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Vespa's large-scale events as a socio-economic tool to promote Italian spirit around the world: an analysis on Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro history and members' perception.

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Abstract.

Vespa parades and large-scale events have been established since the early 50s, under the patronage of Piaggio and then, of Vespa Clubs. Born as an occasion for the promotion of Piaggio's motorcycles, soon such events became an iconic occasion of interconnection among Vespa enthusiasts. Accompanied by the spirit of the mass society of economic boom, the dimension of those parades involved thousands of participants every following decade, crossing the continental borders. Born as "Eurovespas" and nowadays called "Vespa World Days", those events emphasize the uniqueness of the Italian style embraced by Vespa, becoming a sociological phenomenon. They blend elements of tribal marketing, of large-scale sportive events with the logic of strengthening the image of Italian excellent productions worldwide.

This study aims to outline historically such a path, focusing on the case of Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro because of the opportunity to manage its archive. Moreover, involving its members in an online survey, the authors conducted a descriptive analysis of the role of Vespa's heritage and the connected large-scale events. The results underline how the history of such large-scale Vespa events strengthens today's willingness to participate in and promote Italian style worldwide.

Keywords: Piaggio Vespa, Eurovespa, transports, tribal marketing, Italian heritage.

1. Introduction

1.1 Vespa, the industrial opportunity, the social phenomenon.

Italy is, truly, a country of "unique pieces". Unrepeatable or not, it does not matter, since objects and things are often born without pretensions, but they make a revolution. Or rather, they enshrine it in custom and history, silently, but no less legendarily.

Born in 1946 from the vision of Corradino D'Ascanio and the entrepreneurial genius of Enrico Piaggio, Vespa became a symbol of freedom and rebirth in post-war Italy, embodying the spirit of an entire nation that yearned for progress and modernity. In recent weeks, on the occasion of the 78th anniversary of the registration of the first patent on 23rd April 1946, there has been renewed talk of the Vespa (Boni, 2012), that is, one of the icons that most upset the daily life of a people who no longer wanted to walk, but rather run, here and there, "wandering around", out of town. The Times celebrated it as the first typically Italian product after the Roman chariot, because it was "*a paradise for two*" and, again, "*the nobility of mobility*".

Vespa has established itself as an object that transcends its utilitarian function, becoming a symbol of an aspirational lifestyle. Its presence on the Italian streets and in the international panorama testifies to the ability of a design object to influence and be influenced by the social context in which it is inserted (Maggi, 2021). Vespa is not just a means of transport, but a cultural artefact that reflects and at the same time shapes the social norms, identities and aspirations of an era.

1.2 The red apple of the collective imagery.

Vespa represented the beautiful, round and optimistic icon of a new emotional design of the collective imagination, from post-war to contemporary times (Dellapiana, 2022). Consciously or unconsciously, they were the consolation of the eye and the visual announcement of the new time that would arrive, when, in the words of Tom Wolfe, in that time the charm and the senses were explored with new gazes.

Vespa has also been a powerful tool for emancipation, especially for women, who have found in the scooter a means to assert their independence and modernity (Rivola, 1993). Furthermore, Vespa has played a crucial role in the film and fashion industries, becoming a cultural icon immortalized in films such as "Roman Holiday" and helping to spread the image of a carefree, elegant and fashionable Italy throughout the world. From Gregory Peck to Audrey Hepburn, from Nanni Moretti to "LunaPop", Vespa remains, emblematically, associated with the idea of freedom and autonomy, beauty and happiness.

Of aeronautical origin, in fact, Vespa, auroral enclosed in the mind of the creator Corradino D'Ascanio, should have been a helicopter prototype, so much so that the line that recalls the insect still bears witness to this. And scooter was, or rather, myth: creative, optimistic, and qualitative, it was also a witness and an active part of the Italian "cultural spring" of the Sixties, ambodied by the symbol of the "red apple" in commercial advertisements[1] of the era (Kurras, 2021).

[1] The red apple appeared not only as an image but also as the motto in Vespa's advertisement: "Chi Vespa mangia le mele" (translated: "Who Vespa eats apples"). That evocative image sounded like a symbol of further emancipation, using the word Vespa not as a substantive but as a verb.

A simple, linear page, with a unique, beautiful shape, where Italian talent rhymed with the concept of object of material culture, national and international (Calefato, 2009).

1.3 Vespa as "Made in Italy" excellence.

Born by chance, it ended up becoming the icon of Made in Italy (Bucci, Codeluppi, Ferraresi, 2011), making itself admired as a creative project, different from its predecessors and, above all, capable of imagological jurisdiction. Its popularity abroad has had the ability to strengthen the link between the Italian national identity and its industrial production, making the Vespa a cultural ambassador of "made in Italy".

An experiment in material culture, Vespa opened the windows on the new political and social anthropology, thanks to the technical dexterity of Piaggio and an economically advantageous offer, not only to quickly reach the workplace, but rather, to snatch real time for us , i.e., free time (Hebdige, 1991). Preferably two persons together.

Practical, so that men and women could use it; comfortable, so as to facilitate the journey; drivable, since the gearbox, accelerator and clutch were on a bicycle handlebar, adapted for the occasion. The intuition of D'Ascanio's mobile object changed the lifestyle and, at the same time, the aesthetic declination, between disbelief, wonder and gratification, becoming an extension of personal space in the public environment.

The very essence of design, as a multiple phantasmagoria and professional preparation for modernity, without taking anything away from the technical and industrial needs of the sheets that contained the dust and the gravel, the spare wheel supplied and the open chassis, to let madame and madam. And the round, slender structure that made Enrico Piaggio exclaim upon naming it: "It looks like a Vespa".

And it is a fact that, since 1963, thanks to Vespa 50, adolescence itself has changed, since the "Vespino", often "rigged", did not require either a license plate or a license. Its accessibility, due to its engine size that allowed 14-year-olds to drive it without a license, democratized individual mobility, offering new opportunities for exploration and socialization outside of family and local boundaries. In those *gatherings* of "fifty people" gathered, overlapping, jumbled together "they went at it in a big way with pop". Throwing overboard outdated categories and schemes, to have a lot of fun (Colombo 2008).

1.4 Rallies, parades, celebrations.

On board a Vespa it was as good as it used to be and there was something to happily tramp about and fly like "*Peter Pan"* , strolling, metaphor after metaphor, along the paths of the youth utopia of the twentieth century. Hearing about Peter Pan's Neverland, Alice's Wonderland from The Wizard of Oz.

The Vespa has, in fact, made it possible to probe the morphologies and phenomenologies of twentieth-century youth imagination in the "belt twentieth century": more than a century, the possibility of being "always young", not surprisingly, experienced in an "other medium" where there is real and happy life and not a bureaucratic establishment of being together, since something had changed and it was seen and felt playfully, at the level of the collective imagination.

