldwide. Once more, a concrete representation of the recovery is offered.

2.3. Comparative analysis

The evolution of corporate storytelling in the age of Covid-19 was described through the analysis of three advertisements for each phase imposed by the Italian government to deal with the global pandemic. The table below summarises and compares the main features of storytelling in relation to each phase:

Pandemic phases Elements	Pandemic phase 1	Pandemic phase 2	Toward pandemic phase 3
Topic	Resilience	Hope	Recovery
Images	Empty Italian cities, while Italians perform activities at home and work to provide essential services.	Some people share moments at home, others take off their masks and leave their house: the prospect of the beginning of a new humanity and normality emerges.	Companies' concrete restart, represented by raised shutters, raw materials, products, services, and smiling workers.
Sound effects	Dynamic and emotional, always supported by a written or oral narration.	Sometimes deep and distressing, other times joyful, but always supported by an oral or written narration.	Loud and cheerful, supported by oral or written narration, although sometimes silence also plays a narrative role.
Hashtags	<i>#ioescoconlafantasia</i> <i>#italiacheresiste</i>	<i>#torneràilsorriso</i> <i>#TheNewHumanity</i>	There are no hashtags, but expressions such as “ <i>ripartiamo insieme</i> ”.

Table 2.2 - Summary of the main features of the corporate storytelling developed during the global pandemic

3. ITALIAN CONSUMERS' REACTION TO CORPORATE STORYTELLING DURING THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC: THE CASES OF VODAFONE ITALIA, LAVAZZA, AND CONAD

In the previous chapters, a theoretical background has been depicted by analysing the origin and development of corporate storytelling. In particular, the second chapter focused on Italian companies in order to show how corporate storytelling has been changing in the age of Covid-19. However, the crisis also led to a modification in consumers' reactions, which will be further explained in the following sections.

3.1. Goals

The studies presented thus far provide evidence that consumers have changed in conjunction with the development of corporate storytelling. Indeed, nowadays, they are the protagonists of companies' communication strategies, which aim to show the effect of their product or services on people's lives.

As previously explained in chapter two, in the age of Covid-19, corporate storytelling has represented a powerful tool for supporting and guiding consumers through the three phases imposed by the Italian Government in order to deal with the global pandemic. In this respect, three different advertisements for each phase have already been analysed in order to show the evolution of corporate storytelling throughout the past few months. However, while chapter two exclusively analysed the companies' communication strategies without considering consumers' reaction, the analysis carried out in this chapter studies Italian consumers' perspective on the age of Covid-19. In this respect, there are several sub objectives to achieve. Firstly, the study aims at the definition of the type of consumer, according to age, profession, and lifestyle (before, during, and after the national lockdown). This leads to show if the consumer actively observes and listens advertisements or if he/she just skips them. Secondly, the attention must be devoted to the media through which consumers become exposed to companies' storytelling. Indeed, it will be demonstrated that consumers have an active role since they are the protagonists of corporate storytelling as well as the managers of their own

emotions. Finally, this research aims to show if corporate storytelling results in sales increase and in deepened relationships of trust between brands and consumers.

3.2. Methodology

This study was administered using a qualitative analysis in order to understand the phenomenon previously described. Indeed, in August, a sample of 25 Italians belonging to different age ranges were interviewed in person or on Skype. In particular, five people were selected for each of the following age ranges: 15-20, 20-27, 27-35, 35-50, and over 50 years old.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in Italian due to the nationality of the interviewees. They were asked to contribute to the research and, after their acceptance, they were asked specific questions concerning their lifestyle, their relationship with corporate storytelling, and their consumption habits during and after the national lockdown. Indeed, the interview¹¹ had a tripartite structure, composed of biographical data, case studies, and closing questions. Each part had a different number of questions, according to their purpose: the first one had eleven questions, the second thirty-seven, and the third eight. Moreover, on average, the interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each.

Once the objectives of the research were defined and the structure of the interview was created, the selected people were contacted by phone in order to request their availability and to schedule appointments. Everyone had the opportunity to decide whether to be interviewed in person or on Skype. These are the two most efficient surveys' types for the aim of this research, since they enable interviewers to be flexible in the formulation of questions and to be meticulous about observing interviewees' reactions.

The interviews were conducted during the month of August, i.e. the period immediately after the release of the videos analysed in the second chapter of this paper. The interviews were conducted following a specific protocol. Firstly, people were informed that the conversation would be recorded, transcribed, and analysed for the purposes of the research. Secondly, the interviewer introduced the topic while putting the

¹¹ See appendix.

interviewees at ease with the aid of the first few questions, the biographical ones. These were followed by questions concerning the three case studies: Vodafone Italia, Lavazza, and Conad. They were introduced by the videos representing the advertisements that the companies launched during and after the national lockdown. These videos were the ones that have been analysed at the end of the second chapter, since their analysis helped the interviewer to ask suitable questions for understanding Italian consumers' reaction. In particular, they led to subjective opinions that were the result of personal impressions, tastes, and critical thinking. Finally, several conclusive questions were used in order to compare the power of storytelling represented by the three videos.

3.3. Results

The analysis of the data obtained from the interviews highlighted the presence of different opinions within the group selected as the sample. Therefore, despite the similarities detected, it is appropriate to describe each age range individually.

3.3.1. Age range: 15-20 years

The first age range includes three graduate students, one conservatory student and one worker, aged between 15 and 20 years. They come from different backgrounds and have alternative lifestyles. Indeed, while the two friends Sara and Isabella spend enough time in their residence in Bassano del Grappa, a village in the province of Vicenza (Veneto), Tommaso, who resides in Fossombrone, a village in the province of Pesaro-Urbino (Marche), spends his time between work and outdoor activities. Similarly, Filippo, the conservatory student, dedicates himself to music from Monday to Friday, but works as a waiter during the weekend. Thus, he is not used to spend time at his residence in Povegliano, in the province of Treviso (Veneto). On the contrary, Corrado lives in the same village as Tommaso but, unlike him, he studies at home, and goes out with his friends.

When the national lockdown was declared, people belonging to this age range were at home with their families. During this period, Isabella has not changed her habits about the use of television and social networks, as opposed to Sara and Corrado. The

latter, in particular, claimed to have often used Twitter in order to receive information about Covid-19. Increased use of social networks has also been experienced by Filippo and Tommaso, who, however, did not watch much television. In this regard, it is interesting to mention the clarification offered by Filippo, who confesses to have spent so much time on Instagram during the first weeks of quarantine to the point that he no longer wants to use it. For this reason, he became used to seeing advertisements on social networks to the extent that he no longer feels bothered by them, whereas he hates TV commercials and prefers to watch movies or TV shows on Netflix because they are free of commercial breaks. Corrado is of the same opinion, but Isabella and Sara think differently: they are used to seeing advertising on television and not on social networks. Tommaso, on the other hand, makes no distinctions since he is annoyed by any kind of advertising. Thus, their perception is very different, but everyone uses the “skip ad” bottom, especially on YouTube, unless they are interested in the advertisement or, as Corrado said, they are distracted to the point of letting the advertisement run without realizing it.

The viewing of the videos revealed further contrasts, due to the fact that some of the interviewees let themselves be carried away by emotions, while others went in search of concreteness. In particular, Tommaso stated that he did not feel any emotions and that he preferred the video produced by Conad because of the positive feeling that colours and music conveyed to him. For this reason, and because he found Lavazza's storytelling confusing, he went against the point of view of his peers, who were moved by the video just mentioned. Among them, Corrado was impressed by Lavazza's decision to focus its advertising on the historical period that people are experiencing, rather than just promoting its own products, as Conad did. In fact, he has the same opinion as Tommaso and Filippo: in the video produced by Conad, the commercial purpose is more evident than in the others. On the contrary, Isabella and Sara believe that this purpose should be associated with the desire to make their services known, which emerges from Vodafone Italia advertising. However, it is more interesting to note that, at the time when the interviewees were asked if one of the companies had aroused their willingness to buy the advertised products, only Corrado and Tommaso answered no. Indeed, Filippo and Isabella would buy Conad products respectively because they are Italian and because they are the protagonists of the video, while Sara would buy Lavazza coffee because of the

beauty of the advertising created by the company. This causes a strong contrast with the answers to a later question about buying habits, where everyone said they had not bought new brands after quarantine, and emphasized the fact that their consumption habits do not depend on advertising. Moreover, only Sara and Isabella believe that the messages of community and sociality (despite the social distancing) launched by companies in recent months are appropriate. Corrado felt annoyed by the brands that did not take advantage of the situation, preferring to put the commercial purpose in the foreground. Tommaso, on the contrary, would have preferred that the brands had not talked about Covid-19, since Italian citizens were already surrounded by news of that kind. However, the most in-depth reflection was made by Filippo, who believes that it is important to remain positive regardless of advertisements, which often have a commercial purpose: he declares that he has not seen any messages of hope outside of *#celafaremo* or *#andràtuttobuttobene*. Nevertheless, more reliable data have been obtained through specific questions concerning each video, which will be discussed in the next sections.

As far as Vodafone Italia is concerned, the first aspect that emerges from reading the data is that no one was aware of the telephone company's decision to create a commercial with videos sent by customers. On the one hand, Sara and Corrado liked the video, even though they did not feel anything while they were watching it. Neither of the two had already seen it on television or social networks, and both believe that its main purpose is commercial since it is an advertisement. Corrado, in particular, considers that Vodafone Italia is trying to convince people that it is the best network to feel connected even during quarantine. Moreover, they both identify with some of the situations represented in the video since, during the national lockdown, they used internet, and they made several video calls with their friends, relatives, and teachers in order to preserve a sense of normality and community. Therefore, they both perceive a message of hope behind the video that is perfectly suited to the quarantine period: to stay close, even if far away. On the other hand, the other interviewees did not find the video pleasing: no emotion and no sensation, except the one, stated by Isabella, that the message could have been better structured and less confused. Among them, only Tommaso, who had already seen the video, felt annoyed by the fact that it shows and promotes the pleasure of being together in front of a screen. Indeed, during the national lockdown, he has not spent much time in front of a computer, tablet or mobile phone, by limiting video calls to

requirements. Thus, despite believing that the video is appropriate for the national lockdown period, as it represents the life that many people have conducted in that period, he does not identify with its protagonists. Furthermore, like Filippo, Tommaso does not think that the video was created to launch a message of hope, but to attract new customers. On the contrary, Isabella considers that, although the video has a predominant commercial function, the company also wanted to launch a message of community. As a matter of fact, she claims to feel represented by the protagonists of the video, which show the period of quarantine in which, as Filippo also stated, people have dedicated themselves to their passions. They both found video calls, and any other kind of technology, useful to connect with people far away. However, differently from Sara and Tommaso, they are not Vodafone Italia customers because they are fond of another telephone company. Corrado, instead, has been an unsatisfied customer for a period of time, before deciding to change phone operator.

Lavazza advertising used the speech pronounced by Charlie Chaplin in the movie *The Great Dictator*, but no one of the people aged between 15 and 20 years knew it. Isabella, Sara, and Filippo enjoyed the video, since it moves them. In particular, Isabella who had already seen the video on television, said she was pleased to watch it again because it conveys a strong message that overcomes the commercial purpose. Thus, it gave her the opportunity to reflect on the fact that the global pandemic did not create a new humanity, but rather made people aware. The same opinion is shared by Sara and Filippo who, however, believe that the commercial purpose is the main objective of the video. Filippo, in particular, thinks that the company wants to be seen as optimistic and anti-discrimination in order to attract potential consumers, despite the message of hope conveyed by the video. This was not appreciated by Corrado and Tommaso: the former believes that it is inappropriate to use Charlie Chaplin's speech to promote a coffee brand, while the latter did not understand the message because, not understanding English, he found it difficult to read the subtitles and look at the images at the same time. Neither of the two had already seen the video on television or on social networks: Corrado was moved, whereas Tommaso was overwhelmed by a feeling of confusion, also due to the narrator's unsettling tone of voice. Moreover, they both believe that the commercial purpose is secondary, since it becomes evident only at the end of the video, when the logo appears. On the one hand, Tommaso thinks that the advertisement shows a new humanity

caused by the global pandemic and composed of people who are used to not seeing each other and spending time in front of a smartphone. On the other hand, Corrado has a broader view of the issue: he believes that the virus has changed everyone, some for better and some for worse. Overall, none of the interviewees believes that the message launched by Lavazza is excessively positive, but rather of considerable support for Italian citizens. Filippo considers that positivity is never excessive, whereas Corrado believes that people in quarantine needed strong emotions and hope. In addition, no one is a regular consumer of Lavazza coffee: Filippo likes it but does not always drink it, Corrado has never tasted it, Tommaso thinks it tastes too strong, while Sara and Isabella do not drink any kind of coffee. Everyone relies on their parents' choice, except for Tommaso who goes to the supermarket and chooses coffee according to his personal taste, and Isabella, even though she does not drink coffee, would choose it trying to maintain a balance between brand, price, and taste.

Conad created a promotional message with an obvious purpose. Indeed, all interviewees believe that, despite the reference to the country's economic recovery, the video aims to encourage people to shop at Conad supermarkets and buy Conad products. On the one hand, Sara and Corrado did not like the video since they do not find it innovative compared to the company's traditional advertising. While watching it, they did not feel any sensations, although they believe that the message is appropriate to the situation of partial recovery that the Italian nation is experiencing, because it leverages the recovery of the Italian economy. Furthermore, neither of the two knew the song, however, Sara doesn't like it while Corrado does. On the other hand, Isabella and Filippo found the video interesting for the message it launches: to buy Italian products in order to support the recovery of the national economy. Thus, although they have not seen it before nor did they know the song, they believe it is appropriate in the current situation even though they felt nothing special in seeing it. A discordant opinion is that of Tommaso, who appreciated the video for the music, the images and the colours used, although he has seen it several times on television. However, he does not believe the video represents the current situation because he is not sure whether Conad uses Italian products and therefore employs Italians. Overall, the interviewees know Conad supermarkets, but only Tommaso goes shopping there. When this occurs, Tommaso buys Conad products because they have a good value for money and not because they are produced in Italy. In

fact, since he is not used to reading labels, even after watching the video, he still prefers to go to small shops to buy Italian products. Similarly, Isabella stated that she was not influenced by advertising: she has other supermarkets near home, where she tries to buy Italian products and read labels to help the national economy. According to her, it is also a matter of trust: she takes the example of fruit, which is not controlled by the same standards throughout the world. On the contrary, Sara and Corrado rely on their parents' choices: they are the ones who go grocery shopping and who pay attention to the types of products to buy. Finally, Filippo goes grocery shopping a few times. When this happens, he goes to Conad because it is close to his home, and he buys Conad products because they cost less than other brands. Moreover, he stated that he always tries to buy Italian products and read the labels. Thus, after watching the video, he asserted that he will buy Conad products in order to help the Italian economy.

3.3.2. Age range: 20-27 years

The sample of people aged between 20 and 27 includes five interviewees, four of them currently being university students: Giacomo, Amalia, Alessia, and Beatrice. The first two are about to graduate in Modern Languages for Communication and International Cooperation at the University of Padua, while Beatrice and Alessia are respectively a regular student and a graduand at the University of Urbino: the former is enrolled in the school of Foreign Languages and Intercultural Studies, the latter in the school of Communication Science. The fifth member of the group is Costanza, who has recently graduated in International Business. For this reason, she went out almost every day during the summer, while the others studied for the exam sessions or wrote their thesis. Currently, their habits have not changed, although Amalia and Alessia say that, after experiencing a national lockdown, the time they spend at home is directly proportional to their study hours.

Alessia, Giacomo, and Costanza reside in three different villages in the province of Pesaro-Urbino (Marche): Sant'Ippolito, Orciano di Pesaro, and Ponte degli Alberi, respectively. Beatrice also lives in the same province, but in a city, Fano. Thus, she shares the same city life with Amalia, who is from Abruzzo, specifically from Pescara.

Overall, when interviewed, they stated that they had spent the quarantine in their residences, but with different habits. In particular, Alessia, Giacomo, and Amalia have noticed a minimal increase in the time spent in front of the television, due to the need to be informed of the spread of the virus and to watch live coverage of the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. However, they preferred other entertainment channels, such as Netflix. In this respect, Beatrice said she spent a lot of time in front of the television to watch movies and TV shows on Netflix. On the contrary, Costanza, who lived the quarantine alone in a house without Wi-Fi, often watched television: newscasts during the day and movies in the evening (for instance, the Harry Potter saga every Monday).

Concerning the use of social networks, Beatrice is the only interviewee who did not notice an increase in their frequency of use during the national lockdown, but this is mostly due to the fact that she reserves plenty of time to attend online classes and to study. Indeed, everyone, except for her, claimed to have made extensive use of Instagram as a hobby. In particular, Costanza and Amalia appreciated the Instagram Lives through which public figures and influencers entertained the users, by talking about several topics or by suggesting at home workouts. The latter were the reason that led Alessia to make assiduous use of YouTube, in addition to Facebook for the news.

Nonetheless, the interviewees' points of view about advertising converge. In fact, everyone uses the "skip ad" function, especially on YouTube, when the advertisements are not related to their interests. On the one hand, this is a consequence of the annoyance they feel when a promotional message interrupts their activity on social networks. On the other hand, the presence of the "skip ad" function allows users not to be bothered by advertisements, as mentioned by Amalia. In this respect, Costanza and Giacomo's opinions are worth considering: the former is annoyed by the ability of social networks to control people and advertise products that are tailored to their interests, the latter is moved by this ability, since he often discovers interesting companies and products. Similarly, while Costanza says she feels indifferent towards television advertising, Giacomo says he avoids watching television because he is aware of the presence of several promotional messages, and he is used to their presence, as also emphasized by Beatrice. To the contrary, Amalia describes the annoyance she feels every time a TV programme or a movie is interrupted by advertising. Similarly, Alessia is used to critically

observe the commercials, which are part of her field of study, and to feel bothered when they are not well-finished.

After watching the three videos, the interviewees agreed on the beauty of the one produced by Lavazza, since it is emotional and detached from the brand. However, Costanza found it touching but excessively abstract. Therefore, she preferred Vodafone Italia advertising, which managed to excite Amalia and Alessia, giving them the feeling of not being alone during the lockdown period. These answers demonstrate the fact that nobody felt bothered by the messages of hope launched by Italian brands during and after the quarantine, although Costanza would have preferred to receive them from the Italian government, without any commercial purpose. The latter is evident in Conad advertisement, since it is a call to buy Conad products in the respective supermarkets. However, in this respect, it is interesting the point of view expressed by Giacomo, who thinks that both Vodafone Italia and Conad have a commercial purpose. He justifies this response by saying that he considers telephone companies as sellers of services for their own benefit. Therefore, after watching the videos, he is more inclined to buy the coffee Lavazza, as opposed to Amalia, who feels compelled to buy Conad products. The other interviewees, instead, say that they never let themselves be influenced by advertising: their purchases are proportional to their needs and personal taste. For this reason, Amalia was the only one who claimed to have bought products of different brands compared to the usual ones, after discovering them on social networks in the course of the quarantine. During that period, Alessia also changed her buying habits, but out of necessity: she started going to the small supermarket near home. In fact, although she liked the brands that launched messages of hope, she noticed a certain repetitiveness in corporate communication, which did not encourage her to buy something new. Moreover, like her, Giacomo and Costanza are also aware of the fact that the main purpose of commercials is selling. Costanza, in particular, has experienced advertising on the opposite side, that of the producer who has to sell the product; therefore, she has a strongly negative opinion about it. However, she likes advertisements like Vodafone Italia's, which is less aggressive than others. Giacomo, on the other hand, has appreciated Barilla's commercial which, in his opinion, had the sole purpose of instilling courage in people and creating union among Italian citizens.