Vespa 50 concentrated its effect on different, at least complementary, levels, recalling cinema more than theatre, video culture more than learned philological exercises, more hermeneutics of postmodernity than traditionalist resentment. The elective and existential affinity and the philosophical and aesthetic harmony of an object of material culture, more youthful than ever, but open to the deepest suggestions of popular sentiment. *Ergo:* Vasco Rossi quoted a successful advertising slogan in "Bollicine". Italic beauty, soft, gentle, ironic and self-deprecating that knows how to address novelty in a friendly manner, alongside the Fiat 500, the Eclissi lamp by Vico Magistretti, the Alessi coffee machine, the Lettera 22 by Olivetti.

Engineers like Giacosa and D'Ascanio invented indelible modernity for the generations who had to put it into shape, in a circle of distraction and fun that made up the fresco of the Italian-style *On the Road*. A joyful raid is still celebrated and proposed as a visual "ledger" of clubs, associations and gatherings of Vespa enthusiasts.

Vespa Piaggio rallies represent the celebration of an icon that has transcended its role as a means of transport to become a symbol and, therefore, are not only opportunities to show and admire historic models or unique customizations, but also spaces to share experiences and personal stories related to this vehicle. Through these meetings, participants confirm the value and symbolic cultural model of the Vespa, expressing a sense of belonging to a tradition that goes beyond generations and social classes, creating an inclusive and transversal community.

The rally becomes a place of intercultural exchange, as demonstrated by the Vespa World Days 2024, which saw the participation of over twenty thousand Vespas and thirty thousand Vespa enthusiasts from all over the world. The Vespa is thus configured as a vehicle of shared values, a bridge between diverse cultures, which manifests itself in a universal language of friendship and solidarity. Furthermore, Vespa rallies are often associated with sustainable tourism and a way of traveling that favors slow discovery and direct contact with the territories crossed, further acting as catalysts for local tourism, stimulating the economy of the host areas and promoting Italian culture in the world.

The Vespa, with its moderate speed and agility, invites more intimate and personal explorations, favoring proximity and experiential tourism. This aspect is linked to the sociological imagination of a return to the origins, a rediscovery of local roots and a more conscious and respectful approach towards the environment and local communities.

Vespa is the Italian style, the most ineffable and infallible, so that there can be the same continuity of the cultural and social image. Ideas, quick, quick ideas, inside fabulous machines and that was it. A monument to the eternity of industrial design, with simultaneous adoption plus the motorization of the masses (Rapini, 2007) on roads and highways. Reliable and solid tests by the blessed, disengaged and excellent youth who elected a scooter as concrete proof of social change.

2. Between marketing and heritage: clubs and parades

2.1. Tribal marketing: the origins and the development of Vespa Club organization worldwide.

Since 1949, Piaggio understood the potentialities of structuring an associative body, primarily made by Vespa's enthusiasts[2]. The first constitution occurred in Viareggio, but the spread of the Vespa Clubs proceeded in the next decades. The 50s were the years of the pot-war spread of associationism, boosted by the desire to enhance the sense of community, especially bounded by thematic reasons. This happened also in the case of the many Vespa Clubs: the challenge had been meeting up with customers who identified their scooters not only as a means of transport but also as a source of entertainment. This sense of belongingness began spontaneously but has been one of the very first unconscious experiments of tribal marketing (Cova, 2003). On the one hand, a brand community began structuring itself around the commonality of goals and values embraced by Vespa: a shared desire to travel and live occasions of happiness. If for the adult target Vespa embraced a more rational object, for the prototype of the younger customer, Vespa was even an emotional cult object (Cavallone, 2014). Especially during its first phases, the spread of a brand community fosters the business performance: Piaggio proceeded towards a business production mainly rooted on the development of the Vespa product, extending its target. Moreover, the Vespa parades all around Europe became not only a way for socializing among Vespa lovers, but also an occasion to promote the product, gaining further brand visibility. For example, one of the most memorable mega events was Eurovespa 1959 in Paris[3]. Piaggio invited a selected group of the Vespa 1959' model and financed their journey to reach Paris. There, hundreds of young Vespa enthusiasts paraded on the Champs Elysee riding their Vespa. The reason for such a huge investment by Piaggio aimed at launching the technical innovation of the new 2-stroke engine (mixture of 2% rather than 4%).

This honeymoon between the reality of Vespa Clubs and Piaggio continued, but, as reported Longo & Cova (2007), it presented criticalities. More specifically, when the members of the brand community expect to influence the factory's management, begin the problems. It occurred also between Piaggio and Vespa Clubs. On the one hand, the Vespa Clubs' members aimed at proposing unrealistic business solutions, while Piaggio's management necessarily needed to consider mostly the market performances rather than a niche sentiment. Some of the claims by the most traditional Vespa lovers regarded the abandonment of the manual transmission in favor of the automatic one. Other claims regarded the maintenance of the production of 2-strokes models while the environmental laws are homologating necessarily or 4-stroke engines or electric ones. The ongoing ecologic transition is expected to stress even more this tendency, maybe encountering the resistance of the most traditional Vespa's target. Those are just a few examples that Piaggio intended to overcome through the constitution of the Vespa World Club. This company body established in 2006 is responsible for maintaining the contacts among the associative territorial vespa clubs. Moreover, it represents a catalyzer for the contemporary mega parades: the already mentioned Vespa World Days (Bottin, 2018).

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[2] https://web.archive.org/web/20170322015520/http://www.vespaclubditalia.it/istituzionale.aspx/vespa_club_d_italia/le_origini_del_vespa_club

[3] https://asisp.intesasanpaolo.com/publifoto/detail/IT-PF-FT001-008756/motociclette-vespa-adornate-fiori-parcheggiate-piazza-occasione-eurovespa-parigi-del-1959-1

According to what is reported on the official website, Vespa World Club (VWC) is expected to work in a sort of continuity: "as the successor of Vespa Club of Europe, founded in 1953, and Vespa Club Mondial, founded in 1965"[4]. According to this assumption, VWC is a bridge between Piaggio Spa, Piaggio Foundation, and the 66 Vespa Club in five continents. Only the Italian Vespa Club includes 619 affiliated local Clubs, counting about 85000 members.

2.2 The case of Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro.

In a small town 7 kilometers away from Bergamo, in 1952, one of the most historical Italian Vespa Clubs began its activity. Boosted by the entrepreneurial attitude of the local dealer, Mr. Zecchetti, a group of (in that time) young people met and established the local association of Vespa enthusiasts. Gotten the official recognition by the Italian Vespa Club, it represented one of the most active realities in this kind of associationism during the 50s and the 60s in the abovementioned Italian Province. Thanks to that time secretary and co-founder, Ermenegildo Ubiali (1936-2011), Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro archive is still complete and accessible. Two national rallies had been organized by this association in the 50s and some of its most active members joined many Eurovespas. They reached the European capitals riding their Vespa to join in the Vespa's parades, contributing to condensate the myth of Piaggio's Italian excellence. Again, from Ubiali's archive, several pictures formed part of a photographic exhibition in 2012, reporting images of the Eurovespa in Bruxelles 1958 and in Paris 1959[5].

During the 60s, the very first members of Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro abandoned the activities, because of their new life priorities without dismantling the constituted archive. After forty years of inactivity, in 2006 the Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro has been re-established thanks to the commitment of the ongoing President Alessandro Vecchi and his friends. He involved Ermenegildo Ubiali that helped in re-building the historic roots of the Club: a necessary aspect to regain the official recognition by Vespa Club d'Italia.