The viewing of the video produced by Vodafone Italia, a well-known telephone company, provoked conflicting opinions. Firstly, it is important to bear in mind that none of the interviewees is a Vodafone Italia client. The reasons are the most varied: too high costs, confidence in another service provider, similarity among the companies, etc. Secondly, the answers of the interviewees demonstrate that the video was appropriate to the quarantine period, since everyone agrees on its purpose: to attract new customers by showing them the potentiality of the service, in terms of actions performed by current clients. Indeed, despite the fact that no one was aware that Vodafone Italia had decided to use amateur videos as a communication strategy, everyone claimed that they recognized themselves as the protagonists of the video, who represent their lives in quarantine, as well as that of all Italian citizens. As a matter of fact, the interviewees use Internet in order to do several outdoor activities from their home and, above all, to video call friends and relatives. Beatrice, for instance, said she gave a mobile phone to her grandmother so she could see her and stay close to her despite the distance. This refers to the message of hope perceived by Alessia and Costanza during the viewing of the video: to be close despite the physical distance, and to live the quarantine in the best way possible, given the circumstances. In particular, Alessia, who had already seen the video, believes that this message puts the commercial purpose in the background, producing a genuine, not contrived, and exciting story; she says she also appreciates the background music. This opinion is shared by Beatrice as well, while all the other interviewees believe that the objective of Vodafone Italia advertising is to attract new customers, by showing them that everything that can be done in quarantine requires the use of a good internet connection (which is guaranteed by Vodafone Italia).

The commercial from Lavazza had great success. In fact, all the interviewees, regardless of whether they had already seen it or not, found it pleasing as it overshadows commercial interests in order to give more emphasis to the human and sentimental component. The most sceptical attitude was that of Giacomo, who said he found it difficult to follow the voice, the written translation, and the images simultaneously. For this reason, he did not feel very involved, while his peers were moved by watching it. In fact, they do not believe that the combination of music, images, tone of voice, and meaning of Charlie Chaplin's speech creates confusion, but rather that it reinforces the message of hope and community launched by the brand. Nevertheless, Giacomo

appreciated the fact that the video was not focused on the brand and found it courageous for Lavazza to include a homosexual kiss in the commercial, as it is still taboo in Italy. However, he believes that the video conveyed an overly positive message during a negative period of grief and failing companies. Costanza shares this thought and considers that the message was used to generate emotions for commercial purposes, rather than to invite people to live the life Charlie Chaplin recommended. In fact, both Costanza and Giacomo are convinced that the video has a commercial purpose, even though the logo does not appear until the end, as noticed by the other interviewees. However, between them, only Costanza sees the commercial purpose as the main objective of the video, which wants to push consumers to associate hope and positivity to the brand. Indeed, she thinks that, if watched during the quarantine, the video makes people reflect about how a virus can be more powerful than hatred between compatriots and citizens of the world, but if watched now, it makes people perceive the resemblance to other motivational advertisements. This is due to the fact that, although it was a common hope, the global pandemic did not create a new humanity. All the interviewees agree on this issue, since during the quarantine the Italians were in the same situation and felt part of a common destiny that encouraged them to improve, but when the quarantine ended, everything went back to the way it was before. Giacomo also reflects on the fact that there is currently more distrust towards foreigners and Italians who reside in the areas most affected by the virus. For this reason, Alessia, watching the video, experienced regret for the state of the world, as she realized how naive it is to think that the earth can become a better place. Similarly, Beatrice perceived the hope that she would live in a better society and Amalia associated the message to the hope that Italians would fight for their lives and for the world to become a more human and welcoming place. Finally, everyone claimed to know and love Lavazza coffee. At the supermarket, Alessia and Beatrice choose coffee according to their personal taste, Costanza and Giacomo according to price and brand, and Amalia according to value for money.

As for the video broadcasted by Conad, the interviewees perceived it as a traditional advertising of a supermarket. Therefore, it did not move anyone, even though the interviewees are regular customers of Conad supermarkets. This is due to the fact that the video has an evident commercial purpose, since the focus is on Conad production chains, supermarkets, and products. Nevertheless, Alessia and Beatrice believe that the

commercial purpose is not the main objective of the advertisement, since it coexists with the call for action addressed to Italians, who must remain united and work together to support the Italian economy at a time of partial recovery. Alessia, in particular, associates this kind of message with an evolution of the global pandemic, since a few months ago it was not possible to go freely to the supermarket and people preferred to shop online. Moreover, she believes that the images used in the video are conflicting, and that the song, after several listening sessions, becomes annoying. Similarly, Beatrice, who had already seen the video both on television and on YouTube, said she was bothered by the song. On the contrary, Giacomo, despite having already seen it on television, believes that the commercial has good footage and that it is not excessive; an opinion also shared by Amalia, who had never seen it before the interview. In addition, everyone, except for Costanza, believes that the video is suitable for the pandemic phase that the world is experiencing, as it shows a rediscovered normality, without assemblages in the supermarket, where a woman is buying Conad products, with the awareness that they are Italian. Costanza, instead, considers that Conad had no reason to do this type of advertising, which would have been more suitable for brands and sectors that have suffered huge losses in recent months: clothing, catering, etc. Her reflection starts from the assumption that supermarkets have always remained open during the national lockdown, and therefore do not need to "restart". Moreover, she is the only one among the interviewees who goes shopping at Conad because it is a very well-stocked supermarket, not because of the quality of its products. However, as the other interviewees, she prefers to buy Italian products, which are subject to more controls, in order to support the national economy. In this regard, it is noteworthy the reflection made by Giacomo, who thinks that quality is more important than origin. Consequently, if after reading the labels he realises that the quality of the Italian product is lower than the foreign one, he buys the latter. Finally, it is interesting to note that, after watching the video, those who already bought Conad products will continue to buy them because they are good value for money, regardless of how they were advertised. For the same reason, everyone will probably go to Conad for their next grocery shopping.

3.3.3. Age range: 27-35 years

The five people selected for the age range 27-35 are three women and two men. Everyone is a worker, with the exception of Marco, who is about to graduate in Modern Languages at the University of Padua. Federica is the district manager of Inas (Italian National Institute of Social Assistance), Cristina is a business consultant, Fulvia is a lawyer, and Ferdinando is a pharmaceutical researcher. Ferdinando and Marco reside in the city of Pescara (Abruzzo), while Federica and Cristina live, respectively, in Sant'Ippolito and Ponte Rio, two villages of the Marche region, and Fulvia in Udine, a city of Friuli Venezia Giulia. However, Ferdinando stated that he did not spend the national lockdown in his residence, but in L'Aquila, where he works. During that period, the lifestyles of the interviewees have been different: Federica and Ferdinando have made extensive use of social networks, but they have not noticed an increase in the time spent in front of the television, which, on the contrary, has been essential to Cristina and Marco (in addition to social networks). In this respect, Fulvia stood out for having explained that she is not used to waste her time by watching television or joying a social network. Thus, the five interviewees expressed conflicting points of view about advertising. First of all, those who are not used to watch television are not bothered by commercial breaks on television. Marco shares the same opinion, claiming to be used to see advertisements on television. On the contrary, they consider commercials on social networks inappropriate, despite being often "smart" and generated on the basis of users' interests, as suggested by Federica. Secondly, a contrast has emerged between Cristina, who is bothered by both kinds of commercial interruptions, and Fulvia, who describes advertisements as a way to share the commercial culture of a company. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that Cristina always watches television and uses social networks, while Fulvia doesn't. However, everybody uses the "skip ad" button on YouTube, in order to skip the advertisements that interrupt the video they are watching. Moreover, currently, Marco and Fulvia spend most of their time at home, respectively for study and work reasons, while the others are mostly away because they work in an office.

The viewing of the three videos raised similar reactions. Federica, Cristina, and Marco were fascinated by the video created by Lavazza, because the evocative speech and the images used transcend the simple promotional message, giving more importance

to human values. The emotion they felt is comparable to the one felt by Ferdinando, who, however, found the video created by Conad more appealing due to the fact that it is the most coherent of the three videos he has seen because it focuses on the objective, i.e. to sponsor his own brand without making useless speeches. Fulvia shares Ferdinando's thought, describing the video produced by Conad as a real, concrete video, closely related to people in their daily lives since it deals with essential goods. She is moved by the memory that during quarantine people were only allowed to go out for grocery shopping. Therefore, according to her, this is not merely the most beautiful video, but also the most emotional one, even though it has an obvious commercial purpose, similar to that of Vodafone Italia. The other interviewees, on the contrary, believe that the commercial purpose is evident in just one of the two videos: Conad in the case of Cristina, Federica and Ferdinando, and Vodafone Italia in the case of Marco, who underlines that the company exploited the lockdown in a wrong and instrumental way with the aim of selling. Simultaneously, however, Marco considers that the messages launched by the companies during and after the quarantine were suitable for the period. In this regard, Federica stated that she did not pay much attention to promotional messages, while Cristina said she noticed that some advertisements were better structured than others and, overall, she appreciated those (such as Barilla) that recalled values similar to those spread by Lavazza. On the contrary, Ferdinando would have preferred to receive less optimistic messages, in order to avoid constantly thinking about the difficult time he was living. In this regard, it is worth mentioning Fulvia, who appreciated the brands that did not express themselves, withdrawing or interrupting their advertising campaigns during the national lockdown. Moreover, all the interviewees stated that they had not changed their buying habits after the quarantine; it was only Fulvia, who created a small vegetable garden at home, who reduced the purchase of vegetables. She, similar to Cristina, has no intention to buy the products sponsored by the videos, because she does not allow herself to be influenced by the advertisements. On the contrary, Marco and Ferdinando will probably go grocery shopping in a Conad supermarket, because the video conveyed confidence to them. However, the most interesting reflection for the purposes of the study was made by Federica, who believes that during a global pandemic, companies that insist on promoting their products sell less than those that communicate messages of hope and positivity to citizens. For this reason, she stated that she wanted to buy Lavazza coffee since she did

not feel compelled to buy it after seeing the advertisement. Nevertheless, the subsequent description of the interviewees' answers to more specific questions on the three promotional messages examined will help to better understand their point of view.

The video produced by Vodafone Italia was appreciated by Federica, Cristina, Fulvia, and Marco. According to them, in fact, it represents scenes of daily life and solutions to typical needs of the quarantine period. Marco and Fulvia had already seen it several times on television and, when they saw it again for the interview, they did not feel annoyed, but rather moved and nostalgic in remembering their life during the lockdown. The same feeling was experienced by Federica, who saw the video for the first time, while Cristina perceived the power of staying connected. Conversely, Ferdinando distinguished himself: he is not interested in Vodafone Italia advertising, hence he had not already seen the video and, after watching it, he said he did not like it and did not feel moved. He, as well as Marco, Fulvia, and Cristina, is certain that the main objective of the video is commercial, because it shows all the activities that people can do if they are Vodafone Italia customers. In this regard, it is worth bearing in mind Cristina's reflection, who is an expert in the field: she claimed that the commercial purpose is the main objective of every advertising campaign, since they are very expensive and aim to create awareness in current and potential clients. On the contrary, Federica believes that the main purpose of Vodafone Italia is to raise people's awareness and make them feel part of a group with a common destiny. The empathic component was also captured by Marco, who underlined the fact that all Italians found themselves making extensive use of the telephone and technological tools both for leisure and for work and study needs. This was corroborated when all the interviewees stated that they had made video calls during the quarantine, either to see the people they missed or, in Cristina's case, to work. In addition, everyone believes that the video offers an adequate representation of the situations experienced during the national lockdown, such as working in a smart working team, taking online classes, entertaining children, cooking, etc. For this reason, everyone recognises themselves in the protagonists of the video. Marco, in particular, dwells on the fact that the people in the video live a happy life thanks to the internet connection. However, Federica and Fulvia are the only interviewees who believe that there is a message of hope behind the video: to remain united and not to lose contact with the loved ones. Both of them have been Vodafone Italia customers for 10 and 15 years respectively, while the

others are loyal to other telephone operators. Overall, everyone knew Vodafone Italia but no one was aware that Vodafone Italia selected videos sent by its customers to tell its story.

The interview regarding the advertising created by Lavazza proved that everyone already knew the brand, which is appreciated by coffee drinkers (everyone except Fulvia). The interviewees were generally moved by the video, which conveys a powerful message. Indeed, everyone except for Ferdinando appreciated the fact that the video communicates universal and timeless values such as equality and respect, with an adequate and necessary positivity for the national lockdown period. Instead, Ferdinando, believes that it is illogical to use a timeless speech for a coffee advertisement that is excessively positive since it talks about an improvement in the short term that has not yet occurred. Moreover, besides him, only Marco already knew Charlie Chaplin's speech which, in his opinion, was wisely used to create a relationship between two different but complex historical periods. In fact, Charlie Chaplin encouraged citizens to prove their value and to be strong in a tough time such as the Second World War; today his words are used to address the same message to populations that are experiencing a national lockdown. For this reason, Marco was not bothered by the repeated viewing of the video; he firmly believes that Charlie Chaplin's words are not simply rhetoric, but that people needed to hear them during the quarantine. However, watching the video again, he feared that many people did not understand the meaning of the message, and he hopes that there will be no need to hear it again in the future. For the same reason, Fulvia is the only interviewee to think that, at present, it is possible to speak of a new humanity. She believes that people, having had to deal with a new reality, have realized which aspects of life are relevant and which are not. Instead, all the other interviewees consider that the global pandemic has increased the sensitivity of those who have lost their loved ones, but that it has not changed the attitudes and thoughts of those who have not been directly affected by the virus, who feel safe and who are still not respecting the rules because they are not aware of the seriousness of the situation. However, Ferdinando and Fulvia attributed to the commercial a feeling of hope, while Federica recognized tenderness in the message. The latter is also the only one who believes that the video has no commercial purpose because she discovered that it was Lavazza at the end, when the logo appeared. On the contrary, Cristina and Ferdinando think that the commercial purpose is the main objective of the video, which

uses emotionality as a tool to reach current and potential clients. Fulvia and Marco stand halfway between the two positions; they consider the video partially commercial because, despite the final logo, it highlights the need of people to resist a difficult situation. Therefore, according to them, the commercial purpose is not the main objective of the video. Finally, the results show that Fulvia, Cristina, and Ferdinando are not regular Lavazza coffee consumers: Fulvia does not drink coffee, Cristina chooses coffee according to brand and taste, and Ferdinando according to price. On the other hand, Federica and Marco are regular Lavazza coffee consumers: Federica buys coffee according to taste, while Marco always tries to find a balance between price and taste.

The video produced by Conad, a company that everyone knows, only moved Fulvia but made everyone agree on the fact that its main purpose is commercial: the company, the points of sale, and the products are in the foreground throughout the video and are advertised as Italian products, i.e. a tool to boost the Italian economy, weakened by the global pandemic. Thus, the video was considered as a call to action, although only Fulvia stated that, having become aware that Conad products are Italian, she will buy them if she happens to go grocery shopping in a Conad supermarket, despite being far from her home. In fact, as far as the others were concerned, Marco and Ferdinando were already regular customers, while Cristina and Federica will go back to grocery shopping in the supermarkets closest to their homes. Marco and Ferdinando's choice depends from the good value for money of Conad products and from the proximity of well-stocked Conad supermarkets to their homes. However, while Marco, like Fulvia and Federica, is used to read the labels and to buy Italian products, Ferdinando, like Cristina, does not pay attention to the origin of the products and does not read the labels, preferring to purchase products on sale. In this respect, everyone except Cristina, who considers the video as a traditional promotional message launched by Conad, believes that the advertising is suitable for the moment of partial recovery that Italy is experiencing, since it promotes the production and sale of Italian products, whose purchase is fundamental in order to revive the Italian economy and to support Italian workers. This justifies the fact that Fulvia and Ferdinando liked the video. Fulvia, in particular, had already seen it multiple times without ever feeling bothered, since it shows closeness to Italian problems by spotlighting them. Indeed, she said she was moved because she feels close to all the Italian workers, such as artisans and farmers. On the contrary, when Federica watched the video

again, she felt annoyed by its banality and insistence, since it is similar to any other advertisement whose main purpose is to sell. Therefore, the video did not transmit anything to Federica, Cristina, and Marco. However, Marco was not bothered by the repeated viewing of the video, since he links the song *Girasole* by Giorgia to the childhood spent in Sardinia with his grandparents. This song was recognized by everyone except for Ferdinando who, however, said that the video conveyed him a feeling of confidence in the company advertised.

3.3.4. Age range: 35-50 years

The sample of people designed to analyse the reaction of Italian consumers aged between 35 and 50 is composed of four women and one man, all workers: Silvia and Mirco are bank employees, Simona is an advertising graphic designer, Maria is a teacher, and Angela is an e-commerce employee. Everyone spent the quarantine in their province of residence: Treviso in the case of Silvia, Mirco, and Maria; Pesaro-Urbino in the case of Angela and Simona. The latter is the only one among the interviewees who does not live in a village but in a city, Fano.

Currently, the time they spend at home is inversely proportional to their work commitments. Silvia, Mirco, and Simona, who have started working in their offices again after the national lockdown, spend the whole day at work. As for Angela, she rarely goes out since she works in a smart working team and tries to protect her children from the virus. The same applies to Maria, who has a two-year-old daughter.

During the national lockdown, none of them noticed an increase in the time spent in front of the television. Angela, in particular, after a few days spent assiduously following updates on the global pandemic, decided to turn off the television in order to live and share her daily life at home with her children. Concerning social networks, however, Simona, Mirco, and Angela have noticed an increase in the time spent on Instagram and Facebook, with the aim of maintaining contact with the outside world.

Overall, all interviewees have a negative opinion about promotional messages on television or social networks, especially because, most of the time, they do not meet their interests and are continuously repeated over the course of a day. However, Silvia stated that she is used to television commercial breaks and, in contrast to the others, she does

not get annoyed when these interrupt movies and programmes. Similarly, Maria, who makes little use of social networks, and Angela, who appreciates the existence of the “skip ad” function, are not particularly bothered by advertising on social networks. Generally speaking, everyone uses the “skip ad” function in order to avoid wasting time in the vision of content unrelated to their interests.

The viewing of the videos during the interview revealed that, despite having similar lifestyles and opinions, the interviewees have different points of view towards the brands Vodafone Italia, Lavazza, and Conad, due to their previous experiences. However, after the national lockdown, none of them changed their own buying habits. Angela, in particular, highlighted the fact that, during the quarantine, she was forced to renounce to some of her favourite products because they were temporarily unavailable, to the extent that she has recently returned to her old shopping habits. Moreover, at that time, she felt annoyed by the messages of hope launched by Italian companies, as they were in contrast to the difficult coexistence with the virus experienced by all Italians, who had to limit their personal freedom. Similarly, Maria would have preferred to see more realistic, concrete, and therefore useful commercials. On the contrary, the other interviewees believe that the communication strategies developed by Italian brands were suitable for the historical moment they experienced. However, with regards to the three commercials shown to the interviewees, only Angela and Simona expressed an interest in buying some of the products advertised, which are Conad products. According to Silvia, Simona, Mirco, and Angela, Conad advertising has a clear commercial purpose. Maria, instead, having had a negative experience as a client of the telephone company Vodafone Italia, which she defines as intrusive and insistent, believes that the commercial purpose is more evident in its video. This opinion is partially shared by Simona as well. Silvia and Angela have a different viewpoint, since they liked Vodafone Italia commercial because it shows real life scenes. Angela, in particular, was moved by watching it, thus creating a contrast with the other interviewees who preferred Lavazza commercial because it conveys the great values of humanity, such as justice, equality, freedom, and tolerance, in an innovative way, striking the hearts of the viewers. On the contrary, Simona said she did not feel any kind of emotion in front of the three videos proposed.