Reached this goal, Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro returned one of the most active clubs of the northern part of Italy, counting about 263 members (that pays the annual fee) and about 400 active participants[6]. In less than 20 years, the Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro organized other 7 national rallies, and dozens of solidarity events. Moreover, Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro is used to join in national and international parades, demonstrating activism and strengthening a growing network of friendship among Vespa lovers.

3. Research Design, Aims and Methodology

The present study aims to look at the Vespa Club as a place of excellence for the promotion of the values and symbolic contents of the Vespa Piaggio through participation in social assemblies, gatherings and collective activities of its participating members. To this aim, after a preliminary discussion of the "Vespa phenomenon", the researchers asked themselves what the typical profile of

[4] https://vespaworldclub.org/
[5] https://www.laprovinciadicomo.it/stories/Homepage/a-ponte-san-pietrovoli-mongolfiera-o_300490_11/
[6] Estimations reported on the Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro website and confirmed by the Vice President Luca Nava during a direct interlocution. https://www.vespaclubpontesanpietro.it/?page_id=14

Vespa Club members is and what the widespread perception of the Vespa is in terms of collective cultural imagery. Thus, they developed a questionnaire to investigate a specific group of users, enriched by an in-depth focus group with five members.

The questionnaire was administered in July 2024, from the 1st to the 22nd, to an empirical reference group consisting of enthusiasts and affiliates (and acquaintances, through word of mouth) of the Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro. Thanks to the abovementioned reasons and to the Club's board authorization to be involve in this research, Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro represented the target of the following questionnaire. The empirical research counted 220 respondents, including the members and their relatives who actively take part in the association's initiatives. This enlargement of the sample has been a logic choice because the majority of the members participate in couple to the events. The vibrant sense of community among Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro's members allows to ground the history of the club with the heritage of the brand Vespa.

The selective choice of such a specific type of respondent is due to the very object of analysis, that is, the Vespa and the social consequences of the gatherings and activities of the Vespa Clubs, in particular that of Ponte San Pietro. Thus, a group of respondents was outlined who shared the prevalent and significant characteristics of a general ownership of a Vespa and participation in group activities and gatherings of a specific Vespa Club in the province of Bergamo, chosen as a specific case study as a place of excellence in the preservation of memory and activities.

The questionnaire consists of three sections. The first investigates the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondent (age, gender, educational qualifications, job). The second section investigates the ownership of a Vespa (and related model) and participation in a Vespa Club, to continue with questions relating to the use and iconographic and symbolic representation of the Vespa (if it represents a symbol of Italy, what it represents for the person, etc.); the section continues with questions relating to the Vespa Club as a place and form of aggregation. Finally, the third section investigates the cultural heritage of the Vespa and the Vespa Club rallies, to end with the current uses of the Vespa Piaggio image in Italy and around the world.

The spread of the questionnaire proceeded mainly through the WhatsApp common chat of Ponte San Pietro's Vespa Club, pledging its members to forward it to their wives, sons and daughter, just if they participate in Vespa Clubs initiatives. Few contacts without WhatsApp received the link to the questionnaire form through email. At the end, in July 2024, the authors organized a focus group with 5 Vespa Club members, in a confirmatory logic of deepening.

4. The Vespa Club of Ponte San Pietro: the profile of the respondents to the questionnaire

The questionnaire administration produced 220 respondents, who, as can be seen, are predominantly men (91%) with an average age of 47, with 68% of respondents aged between 25 and 49 (table 1 and table 2). Traditionally, sociology observes that participation in motorsport-type aggregative activities is a predominantly male tendency, as they often serve as places for building relationships and affirming one's social status in which cultural barriers and social expectations move along the typical tracks of gender inequality. At the same time, it is particularly important to note - again confirming this aforementioned inequality - how the presence of women at rallies is remarkably high, but almost entirely in the role of companions (wives, girlfriends, life partners) of the partner registered with the

Club and at the rally. Highlighting the fact that membership is mainly signed up by only one member per family, it is noteworthy the progressive involvement of children, brothers and sisters. This sociological dynamic is also confirmed because the Vespa often represents an element of social identification for many families, also connecting to the stories of ancestors who owned it in previous decades. Often, we witness the restoration of the grandfather's or parent's Vespa, almost as if to reconnect the logic of hereditary transmission of the same passion. Always along the same lines, the interest in collecting is linked to the purchase of models that belonged to one's ancestor, where the vehicle actually owned by him/her has been destroyed or sold over time (Boni, 2020).

The sample also shows a significant heterogeneity in the cultural background of the respondents, in which 50% have obtained a secondary school diploma (high school). There is also a large segment of people with a university degree (21%), while few has post-graduate diplomas (2%). This aspect denotes the transversality of the skills and professions carried out by the respondents. It is therefore hypothesized that there is a coexistence of a passion for motoring on the one hand and, on the other, a tourist momentum and status symbol. It is noteworthy to observe the relative prevalence of workers (24%) and employees (24%), proving that the type of work carried out does not condition membership in the clubs. Adding a further 5% of students and 7% of unemployed, the extreme internal democracy of this association is confirmed, whose membership is independent of both income level and age (the latter is bound by the legal requirements regarding the driving of vehicles on the road). In the case of the Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro, members carry out diversified activities, which makes the "group" particularly heterogeneous, inclusive and able to create interesting and constructive social relations of comparison and debate.

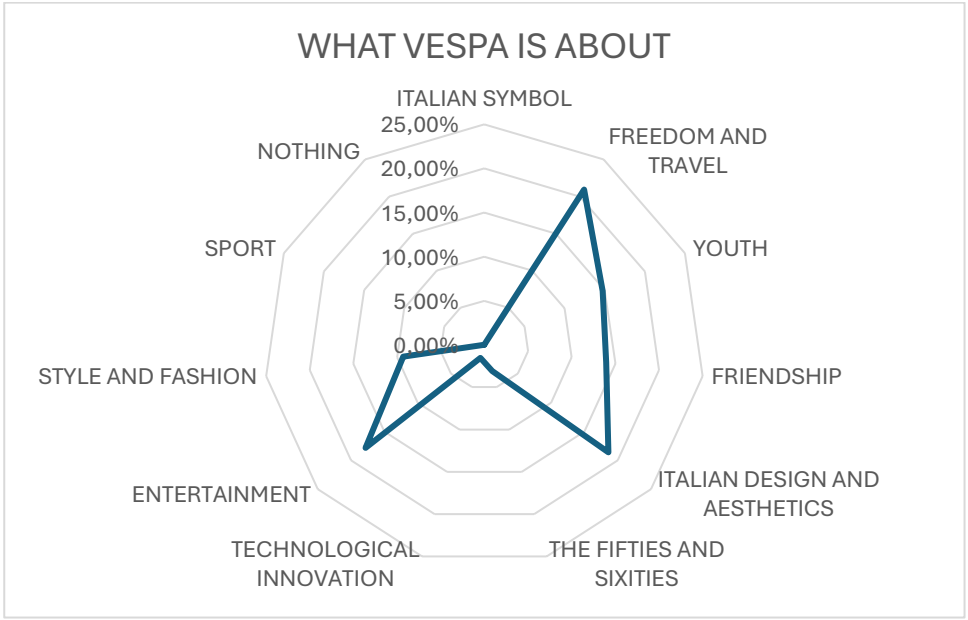
In relation to the type of Vespa owned (Table 5), the group of respondents is quite fragmented, especially given the heterogeneity of models produced by Piaggio. However, some interesting trends can be noted. The type of Vespa owned are models with a displacement greater than 50cc, produced after the 1970s, corresponding to 47%. Among them is mainly the Vespa PX, a remarkably successful product that has been able to almost entirely retain the prerogatives of the first Vespas with a drivability adequate even for today's traffic. This is a Vespa produced with light but functional implementations between 1977 and 2017, and it maintains the traditional set-up with gears and foot brake, despite having introduced salient features over time such as front disc system, headlight with halogen light and improved emission standards. This specificity has allowed it to have market appeal and be an economically accessible vehicle, suitable for long distances and also compatible with long distances, often imposed by trips related to rallies outside the province. This has further assisted an increase in its prestige as it was the last two-stroke Vespa with manual transmission produced in Pontedera, which is also famous for its undertakings such as intercontinental raids, proving its extreme reliability (Uhlig, 2015).