The video produced by Vodafone Italia, a telephone company known by all the interviewees, had already been seen on television by Silvia, who found it pleasant and

emotional due to the cheerfulness and serenity of the people depicted, who managed to maintain contact despite the distance. The same people made Angela relive the emotions she felt during the quarantine, when she was constantly seeking normality: the sense of closeness despite the physical distance, and the expectation and trepidation for the daily appointment on video call with family and friends. However, the images depicted did not impress neither Mario, who found the video pleasant just because the scenes are dynamic and have a nice musical background, nor Simona, to whom the video conveyed sadness. The same opinion is expressed by Maria, who believes that the video represents unrealistic situations, far from the real life that she and other people have experienced during the national lockdown. In other words, everyone, with the exception of Maria, identifies with the protagonists of the video and believes that it adequately portrays the quarantine period, which engaged some but bored others. In addition, only Silvia and Angela think that at the base of the video there is a message of hope, that of returning soon to normality and of being able to share every moment with the loved ones. Silvia, in particular, is the only interviewee to be a Vodafone Italia customer, and she is convinced that, in the video, the commercial purpose is overshadowed by the social aspect. This opinion is not shared by the other interviewees, who consider that Vodafone Italia created an advertisement aimed at attracting new customers and selling its services, showing their ability to connect people during difficult periods. This could be due to the fact that all interviewees made video calls during the quarantine, but none of them was aware of the fact that Vodafone Italia had decided to tell a story based on amateur videos of its clients.

The viewing of the video produced by Lavazza led to conflicting opinions. The most negative point of view was expressed by Angela, who said that the advertisement failed to move her because it is too positive. Therefore, the only thing that captured her attention is the logo that appears at the end of the video which, in her opinion, has a strong and exclusively commercial purpose. This could be due to the fact that she was unaware of the speech made by Charlie Chaplin in the movie *The Great Dictator*, and that she does not believe that the global pandemic has created a new humanity, but rather that it has destroyed all good intentions. The other interviewees, on the contrary, found the video pleasant, although only Silvia and Mirco said they were moved by watching it, since it deals with current and important issues by using plain words. Both had already seen it on television but, while Mirco did not feel bothered by the frequent airings, Silvia thinks that

it would be more important to listen to it less times but more carefully, because the words used, despite being dated, refer to a current situation. Moreover, Silvia is the only interviewee to be convinced that it is possible to talk about a new humanity, since it has been understood that everything can be questioned at any time. Therefore, she does not consider the video as excessively positive; an opinion shared by Simona and Mirco, both convinced that quarantine was the appropriate time to raise people's awareness. Maria, instead, probably due to the fact that she already knew the speech, believes that the positivity communicated by the video is not adequate to the confusion caused by the lockdown. Thus, she thinks that the commercial purpose is the main objective of the video, while Mirco and Simona do not believe that Lavazza is promoting coffee, as it does not appear in the video. Halfway between the two positions there is Silvia: according to her, the video has a commercial purpose because it associates the message to the brand, but the latter cannot overcome the former. Generally speaking, everyone knows, appreciates, and regularly consumes Lavazza coffee, except for Simona, who is not a great coffee lover, and Maria. Moreover, Angela, Silvia, and Mirco are used to choose coffee at the supermarket according to the brand, Simona chooses it according to the taste, and Maria according to the value for money.

Concerning the video created by Conad, all the interviewees said they knew Conad's points of sale. Nevertheless, Silvia, Maria, and Mirco are not regular customers as they prefer other supermarkets that are closer to their residence. For the same reason, they will not go grocery shopping in a Conad supermarket after watching the video. Among them, Silvia appreciated the fact that the advertising promotes Italian products and that it is, therefore, suitable for the moment of partial recovery that Italy is experiencing. Angela also said that she liked the video, as it gives her a sense of belonging and makes her think about her family, although, after watching it several times, she felt indifferent to the subject matter. Likewise, Simona, Maria, and Mirco found it unimpressive: it didn't convey any sensations to them. Maria, in particular, considers it a simple promotional video and, after having seen it several times on television, thinks that it is not suitable for the current situation because Italy is not yet experiencing a moment of recovery. The same opinion is shared by Simona, who does not see any connection with the current reality. Moreover, everyone assumes that the predominant purpose of the video is commercial since it is an encouragement to buy at Conad supermarkets, based

on the social motivation it advertises. Everyone also agrees that it is important to buy Italian products in order to support the Italian economy and to read the labels to ensure that the products are Italian and therefore of higher quality. On the contrary, concerning the background music used in the video, Silvia, Mirco and Angela know the song and they like it, Maria does not know it but she likes it, and Simona does not know it and does not like it.

3.3.5. Age range: over 50 years

The last age range is composed of four women and one man aged between 55 and 65: Loredana and Claudio are retired, Eufemia is a housewife, Patricia is a kindergarten teacher, and Patrizia is a worker in the agri-food sector. They all have spent the national lockdown in their residence, in different villages in the province of Pesaro-Urbino (Marche). During this period, they have noticed an increase in the time spent in front of the television, except for Eufemia, who preferred watching video recipes on YouTube. This is the only social network she and Claudio use, pressing the bottom “skip ad” without hesitation whenever any useless and annoying advertisement appears. The same function is always used by Patrizia and Loredana, who have made extensive use of Instagram and Facebook during the quarantine. On the contrary, Patricia has not joined any social network, since she is not interested in using them. Currently, after the quarantine, she still spends a lot of time at home and she states to be bothered by television advertising. This opinion is also shared by the other interviewees, particularly by Eufemia and Loredana, who are not used to go out every day and claim to hate commercials that interrupt the climax of a film or a programme. On the contrary, Claudio prefers outdoor activities, while Patrizia works every morning from Monday to Friday and goes out on Saturdays and Sundays.

Overall, the interviewees are leading similar normal lives: the answers to the questions related to the three videos confirm it. In particular, Patrizia and Patricia have appreciated the importance that brands have given to Italy and Italians during the national lockdown. For this reason, they loved the emotional video produced by Lavazza, which gives hope to humankind through the words pronounced by Charlie Chaplin. The message launched by the latter, as well as his tone of voice, also moved Eufemia and Loredana,

although they preferred the video launched by Conad, since they are regular customers of the supermarket. According to them, the advertisement has an obvious commercial purpose; an opinion they share with Claudio, who is a supporter of the consumption of national products. For the same reason, the video moved him by sparking an interest which could result into the purchase of those products. To the contrary, Eufemia, Loredana, Patrizia, and Patricia state that they never let themselves be influenced by any kind of advertisement. In particular, Patrizia and Patricia believe that both Conad and Vodafone Italia have an obvious commercial purpose, however, although they will continue to buy Conad products, they will not benefit the services offered by Vodafone Italia. Thus, the interviewees appreciated the messages of hope connected to the brands. Patricia, in particular, loved the positivity conveyed by Kellogg's advertisement and the French song used by the company, which reminds her of her childhood in France. However, after the quarantine, none of them bought products of different brands than the usual ones, since they are sure about their consumer habits.

The viewing of the video produced by Vodafone Italia demonstrates that everyone knew the company, but no one was aware of its decision to produce a storytelling based on videos filmed by its customers during the national lockdown. Generally speaking, the advertisement was not perceived as touching: the only two positive impressions have been those of Eufemia, who loved the musical background, and Patrizia, who appreciated the images showing the power of the connection offered by telephone companies; in this case, Vodafone Italia. To the contrary, the most negative impression was that of Patricia, who said she was annoyed and distracted by the high tone of the music; the same music which, for Eufemia, had represented a moment of distraction from the dramatic situation she was experiencing. As a matter of fact, Eufemia was the only one who had already seen the video shown during the interview, from which she never felt bothered. Nevertheless, she shares common interests with the other interviewees: they are not and do not want to become Vodafone Italia clients in the short term, even though they feel part of Vodafone Italia's quarantine representation. Indeed, everyone has made video calls with friends and relatives, Patrizia has taken gymnastics lessons on YouTube, and Loredana and Eufemia have cooked. Therefore, everyone is convinced that the video adequately represents the lockdown from the point of view of Italian citizens. In addition, everyone except for Eufemia, believes that the video communicates a message of hope: to stay close in order

to overcome a difficult situation and to return to living a normal life together with the loved ones. According to Loredana, this message is so strong that it leaves no room for commercial purpose; in her opinion, unlike her peers, Vodafone Italia does not try to attract new customers. Eufemia's opinion is quite the opposite: she believes that Vodafone Italia has played with the emotions felt by Italians during the quarantine in order to sell its products.

As for the video broadcasted by Lavazza, Claudio and Eufemia's opinions are worth considering. Claudio had not seen the video before the interview, while Eufemia had already seen it on television. Both stated that they did not understand the message pronounced by Charlie Chaplin because of the language. As a consequence, they remained indifferent in front of a story which moved the other interviewees. However, Eufemia watched the movie *The Great Dictator* when she was younger, thus she appreciated the use of the speech pronounced by Charlie Chaplin in order to send a message of hope during a difficult time for humankind. Indeed, she claimed that, with the exception of the disturbing tone of voice, the frequent airing of the video on television was pleasant due to the harmony among music, text, and images. On the other hand, the opinion of the other interviewees was completely different. Among them, Patricia was the only one to have already seen the video on television. In this respect, she stated that she liked it so much that she interrupted her household chores each time it was broadcasted. According to her, the union of strength, positivity, and courage, makes the message successful to recover some stability. Patrizia and Loredana, who had not seen the video before the interview, were also pleasantly impressed by the subject matter: Patrizia, who was already familiar with Charlie Chaplin's speech, captured the message of hope of living in a better world, whereas Loredana felt sad for the presence in the world of unpleasant realities. However, despite conflicting opinions, no one of the interviewees believes that the message launched by Lavazza is excessively positive, but rather appropriate to the quarantine period, which was characterised by uncertainty and discouragement. They think that the commercial purpose is not the main objective of the video, to the extent that Eufemia and Patricia did not understand that it was a Lavazza advertisement until the end, when the logo appeared. However, Loredana highlighted the fact that since the coffee company is saying good morning to a new humanity, it is implicitly trying to attract new consumers (especially in Italy, where most people drink

coffee). In fact, Patrizia and Loredana believe that the commercial purpose is present, but it is secondary. Nevertheless, all interviewees are regular Lavazza coffee consumers. On the one hand, Claudio and Patricia always buy Lavazza coffee at the supermarket. On the other hand, Eufemia and Patricia choose coffee exclusively on the basis of taste, while Loredana on the basis of the relationship between price and taste. In addition, another interesting element that emerged from the interviews is the hope that Eufemia, Loredana, and Patrizia have harboured towards the birth of a new humanity, which was followed by the awareness that the virus has not changed people's attitudes. On the contrary, Claudio and Patricia believe that human beings have had the opportunity to reflect on the situation, on the life they led, and consequently to change.

The last video, produced by Conad, was a great success. Everyone, except for Patrizia (who considered it as an end in itself), had already seen it on television, without feeling annoyed. However, their opinion was subject to their purchase experiences, since everyone was already a Conad customer. Indeed, according to the interviewees, the products of this company have a good value for money, increased by the fact that they are produced in Italy, hence their purchase supports the Italian economy. For this reason, the video is perfectly suited to the current situation, by showing a national reality made by positive people and satisfied consumers. Its commercial purpose is clear because of the focus on Conad production chains, supermarkets, and products, but the musical background as well as the colourful images made a good impression on the interviewees. Indeed, among them, only Eufemia and Patrizia stated that the video does not communicate any feeling, while Loredana and Patricia perceived the beauty of everyday life, and Claudio the reliability of the company.

3.4. Discussion

The interview was addressed to 25 Italian consumers made of 17 women and 8 men. They are aged between 15 and 65 and have different lifestyles: 9 of them are students, 1 is a recent graduate, 13 are workers and 2 are retired. In addition, among the 9 students, 3 are high school graduates who are waiting to start university, 1 is a conservatory student, 1 is a regular student at the university and 4 are about to graduate. Their provinces of residence are located in 4 Italian regions: Marche, Abruzzo, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and

Veneto, respectively 2 in the centre and 2 in the north of Italy. In particular, 6 people reside in Veneto, 2 in the province of Vicenza and 4 in the province of Treviso, 1 person resides in Friuli Venezia Giulia, in the province of Udine, 3 people reside in Abruzzo, in the province of Pescara, and 15 people reside in Marche, in the province of Pesaro-Urbino. Moreover, only 6 people out of 25 reside in a city rather than a village: 3 in the province of Pescara, 1 in the province of Udine and 2 in the province of Pesaro-Urbino. 24 people out of 25 spent the national lockdown in their provinces of residence: only one of the interviewees, resident in Pescara, was in the province of L'Aquila, where he works. During that period, 20 people changed their habits due to the limited activities that could be performed at home: 11 people noticed an increase in time spent both in front of the television and on social networks, 1 person watched more television, and 8 people spent more hours on social networks. The other 5 interviewees, on the contrary, did not notice an increase in the time spent in front of the television or on social networks. The following graphic shows the approach that people belonging to the 5 different age groups have had towards television and social networks:

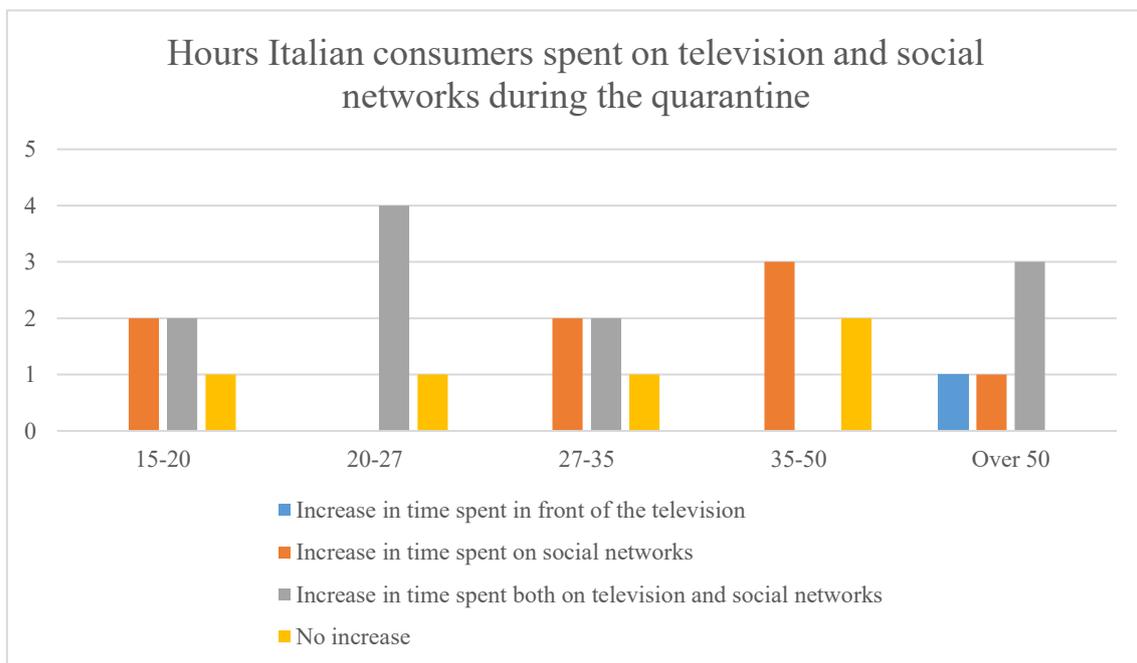


Figure 3.1

After the quarantine, the time spent at home has been drastically reduced for 12 out of 25 people for study, work, or leisure purposes. However, for the same reasons, 13 people are still spending a lot of time at home. As the graphic below shows, the number is particularly high in the 20-27 age range, which includes university students close to the exam session or about to graduate:

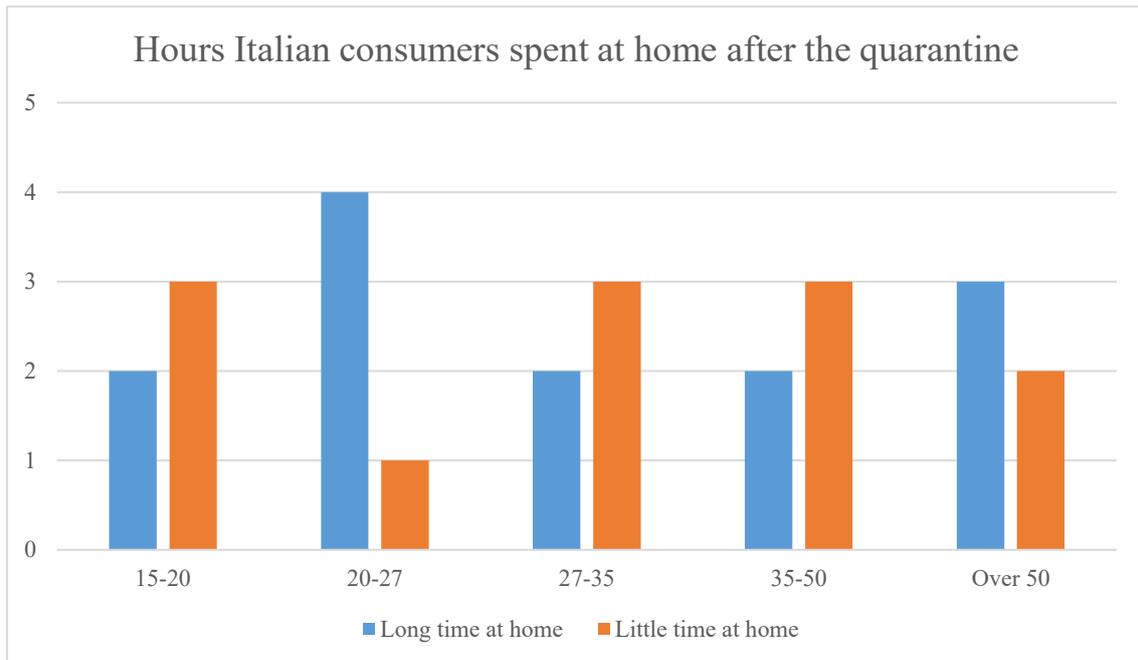


Figure 3.2

Overall, before, during, and after quarantine everyone has used the “skip ad” function to skip advertisements unrelated to their interests. In fact, interviews have shown that 23 out of 25 people say they are annoyed by promotional messages. In particular, 9 of them are bothered by advertising on television and social networks, 8 by promotional messages on social networks, and 6 by television commercials.

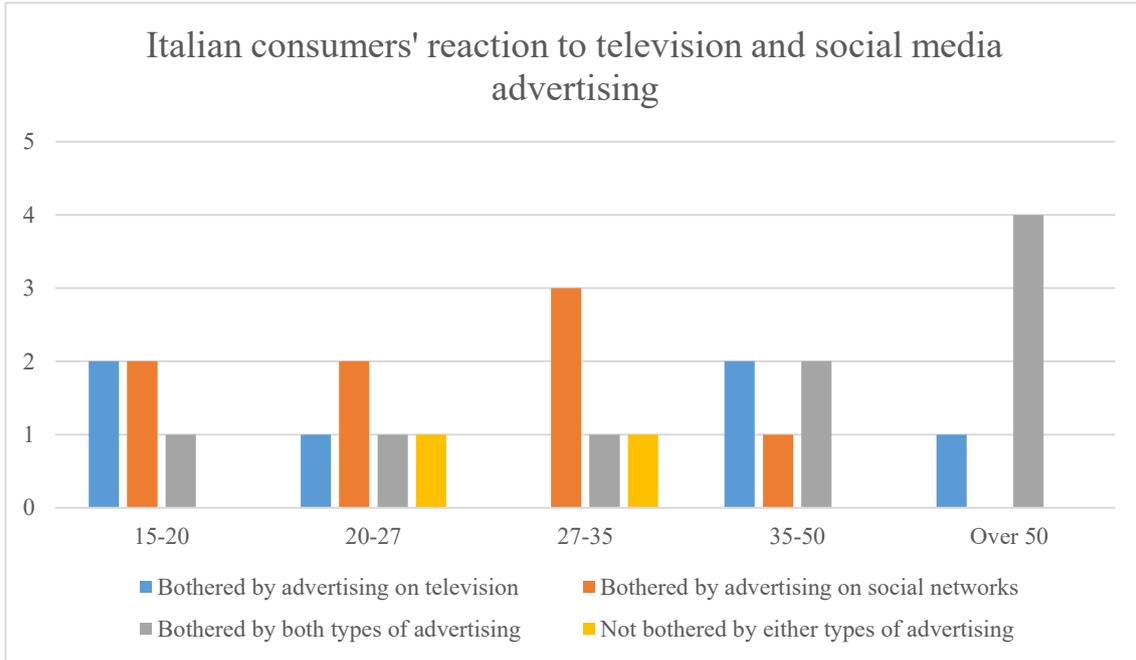


Figure 3.3

These data demonstrate that the majority of people interviewed do not pay attention to advertising. This is confirmed by the information regarding the advertisements proposed: Vodafone Italia, Lavazza, and Conad. In fact, only 7 out of 25 people had already seen Vodafone Italia commercial on television, including 2 who felt annoyed by watching it. In addition, 1 said she did not remember whether she had seen it or not. As for Lavazza commercial, 8 out of 25 people had already seen it on television, 1 of them expressing frustration. Once again, 1 said she did not remember whether or not she had seen it. Finally, 12 people out of 25 had already seen the commercial created by Conad; 3 of them felt annoyed (2 had previously see it both on television and on YouTube, and 1 only on television). 1 said she did not remember where she saw it but did not feel annoyed.

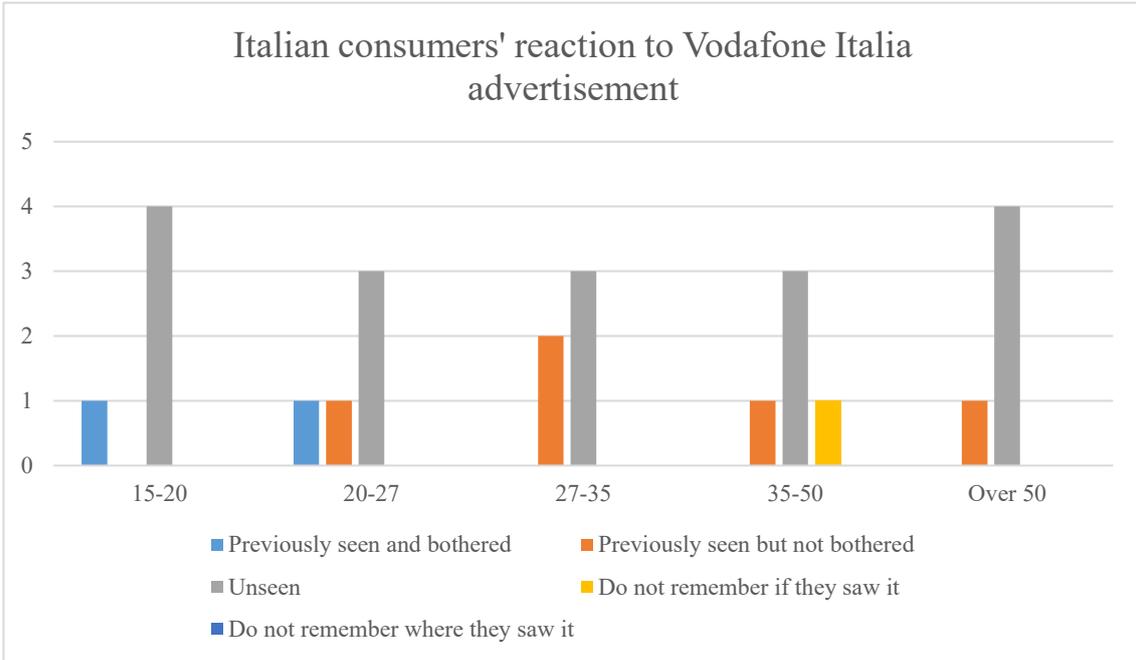


Figure 3.4

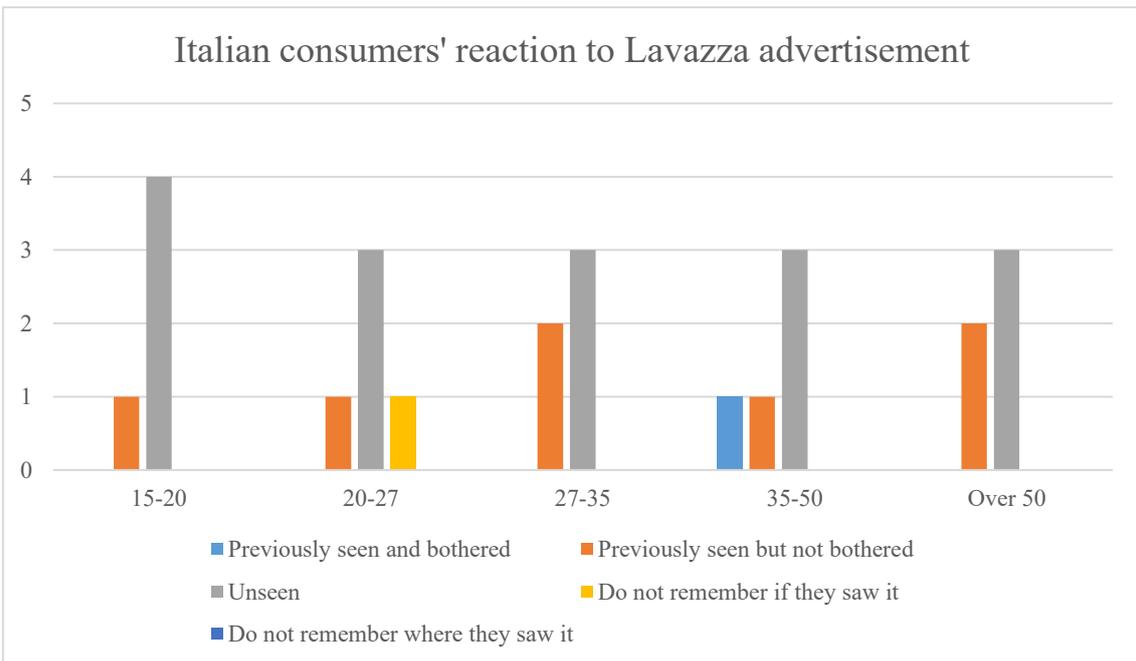


Figure 3.5

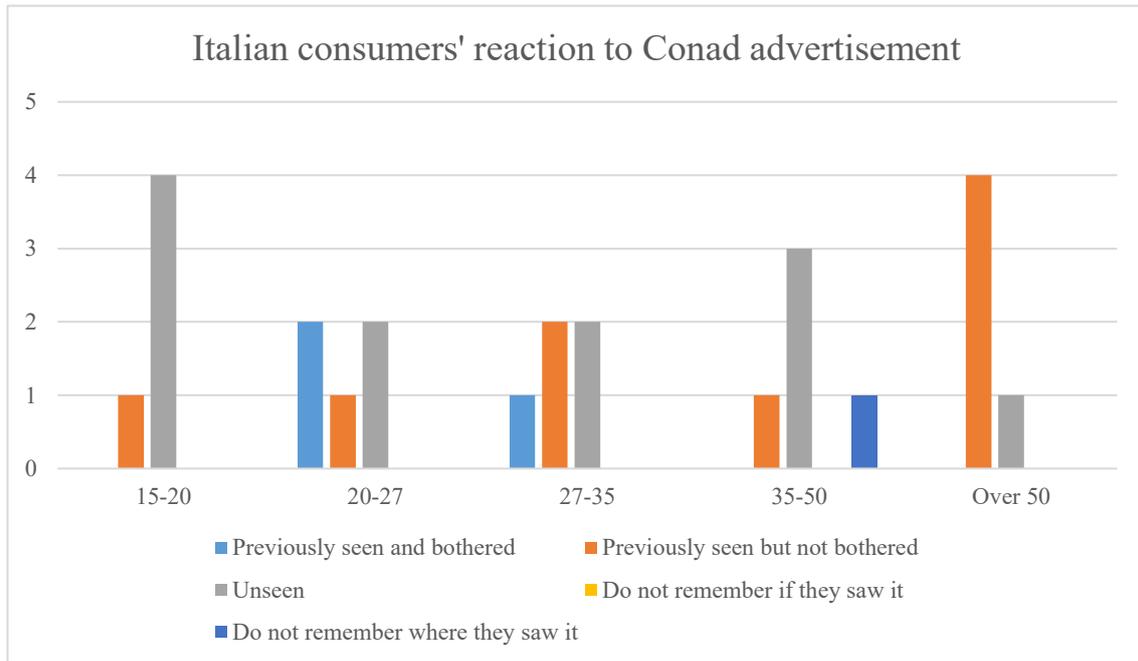


Figure 3.6

However, there was no significant difference between the answers provided by people who had already seen the videos and those who had never seen them. Indeed, the majority of interviewees demonstrated that they paid attention to the messages launched during the quarantine, to the extent that they stated that they would have preferred to receive different messages. In fact, 14 people appreciated the messages of hope launched by Italian brands, while 6 believe that the brands should have represented more realistic and concrete situations. Moreover, 1 of the respondents stated that he appreciated some messages more and some others less. Finally, 4 people do not watch much television and therefore pay little attention to promotional messages or have not seen them repeatedly to be able to express their point of view.

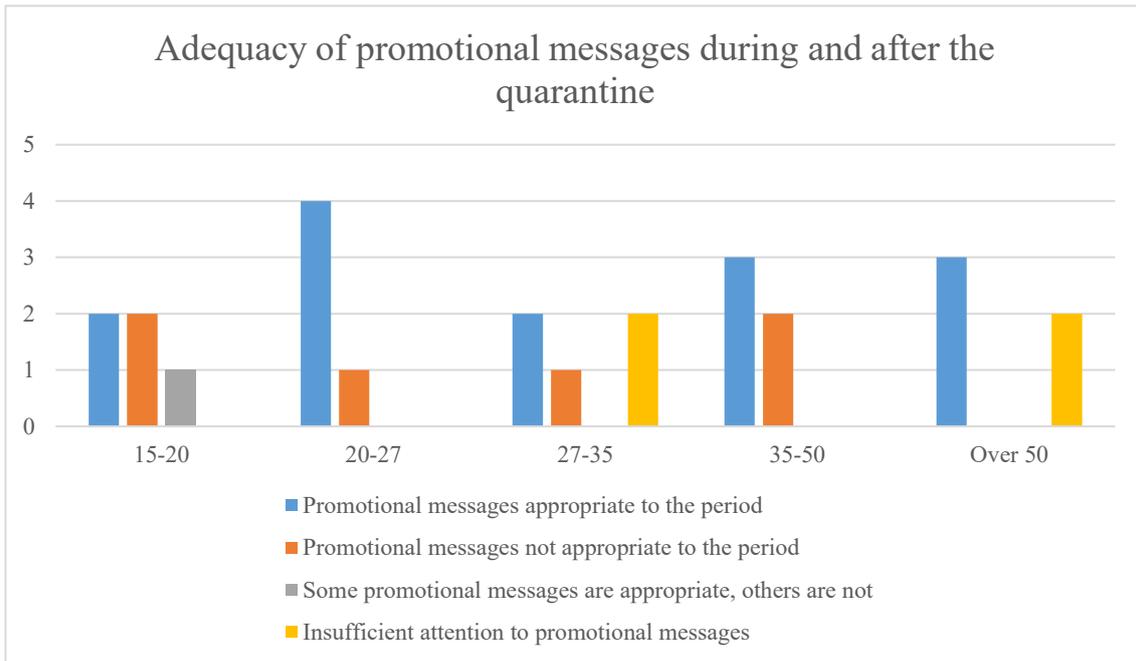


Figure 3.7

Concerning the messages that are being studied in this project, the one launched by Lavazza is the most successful in terms of beauty (16 people out of 25) and emotionality (19 people out of 25). However, 6 out of 25 people preferred Conad commercial, and 2 found it emotional. Moreover, 3 out of 25 people preferred Vodafone Italia commercial, and 2 found it exciting. There were also 2 people who said they were not moved by any of the three videos.

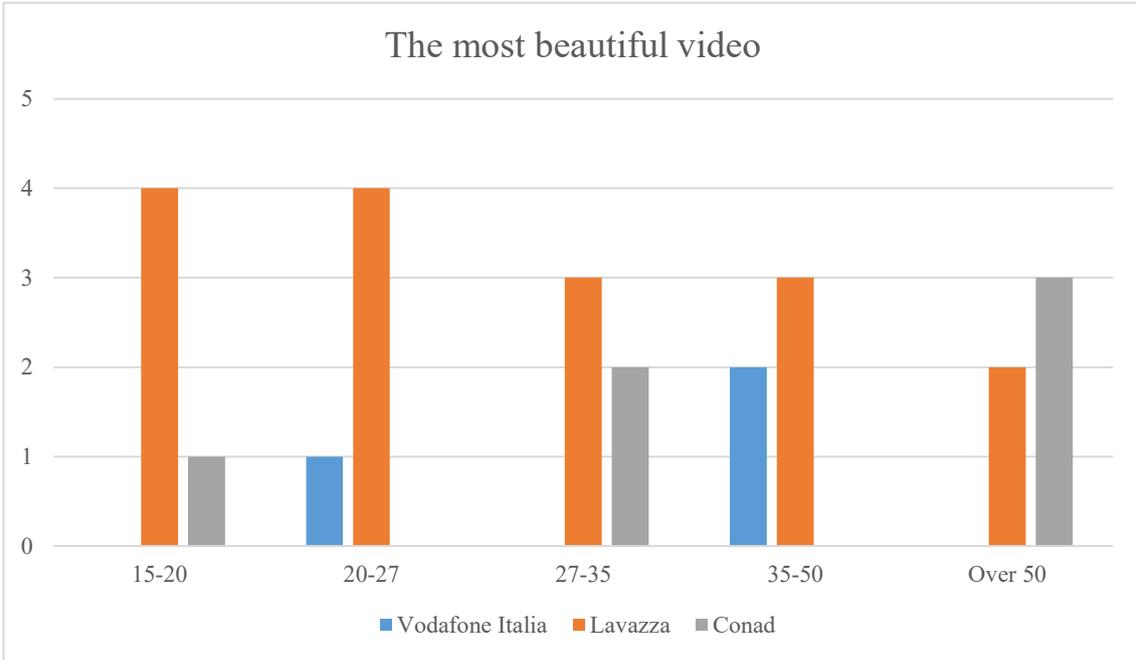


Figure 3.8

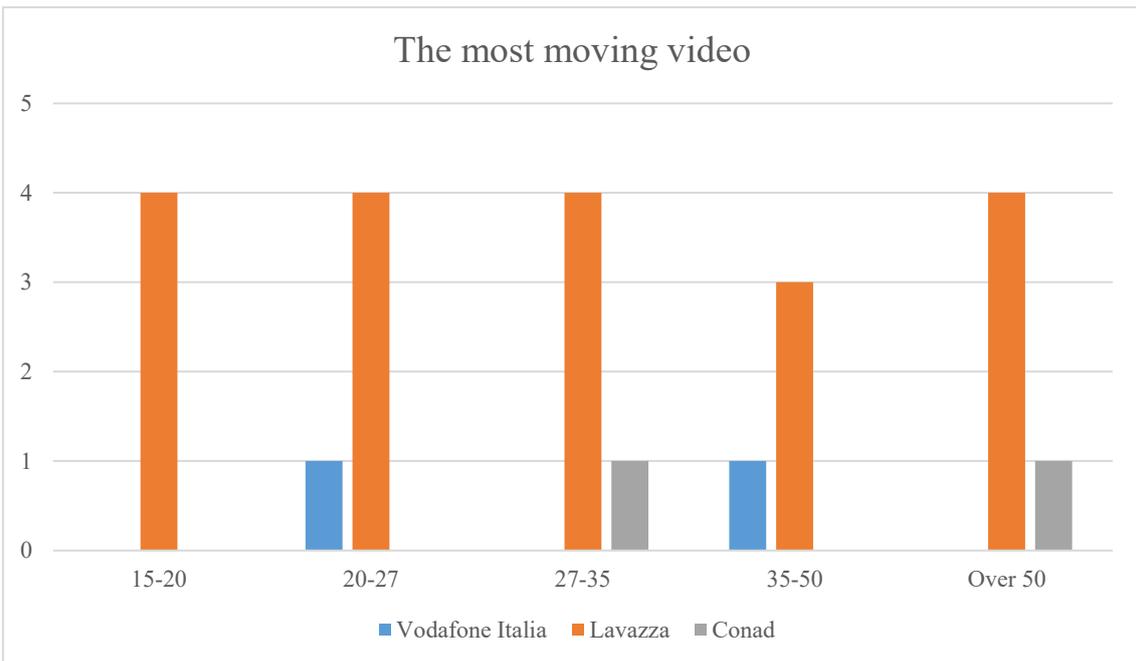


Figure 3.9

Furthermore, the video that, according to most of the interviewees (16 people out of 25), has a more evident commercial purpose than the others is the one created by Conad. However, 4 people attribute this feature to Vodafone Italia, and 5 people to both companies. In this respect, it is interesting to note that, despite these responses, 14 out of 25 people said that none of the three advertisements aroused their interest in buying their products or using their services; 8 out of 25 people attribute this function to Conad, 3 out of 25 people attribute it to Lavazza.