Other interesting aspects are the presence of 8% of respondents who have embraced modernity, owning substantially modern Vespas, with automatic transmission. The presence of electric Vespas is decidedly residual, corresponding to a meager 2%. Since it is a technological innovation and with a high price, it is plausible to expect a growing trend in this percentage in the next decade, also complying with increasingly restrictive anti-pollution measures. The electric Vespa, however, shows difficulty in being able to fully cover rallies over 50 km, considering the limited mileage allowed by today's batteries (Scorrano & Daniels, 2021). Also noteworthy is the 22% of respondents who participate with 50cc Vespas: on the one hand, they support the possibility of participation even for

minors with an adequate driving license, on the other, many enthusiasts also prove to be fans of the small-displacement model, mindful of their youth.

A subsequent section of the analysis weighs the actual participation in the social life of the club. Starting from the actual membership of the club, 95% of respondents claim their affiliation (Table 6). The actual membership to the Vespa Club also offers many advantages in addition to aggregation, such as the historical certification of the Vespas owned, in order to also be able to access advantageous insurance agreements. It is noted that the use of the Vespa is not limited to rallies only, denoting in Table 7 a 22% of respondents that uses it daily, probably as a means of daily work/school travel. 56% declare that they use it at least once a week, probably for leisure trips in their free time. Finally, it is worth noting the presence of a minority of 3% dedicated to static collecting, purely for exhibitions except for occasional rallies. All this is confirmed in Table 8, the result of a question in which 3 possible answers were allowed regarding the logic of use of the vehicle. In addition to the aforementioned, there are also two other interesting purposes for which the respondent declares to use their Vespa: use as a means of connection between their home and public transport access stations. This use, although representing a residual phenomenon of 3%, denotes the persistence of that original functional logic, typical of individual transport (Maggi, 2021), also with a view to interchange with shared and more eco-sustainable mobility. A similar 3% declares to use their Vespa for private errands, with a view to micromobility, certainly facilitated by the agility of scooters in urban traffic.

The Kiviat Diagram below expresses what Vespa represents for the respondents. The evocation of the sense of freedom, also in terms of tackling travel, prevails with over 20%. Furthermore, the importance of the aesthetic aspect of the Piaggio vehicle, an iconic symbol of Made in Italy, is evoked, almost of equal weight to that expressed by the sensation of fun. Similar importance is expressed by the concept of friendship and youth, which are confirmed as variables above all relating to the dynamics of sociality of which the Vespa Clubs are co-vectors.



Going into the specifics of the horizontal histograms - results of the elaboration of Likert scales 1-4 on the representativeness of the Vespa (Table 9) - we note a substantial agreement of the respondents with the expression of the highest vote (4), proving the multiplicity of evocative aspects pertaining to

the scooter from Pontedera: design and engineering value prevail for the more technical items, while for the emotional ones Vespa expresses personal style with traits of nostalgia towards the style of the past. Although not in a plebiscitary manner but still with a good 50% approximately, the respondent feels represented by his own motorbike. This is a trait of the already mentioned "Tribal Marketing" effect, in which the subject feels part of a community with characteristic and recognizable traits, which denote aspects of his personality.

In reference to the "Vespa phenomenon" as a promoter of forms of aggregation - typically Vespa Clubs - Table 10 proposes a cluster of questions in the form of Likert scales 1-4. A similar trend makes the degrees of judgment corresponding to 3 and 4 prevail, underlining how the median of consensus approves the concept that associationism corresponds to a shared social experience. There is a massive appreciation of how the Clubs are able to combine fun with solidarity initiatives, often allocating part of the proceeds from membership fees to non-profit organizations. It is noted how the social activities within the clubs are appreciated, including dinners, amateur championships, gymkhanas and mutual recognition between groups belonging to different territories (e.g., prize for the largest, most distant, youngest Vespa Club...). It is instead noted how the co-marketing action between Piaggio Spa and the rallies is perceived as present but not characterizing the aggregative experience, perhaps also due to the prevalence of historic motorcycles compared to contemporary ones. Finally, the value of the perception of valorization of Made in Italy on the occasion of international rallies is highlighted. To conclude this section, the correlation between the concept of friendship and belonging to a club is underlined; this proves the fact that passion transcends the logic of the association, also strengthening the bonds between people who met in association contexts.

Tab. 11 and Tab. 12 express two fundamental concepts. The first is the prevalence of participation of the responding sample also in thematic online groups. Among these are the various social communities, especially Facebook, Telegram, in addition to the timeless forums in which mechanical advice or commercial advertisements related to the Vespa world are generally exchanged. Tab.12 instead probes how much, in the form of Likert Scale 1-4, the respondents' desires exist in participating in revivals and historical re-enactments. This type of event differs from the classic gatherings because it also takes on a thematic value, such as dressing in specific clothing, re-proposing movie sets or retracing classic routes that symbolize the history of Vespa: last but not least, the Vespa World Day of 2024 in the very city where Piaggio founded its main Italian factory, Pontedera in the province of Pisa.

The analysis section concludes with Table 13, with a view to measuring the Vespa Club phenomenon, also in relation to the contemporary product. First of all, it is noted how Vespa Clubs are plebiscitarily perceived as vectors of Made in Italy in the world by respondents, finding a positive effect of good reputation also towards other national excellences. This sense of Italianness is expressed above all in the persistence of the Vespa style even in contemporary products, confirming how its unmistakable design denotes the essential but sinuous lines of the Pontedera scooter. Worthy of note and certainly the subject of potential sociological and management debate is the skepticism about the possibility that Vespa Clubs promote the transition towards electric mobility. The explanation, that also emerged from confirmatory interviews conducted on a small sample of respondents (a focus group with five members held in July 2024), highlights elements of nostalgia that clash with the futuristic prospects of electrification of the Vespa range. The debate then moved on to criticize primarily technical aspects, first and foremost the poor battery life that would require a rethink of the very founding values of

Vespa mobility, characterized by versatility and freedom of movement. Regarding this discrepancy, a debate must be opened so that motor excellence can coexist both in its essence with a combustion engine and with modern technologies. The sample of respondents from the Vespa Club of Ponte San Pietro, as it belongs to an industrial area and is characterized by already ongoing restrictions on mobility for polluting vehicles, could be an interesting sample to study over time. The challenge between modernity and tradition will in fact pass through both a political-regulatory discourse and economic-social transformation.