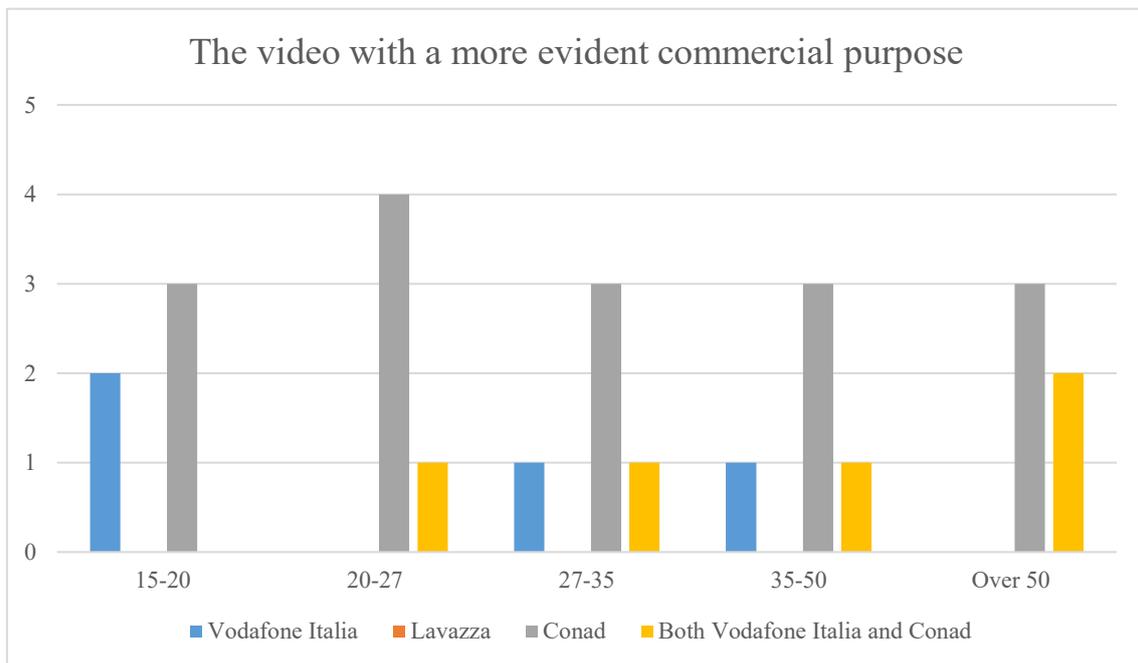


Figure 3.10

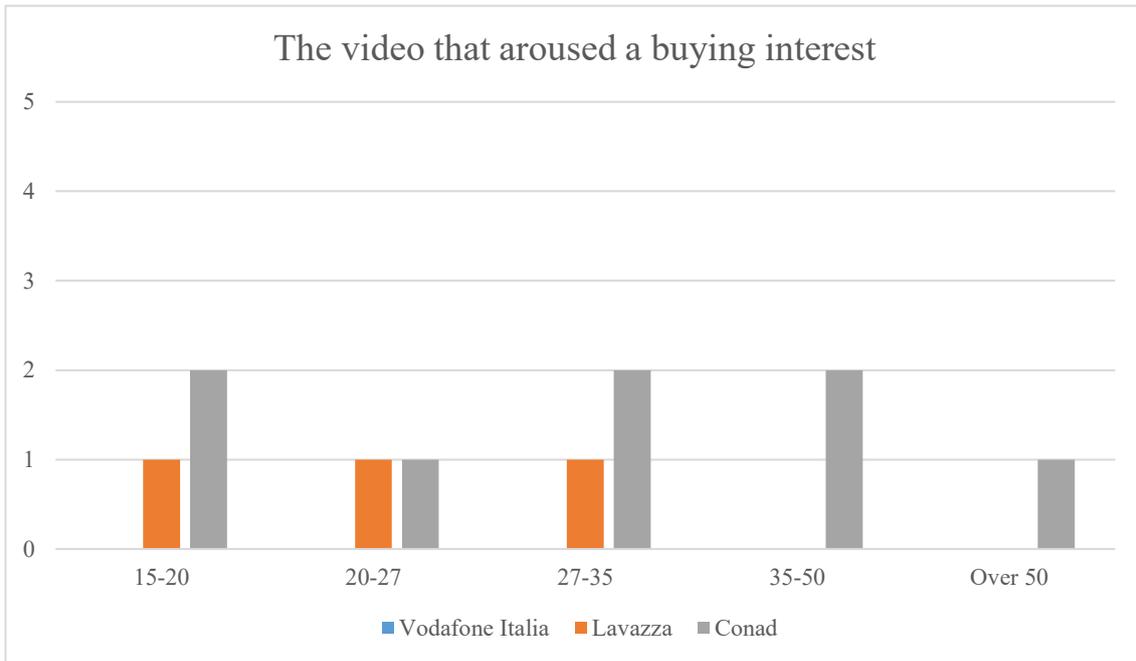


Figure 3.11

The three videos, produced by Vodafone Italia, Lavazza, and Conad, were proposed as examples of the corporate storytelling approach during the three phases of the medical emergency. They have aroused several reactions among the interviewees belonging to different age ranges.

3.4.1. Vodafone Italia

Vodafone Italia produced a story which, according to the majority of the interviewees (17 out of 25), is a faithful representation of life in quarantine. In fact, just 7 out of 25 of them claimed to have partially identified themselves in the actions performed by the protagonists of the video. These are aged between 15 and 20 years and between 55 and 65 years, as shown in the graphic below:

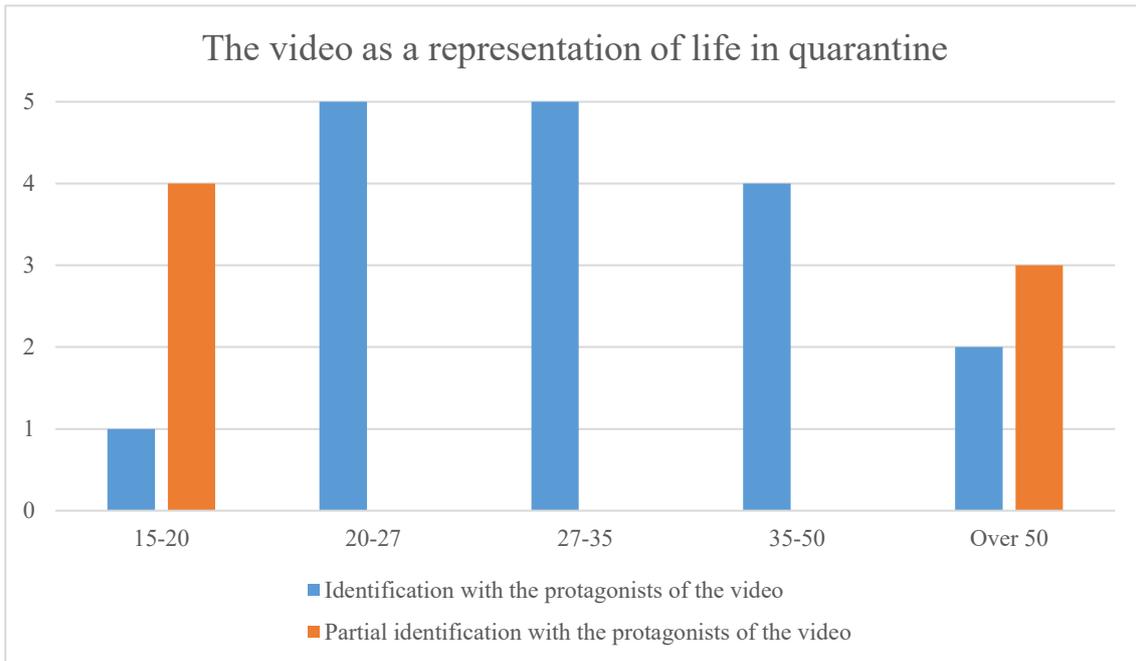


Figure 3.12

The above-mentioned representation is based on a message of hope launched to Italian citizens, which was recognised by 17 out of 25 participants. They are aged between 15 and 65, with a lower percentage between 35 and 50 years.

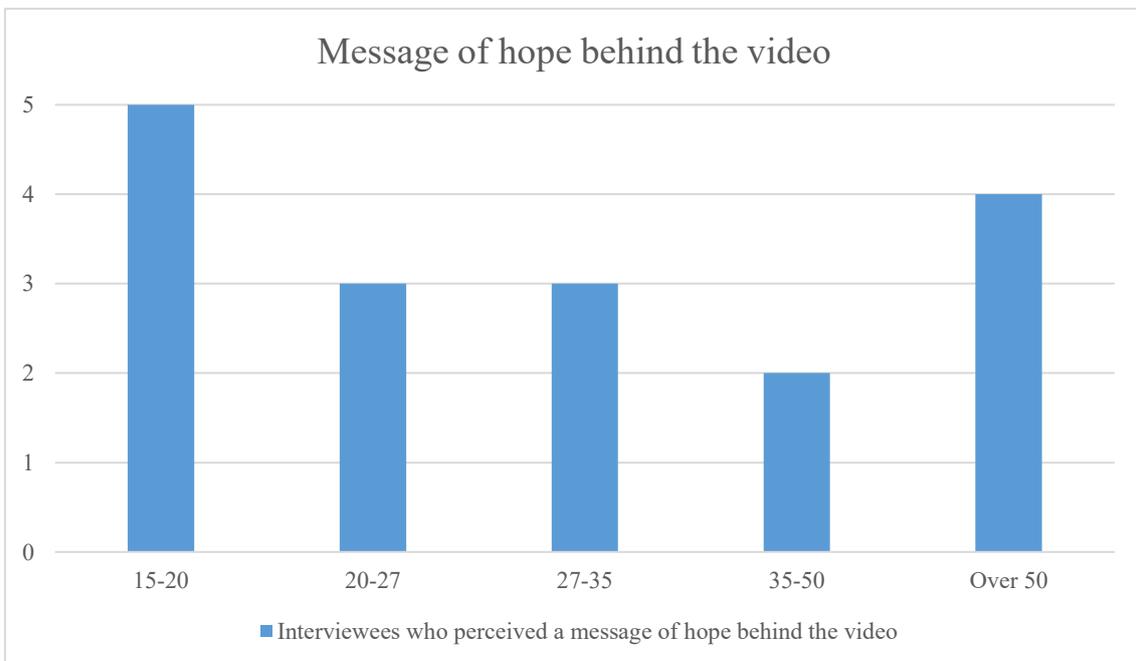


Figure 3.13

Furthermore, the interviewees were asked to describe the feelings they felt while watching the video. In this regard, it is interesting to note that, with the exception of 8 people out of 25, who stated that they did not feel anything, the others used the most disparate terms to describe their feelings: “pleasantness”, “positivity (for the power of connection)”, “sadness”, “boredom”, “memory and fear of experiencing lockdown again”, “nostalgia”, “strange memory of a difficult period”, “beauty of staying connected”, “melancholy”, “closeness”, “joy and serenity among people”, “dynamism”, “annoyance for loud music”, “good publicity”, “indifference”. In particular, two people used the term “memory”, two “positivity”, and two “sadness”. Therefore, a contrast emerged between the melancholy caused by the memory of the days spent in quarantine and the cheerfulness and dynamism transmitted by the protagonists of the video.

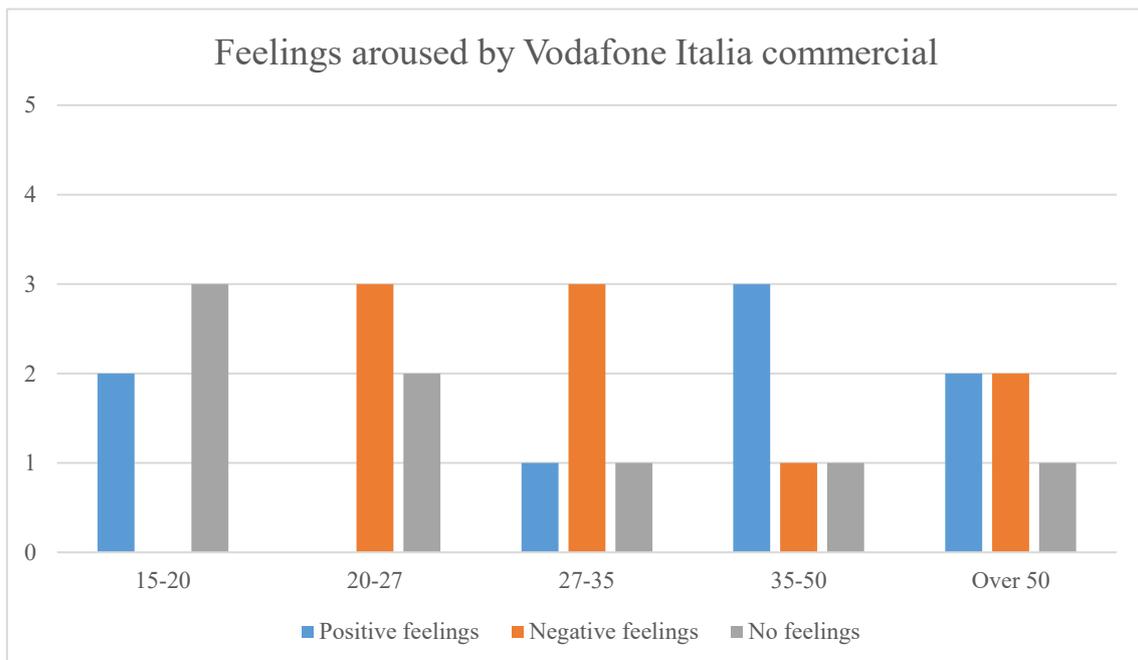


Figure 3.14

However, just 5 out of 25 interviewees are Vodafone Italia clients, and none of them is aged between 20 and 27 or 50 and 65 years old. In this regard, the most relevant figure concerns the 20 people who are not and do not want to become Vodafone Italia clients, even after watching the video. Some of them claimed to be loyal to another telephone operator, others stated that they changed operator in the presence of competitive offers,

and others expressed to have been unsatisfied with their previous experience with Vodafone Italia.

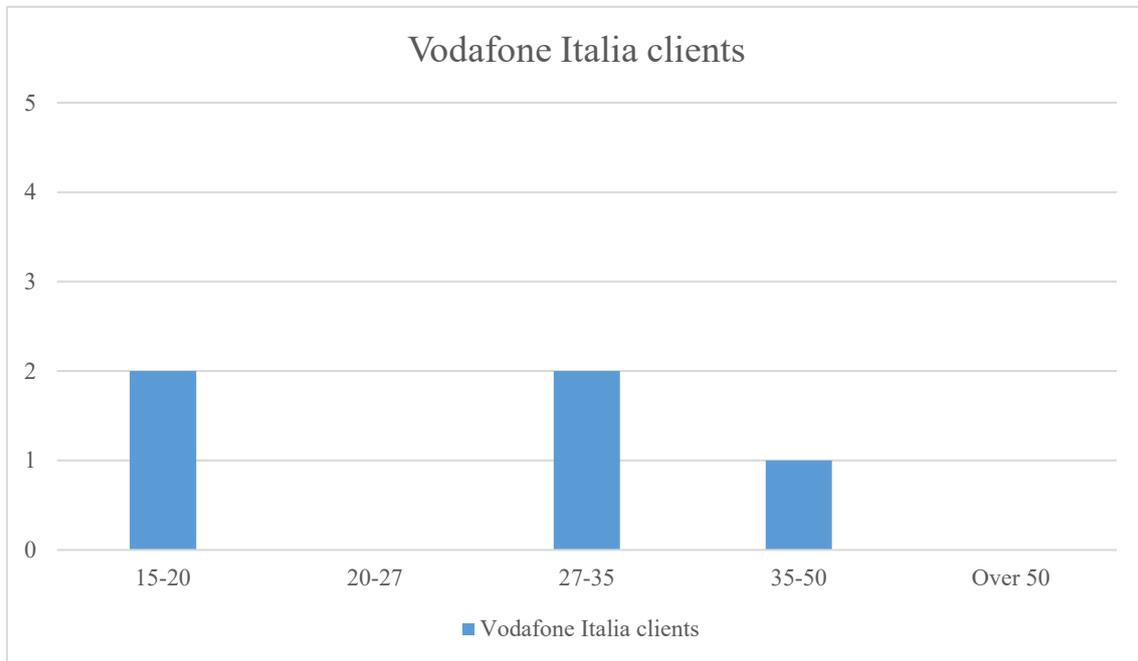


Figure 3.15

3.4.2. Lavazza

The video created by Lavazza during the global pandemic launches a message that is considered excessively positive by 5 out of 25 interviewees, who are all aged between 20 and 50.

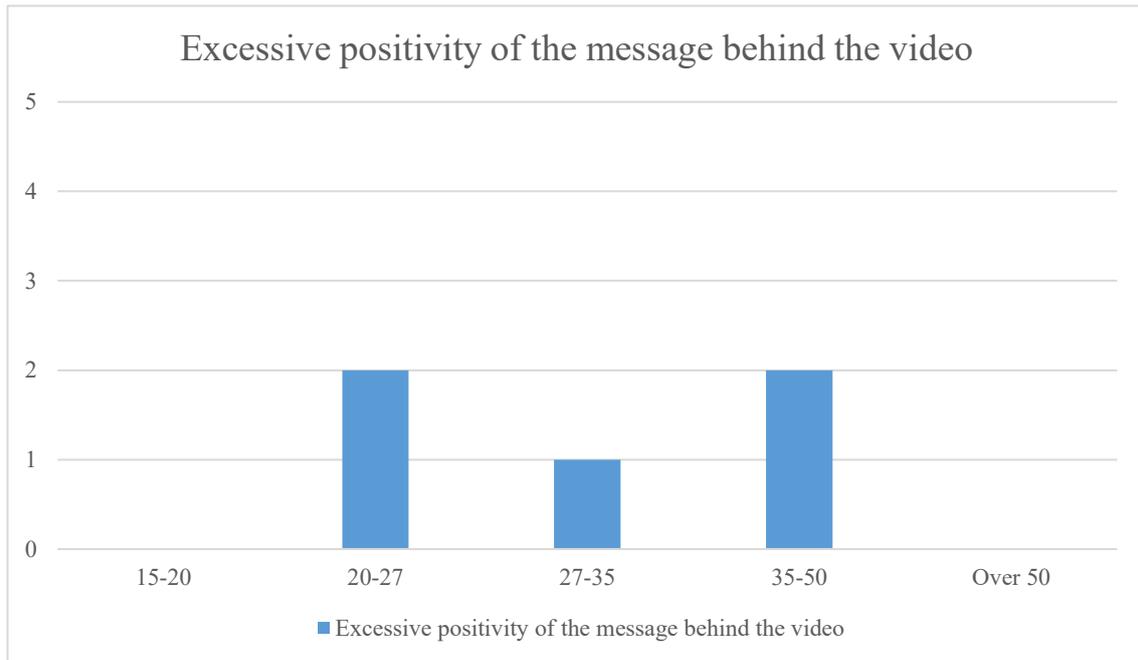


Figure 3.16

In fact, the video moved the interviewees to the extent that only 2 out of 25 said they did not feel anything by watching it. Most of the sensations are positive: “power”, “happiness”, “hope”, “positivity”, “empathy”, “importance of the values of respect and equality”, “tenderness”, “strength”, and “reflection on the topics dealt with”. However, there were also negative impressions: “reflection on how backward Italy is in terms of equality”, “confusion concerning the language used”, “sorrow for the current situation”, “indifference”, “anxiety caused by the tone of voice”, “sadness”.

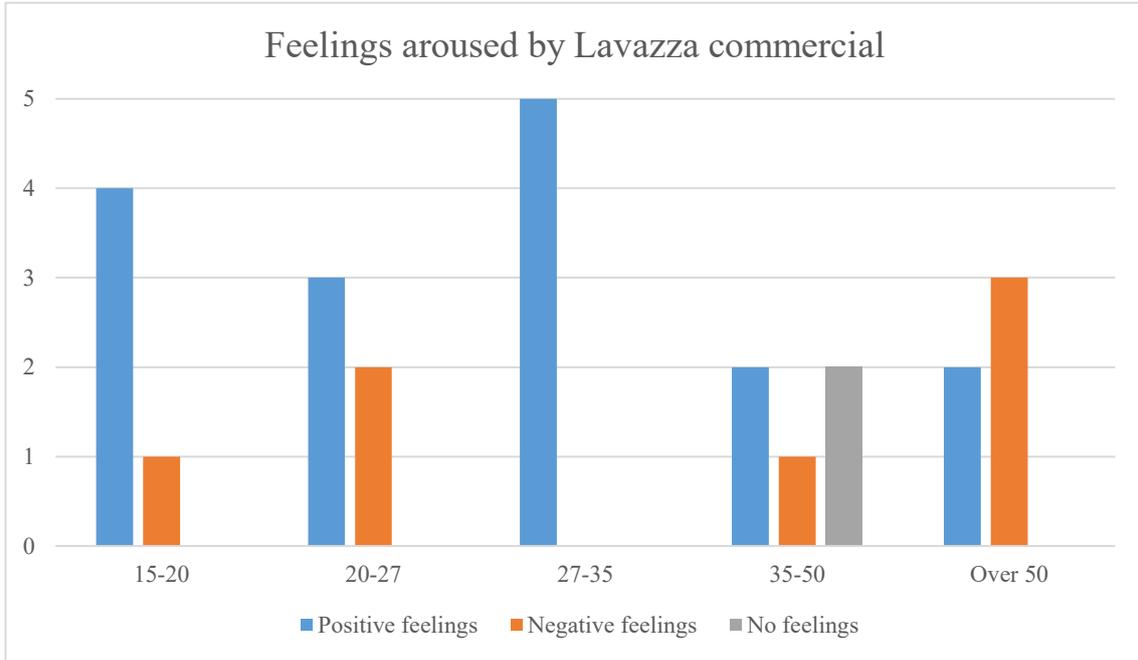


Figure 3.17

In addition, the interviews showed that 15 out of 25 people are regular Lavazza coffee consumers, however, none of them belongs to the 15-20 age range and a minority is aged between 27 and 35.