5. Conclusions.

This paper explored an interesting niche of studying: Vespa and its associative bodies, the Vespa Clubs. Globally, Vespa represents an Italian icon, identifiable as a "Made in Italy" excellence.

Born under a practical perspective, the scooter of Pontedera spontaneously became an object of cult, a symbol of freedom and youth emancipation. The constitution of the Vespa Clubs was a perfect mixture of clever marketing purposes, aiming at intercepting the widespread desire for entertainment in post-war Italy and Europe. The social phenomenon of the Vespa Clubs became a tool for promoting Piaggio's product in international contexts through mega-events, like the Eurovespa 1959 in Paris.

During the 80s and the 90s the progressive emancipation of the Vespa Clubs from Piaggio became more evident, paving the way to collectionism rather than for new products. In this optic, the constitution of the Vespa World Club in 2006 is expected to guarantee Piaggio a supervision of the national and local Vespa Clubs: on the one hand accepting their associative autonomy, on the other hand coordinating the current mega-events.

The questionnaire filled out by the 220 Vespa Club Ponte San Pietro's respondents, allowed this research to outline the symbolical value of Vespa among a selected group of Vespa enthusiasts. The roots of the abovementioned local Vespa Club date back to the 50s, demonstrating a huge commitment to giving a future to its archive, also through many memorial initiatives. The results of the survey denoted the permanence of Vespa as crystalized in the national imaginary: an iconic product that allows its owners to have fun, socialize, travel, and make friends. Vespa is still perceived as a functional mean of transport able to match rational and emotional features (Cavallone, 2014). The potentialities of Vespa Club to promote the Piaggio's national excellence worldwide are rooted not only in tribal marketing perspectives, but also in strategies able to mobilize nostalgia and heritage together. As claimed by Brown (1999) retro marketing can bring further opportunities to let a product evolve technically but maintaining its original fundamental features. This is expected to happen also for the ecologic transition to electric mobility within the Vespa product range. It is a huge challenge for Piaggio's management: innovating without betraying the origins. This shift towards electric mobility will be progressively required also by the evolution of normative regulation regarding emission standards. The sample of the Vespa Club is evidently difficult to be penetrated by this logic, because of the permanent nostalgia embodied by the historical Vespa models. The values embraced by the Vespa Clubs and Piaggio's business expectations ought to hopefully match thanks to the co-existence and respect among the parts. The synergic dialogue promoted by Vespa World Club can be a starting point for strengthening the relationship between the Vespa Clubs' members and Piaggio spa.

This empirical case study results as a fruitful starting point to foster the debate about the future of this iconic Italian product. The heritage promoted by any form of historical associationism, as in the case of Vespa Club, can be a useful socio-economic tool to promote the Italian spirit and contemporary products around the world.

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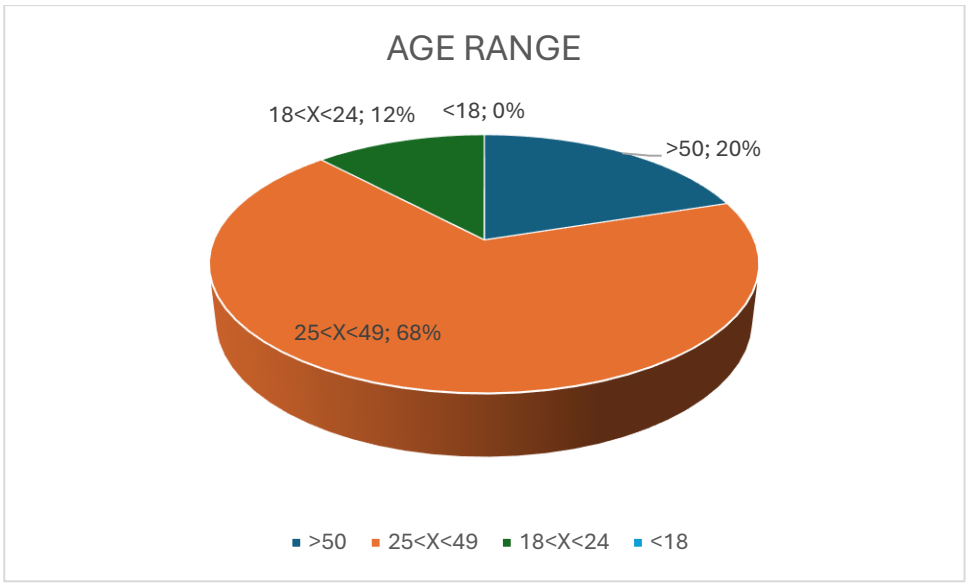
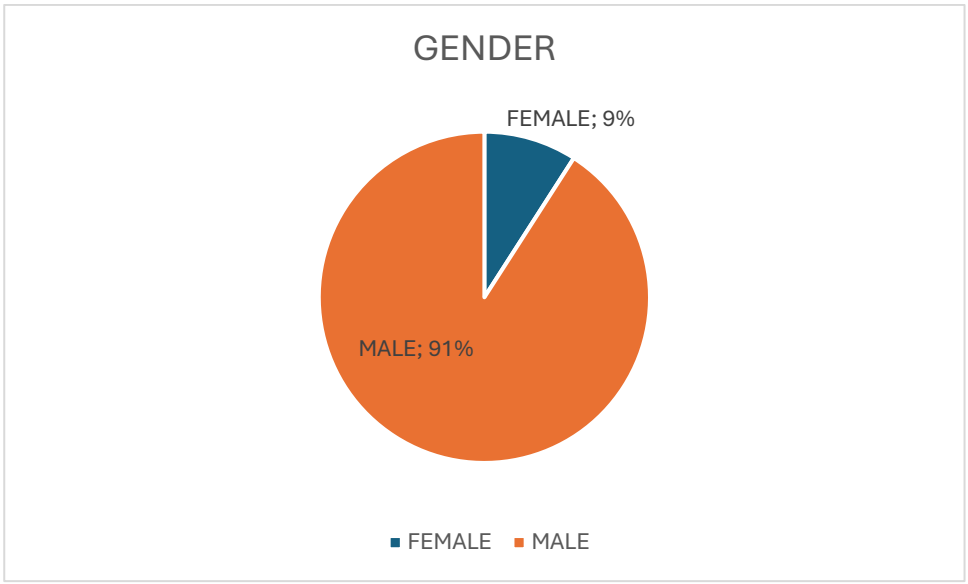
Annexes