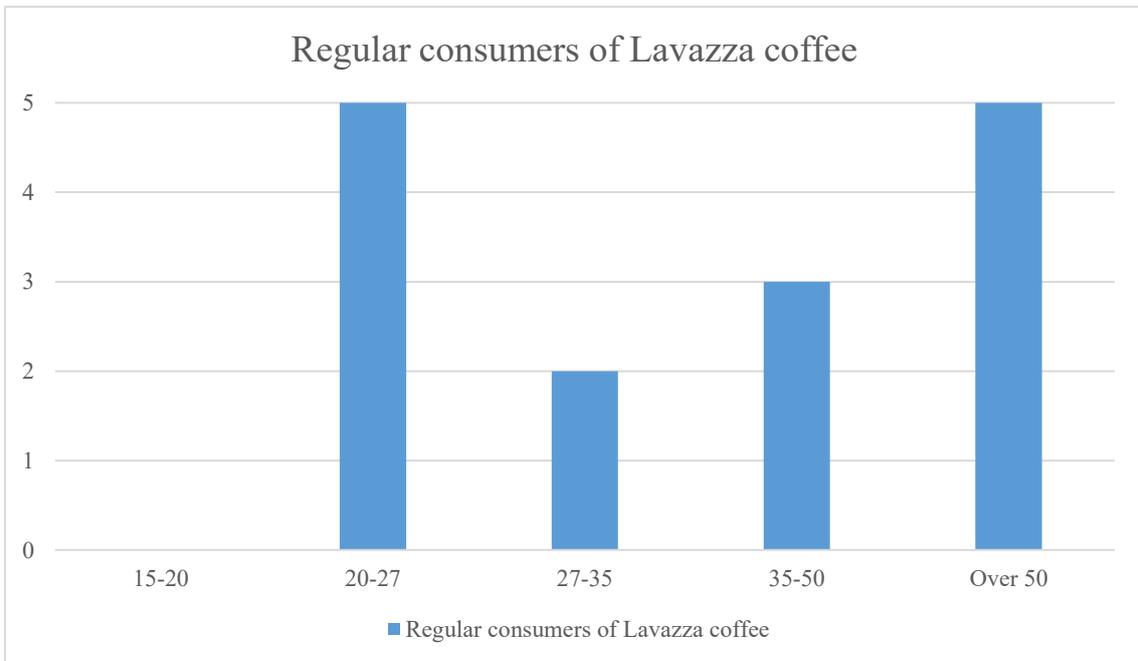


Figure 3.18

Among regular coffee consumers, 2 said they only buy Lavazza coffee, while the others said they choose coffee according to several factors: the majority of them according to their personal taste (7 out of 25), 4 according to the brand, 2 according to the values for money and 2 according to a balance between their personal taste and the price of the coffee. Then, there were 4 people who said they choose coffee after evaluating, respectively, the relationship between brand and price, the relationship between brand and personal taste, the relationship between brand, price and personal taste, and the offers. In addition, 3 people are not used to go grocery shopping and 1 is not used to purchase coffee when she goes grocery shopping, but if she had to choose it, she would try to find a balance between brand, price and taste. In particular, the majority of the interviewees aged between 15 and 20 is not used to go grocery shopping and therefore does not buy any kind of coffee, while the majority of people belonging to the age ranges 20-27, 27-35 and 55-65 does not choose coffee according to the brand, as opposed to those aged between 35 and 50.

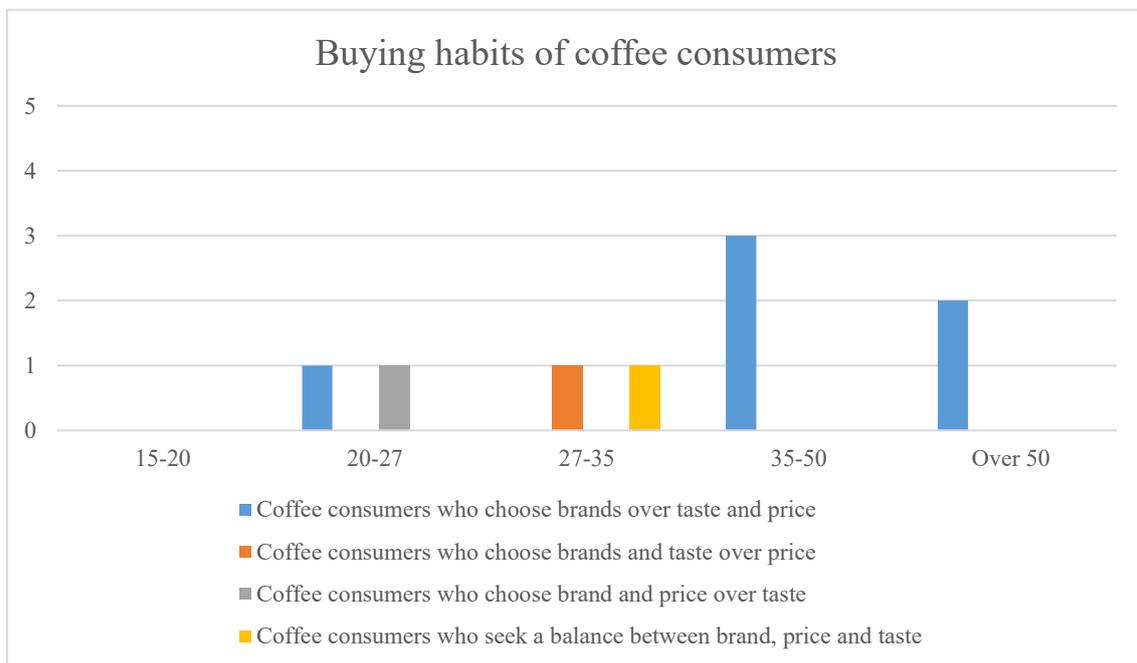


Figure 3.19

3.4.3. Conad

The video produced by Conad provoked a balanced amount of positive and negative feelings. Indeed, 11 people out of 25 stated that they did not experience any sensations and 3 asserted that they remained indifferent in front of the advertisement. However, 11 people described the feeling they experienced in positive terms: “agreement”, “cheerfulness (due to the music)”, “recovery”, “positivity”, “sense of belonging”, “importance of promoting the country”, “normality”, “everyday life”, “reliability”, “concreteness”, and “closeness to the current situation”.

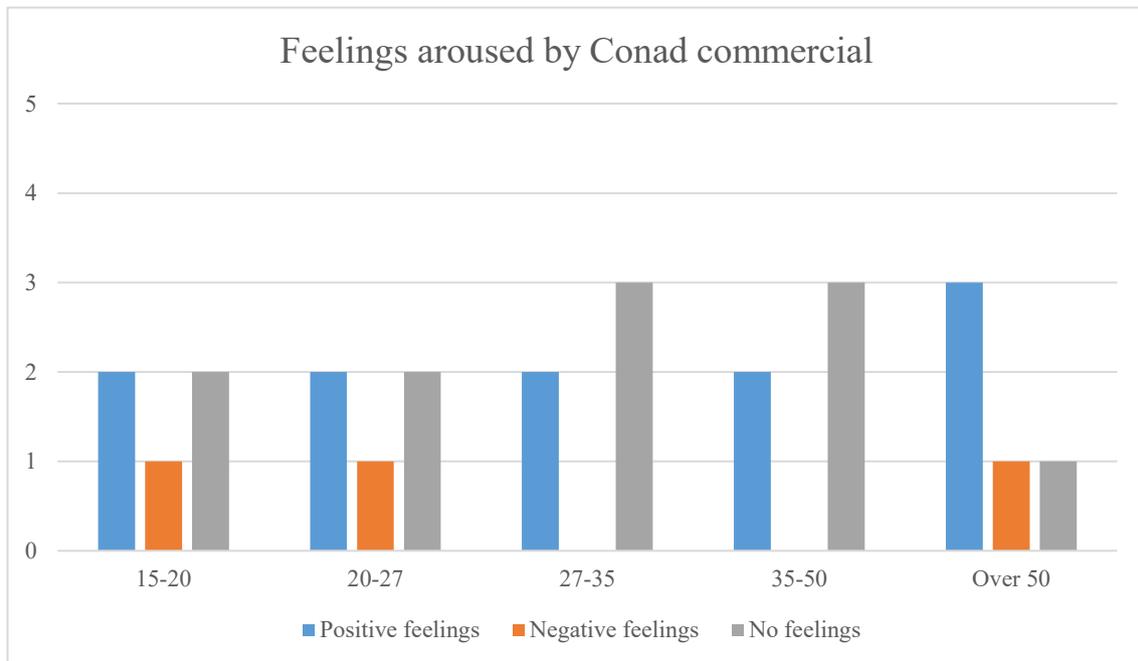


Figure 3.20

In addition, the interviews showed that 15 out of 25 people used to go grocery shopping at Conad and, except for one of them, to buy Conad products. On the contrary, 1 person out of 25 admitted never to go grocery shopping (but his mother is a Conad client) and 3 people out of 25 to occasionally go grocery shopping at Conad and buy Conad products. Moreover, everyone stated that they were not influenced by the video, with the exception of 2 out of 25 people: one will do her next shopping at Conad, the other will buy Conad products if she happens to go there. This is probably due to the

awareness, raised by some consumers, that buying Conad products is a way to support the Italian economy. In particular, the majority of interviewees belonging to the age ranges 15-20 and 20-27, and all those over 50, are used to shop at Conad and buy Conad products, regularly or occasionally.

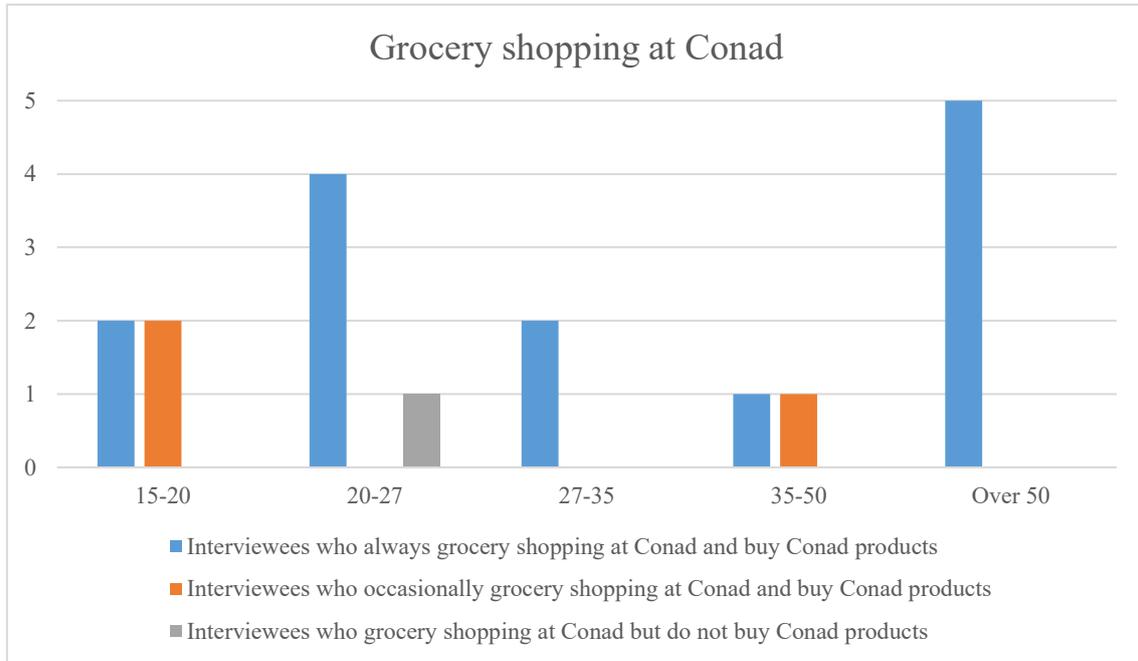


Figure 3.21

Finally, 18 out of 25 people always buy Italian products, 3 out of 25 people buy them occasionally, 1 out of 25 people, aged between 15 and 20, let his mother buy them for the whole family. In this regard, most of the interviewees belonging to this age range, as well as to the 27-35 one, stated that they always buy Italian products, while the majority of those belonging to the 20-27 age range buy them occasionally. Concerning the interviewees aged over 50, all of them is used to buy Italian products.

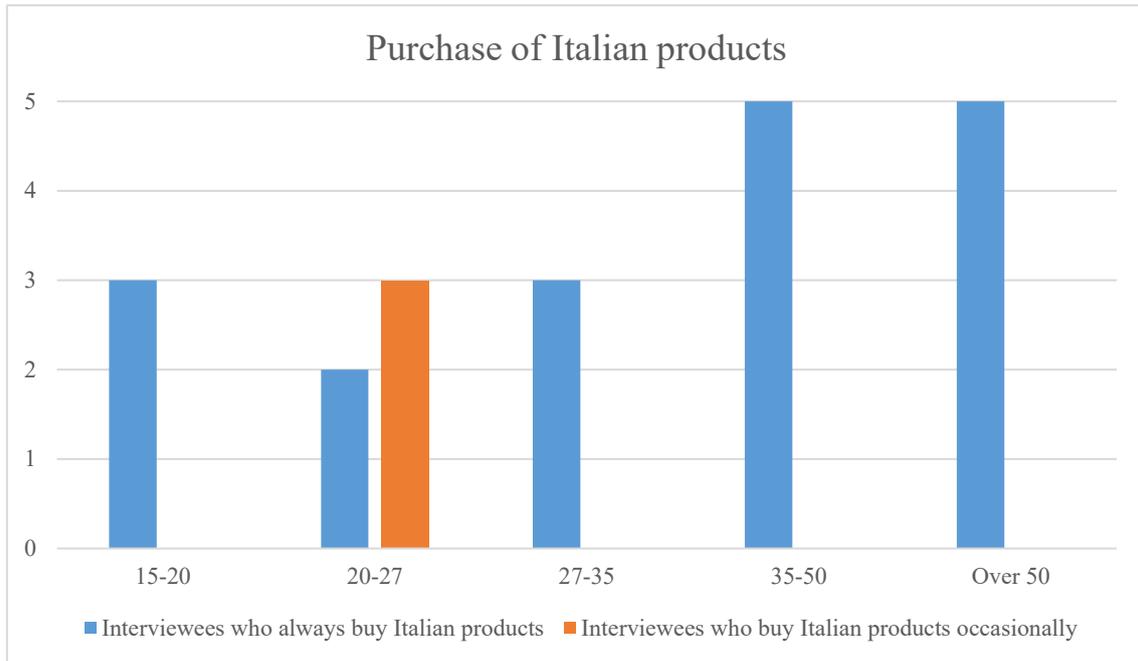


Figure 3.22

3.4.4. Conclusion

Consumers proved to have consolidated buying habits. In fact, in addition to not being influenced by advertising, 23 out of 25 of them maintained the same brand purchases during and after quarantine. Therefore, only 2 out of 25 interviewees between the ages of 20 and 27 behaved in peculiar ways: one of them discovered new companies through social networks and wanted to try their products; the other one became addicted to brands that needed to buy during the quarantine in a supermarket close to home, as a replacement of her favourite ones. Moreover, one person aged between 25 and 35 years old focused on the fact that, although she had not changed her buying habits, she was forced to buy masks, gloves, and hand sanitisers; objects that she did not need before. On the contrary, after the quarantine, a person between 35 and 50 years old returned to buy all those products that were not available during the lockdown.

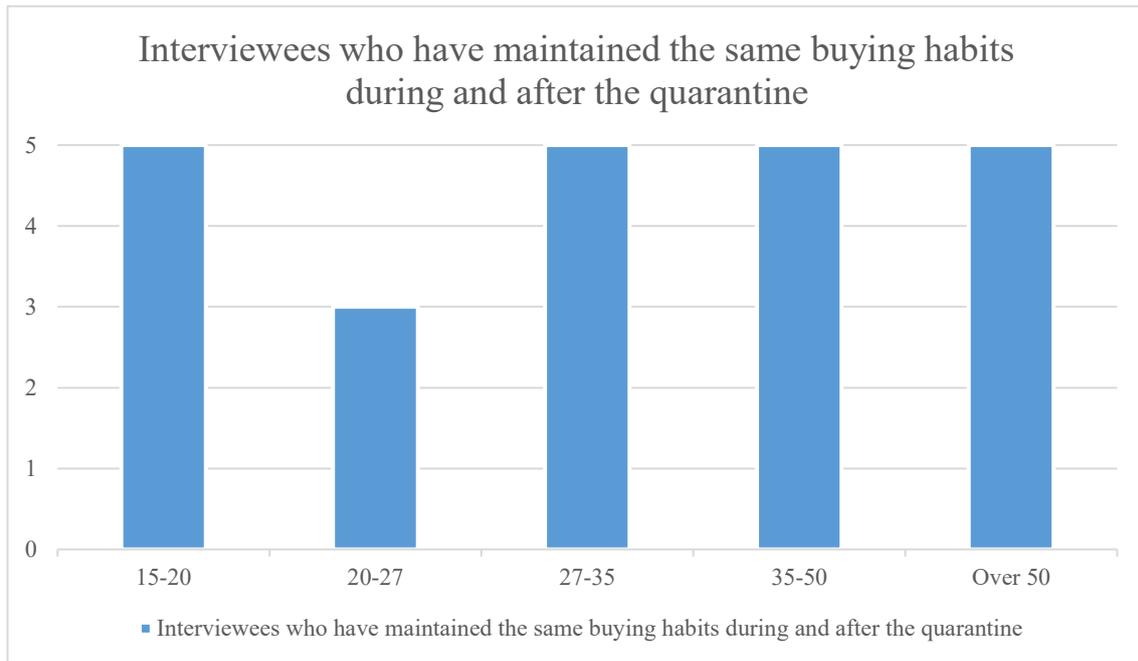


Figure 3.23

The data illustrated above were confirmed by the reactions of the interviewees to the three videos that were proposed. In particular, as already mentioned, most of them believe that the video created by Conad has a stronger commercial purpose than the others, and 8 of them asserted that it is the video that aroused the most their buying interest compared to the others. However, the video only managed to influence two people between the ages of 27 and 35; all the others said they did not want to change their buying habits after watching it. Therefore, the data on the purchase interest is probably a consequence of the focus on the company, the points of sale, and the products offered by Conad advertisement: when watching it, 8 out of 25 people felt pushed towards buying, but not in concrete terms. Similarly, 3 people said that the video produced by Lavazza aroused their buying interest, mainly because it was not a direct call to action. However, the video did not really change their habits: those who were regular consumers will remain loyal to it, those who were not will not become regular consumers; everyone will continue to buy coffee according to the parameters they consider most appropriate. As far as Vodafone Italia is concerned, on the contrary, the interviewees stated that the video did not arouse any purchase interest on their part. This is consistent with the fact that none of them wants to become a Vodafone Italia client after watching it.