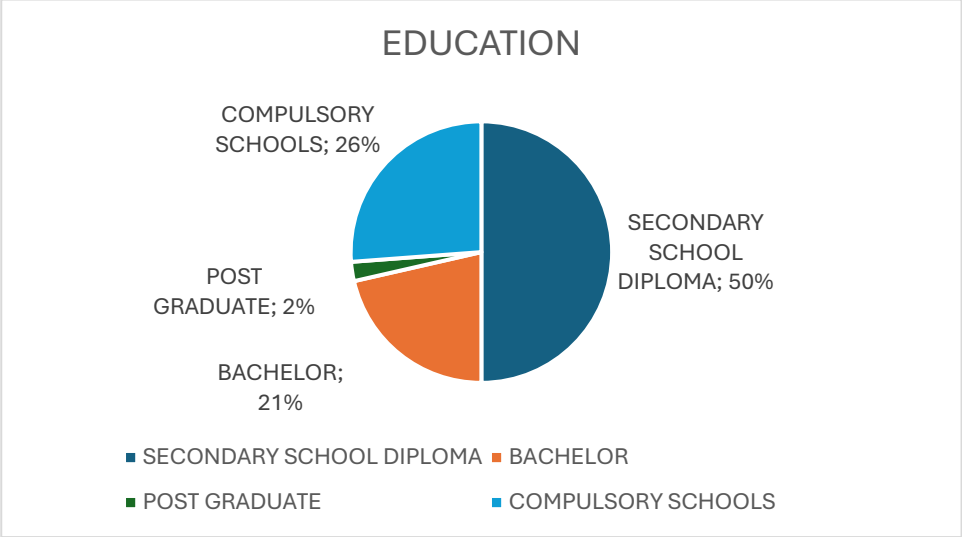
Tab.1



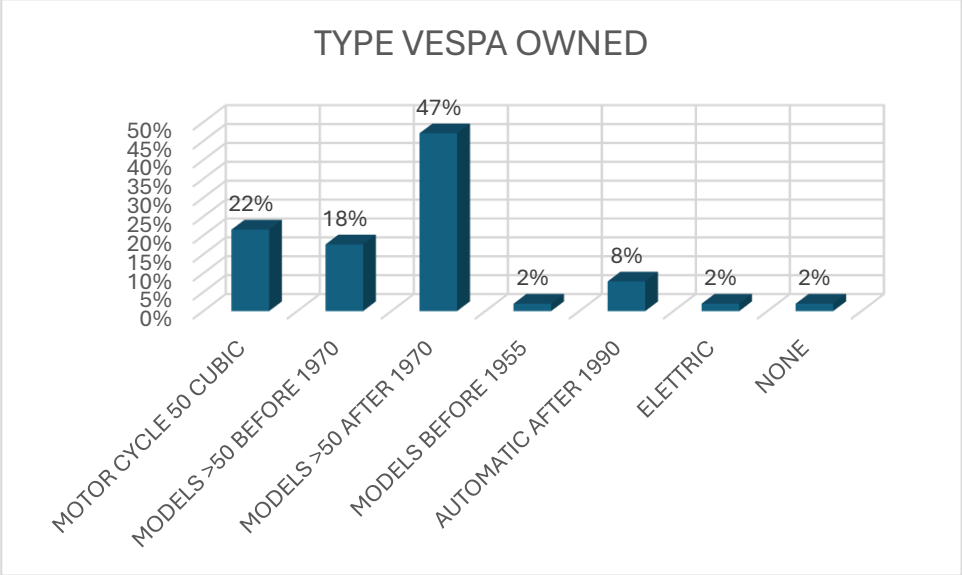
Tab.2



Tab.3


EDUCATION
COMPULSORY SCHOOLS; 26%
SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMA; 50%
POST GRADUATE; 2%
BACHELOR; 21%
SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMA
BACHELOR
POST GRADUATE
COMPULSORY SCHOOLS

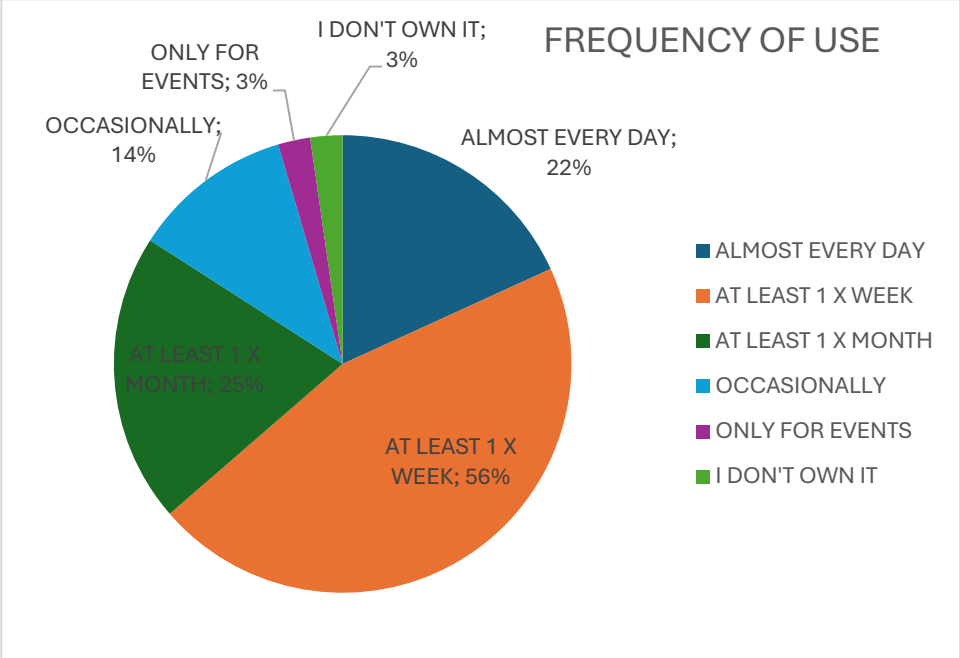
Tab.4


TYPE VESPA OWNED
50%
45%
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
22%
18%
47%
2%
8%
2%
2%
MOTOR CYCLE 50 CUBIC
MODELS >50 BEFORE 1970
MODELS >50 AFTER 1970
MODELS BEFORE 1955
AUTOMATIC AFTER 1990
ELETTRIC
NONE

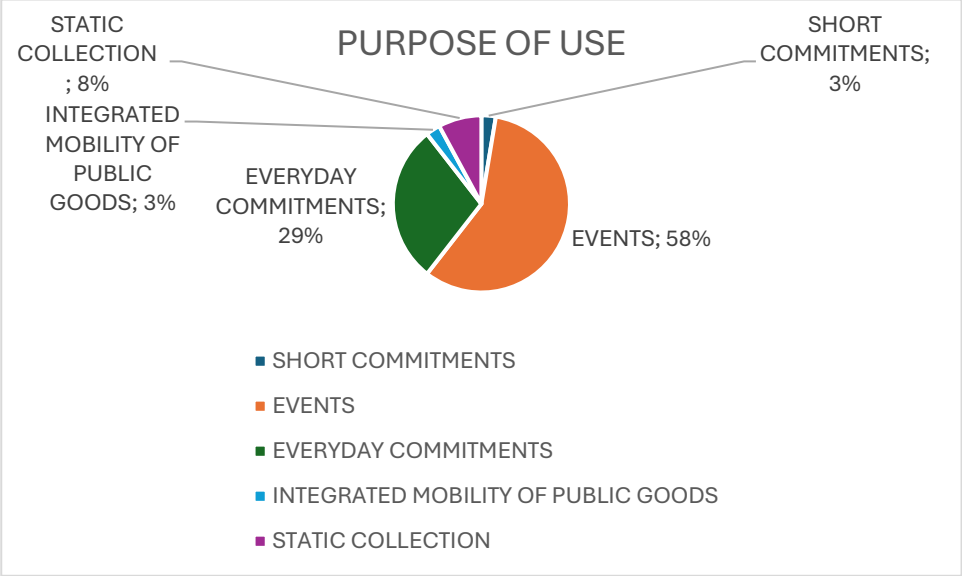
Tab.5

VESPA CLUB MEMBERSHIP
NOT MEMBERS; 5%
MEMBERS; 95%
MEMBERS
NOT MEMBERS

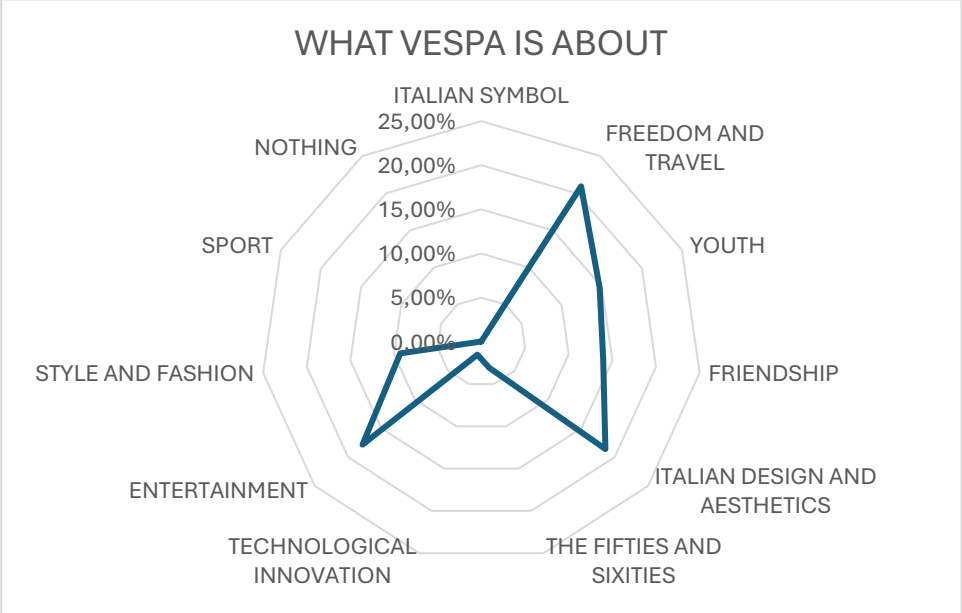
Tab.6


FREQUENCY OF USE
I DON'T OWN IT; 3%
ONLY FOR EVENTS; 3%
OCCASIONALLY; 14%
ALMOST EVERY DAY; 22%
AT LEAST 1 X MONTH; 25%
AT LEAST 1 X WEEK; 56%
ALMOST EVERY DAY
AT LEAST 1 X WEEK
AT LEAST 1 X MONTH
OCCASIONALLY
ONLY FOR EVENTS
I DON'T OWN IT

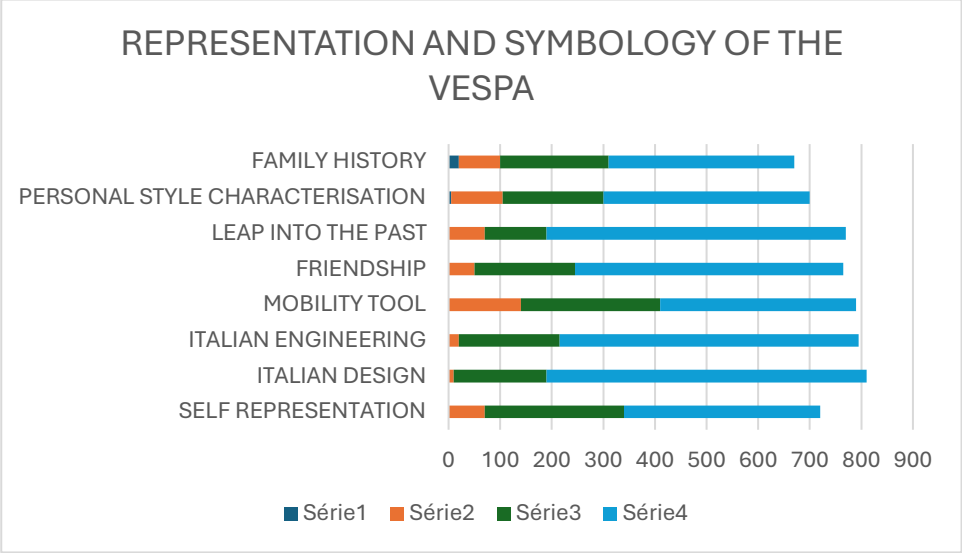
Tab.7


PURPOSE OF USE
STATIC COLLECTION ; 8%
INTEGRATED MOBILITY OF PUBLIC GOODS; 3%
EVERYDAY COMMITMENTS; 29%
SHORT COMMITMENTS; 3%
EVENTS; 58%
SHORT COMMITMENTS
EVENTS
EVERYDAY COMMITMENTS
INTEGRATED MOBILITY OF PUBLIC GOODS
STATIC COLLECTION