Generally speaking, the majority of the interviewees belonging to different age ranges proved to pay little attention to advertisements, since they had never seen those proposed as case studies. However, the data do not show different answers compared to those who had already seen them. Nevertheless, the majority of the interviewees noticed an increase in time spent on social media and/or in front of the television during the quarantine, and they also spent a long time at home during the period immediately after the national lockdown due to study, work or leisure reasons. Thus, the fact that they pay little attention to advertisements is principally due to their regular use of the “skip ad” function to skip advertisements not related to their interests on social networks, and to their habit of changing channels during television commercial breaks. However, most interviewees showed that they paid attention to the messages of hope launched during and after the quarantine: some thought they were appropriate for the period, while others would have preferred to receive more concrete messages. Thus, in addition to awareness, consumers play an active role and are managers of their own interests and feelings. This is evident in the reactions to the three videos proposed: Lavazza commercial is the one that was liked and that moved the most, but there are people who preferred and were moved by the concreteness expressed by Conad and others by experiencing again the moments lived in quarantine through the video created by Vodafone Italia. In this regard, although most of the interviewees, despite not being Vodafone Italia clients, identified themselves in the actions and attitudes of the protagonists of the telephone company commercial and appreciated the message of hope that was launched, some did not have a positive approach to the story told. Similarly, most of the interviewees, regardless of the fact that they are regular Lavazza coffee consumers, did not believe that the message launched by the company, which moved them, was excessively positive, but others experienced negative feelings by watching it. The video proposed by Conad, instead, is the most recent and deserves further consideration: many interviewees feel involved in the video because it offers a concrete representation of the current reality, characterized by a partial recovery of normality. Therefore, although it has a more evident commercial purpose than the others, it has provoked an almost equal number of positive and negative reactions.

In other words, consumers always have the last word: they decide what they like, what to be influenced and excited by, and what to purchase; whether an advertisement is

liked or not is independent of whether a person is a customer and regardless of his/her buying habits. A Vodafone Italia customer does not necessarily love the brand advertising, and a person who has had a negative experience with the brand in the past does not necessarily dislike its storytelling. In this regard, the structure of the video and its narration, combined with its ability to convey emotions, plays a decisive role.

In conclusion, advertising has no influence on interviewees because they have decided not to let themselves be influenced. Therefore, this study has shown that storytelling created by Italian companies in the age of Covid-19 was not efficient from the emotional point of view, because it did not arouse a buying interest. However, sometimes it has contributed to establishing a relationship of trust with consumers: this is the case of Conad, which, according to some interviewees, conveyed reliability. Nevertheless, consumers are aware and confident of their purchase choices. Everyone can decide and their choice comes from letting themselves be transported or not by emotions.

3.5. Research limitations

The phenomenon described and analysed in the previous sections needs further investigation by specialists, since it has some limitations. The first one is the scarce availability of time, due to the way this paper was developed and submitted, which did not allow to observe the behaviour of Italian consumers, that is constantly changing, until the end of the period of the virus circulation. The second one is the non-statistically representative sample, used to make a purely qualitative analysis with the aim of understanding the phenomenon rather than explaining it. However, the data obtained from the transcripts of the interviews are limited, due to the use of a restricted and undifferentiated sample of people coming from four Italian regions: Marche, Abruzzo, Veneto, and Friuli Venezia Giulia. In fact, although the answers are quite long and justified, they are not sufficient to assess the actual behaviour of the average Italian consumer during and after the quarantine. In addition, the choice of three advertisements is another limitation to the research, especially because all interviewees were already familiar with the brands used as case studies and, therefore, may have been influenced by their previous consumer experiences. For instance, many people said they did not want to become Vodafone Italia clients because they previously had a contract with the

company but the service did not meet their needs. Similarly, many of the interviewees had not seen the videos on television or social networks; otherwise their answers would have probably been different, due to the greater attention paid on the different stories narrated by the companies. The one offered by Lavazza, in particular, was not understood by everyone due to a lack of knowledge of the English language.

Thus, the validity of the conclusions is limited and the topic needs further study. In the future, a larger sample could be created, composed of people equally distributed throughout Italy and possibly grouped by regions. Moreover, different results could have been obtained if the study was aimed exclusively at regular consumers of certain brands in order to have a sincerer opinion, or at people who have, for study or work reasons, knowledge of marketing and communication. However, in the short term, it would be necessary to interview the same people again in order to understand the evolution of their behaviours and point of views, considering that consumers' habits are constantly evolving.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to examine how Italian consumers reacted to corporate storytelling during the global pandemic. Their attitude has been analysed from a qualitative point of view through twenty-five interviews structured into general questions aimed at assessing the lifestyle and consumption habits of the interviewees, and specific questions aimed at understanding their point of view about the proposed case studies, namely Vodafone Italia, Lavazza, and Conad. These companies created videos that were taken as examples to analyse the evolution of corporate storytelling during the three phases of the global pandemic and that were compared to those produced by other organisations. As a matter of fact, corporate storytelling is an ancient phenomenon whose origin and evolution has been extensively described in order to lay the foundations of this research. However, over the last few months, the topic has been discussed again due to the need for companies to adapt their stories to the current medical emergency. Thus, before proceeding with the interviews, 9 advertisements (3 for each phase), created by 9 different Italian companies, were analysed with the aim of assessing analogies and differences among them. Indeed, a comparative analysis revealed the main features of Italian corporate storytelling during the age of Covid-19. The focus, in particular, was placed on the subject of the message, the images, the tone of voice, and the hashtags used. Therefore, the passage from resilience, to hope, to recovery has been highlighted, as well as the passage from images of empty cities and people working at home, to those of people who take off their masks and return to live and work, while the shutters of shops and factories rise. This allowed to survey the three videos that were considered to be the most representative of the different phases and to reach the pre-established micro-targets. These concern the definition of consumers' profiles according to age, profession, and lifestyle (before and after the national lockdown), the understanding of their propensity to pay attention to or skip advertising on the different media, the demonstration of the active role that they have acquired over the years, and the ability they have to manage their emotions. In addition, an attempt has been made to show whether corporate storytelling succeeds or not in increasing sales and establishing trusting relationships between brands and consumers.

The interview was addressed to 25 Italian consumers, 5 for each of the following age ranges: 15-20, 20-27, 27-35, 35-50, and over 50. They were conducted in the month of August, immediately after the period considered in the analysis of the pandemic situation, from its origin to 31 July 2020. The results were collected separately by age groups, analysed, and then compared, using histograms, to draw the final considerations. First of all, it was found that interviewees reside in different cities or villages and lead diverse lives since 9 of them are students, 1 is a recent graduate, 13 are workers, and 2 are retired. However, 24 of them share the fact that they spent the quarantine in their residence, and 20 of them changed some of their habits during that period due to the reduction of possible activities to do. For this reason, the majority of the interviewees noticed an increase in the time spent in front of the television and on social networks, and still spends a lot of time at home, especially for study reasons, but also for work or leisure. As a consequence, 23 out of 25 people stated that they are bothered by promotional messages, especially on social networks. Indeed, the majority of them had never seen the video proposed during the interview, since they are not used to pay attention to advertisements but rather to skip them. However, they were interested in the messages of hope launched by the brands during the quarantine, as most of them said they liked this kind of communication, while a minority would have preferred to see more concrete representations.

Concerning the videos provided as models of the corporate storytelling during the phases of the medical emergency, they provoked similar opinions among the interviewees belonging to different age ranges. In particular, the advertisement that received the most positive opinions in terms of beauty and emotions was the one created by Lavazza, while the one that conveyed a more evident commercial purpose than the others was Conad commercial. In addition, the majority of the interviewees found the messages launched by Lavazza and Vodafone Italia particularly appropriate for the quarantine period, when Italians needed to be positive and not feel alone. Their feelings alternate between the sadness and melancholy generated by the memory of the national lockdown, and the happiness of being in a new pandemic phase. In this regard, it is interesting to note that these opinions are independent of the consumption habits of the interviewees, since only 5 people are Vodafone Italia clients and only 2 of them exclusively buy Lavazza coffee when they go to the supermarket; their video judgment parameters go beyond their buying

habits, and vice versa. The same applies to the video created by Conad, which generated a fair number of positive and negative impressions, despite the fact that most of the interviewees were already Conad clients and regular consumers of their products. As a consequence, 14 out of 25 people said that these videos did not arouse any buying interest in them.

The findings of this investigation suggest that corporate storytelling created by Italian companies during the global pandemic was not efficient from the emotional point of view. Indeed, although Conad succeeded in inspiring confidence in some of the interviewees, the majority of them have a responsible and habitual attitude towards purchasing decisions. As a consequence, even the video created by Conad, which has a more evident commercial purpose compared to the others, has not managed to influence the interviewees, most of whom have maintained their buying habits both during and after the quarantine. This may be due to the fact that, although the majority of them currently spends a long time at home and, during quarantine, has increased the time spent in front of the television and on social networks, they are not used to observe and listen to advertisements. In fact, everyone has agreed to use the “skip ad” function when it is available. However, this statement is not in harmony with the attention paid to the messages of hope launched by the brands during the global pandemic: all the interviewees gave their opinion, most of which are positive. Therefore, the awareness is complemented by the ability to make decisions and dominate emotions, which renders consumers' judgement independent from storytelling. Indeed, their point of view about a company is totally unrelated to the promotion the company makes of itself and its products and/or services, and vice versa. For instance, some people stated that they had a negative experience with Vodafone Italia, others asserted that they did not want to become clients of this telephone company, but this did not affect their opinion about the attractiveness and emotiveness of the video released during the quarantine. In fact, their points of view show that narrative plays a fundamental role when it is emotional and detached from commercial purposes. Consumers want to feel represented by brands, not pushed to buy their products or services. Therefore, if the advertisements proposed did not arouse a buying interest in most of the interviewees, it means that those 25 people had decided a priori not to let themselves be influenced; maybe they got excited and praised the beauty of the story, but they are not willing to change their buying habits.

Nowadays, the global pandemic in general, and the quarantine in particular, has intensified the dynamism of corporate storytelling, which is not a recent but rather a constantly changing phenomenon. In fact, the national lockdown imposed by the Italian government represented a period of uncertainty and fear, which leads Italians to need positivity and to be moved by a simple but not trivial promotional message. However, despite the problems, and perhaps due to them, Italian consumers remained loyal to their buying habits and, in some cases, to their lifestyles. For this reason, some interviewees claimed that they have not increased the time spent in front of the television and on social networks during the quarantine. Nevertheless, it should be investigated whether this is a consequence of a distracted and narrow perception of reality. Being locked at home 24 hours per day or going out to work in order to guarantee the protection of citizens, led everyone to review their priorities, even though the results of the interviews revealed that the new humanity for which everyone had hoped actually never existed. Companies are well aware of this situation, as can be perceived by observing the diversity of the advertisements proposed during the three consecutive pandemic phases. In fact, initially, they did not want to increase sales, but rather to stay close to Italians. However, subsequently, they acted with the hope that their messages would be associated with their brand when making a purchase decision instead of another.

Further research should be undertaken to establish the future relevance and impact of corporate storytelling. As a matter of fact, the lack of time, the choice of three advertisements as examples, and the interviewees' familiarity with the brands proposed, represent significant limitations to the research. In addition, the sample used is neither diversified nor statistically representative, even though it has provided some interesting ideas on the topic. Nowadays, what is certain is that consumers are fully aware of themselves and their purchase choices, to the extent that it is useless trying to push them towards a product, since they will be the ones to go for it when they perceive its beauty, functionality, and affinity to their own interests. They will presumably ignore advertisements for the rest of their life, but they will develop a proactive attitude towards storytelling by identifying themselves with the stories and allowing their emotions to move them.

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APPENDIX

INTERVISTA

1. DOMANDE GENERALI

- Come ti chiami?
- Quanti anni hai?
- Sei uno studente, lavoratore o altro?
- Dove risiedi?
- Hai trascorso la quarantena nella tua residenza?
- Attualmente, in base al tuo stile di vita, passi molto tempo in casa?
- Durante la quarantena, hai notato un aumento del tempo trascorso davanti alla televisione?
- Durante la quarantena, hai notato un aumento del tempo trascorso sui social networks? Quali social networks hai utilizzato di più?
- Generalmente, ti infastidiscono i messaggi promozionali trasmessi in televisione?
- Generalmente, ti infastidiscono i messaggi promozionali trasmessi sui social networks?
- Quando presente, utilizzi la funzione *skip ad* (saltare l'annuncio) sui social networks?

2. CASI DI STUDIO

1. Vodafone Italia (video: <https://www.vodafone.it/portal/Privati/Together>)

- Ti è piaciuto?
- L'avevi già visto? Se sì, ti ha infastidito guardarlo?
- Ti ha emozionato?
- Che sensazione ti ha lasciato?
- Eri a conoscenza della decisione di Vodafone Italia di selezionare video inviati dai propri clienti per raccontarsi?
- Ti senti uno dei protagonisti dei video che compongono lo spot? Credi, quindi, che il video rappresenti la tua vita in quarantena?

- Hai fatto delle videochiamate durante la quarantena?
- Credi che il video abbia una finalità commerciale?
- Credi che la finalità commerciale sia il principale obiettivo del video?
- Credi che, alla base del video, ci sia un messaggio di speranza? Se sì, quale?
- Credi che il messaggio lanciato da Vodafone Italia sia adeguato al periodo di quarantena che hai vissuto?
- Conoscevi già Vodafone Italia?
- Sei cliente Vodafone Italia? Se no, dopo aver visto il video, hai intenzione di diventare cliente Vodafone Italia?

2. Lavazza (video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9cxIxMatnE>)

- Ti è piaciuto?
- L'avevi già visto? Se sì, ti ha infastidito riguardarlo?
- Ti ha emozionato?
- Che sensazione ti ha lasciato?
- Conoscevi già il discorso (qui riadattato) pronunciato da Charlie Chaplin nel film Il Grande Dittatore?
- Credi che il messaggio, lanciato da Lavazza durante la quarantena, sia eccessivamente positivo?
- Credi che la pandemia globale abbia dato vita ad una nuova umanità?
- Credi che il video abbia una finalità commerciale?
- Credi che la finalità commerciale sia il principale obiettivo del video?
- Conoscevi già Lavazza? Se sì, ti piace il caffè Lavazza?
- Sei un consumatore abituale del caffè Lavazza?
- Al supermercato, scegli il caffè in base a prezzo, marca o gusto?

3. Conad (video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPNXrP0SDO0>)

- Ti è piaciuto?
- L'avevi già visto? Se sì, ti ha infastidito riguardarlo?
- Ti ha emozionato?
- Che sensazione ti ha lasciato?

- Conosci la canzone utilizzata nel video?
- Credi che il video sia adeguato al momento di parziale ripresa che stiamo vivendo?
- Credi che il video abbia una finalità commerciale?
- Credi che la finalità commerciale sia il principale obiettivo del video?
- Conoscevi già Conad? Se sì, generalmente fai la spesa in un supermercato Conad?
- Quando vai in un supermercato Conad, acquisti prodotti Conad?
- Quando fai la spesa, acquisti prodotti italiani? Per farlo, leggi le etichette?
- Dopo aver visto il video, farai la tua prossima spesa in un supermercato Conad? Se sì, comprerai prodotti Conad?

3. DOMANDE CONCLUSIVE

- Quale video ti è piaciuto di più?
- Quale video ti ha emozionato di più?
- A tuo parere, quale video ha una finalità commerciale evidente?
- Quale azienda ha suscitato in te un interesse che potrebbe tradursi nell'acquisto dei suoi prodotti o servizi?
- Con il passare delle settimane e il prolungamento della quarantena, i messaggi di speranza lanciati dai brand italiani ti hanno infastidito? Avresti preferito ricevere dei messaggi diversi?
- A tuo parere, ci sono stati dei brand che si sono distinti per il tipo di messaggio che hanno lanciato durante e dopo la quarantena?
- In generale, dopo la quarantena, hai acquistato prodotti di brand diversi da quelli abituali?
- La tua opinione è importante. Hai qualche ulteriore considerazione da fare?

SUMMARY IN ITALIAN

Nel corso dei secoli, numerosi sono stati gli autori che hanno indagato le origini e lo sviluppo dello *storytelling*, un fenomeno antico quanto la storia dell'umanità, costituita da animali sociali con un innato bisogno di comunicare. Tuttavia, solamente a partire dal 1709 il termine "*storytelling*" ha iniziato ad essere utilizzato per descrivere l'ingente quantità di narrazioni basate su esperienze reali e considerate delle vere e proprie azioni sociali, abili nel conferire significatività alla vita degli esseri umani, descrivendo i loro punti di vista in maniera dettagliata. In quel periodo, infatti, gli studi iniziavano ad essere finalizzati all'analisi delle modalità di utilizzo delle storie, piuttosto che agli aspetti formali che le caratterizzano, creando pertanto una forte cesura con le teorie narratologiche classiche e rendendo necessaria una distinzione tra i termini "storia", "racconto" e "narrazione", che fino a quel momento erano stati utilizzati erroneamente come sinonimi. In particolare, è stato reso noto il fatto che sia la storia, concepita come simulazione di una realtà che trascende la dimensione spazio-temporale, la vera protagonista dello *storytelling* che, per questo motivo, richiede abilità specifiche per la sua redazione. A tale proposito, lo/la *storyteller* non può prescindere dall'utilizzo di un registro linguistico appropriato, che gli/le dia l'opportunità di rendere la storia un prodotto comunicativo memorabile e adatto al periodo di emissione, al mezzo di comunicazione utilizzato, e al pubblico di riferimento. In altre parole, il suo obiettivo è quello di creare, sulla base delle proprie esperienze, dei contenuti utili e rappresentativi, in cui i riceventi della comunicazione, appartenenti ad ambiti specifici, possano identificarsi.

Negli anni Novanta, lo *storytelling* si è convertito in un potente mezzo di comunicazione universale che non veniva più applicato esclusivamente alla vita privata, ma anche a quella organizzativa. Ciò è attualmente visibile soprattutto in ambito economico, dove l'unione di successo tra letteratura e gestione d'impresa ha contribuito alla diffusione del cosiddetto "*corporate storytelling*". Tale espressione fa riferimento all'utilizzo della narrazione come strumento per raggiungere gli obiettivi aziendali all'interno delle diverse aree di attività di un'impresa, dopo un'attenta pianificazione degli schemi narrativi. Pertanto, come sostiene Seth Godin (2009) nel suo libro *All marketers are liars tell stories*, nonostante lo *storytelling* sia un fenomeno antico, gli imprenditori e i commercianti hanno contribuito a perfezionarlo, affinché fosse adeguato

alle necessità dei consumatori attuali e potenziali, e affinché li incitasse all'azione. Lo stesso punto di vista, che si presenta come una conseguenza diretta della pubblicità tradizionale, è stato recentemente rivisitato da Roberto Rondinelli e Riccardo Bresciani (2019) nel loro libro *Nice to Brand You. Perché funziona quando funziona la comunicazione pubblicitaria all'epoca dello storytelling*. I due autori hanno sottolineato l'importanza di utilizzare la narrazione come strumento per coinvolgere ed emozionare i potenziali consumatori che, in questo modo, avranno la possibilità di decidere se procedere o meno ad un determinato acquisto. Oggigiorno, infatti, le aziende sono solite comunicare progetti, valori, informazioni e risultati (beni o servizi) delle attività produttive ai propri clienti attuali e potenziali, spesso celandosi dietro la voce dei personaggi di una storia adibita a tale funzione e diffusa attraverso un mezzo di comunicazione appropriato. Le aziende assumono, pertanto, il ruolo strategico di *storytellers* professionisti, occupandosi della costruzione di uno schema narrativo efficace, strutturato a partire dalle esperienze di vita del pubblico di riferimento e dagli obiettivi prestabiliti: la cosiddetta "*corporate story*". Tale espressione viene utilizzata per descrivere una storia, testuale o visiva, costituita da personaggi che utilizzano uno stile linguistico appropriato al periodo storico-culturale in cui viene diffusa, al fine di generare una tensione emotiva che sia in grado sia di persuadere che di offrire un'esperienza indimenticabile ai consumatori. Infatti, nonostante il cervello umano elabori più velocemente le immagini rispetto alle parole, e nonostante le immagini narrative abbiano la capacità di trasportare gli esseri umani nel mondo rappresentato con maggiore intensità di quanto le parole riescano a fare, una storia, per essere efficace, deve essere autentica, credibile e, soprattutto, generare un impatto emotivo. Ciò è conseguenza del fatto che lo *storytelling* aziendale, come quello tradizionale, viene progettato in seguito ad aver analizzato le caratteristiche e le esigenze dei destinatari della comunicazione, in questo caso i consumatori. Questi ultimi giocano, pertanto, un ruolo chiave, ma in costante evoluzione, nella narrazione di idee, prodotti e servizi: dopo essere stati a lungo i principali bersagli della comunicazione aziendale, ne sono diventati co-creatori, stabilendo una relazione di fiducia reciproca con l'azienda in questione. Interessante, a tale proposito, è il punto di vista espresso da Ramon Soranzo (2011) che, nel libro *Marketing narrativo. Usare lo storytelling nel marketing contemporaneo*, redatto in collaborazione con Andrea Fontana e Joseph Sassoon, si sofferma sul valore acquisito dai

consumatori che, oltre ad avere un ruolo attivo nella produzione di messaggi comunicativi, ne sono anche gli interpreti. Tuttavia, nonostante le storie li rappresentino, il loro giudizio è condizionato da stili di vita e visioni del mondo diverse. Pertanto, non sono disposti a ricevere alcuna imposizione, bensì vogliono esercitare la libertà di scegliere individualmente tra le numerose opzioni che il mercato offre, sentendosi liberi di non prestare attenzione ai messaggi promozionali non affini ai loro interessi. Inoltre, il loro punto di vista è dipendente anche dal canale utilizzato come strumento di trasmissione e ricezione della comunicazione aziendale. Questo aspetto è stato ampiamente analizzato da Andrea Fontana (2016) nel suo libro *Storytelling d'impresa. La guida definitiva*, in cui descrive la scelta dei *media* come l'ultima fase di costituzione del processo narrativo, diventata particolarmente importante nell'ultimo secolo, quando il potere crescente dei consumatori e l'emergere di nuovi canali di comunicazione hanno causato una frammentazione dei *media* e una drastica riduzione della comunicazione di massa e della pubblicità. Ciò si è verificato quasi contemporaneamente allo sviluppo tecnologico e all'avvento dei *social media*, che hanno segnato l'inizio dell'era digitale. A partire da quel momento, infatti, le aziende hanno avuto l'opportunità di raccontare situazioni specifiche con l'ausilio di immagini, video, sottofondi musicali e voci narrative. In questo modo, le storie hanno acquisito un maggiore potere persuasivo, trasformandosi in veri e propri prodotti commerciali di cui poter fruire e su cui poter dare un giudizio in tempo reale. Ekaterina Walter (2014), nel suo libro *The Power of Visual Storytelling: How to Use Visuals, Videos, and Social Media to Market Your Brand*, ha dimostrato che i *social media* offrono grandi opportunità alla comunicazione aziendale, in termini di produzione e valutazione del successo di contenuti di alta qualità, tramessi immediatamente ai consumatori attraverso il canale più appropriato. La rapidità con cui avviene la comunicazione è agevolata dal ricorso frequente a contenuti visivi, attraverso i quali si è evoluto il concetto di *visual storytelling*, oggi associato all'utilizzo di GIF, vignette, immagini, video ed altre forme artistiche di comunicazione, spesso presentate con didascalie o citazioni. Ciò ha causato una riduzione dell'attenzione dei consumatori, sempre più distratti e propensi a saltare gli annunci non affini ai loro interessi utilizzando la funzione "skip ad". Simultaneamente, tuttavia, le opinioni dei consumatori e i contenuti da loro creati hanno acquisito una maggiore capacità di

coinvolgimento, dando vita a delle vere e proprie *communities* che possono beneficiare o danneggiare l'azienda.

Negli ultimi mesi, lo *storytelling* aziendale è stato oggetto di numerose ricerche a causa della diffusione del Covid-19 e dello scoppio della pandemia attualmente in corso, che ha apportato modifiche radicali in ogni ambito della vita umana, incluso quello economico. Le aziende, infatti, hanno dovuto velocemente abbandonare le proprie strategie di comunicazione e dedicarsi alla produzione di contenuti affini alla situazione di emergenza sanitaria e alla rapidità di diffusione del virus. Di conseguenza, i consumatori hanno potuto giovare di messaggi promozionali permeati di positività e spirito di condivisione, due attitudini indispensabili per fronteggiare le difficoltà emerse. Al fine di comprendere il loro punto di vista, l'elaborato ha innanzitutto percorso le tappe principali dello sviluppo della pandemia a livello globale ed europeo, mostrandone la gestione e le misure di sicurezza adottate, e soffermandosi sui periodi di isolamento, parziale o totale, vissuti da più di cento nazioni. Successivamente, sono state descritte e messe in evidenza le problematiche affrontate in Italia, dove il Presidente del Consiglio, Giuseppe Conte, ha articolato la gestione della pandemia in tre fasi, la prima delle quali ebbe inizio il 9 marzo 2020, con l'imposizione del *lockdown* nazionale. Infatti, a partire dal giorno seguente, i cittadini italiani potevano uscire di casa, muniti di autocertificazione, esclusivamente per motivi di salute e/o lavoro, e per acquistare beni di prima necessità; ovvero per recarsi in uno dei pochi spazi pubblici autorizzati a rimanere aperti, quali ospedali, farmacie, supermercati, compagnie assicurative, banche, e simili erogatori di servizi indispensabili. In quel periodo, il distanziamento sociale ha generato un senso di solidarietà che ha portato le aziende ad elaborare nuove strategie di comunicazione con l'obiettivo di mantenere e creare nuove relazioni di fiducia con consumatori attuali e potenziali. Di conseguenza, lo *storytelling* di tutti i brand che non hanno deciso di interrompere le proprie campagne pubblicitarie, ha subito una forte standardizzazione: simili ambientazioni, sottofondi musicali, immagini e, soprattutto, messaggi inclusivi di gratitudine e speranza. Il 18 maggio 2020, con l'inizio della fase due, quella di convivenza con il virus, le misure di contenimento sono state allentate, permettendo ai cittadini italiani di ripristinare parzialmente la quotidianità a cui avevano dovuto rinunciare. Attualmente, l'Italia sta vivendo un periodo di transizione tra la seconda e la terza fase, la quale diventerà effettiva solamente nel momento in cui verrà

trovata una cura o un vaccino in grado di debellare il virus. Nel frattempo, lo *storytelling* aziendale ha continuato ad evolversi, adeguandosi alle mutate esigenze dei consumatori. Pertanto, è stato necessario analizzare e comparare alcuni messaggi promozionali lanciati da diverse aziende italiane nel periodo di monitoraggio della pandemia, compreso tra il 9 marzo e il 31 luglio 2020. In particolare, sono stati presi in esame nove video, selezionati tra quelli delle aziende che si sono distinte maggiormente nel corso delle tre fasi: Vodafone Italia, Mondadori e Barilla per la fase uno; Star, Pupa Milano e Lavazza per la fase due; Enel Energia, Conad e Lago per il periodo di transizione tra la fase due e la fase tre. Lo *storytelling* da loro proposto è stato classificato come autentico e adeguato alla dinamicità della situazione, rappresentata attraverso tre temi: resilienza, speranza e ripresa. La resilienza è l'atteggiamento tipico della fase uno, quello delle persone che svolgevano attività in casa, leggevano libri per evadere dalla realtà, riducevano la distanza sociale attraverso una buona connessione ad internet, e celebravano la bellezza dell'Italia e l'altruismo degli italiani, sventolando bandiere e cantando dai balconi. Era il periodo delle città deserte, delle saracinesche che si abbassavano, delle persone disorientate ma unite e degli eroi che lottavano in prima fila, descritti con l'ausilio di narrazioni scritte o orali, accompagnate da suoni dinamici ed emozionali. Tale dinamicità è stata successivamente sostituita da sottofondi musicali a volte profondi ed inquietanti, altre volte piacevoli; un contrasto causato dal fatto che i video proposti sono stati creati prima del 18 maggio 2020, quando la fase due era ancora un'ipotesi. Per questo motivo, mentre Star rappresenta la condivisione di momenti ed emozioni nelle cucine delle case italiane e Lavazza descrive la speranza della nascita di una nuova umanità, dominata dai valori di rispetto ed uguaglianza, Pupa Milano mostra il ritorno ad una parziale normalità, con persone che si tolgono le mascherine e tornano a sorridere e a ripopolare le città italiane. La ripartenza concreta, però, è visibile solamente nella fase successiva, quando nelle fabbriche e nei negozi cessa il silenzio, lasciando spazio al rumore dei macchinari, alla felicità assordante dei lavoratori, e alla soddisfazione nei volti dei clienti; perfino la musica che accompagna la narrazione diventa più ritmata. Interessante, inoltre, è stato notare la presenza, nei primi video, di hashtag utilizzati come elementi motivazionali: da #ioescoconlafantasia e #italiacheresiste della prima fase, a #torneràilsorriso e #TheNewHumanity nella seconda fase. Tali espressioni costituiscono un'ulteriore prova dell'evoluzione del *corporate storytelling* nel corso della pandemia globale.

L'analisi condotta rappresenta un punto di partenza, un passaggio indispensabile nella descrizione dello sviluppo dello *storytelling* dalle sue origini ad oggi. Tuttavia, l'effetto reale del cambiamento è visibile solamente studiando il punto di vista dei consumatori, a cui le strategie comunicative aziendali sono rivolte. Pertanto, obiettivo principale della ricerca è stato indagare le reazioni dei consumatori italiani al *corporate storytelling* prodotto durante la pandemia globale. Tale scopo è stato raggiunto effettuando un'analisi qualitativa su un campione di 25 consumatori italiani, 5 per ognuna delle seguenti fasce di età: 15-20, 20-27, 27-35, 35-50 e *over 50*. Le persone selezionate sono state sottoposte ad un'intervista della durata media di 30 minuti, strutturata in tre parti: 11 domande riguardanti dati biografici e stili di vita (durante e dopo la quarantena), 37 domande sui casi di studio (Vodafone Italia, Lavazza e Conad) e 8 domande conclusive. Le interviste sono state condotte di persona o via Skype (in base alla disponibilità degli intervistati) nel mese di agosto, ovvero il periodo immediatamente successivo a quello selezionato per monitorare l'evoluzione della pandemia e, di conseguenza, dello *storytelling* aziendale. I dati sono stati prima raccolti ed analizzati per fasce di età, poi comparati attraverso il supporto di istogrammi specifici per trarre le considerazioni finali, in seguito al raggiungimento degli obiettivi intermedi precedentemente stabiliti. Questi consistono, in primo luogo, nella definizione del profilo dei consumatori, al fine di dimostrare che hanno un ruolo attivo e che sono abili nel dominare le proprie emozioni, e di riflettere sulla loro eventuale propensione a saltare gli annunci pubblicitari sui diversi *media* a loro disposizione. In secondo luogo, sono state valutate le reazioni dei consumatori come conseguenza alla ricezione dello *storytelling* di una specifica azienda, in termini di coinvolgimento emotivo volto a creare una stabile relazione di fiducia con il brand o a suscitare un reale interesse d'acquisto.

Le interviste hanno, innanzitutto, focalizzato l'attenzione sulla vita degli intervistati, i quali risiedono in città o paesi situati in quattro regioni italiane: Marche, Abruzzo, Veneto e Friuli Venezia Giulia. Tutti, ad eccezione di uno, hanno dichiarato di aver trascorso la quarantena nella propria residenza, nonostante conducano stili di vita differenti: 9 sono studenti, 1 è neolaureata, 13 sono lavoratori e 2 sono pensionati. Inoltre, 20 intervistati su 25 hanno dichiarato di aver modificato le proprie abitudini durante il *lockdown* nazionale, a causa della drastica riduzione delle attività da poter svolgere in casa. Pertanto, la maggior parte ha notato un aumento del tempo trascorso di fronte alla

televisione e sui *social networks* ed ha affermato di trascorrere ancora molto tempo in casa per motivi di studio, lavoro o svago. Questa è stata identificata come una delle possibili cause del sentimento di fastidio nutrito da 23 persone su 25 nei confronti dei messaggi promozionali trasmessi sia in televisione che sui *social networks*. Per la stessa ragione, tutti hanno dichiarato di utilizzare la funzione “*skip ad*”, quando disponibile, per saltare gli annunci non affini ai loro interessi. Se ne deduce che il campione non presta attenzione alla pubblicità; tesi rafforzata dal fatto che pochi intervistati avevano già visto, almeno una volta, i video sottoposti al loro giudizio durante l’intervista. A tale proposito, occorre sottolineare che l’atteggiamento appena descritto non ha inciso sulla raccolta dei dati: le loro risposte non si sono discostate da quelle di coloro che avevano già visto il video, che semplicemente li associavano maggiormente al ricordo della quarantena vissuta. Infatti, la maggior parte degli intervistati si è dimostrata interessata e piacevolmente colpita dai messaggi di speranza lanciati dai brand italiani durante quel periodo.

Secondariamente, le domande relative alla visione dei video hanno dato luogo ad un’omogeneità di risposte tra gli intervistati appartenenti a distinte fasce di età. In particolare, la pubblicità creata da Lavazza è stata valutata come la più bella ed emozionale, riscuotendo il maggior numero di opinioni positive, mentre quella prodotta da Conad è stata associata ad una finalità puramente commerciale. Inoltre, sono stati apprezzati i messaggi di speranza lanciati da Lavazza e Vodafone Italia, in quanto considerati adeguati al bisogno di inclusione e positività nutrito dagli italiani durante il *lockdown*. Di conseguenza, le sensazioni degli intervistati si sono alternate tra la malinconia generata dal ricordo di un periodo difficile e la felicità di essere in una nuova fase della propria vita; sensazioni indipendenti dalle abitudini di consumo. Infatti, solamente 5 di loro sono clienti Vodafone Italia e solamente 2 hanno dichiarato di comprare esclusivamente caffè Lavazza. Similmente, nonostante la maggior parte degli intervistati fosse cliente Conad e acquistasse regolarmente prodotti Conad, le reazioni suscitate dalla pubblicità non sono state tutte positive. Tale tesi è avvalorata dal fatto che 14 persone su 25 hanno affermato che i video non hanno suscitato in loro alcun interesse d’acquisto.

In conclusione, dallo studio qualitativo è emerso che lo *storytelling* creato, durante la pandemia globale, dalle aziende italiane sottoposte a giudizio, non ha generato un

impatto emotivo tale da fare in modo che i consumatori intervistati nutrissero un sentimento di fiducia o un interesse di acquisto nei confronti dei brand. Di conseguenza, anche il video creato da Conad, che ha una finalità commerciale maggiormente evidente rispetto agli altri e che ha suscitato un sentimento di fiducia in alcuni degli intervistati, non ha esercitato un'influenza degna di nota. Infatti, la maggior parte degli intervistati ha dimostrato di avere un atteggiamento responsabile e abituale nei confronti delle decisioni di acquisto; ha mantenuto le proprie abitudini di acquisto sia durante che dopo la quarantena. Tale atteggiamento potrebbe essere una conseguenza del fatto che, nonostante passino molto tempo in casa e, soprattutto, abbiano aumentato il tempo trascorso davanti alla televisione e sui *social networks* durante la quarantena, non siano soliti osservare ed ascoltare le pubblicità, bensì preferiscano saltarla. Tuttavia, questa affermazione è in contrasto con l'attenzione prestata ai messaggi di speranza lanciati dai brand italiani durante la pandemia, nei confronti dei quali tutti gli intervistati hanno espresso la propria opinione, nella maggior parte dei casi positiva. Pertanto, se ne deduce che il punto di vista e le scelte dei consumatori siano indipendenti dallo *storytelling* attraverso cui un'azienda promuove sé stessa e i suoi prodotti e/o servizi. I consumatori sono abili nel prendere le decisioni che ritengono essere più adeguate alle loro esigenze e nel non lasciarsi dominare dalle emozioni a priori. Dalle interviste è, ad esempio, emerso che il fatto che alcuni abbiano avuto un'esperienza negativa, in passato, come clienti Vodafone Italia, e altri siano fedeli a compagnie telefoniche concorrenti, non ha influito sul modo di giudicare la pubblicità. Tuttavia, non è opinabile il fatto che la narrativa giochi un ruolo fondamentale nell'intento di generare emozioni che non siano relazionate ad interessi di tipo commerciale: i consumatori vogliono sentirsi rappresentati dai brand, non spinti ad acquistarli. Pertanto, se la pubblicità proposta non suscita un interesse d'acquisto nella maggior parte degli intervistati, significa che loro hanno liberamente deciso di non lasciarsi influenzare; probabilmente si saranno emozionati e avranno apprezzato la bellezza della storia raccontata, ma non cambieranno abitudini di acquisto.

Negli ultimi mesi, la pandemia e il conseguente bisogno di ritrovare serenità e positività hanno intensificato il dinamismo dello *storytelling* aziendale, che è un fenomeno in costante evoluzione. Il periodo vissuto in quarantena fu particolarmente sfidante per i cittadini italiani, che dominati da incertezza e paura decisero liberamente di lasciarsi trasportare dalle emozioni anche di fronte ad un messaggio promozionale.

Ciononostante, le loro abitudini, di consumo e di vita, sono rimaste percettivamente stabili; percettivamente perché un cambiamento di percezione diventa inevitabile quando si trascorrono intere giornate in casa. In quel periodo infatti, era autorizzato ad uscire solamente chi svolgeva un lavoro considerato imprescindibile per la salvaguardia e la sussistenza dei cittadini. Pertanto, alcuni di coloro che rimasero in casa, non hanno percepito un aumento del tempo trascorso di fronte alla televisione o sui *social networks*. Contemporaneamente, la responsabilità sociale di coloro che continuavano ad andare a lavorare era molto elevata e le priorità di ognuno hanno iniziato ad essere messe in discussione, nonostante non sia nata la nuova umanità di cui Lavazza parlava e in cui tutti speravano. Dall'altro lato, le aziende erano consapevoli della situazione, giungendo a creare *storytelling* diversi per ogni fase della pandemia, in base alle esigenze. Di conseguenza, inizialmente il loro obiettivo era quello di supportare gli italiani, ma successivamente la loro speranza era quella che i messaggi, talvolta emozionali, venissero associati al brand nel momento di prendere una decisione di acquisto piuttosto che un'altra.

L'elaborato presenta limiti sostanziali dovuti, principalmente, alla scarsità di tempo, alla scelta di un numero esiguo di pubblicità, e alla familiarità degli intervistati con i brand trattati. Inoltre, il campione utilizzato non è diversificato né statisticamente rappresentativo, in quanto selezionato per un'analisi esclusivamente qualitativa. Pertanto, in futuro, sarà necessario condurre ulteriori studi per valutare la rilevanza e l'impatto dello *storytelling* in ambito aziendale, dove i consumatori potranno decidere se identificarsi nei protagonisti delle storie e lasciarsi trasportare dalle emozioni.