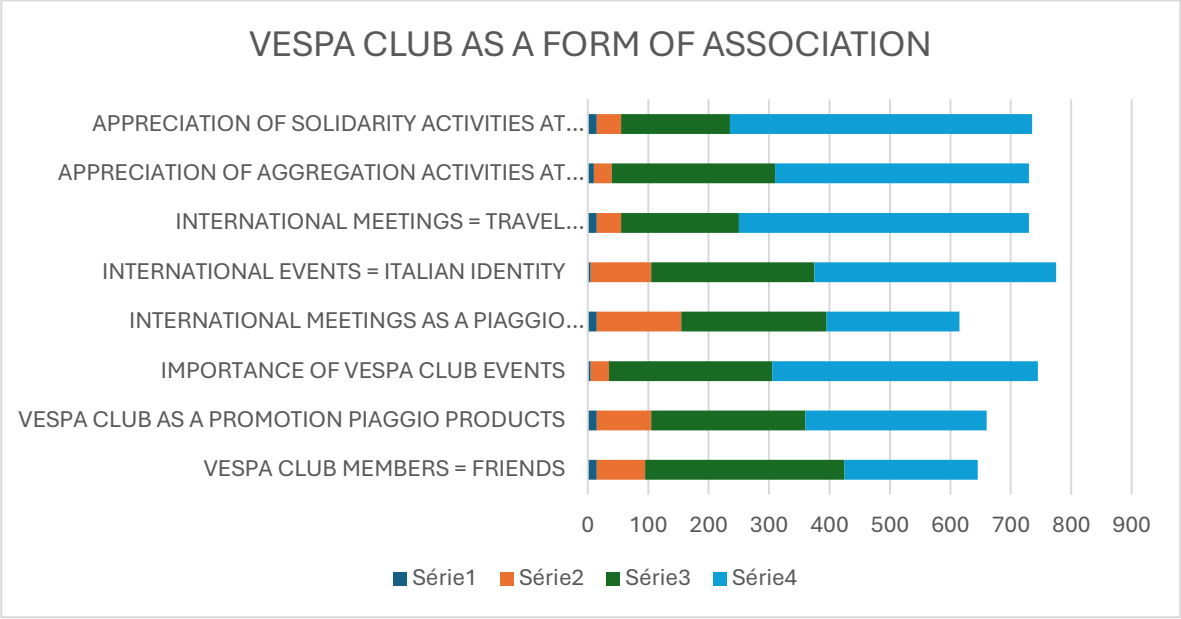
Tab.8


WHAT VESPA IS ABOUT
ITALIAN SYMBOL
FREEDOM AND TRAVEL
YOUTH
FRIENDSHIP
ITALIAN DESIGN AND AESTHETICS
THE FIFTIES AND SIXITIES
TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION
ENTERTAINMENT
STYLE AND FASHION
SPORT
NOTHING
25,00%
20,00%
15,00%
10,00%
5,00%
0,00%

Tab.9


REPRESENTATION AND SYMBOLOGY OF THE VESPA
FAMILY HISTORY
PERSONAL STYLE CHARACTERISATION
LEAP INTO THE PAST
FRIENDSHIP
MOBILITY TOOL
ITALIAN ENGINEERING
ITALIAN DESIGN
SELF REPRESENTATION
0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900
Série1 Série2 Série3 Série4

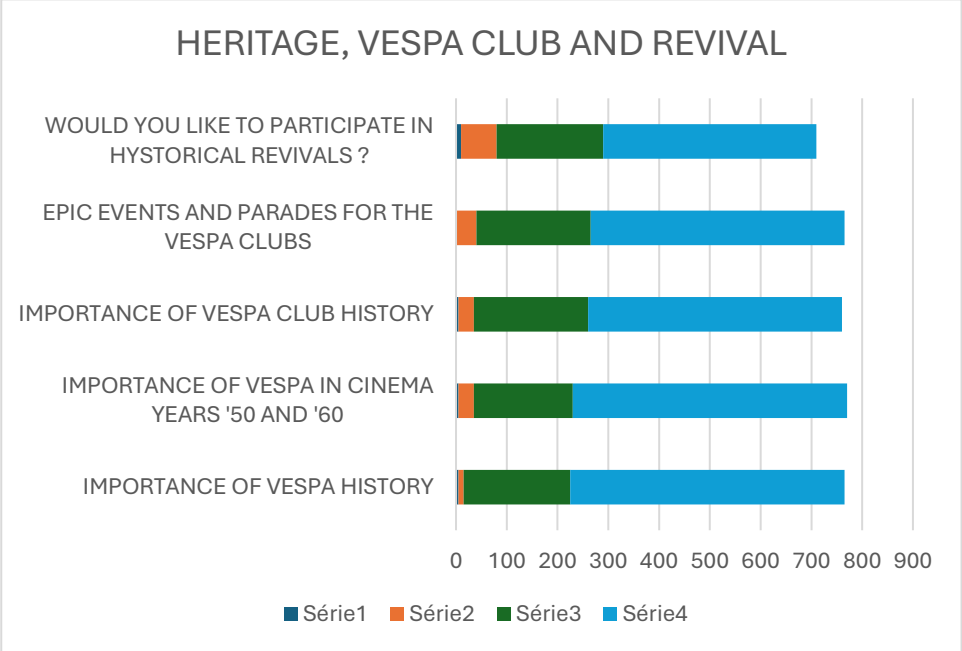
Tab.10


VESPA CLUB AS A FORM OF ASSOCIATION
APPRECIATION OF SOLIDARITY ACTIVITIES AT...
APPRECIATION OF AGGREGATION ACTIVITIES AT...
INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS = TRAVEL...
INTERNATIONAL EVENTS = ITALIAN IDENTITY
INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS AS A PIAGGIO...
IMPORTANCE OF VESPA CLUB EVENTS
VESPA CLUB AS A PROMOTION PIAGGIO PRODUCTS
VESPA CLUB MEMBERS = FRIENDS
0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900
Série1 Série2 Série3 Série4

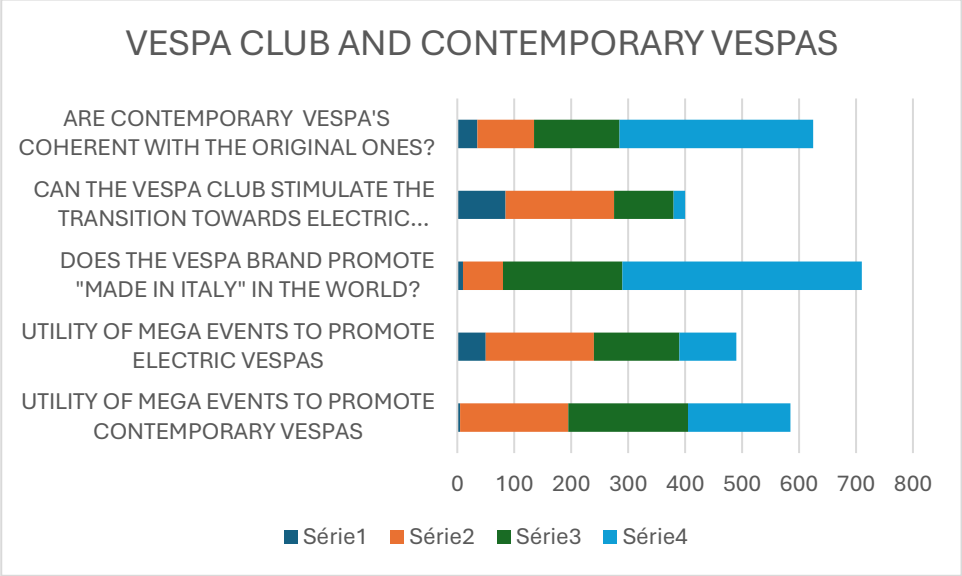
Tab.11

MEMBERSHIP IN VESPA'S ONLINE COMMUNITY
NOT; 34%
YES; 66%
YES
NOT

Tab.12


HERITAGE, VESPA CLUB AND REVIVAL
WOULD YOU LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN HYSTORICAL REVIVALS ?
EPIC EVENTS AND PARADES FOR THE VESPA CLUBS
IMPORTANCE OF VESPA CLUB HISTORY
IMPORTANCE OF VESPA IN CINEMA YEARS '50 AND '60
IMPORTANCE OF VESPA HISTORY
0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900
Série1 Série2 Série3 Série4

Tab.13



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